January, 1933

STRANGE TALES

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JANUARY

STRANGE TALES

OF MYSTERY AND TERROR

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BY HUGH B. CAVE

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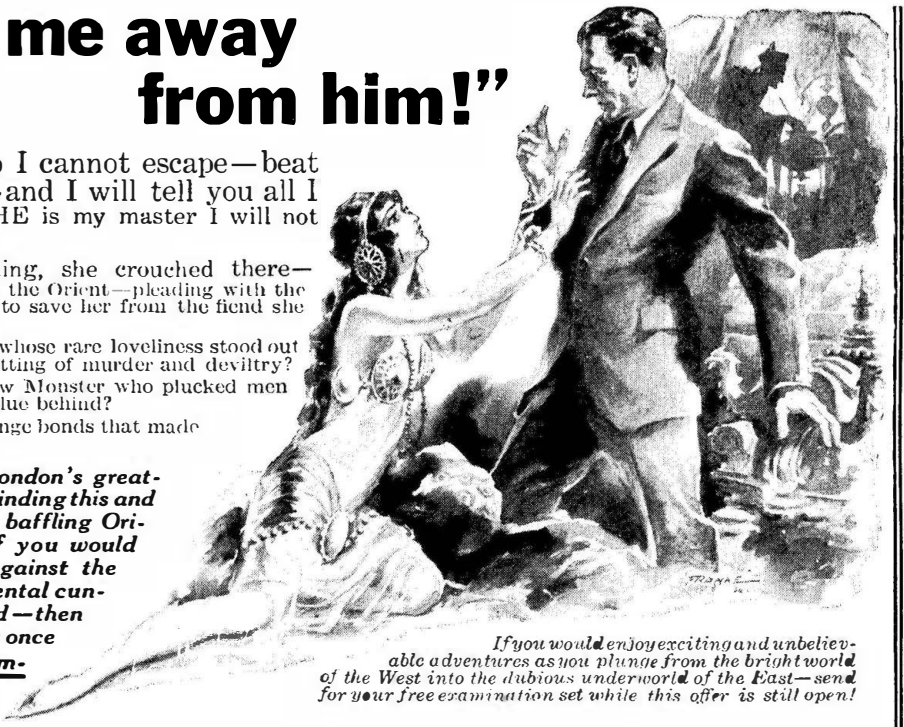

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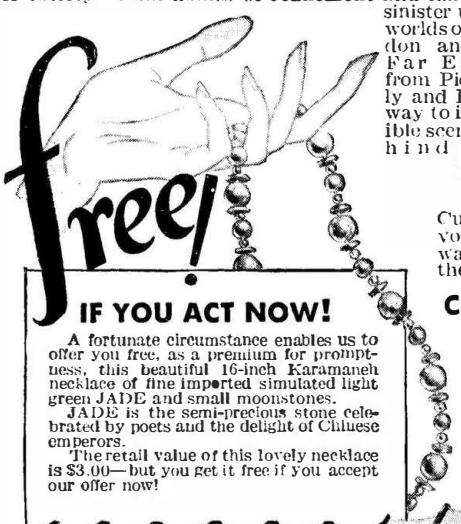

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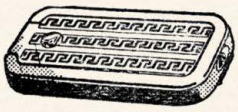

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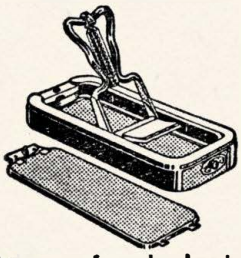

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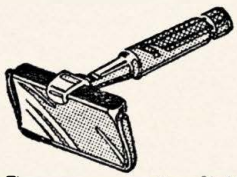

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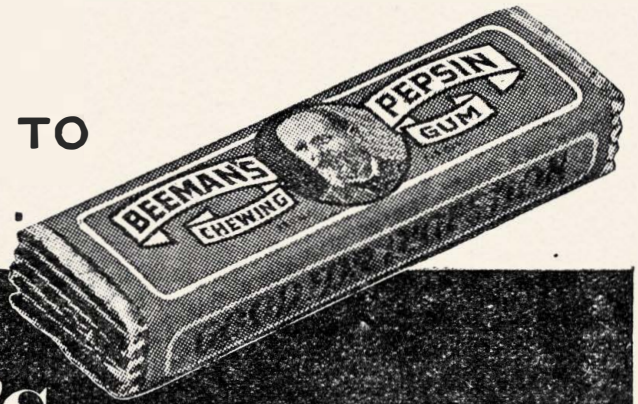


Chew **BEEMAN'S PEPSIN GUM**

Human Embers

AMONG the many mysterious workings of nature that have been recorded are two cases in which the bodies of women were consumed by fire under circumstances that can be ascribed only to spontaneous combustion or some supernatural agency.

The first occurred many years ago to Countess Cornelia Zangari, of Cesena, Italy. This lady, who was in her sixty-second year, returned to bed one night in her usual health. She spent over three hours in conversation with her maid and in saying her prayers; and then, having at last fallen asleep, the door of her chamber was shut.

The next morning, when the maid was not summoned at the usual hour, she went to the bedroom to wake up her mistress. Receiving no answer to her knock on the door, she opened the window, and saw the body of her mistress on the floor in the most dreadful condition.

At the distance of four feet from the bed there was a heap of ashes. Her legs, with the stockings on, remained untouched, and the head, half-burned, lay between them. Nearly all the rest of the body was reduced to ashes. The air in the room was charged with floating soot. A small oil lamp on the floor was covered with ashes, but had no oil in it; and two candlesticks, which stood upright on a table, contained the cotton wicks of the candles they had held, although the tallow of both had disappeared. The bed was not injured, and the sheets and blankets were raised on one side, as if a person had risen up from them.

It was thought at the time, from an examination of all the circumstances of the case, that an internal combustion had taken place. They reasoned that the lady had risen from her bed to cool herself, and that on her way to open the window the combustion had overpowered her and consumed her body by a process in which no flame was produced which could set fire to the furniture and floor.

The second case resembled the first in several respects. The victim this time was a fisherman's wife by the name of Grace Pett, and she lived in Ipswich, England.

Mrs. Pett was in the habit of going downstairs every night after half undressing to smoke a pipe. One morning her daughter, who shared the same bed with her, awoke and found her mother missing. Upon dressing herself and going downstairs she found her mother lying on the right side with her head against the grate. Her body was extended over the hearth with her legs on the deal floor, the trunk appearing like a block of wood burning with a glowing fire without flame.

She quenched the fire with two bowls of water. The neighbors, whom the cries of the daughter had brought in, were almost stifled with the smell. They found that the trunk of the unfortunate woman was reduced almost to ashes; it looked like a heap of charcoal covered with powdery white. The head, arms, legs and thighs were also much burned. There was no fire whatever in the grate, and the candle was burned out in the socket of the candlestick, which stood by her body. The clothes of a child on one side of her, and a paper screen on the other, were untouched. The deal floor was neither singed nor discolored.

The Second Interment

By Clark Ashton Smith

"WELL," said Guy Magbane, "I notice that you're still alive." His curtain-shadowed lips, as they shaped the words, took on a thin, ambiguous curve that might have been either smile or sneer. He came forward, peering a little obliquely at the sick man, and held out the glass of garnet-colored medicine.

Sir Uther Magbane, sitting amid the heavy pillows like a death's-head with tawny hair and blue eyes, made no answer and appeared to hesitate before accepting the glass. A dark, formless terror seemed to float upward in his pale gaze, like a drowned object that rises slowly in some autumnal weir. Finally he took the glass and drained its contents with a convulsive gulp, as if the act of swallowing were difficult.

"I'm pretty sick this time, Guy," he said, in a voice that some inner constraint or actual physical constriction had rendered harshly guttural and toneless. "But the worst fear is that I may not be sick enough—that the thing may happen again as it did before. My God! I can't think of anything else—can't imagine anything else but the black, suffocating agony, the blind, intolerable, stifling horror of it. Promise me—promise me again, Guy, that you'll defer my burial for at least a fortnight, for a month; and swear that when you do put me away you'll make sure that the push-button and electric wiring in my casket are in good order. Merciful God, supposing I should wake up in the tomb—and find that the alarm didn't work!"

"Don't worry; I'll attend to all that." The tone was soothing, a little contemptuous and, to the listener, touched with a sinister meaning. Guy Magbane turned to leave the room, and did not see that the floating fear in his brother's gaze had become for the moment a palpable, recognizable thing. He added over his shoulder, negligently and without looking back:

> "Somewhere in that descent there came the unknown, incognizable mercy of nothingness."

"That idea has grown to be a regular obsession with you. Just because the thing occurred once doesn't mean that it will ever occur again. If you die this time, you'll stay dead, in all likelihood. There won't be any more mistakes about it." With this equivocal and dubious reassurance, he went out and closed the door behind him.

Sir Uther Magbane leaned back among the pillows and stared at the somber oaken wainscoting. He felt—as he had felt ever since the beginning of his present illness—that the room was too cramped and

narrow; that the walls were always threatening to close in upon him, the roof to descend above him, like the sides and lid of a coffin. He could never seem to draw a full breath. All he could do was to lie there, alone with his ghastly fear, his hideous memories and his even more hideous apprehensions. The visits of his younger brother, Guy, for some time past, had served merely to strengthen his feeling of sepulchral oppression—for Guy was now part of the fear.

HE had always been afraid of death, even in his boyhood—that time when the specter should normally be dim and far away, if perceived at all. It had begun with the early death of his mother: ever since that black bereavement, a hovering vulturine shadow had seemed to taint and darken the things that were unspoiled for others. His imagination, morbidly acute, sick with suspicion of life itself, had seen everywhere the indwelling skeleton, the flower-shrouded corpse. The kisses of young love were flavored with mortality. The very sap of things was touched with putrefaction.

With heartfelt shudders, as he matured, he had nourished his charnel fancy on all that was macabre in art and literature. Like a seer who gazes into a black crystal, he foresaw with harrowing minuteness the physical and mental agonies of dissolution; he previsioned the activities of decay, the slow toil of the mordant worm, as clearly as if he had descended into the tomb's loathsome oblivion. But he had not imagined or feared the most poign-

ant horror of all—that of premature burial—until he had himself experienced it.

The thing had come without warning, just after his succession to the estate, and his engagement to Alice Margreave, in whose love he had begun to forget a little his boyhood terrors. It was as if the haunting spectre had retired, only to strike in a more abhorrent and appalling shape.

LYING there now, the memory seemed to stop his very heart, to throttle his breathing, as it always did. Again, with hallucinatory distinctness, he recalled the first gradual attack of his mysterious malady. He recalled the beginning of his syncope, the lightless gulf into which he had gone down, by timeless degrees, as if through infinite empty space. Somewhere in that gulf, he had found oblivion—the black instant that might have been hours or ages—from which he had awakened in darkness, had tried to sit up, and had bruised his face against an adamantine obstruction that seemed to be only a few inches above him. He had struck out, blindly, in mad, insensate panic, trying to thresh about with hands and feet, and had met on all sides a hard, unyielding surface, more terrifying, because of its inexplicable *nearness*, than the walls of some nighted oubliette.

There was a period of nightmare confusion—and then he knew what had happened. By some ghastly mistake, he had been placed, still alive, in a casket; and the casket was in the old vaults of his family, below the chapel floor. He began to scream then, and his screams, with the dull, muffled repercussion of some underground explosion, were hurled back upon him appallingly in the narrow space. Already the air seemed to stifle him, thick with mortuary odors of wood and cloth.

Hysteria seized him, and he went quite mad, hurling himself against the lid in what seemed an eternity of cramped, hopeless struggle. He did not hear the sound of footsteps that came hurrying to his aid, and the blows of men with chisels and hammers on the heavy lid which mingled indistinguishably with his own cries and clamorings. Even when the lid was wrenched loose, he had become quite delirious with the horror of it all, and had fought against his rescuers, as if they too were part of the suffocating, constrictive nightmare.

NEVER was he able to believe that his experience had been a matter of a few minutes only—that he had awakened just after the depositing of the coffin in the vault and before the actual lowering of the slab and the departure of the pall bearers, whose horrified attention he had attracted by the muted sound of his cries and struggles. It seemed to him that he must have fought there for immeasurable cycles.

The shock had left him with shattered nerves that trembled uncontrollably; nerves that found a secret terror, a funereal alarm, in the most innocent, unshadowed things. Three years had gone by since then, but at no time had he been able to master his grisly obsession, to climb from the night-bound pit of his demoralization. His old fear of death was complicated by a new dread: that his illness, recurring, as it was likely to do, would again take the deceptive semblance of death, and again he would awaken in the tomb. With the ceaseless apprehension of a hypochondriac, he watched for the first repetition of the malady's preliminary symptoms, and felt himself irretrievably doomed from their beginning.

His fear had poisoned everything; had even parted him from

Alice Margreave. There had been no formal breaking of the engagement, merely a tacit falling apart of the self-preoccupied, self-tortured neurotic and the girl whose love had soon turned, perforce, to a bewildered and horror-mingled pity for him.

After that, he had abandoned himself more fully, if possible, to his monomania. He had read everything he could find on the subject of premature interment, he had collected clippings that told of known cases: people who had been rescued in time—or whose reanimation had been detected too late, perhaps had been surmised only from some change or contortion of posture noticed after many years in the removal of the body to a new burial place. Impelled by a shivering fascination, he delved without restraint in the full ghastliness of the abominable theme. And always, in the fate of others, he saw his own fate; and their sufferings, by some vicarious visitation, became his.

FATALLY convinced that the insufferable horror would recur, he had made elaborate precautions, equipping the casket in which he was to be buried with an electrical device that would summon help. The least pressure of a button, within easy reach of his right hand, would set an alarm gong to ringing in the family chapel above, together with a second gong in the nearby manor house.

Even this, however, did little to assuage his fears. He was haunted by the idea that the push button might fail to work, or that no one would hear it, or that his rescuers might arrive too late, when he had undergone the full agonies of asphyxiation.

These apprehensions, growing more dolorous and more tyrannous daily, had accompanied the first stages of his second illness. Then, by vacillating degrees, he had begun to doubt his brother, to suspect that Guy, being next in the line of inheritance, might wish for his demise and have an interest in its consummation. Guy had always been a cynical, cold-blooded sort; and his half-concealed contempt and scant sympathy for Uther Magbane's obsession was readily translated into darker terms by a sick fantasy. Gradually, as he grew weaker, the invalid had come to fear that his brother would deliberately hasten the burial—might even disconnect the device for summoning aid, whose care had been confided to him.

Now, after Guy had gone out, the certainty of such treachery, like a black and noxious blossom, leaped full-grown in Sir Uther Magbane's mind. Swept by a cold, devastating panic, he resolved that he would speak, at the first opportunity, to someone else—would confide secretly to another person than Guy the responsibility of seeing that the electrical alarm was kept in good working order.

HOURS went by in a shrouded file as he lay there with his poisonous and sepulchral thoughts. It was afternoon, and the sloping sun should have shone now through the leaded panes, but the yew-fringed sky beyond the window seemed to be overcast, and there was only a sodden glimmering. Twilight began to weave a gray web in the room; and Magbane remembered that it was almost time for the doctor to pay him his evening visit.

Could he dare confide in the doctor, he wondered? He did not know the man very well. The family physician had died some time ago, and this new doctor had been called in by Guy. Sir Uther had never cared much for his manner, which was both brisk and saturnine. He might

be in league with Guy, might have an understanding as to the way in which the elder brother could be so conveniently disposed off, and his demise made certain. No, he could not speak to the doctor.

Who was there to help him, anyway? He had never made many friends, and even these seemed to have deserted him. The manor house was in a lonely part of the country, and everything would facilitate the treachery that he apprehended. God! he was being smothered—buried alive! . . .

Someone opened the door quietly and came toward him. He felt so hopeless and helpless that he did not even try to turn. Presently the visitor stood before him, and he saw that it was Holton, the aged family butler, who had served three generations of the Magbanes. Probably he could trust Holton, and he would speak about the matter now.

He framed the words with which he would address the butler, and was horrified when his tongue and his lips refused to obey him. He had not noticed anything wrong heretofore: his brain and his senses had been preternaturally clear. But now an icy paralysis appeared to have seized his organs of articulation.

He tried to lift his pale, clawlike hand and beckon to Holton, but the hand lay moveless on the counterpane, in spite of the agonized and herculean effort of will which he exerted. Fully conscious, but powerless to stir by so much as the shifting of a finger or the drooping of an eyelid, he could only lie and watch the dawning concern in the old butler's rheumy eyes.

Holton came nearer, reaching out his tremulous hand. Magbane saw the hand approaching him, saw it hover above his body, and descend toward his heart, just below the direct focus of his vision. It seemed never to reach him—at least there was no sensation of contact. The room was dimming rapidly—strange that the darkness should have come so soon—and a faintness was creeping on all his senses, like an insidious mist.

With a start of familiar terror, and a feeling of some intolerable repetition, of doing what he had once before done under circumstances of dire fright, he felt that he was going down into a night-black abyss. Holton's face was fading to a remote star, was receding with awful velocity above unscalable pits at whose bottom nameless, inexorable doom awaited Magbane: a doom to which he had gone at some previous time, and which he had been predestined to meet from the beginning of cycles. Down, forever down he went; the star disappeared; there was no light anywhere — and his syncope was complete.

MAGBANE'S reviving consciousness took the form of a fantastic dream. In this dream, he remembered his descent into the gulf; and he thought that the descent had been prolonged, after a dim interval, by some animate, malignant agency. Great demoniac hands had seemed to grasp him in the nadir-founded gloom, had lifted him, had carried him down immeasurable flights of inframundane stairs and along corridors that lay deeper than hell itself.

There was night everywhere. He could not see the forms of those who bore him, supporting him at feet and head, but he could hear their implacable, unceasing steps, echoing with hollow and sepulchral thunder in the black subterranes; and he could sense the funeral towering of their shapes, oppressing him from about and above in some ultra-tactual fashion, such as is possible only in dreams.

Somewhere in that nether night

they laid him down, they left him and went away. In his dream he heard the departing rumble of their footsteps, with leaden reverberations, endless and ominous, through all the stairs and corridors by which they had come with their human burden. At last there was a prolonged clangor as of closing doors, somewhere in the upper profound, a clangor fraught with unutterable despair, like the knell of Titans. After its echoes had died away, the despair seemed to remain, stagnant and soundless, dwelling tyrannically, illimitably, in all the recesses of this sepulchral underworld.

Silence, dank, stifling, eonian silence prevailed, as if the whole universe had died, had gone down to some infraspatial burial. Magbane could neither move nor breathe; and he felt, by no physical sense, an infinity of dead things about him, lying hopeless of resurrection, like himself.

Then, within the dream, by no perceptible transition, another dream was intercalated. Magbane forgot the horror and hopelessness of his descent, as a new-born child might forget some former death. He thought that he was standing in a place of soft sunlight and blithe, many-tinted flowers. An April turf was deep and resilient beneath him; the heavens were those of some vernal paradise; and he was not alone in this Eden, for Alice Margreave, his former fiancée, stood lovely and smiling amid the nearer blossoms.

He stepped toward her, filled with ineffable happiness—and in the sward at his feet a black pit, shaped like the grave, opened and widened and deepened with awful rapidity. Powerless to avert his doom, he went down into the pit, falling, falling interminably; and the darkness closed above him, swooping from all sides on a dim pin-point of light which was all that remained of the April heavens. The light expired, and Magbane was lying once more among dead things, in vaults beneath the universe.

BY slow, incalculably doubtful graduations, his dream began to merge into reality. At first, there had been no sense of time; only an ebon stagnation, in which eons and minutes were equally drowned. Then—through what channel of sense he knew not—there returned to Magbane the awareness of duration. The awareness sharpened, and he thought that he heard, at long, regular intervals, a remote and muffled sound. Insufferable doubt and bewilderment, associated with some horror which he could not recall, awoke and brooded noxiously in his dark mind.

Now he became aware of bodily discomfort. A dank chill, beginning as if in his very brain, crept downward through his body and limbs, till it reached his extremities and left them tingling. He felt, too, that he was intolerably cramped, was lying in some stiff, straitened position. With mounting terror, for which as yet he could find no name, he heard the remote muffled sound draw closer, till it was in his own body, and was no longer a sound, but the palpable hammering of his heart against his side. With this clarifying of his sense-perceptions, he knew abruptly, as in a flash of black lightning, the thing of which he was afraid.

The terrible knowledge went through him in a lethal shock, leaving him frozen. It was like a tetanic rigor, oppressing all his members, constricting his throat and heart as with iron bands; inhibiting his breath, crushing him like some material incubus. He dare not, *could* not move to verify his fear.

Utterly unmanned by a conviction of atrocious doom, he fought to regain some nominal degree of composure. He must not give way to the horror, or he would go mad. Perhaps it was only a dream after all; perhaps he was lying awake in his own bed, in darkness, and if he reached out his hand, he would encounter free space—not the hideous nearness of a coffin lid.

IN a sick vertigo of irresolution, he tried to summon courage and volition for the test. His sense of smell, awakening now, tended to confirm his despair; for there was a musty closeness, a dismal, sodden reek of wood and cloth—even as once before. It seemed to grow heavier momently with confined impurities.

At first, he thought that he could not move his hand—that the strange paralysis of his malady had not yet left him. With the dread laboriousness of nightmare, he lifted it slowly, tediously, as if overcoming the obstruction of a viscid medium. When, finally, a few inches away, it met the cold, straight surface he had apprehended, he felt the iron tightening of his despair, but was not surprised. There had been no real room for hope: the thing was happening again, just as it had been ordained to happen. Every step he had taken since birth, every motion, every breath, every struggle—had led only to this.

Mad thoughts were milling in his brain, like crowded maggots in a corpse. Old memories and present fears were mingled in strange confusion, steeped with the same charnel blackness. He recalled, in that tumult of disconnected ideas, the push-button he had installed in the casket. At the same moment, his brother's face, callous, ironic, touched with a thin, ambiguous sneer, appeared like a hallucination from the darkness; and the newest of his fears came back upon him with sickening certitude. In a flash, he saw the face presiding above the entire process through which, by the illegal connivance of the doctor, he must have been hurried into the tomb without passing through an embalmer's hands. Fearing that he might revive at any moment, they had taken no chances—and had doomed him to this horror.

THE mocking face, the cruel vision, seemed to disappear; and among his disordered, frenzy-driven thoughts there rose an irrational hope. Perhaps he had been wrong in his doubts of Guy. Perhaps the electrical device would work after all, and a light pressure would summon eager hands to loose him from his mortuary confinement. He forgot the ghastly chain of condemning logic.

Quickly, by an automatic impulse, he groped for the button. At first he did not find it, and a sick consternation filled him. Then, at last, his fingers touched it and he pressed the button again and again, listening desperately for the answering clang of the alarm gong in the chapel above. Surely he would hear it, even through the intervening wood and stone; and he tried insanely to believe that he *had* heard it—that he could even hear the sound of running footsteps somewhere above him. After seeming hours, with a hideous lapse into the most abominable despond, he realized that there was nothing—nothing but the stifled clamor of his own imprisoned heart.

For a while, he yielded to madness, as on that former occasion, beating obliviously against the sides of the casket, hurling himself blindly at the inexorable lid. He shrieked again and again, and the narrow space seemed to drown him with a volume of thick, demoni-

acally deep sound, which he did not recognize as his own voice or the voice of anything human. Exhaustion, and the wet, salty taste of blood in his mouth, flowing from his bruised face, brought him back at last to comparative calmness.

He perceived now that he was breathing with great difficulty—that his violent struggles and cries had served only to deplete the scant amount of air in the casket. In a moment of unnatural coolness, he recalled something that he had read, somewhere, about a method of shallow breathing by which men could survive protracted periods of inhumation. He must force himself to inhale lightly, must center all his faculties on the prolongation of life. Perhaps, even yet, if he could hold out, his rescuers would come. Perhaps the alarm *had* rung, and he had not been able to hear it. Men were hurrying to his aid, and he must not perish before they could lift the slab and break open the casket.

HE wanted to live, as never before; he longed, with intolerable avidity, to breathe the open air once more, to know the unimaginable bliss of free movement and respiration. God! if someone would only come—if he could hear the ring of footsteps, the sullen grating of the slab, the hammers and chisels that would let in the blessed light, the pure air! Was this all that he could ever know, this dumb horror of living interment, this blind, cramped agony of slow suffocation?

He strove to breathe quietly, with no waste or effort, but his throat and chest seemed to constrict as with the inexorable tightening of some atrocious torture instrument. There was no relief, no escape, nothing but a ceaseless, relentless pressure, the strangling clutch of some monstrous garrote that compressed his lungs, his heart, his windpipe, his very brain.

The agony increased: there was a weight of piled monuments upon him, which he must lift if he were to breathe freely. He strove against the funereal burden. He seemed to hear, at the same time, the labored sound of some Cyclopean engine that sought to make headway in a subterranean passage beneath fallen masses of earth and mountainous stone. He did not know that the sound was his own tortured gasping. The engine seemed to pant, thunderous and stertorous, with earth-shaking vibrations, and upon it, he thought, the foundations of ruined worlds were descending slowly and steadily, to choke it into ultimate silence.

THE last agonies of his asphyxiation were translated into a monstrous delirium, a phantasmagoria that seemed to prolong itself for cycles, with one implacable dream passing without transition into another.

He thought that he was lying captive in some Inquisitorial vault whose roof, floor and walls were closing upon him with appalling speed, were crushing him in their adamantine embrace.

For an instant, in a light that was not light, he strove to flee with leaden limbs from a formless, nameless juggernaut, taller than the stars, heavier than the world, that rolled upon him in black, iron silence, grinding him beneath it into the charnal dust of some nethermost limbo.

He was climbing eternal stairs, bearing in his arms the burden of some gigantic corpse, only to have the stairs crumble beneath him at each step, and to fall back with the corpse lying upon him and swelling to macrocosmic proportions.

Eyeless giants had stretched him prone on a granite plain and were

building upon his chest, block by colossal block, through eons of slow toil, the black Babel of a sunless world.

An anaconda of black, living metal, huger than the Python of myth, coiling about him in the pit where he had fallen, constricted his body with its unimaginable folds. In a gray, livid flash, he saw its enormous mouth poised above him, sucking the last breath it had squeezed from his lungs.

With inconceivable swiftness, the head of the anaconda became that of his brother Guy. It mocked him with a vast sneer, it appeared to swell and expand, to lose all human semblance or proportion, to become a blank, dark mass that rushed upon him in cyclonic gloom, driving him down into the space beyond space.

Somewhere in that descent there came to him the unknown, incognizable mercy of nothingness. . . .

Powwows of John George Hohman

IT would not be an exaggeration to say that a million or more Americans have in the last hundred years trusted fully in John George Hohman's *Long Lost Friend* for the relief of their common physical ailments and a way out of their supernatural afflictions; and, if only because of the great number of people who found—and find—his powwows efficacious, it is interesting to observe the remedies he prescribes for various human troubles. Here are a few:

A Remedy to Be Used When Anyone Is Falling Away: Let the person in perfect soberness and without having conversed with anyone catch rain in a pot, before sunrise; boil an egg in this; bore three small holes in this egg with a needle, and carry it to an ant-hill made by big ants; and the person will feel relieved as soon as the egg is devoured.

Another Remedy to Be Applied When Anyone Is Sick: Let the sick person, without having conversed with anyone, put water in a bottle before sunrise, close it up tight, put it immediately in some box or chest, lock it and stop up the keyhole; the key must be carried in one of the pockets for three days, as nobody dare have it except the person who puts the bottle with water in the chest or box.

A Good Remedy for the Colic: "I warn ye, ye colic fiends! There is one sitting in judgment, who speaketh: just or unjust. Therefore beware, ye colic fiends!"

To Attach a Dog to a Person, Provided Nothing Else Was Used before to Effect It: Try to draw some of your blood, and let the dog eat it along with his food, and he will stay with you. Or scrape the four corners of your table while you are eating and continue to eat with the same knife after having scraped the corners of the table. Let the dog eat those scrapings.

To Make a Wand for Searching for Iron, Ore or Water: On the first night of Christmas, between 11 and 12 o'clock, break off from any tree a young twig of one year's growth, in the three highest names (Father, Son and Holy Ghost), at

the same time facing toward sunrise. Whenever you apply this wand in searching for anything, apply it three times. The twig must be forked, and each end of the fork must be held in one hand, so that the third and thickest part of it stands up, but do not hold it too tight. Strike the ground with the thickest end, and that which you desire will appear immediately, if there is any in the ground where you strike. The words to be spoken when the wand is thus applied are as follows: "Archangel Gabriel, I conjure thee in the name of God, the Almighty, to tell me, is there any water here or not? Do tell me!" If you are searching for iron or ore, you have to say the same, only mention the name of what you are searching for.

To Prevent Wicked or Malicious Persons from Doing You an Injury: "Dullix, ix, ux. Yea, you can't come over pontio; Pontio is above Pilato."

A Remedy for the Whooping Cough: Thrust the child having the whooping cough tree times through a blackberry bush, without speaking or saying anything. The bush, however, must be grown fast at two ends, and the child must be thrust through three times in the same manner, that is to say, from the same side it was thrust in the first place.

A Good Remedy for the Toothache: Stir the sore tooth with a needle until it draws blood; then take a thread and soak it with this blood. Then take vinegar and flour, mix them well, so as to form a paste, and spread it on a rag, then wrap this rag around the root of an apple tree, and tie it very close with the above thread, after which the root must be well covered with ground.

Another Good Remedy for the Toothache: Cut out a piece of greensward (sod) in the morning before sunrise, quite unbeshrewdly from any place, breathe three times upon it, and put it down on the same place from which it was taken.

A Very Good Remedy for the Colic: Take half a gill of good rye whiskey, and a pipe full of tobacco; put the whiskey in a bottle, then smoke the tobacco and blow the smoke into the bottle, shake it well and drink it. . . .

A Very Good Plaster: I doubt very much whether any physician in the United States can make a plaster equal to this. It heals the white swelling, and has cured the sore leg of a woman who for eighteen years had used the prescriptions of doctors in vain. Take two quarts of cider, one pound of bees'-wax, one pound of sheep tallow and one pound of tobacco; boil the tobacco in the cider till the strength is out, and then strain it, and add the other articles to the liquid; stir it over a gentle fire till all is dissolved.

A Remedy for Epilepsy, Provided the Subject Had Never Fallen into Fire or Water: Write reversedly or backwards upon a piece of paper: "It is all over!" This is to be written but once upon the paper; then put it in a scarlet-red cloth, and then wrap it in a piece of unbleached muslin, and hang it around the neck on the first Friday of the new moon. The thread with which it is tied must also to be unbleached.

To Cure Fits or Convulsions: You must go upon another person's land, and repeat the following words: "I go before another court —I tie up my 77-fold fits." Then cut three small twigs off any tree on the land; in each twig you must make a knot. This must be done on a Friday morning before sunrise, in the decrease of the moon unbeshrewdly. Then over your body where you feel the fits you make the crosses. . . .

The Thing That Walked on the Wind

By August W. Derleth

STATEMENT of John Dalhousie, division chief of the Royal Mounted Police, issued from temporary quarters at Navissa Camp, Manitoba, 10-31-31:

This is my final word regarding the strange circumstances surrounding the disappearance of Constable Robert Norris from Navissa Camp last March 7th, and the discovery of his body on the 17th of this month in a snow bank four miles north of here. The press has harrassed me continually with questions which, in view of the peculiar circumstances, I could not and would not answer, but the doubt of my superiors now leads me to publish at last the report of Robert Norris made to me under date of 27 February, 1931, from Navissa Camp.

My attitude in the matter will be clearly seen by the time the end of this statement is read. For the assistance of those to whom this matter is not so familiar, I want to chronicle briefly the facts leading up to it. As I have stated above, on the 27th of February last, Robert Norris sent me the appended report, which apparently solved the now famed Stillwater mystery, a report which for reasons that will be obvious, could not be released. On the 7th of the following month, Robert Norris vanished without leaving a trace. On the 17th of this October, his body was found deep in a snow bank four miles north of here.

> **"Where the head should have been there were two gleaming stars, burning bright—like eyes!"**

THOSE are the known facts. I append herewith the last report made to me by Robert Norris:

"Navissa Camp, 27 February, 1931: In view of the extreme difficulty of the task which lies before me in writing to you what I know of the mystery at Stillwater, I take the liberty of copying for you in shortest possible form, the account which appeared in the *Navissa Daily* under date of 27 February, 1930, exactly a year ago at this writing:

"Navissa Camp, February 27: An as yet unverified story regarding the town of Stillwater on the Olassie trail thirty miles above Nelson has come to the editors of the *Daily*.

"It is said that no single inhabitant can be found in the village, and that travelers coming through the district can find no signs of anyone having left it. The village was last visited on the night of Febru-

The Thing swooped down after them.

ary 25th, just prior to the storm of that date. On that night all was as usual, according to all reports. Since then, nothing has been seen of the inhabitants.

"You will remember this case at once as the unsolved mystery which caused us so much trouble, and which earned us so much undeserved criticism. Something happened here last night which throws a faint light on the Stillwater mystery, affording us some vague clues, but clues of such nature that they can help us not at all, especially so far as staving off press criticism is concerned. But let me tell this from the beginning, just as it happened, and you will be able to see for yourself.

"I had put up with Dr. Jamison, in whose house at the northern end of the village I have been staying for years whenever I stopped over in Navissa Camp. I came to the Camp in early evening, and had hardly got settled when the thing happened.

"I HAD stepped outside for a moment. It was not cold, nor yet particularly warm. A wind was blowing, yet the sky was clear. As I stood there, the wind seemed suddenly to rise, and abruptly it grew strikingly cold. I looked up into the sky, and saw that many of the stars had been blotted out. Then a black spot came hurtling down at me, and I ran back toward the house. Before I could reach it, however, I found my path blocked;

before me, the figure of a man fell gently into the snow banks. I stopped, but before I could go to him, another form fell with equal softness on the other side of me. And, lastly, a third form came down; but this form did not come gently—it was thrown to the earth with great force.

"You can imagine my amazement. For a moment, I confess that I did not know just what to do. In that brief space of my hesitation, the sudden wind went down and the sharp cold gave place to the comparative mildness of the early evening. Then I ran to the closest form, and ascertained at once that the man was still living, and was apparently unhurt. The second, also a man, was likewise unhurt. But the third body was that of a woman; she was stone cold—her skin to the touch was icy to an astounding degree—and she had the appearance of having been dead for a long time.

"I called Dr. Jamison, and together we managed to get the three into the house. The two men we put to bed immediately, and for the woman we called the coroner, the only other doctor in Navissa Camp. We had also to summon other help, and Dr. Jamison called in two nurses. A quick examination proved that the men were, as I had conjectured, very little hurt. The same examination disclosed another astonishing point—the identification of these two men.

"YOU will remember that at about the time of the Stillwater case, on the night of the 25th of February, in fact, two men had left Nelson for Stillwater, and had vanished as mysteriously as the inhabitants of that town. These two men had given their names in Nelson as Allison Wentworth and James Macdonald; identification papers found on the bodies of these strange visitors from above proved conclusively that at least two of the men who were supposed to have been in Stillwater at the time the mysterious tragedy occurred had returned, for our visitors were none other than Wentworth and Macdonald. You can easily visualize with what anticipation I looked for a solution to the Stillwater mystery from these two men when once they regained consciousness.

"I resolved, in consequence, to keep a bedside watch. The doctors told me that Wentworth showed the best signs of coming out of his unconscious delirium first, and I took my place at his side, one of the nurses ready to take down anything Wentworth might say. Shortly after I had taken my position there, the body of the girl was identified by a resident of Navissa Camp who had already heard of her and had come to look at the body. The girl was Irene Masitte, the only daughter of the Masitte who ran the tavern at Stillwater. This indicated conclusively that the two men had been in Stillwater at the time of the inexplicable tragedy which swept its inhabitants off the face of the earth, and very probably were in the tavern at the moment the tragedy occurred, perhaps talking with this girl. So I thought at the moment.

"Naturally, I was deeply perplexed as to where the men and the girl might have come from, and also as to why the men were practically unhurt and the girl dead, dead for a great length of time, said Dr. Jamison, perhaps preserved by the cold. And, why and how did the men come gently to the earth, and why was the girl literally dashed to the ground? But all these puzzling questions were for the time being shoved into the background, so eager was I to get at the mystery which surrounded the Stillwater case.

"AS I have already written, I had taken my place beside the bed of Wentworth, and listened eagerly for any hint he might drop in his delirium, for as he became warmed, he began to talk a great deal, though not always intelligibly. Some sentences and phrases could be made out, and these the nurse took down in shorthand. I copy a few of the sentences I heard as we bent over the bed:

" 'Death-Walker . . . God of the Winds, you who walk on the wind . . . *adoramus te* . . . *adoramus te* . . . *adoramus te*. . . . Destroy these faithless ones, you who walk with death, you who pass above the earth, you who have vanquished the sky. . . . Light gleams from the mosques of Baghdad . . . stars are born in the Sahara . . . Lhassa, lost Lhassa, worship, worship, worship the Lord of the Winds.'

"These enigmatic words were followed by a deep and profound silence, during which the man's breathing struck me as highly irregular. Dr. Jamison, who was there, noticed it also, commenting on it as a bad sign, though there was no intimation as to what might have brought on this sudden irregularity unless it were some unconscious excitement. The delirious jumble meanwhile continued, even more puzzling than before:

" 'Wind-Walker, disperse the fogs over England . . . *adoremus te*. . . . It is too late to escape . . . Lord of the Winds. . . . Fly, fly, or He will come. . . . Sacrifice, sacrifice . . . a sacrifice must be, yes, must be made. . . . Chosen one, Irene, bow. . . . Oh, Wind-Walker, sweep over Italy when the olive trees blossom . . . and the cedars of Lebanon, blue in the wind . . . cold-swept Russian steppes, over wolf-infested Siberia . . . onward to Africa, Africa. . . . Blackwood has written of these things . . . and there are others . . . the old ones, elementals . . . and back to Leng, lost Leng, hidden Leng, whence sprung Wind-Walker . . . and others. . . .'

"DR. JAMISON was much interested in the mention of 'elementals,' and since he appeared to know something of them, I asked him to explain. It seems that there still exists an age-old belief that there are elemental spirits—of fire, water, air and earth—all-powerful spirits subject to no one, spirits actually worshipped in some parts of the world. His excitement I thought rather exaggerated, and I shot questions at him.

"It is very difficult for me to chronicle what came out finally in answer to all my questions. It is something that had been kept carefully away from us, though how it could have been is puzzling to me. Even I hesitated at first to believe Dr. Jamison, though he appears to have known it for some time, and assures me that a number of people could tell odd stories if they wanted to. I remember that several anonymous reports of a highly suggestive nature were turned in to us, but I hardly dared suspect what lay behind them at the time.

"It seems that the inhabitants of Stillwater to a body performed a curious worship—not of any god we know, but of something they called an air elemental! A large thing, I am told, vaguely like a man, yet infinitely unlike him. Details are very distorted and unreliable. It is said to have been an air elemental, but there are weird hints of something of incredible age, that rose out of hidden fastnesses in the far north, from a frozen and impenetrable plateau up there. Of this I can venture nothing. Dr. Jamison mentions a 'Plateau of Leng,' of which I have never heard save in the incoherent babblings of Wentworth. But what

is most horrible, most unbelievable in the mystery of this strange communal worship, is the suggestion that the people of Stillwater *made human sacrifices to their strange god!*

"THERE are strange stories of some gigantic thing that these people summoned to their deeply hidden forest altars, and still weirder tales of something seen against the sky in the glare of huge pine fires burning near Stillwater by travelers on the Olassie trail. How much credence it is advisable to give these stories you must decide for yourself, for I am, frankly, in view of later developments which I will chronicle in their order, unable to give any opinion. Dr. Jamison, whom I regard as a man of great intelligence, assures me that the elemental stories are sincerely believed hereabouts, and admitted to my surprise that he himself was unwilling to condemn belief without adequate knowledge. This was, in effect, admitting that he himself might believe in them.

"The man Wentworth suddenly became conscious, and I turned from Dr. Jamison. He asked, naturally, where he was, and he was told. He did not seem surprised. He then asked what year this was, and when we told him expressed only an irritated surprise. He murmured something about, 'An even year, then,' and aroused our interest the more.

"'And Macdonald?' he asked then.

"'Here,' we answered.

"'How did we come?' he asked.

"'You fell from the sky.'

"'Unhurt?' He puzzled over this for a moment. Then he said, 'He put us down, then.'

"'There was a girl with you,' said Dr. Jamison.

"'She was dead,' he answered in a tired voice. Then he turned his strangely burning eyes on me and asked, 'You saw Him? You saw the thing that walked on the wind? . . . Then He will return for you, for none can see Him and escape.'

"WE waited a few moments, thinking to give him time to become more fully conscious, but alas, he lapsed into a semi-conscious state. It was then that Dr. Jamison, after another examination, announced that the man was dying. This was naturally a great shock to me, and this shock was emphasized when Dr. Jamison added that the man Macdonald would in all probability die without ever gaining consciousness. The doctor could not guess at the cause of death, beyond referring vaguely to an assumption that perhaps these men had become so inured to cold that they could no longer stand warmth.

"At first I could not guess the significance of this statement, but it came to me suddenly that Dr. Jamison was simply accepting the notion, which had occurred to all of us, that these two men had spent the year just passed above the earth, perhaps in a region so cold that warmth would now affect them in the same manner as extreme cold.

"Despite Wentworth's semi-conscious state, I questioned him, and. surprisingly enough, got a rather jumbled story, which I have pieced together as well as I could from the notes the nurse took and from my own memory.

"It appears that these two men, Wentworth and Macdonald, had got into Stillwater quite late, owing to a sudden storm which had come up and put them off the trail for a short time. They were eyed with distinct disfavor at the tavern, but insisted on remaining for the night, which the tavern-keeper, Masitte, did not seem to like. But he gave them a room, requesting them to

remain in it, and to keep away from the window. To this they agreed, despite the fact that they regarded the landlord's proposal as somewhat out of the ordinary.

"THEY had hardly come into the room when the inn-keeper's daughter, this girl, Irene, came into the room, and asked them to get her away from the town quickly. She had been chosen, she said, to be sacrificed to Wind-Walker, the elemental which the Stillwater people are said to have worshipped, and she had decided that she would flee, rather than die for a pagan god, of whose existence even she was not too sure.

"Yet, the girl's fear must have been convincing enough to impress the two men into going away with her. The inhabitants had recently, it seems, been working against the thing they had worshipped, and its anger had been felt. Because that night was the night of sacrifice, strangers were frowned upon. According to suggestions Wentworth made, he discovered that the Stillwater people had great altars in the pine forests nearby, and that they worshipped the thing they called variously Death-Walker or Wind-Walker at these altars. (Though you can imagine my skeptical view of this entire matter, this *does* seem to tie up with the stories of giant fires which Dr. Jamison mentioned travelers on the Olassie trail as having seen.)

"There was also some very incoherent mumbling about the thing itself, vague and horrible thoughts which seemed to obsess Wentworth, something about the towering height of the thing seen vaguely against the sky in the hellish glow of the nocturnal fires.

"Exactly what happened, I hardly dare venture to guess at. Out of Wentworth's incoherent and troubled speech, there came only one positive statement, the substance of which was simply, that the three of them, Wentworth, Macdonald, and the girl *did* flee the sacrificial fires and the village, and had been caught on the Olassie trail on the way to Nelson by the thing, which had picked them up and carried them along.

"AFTER this statement, Wentworth became steadily more and more incoherent. He babbled a horrible story of the thing that swooped down after them as they fled in terror along the Olassie trail, and he blurted out, too, some terrible details of the mystery at Stillwater. From what I can make out, the thing that walked on the wind must have avenged itself on the villagers not only for their previous coldness toward it, but also because of the flight of Irene Masitte, who had been chosen for the sacrifice. At any rate, between hysterical wails and shuddering adulations of the thing, there emerged from Wentworth's distorted speech a graphic and terrible picture of a giant monstrosity that came into the village from the forest, sweeping the people into the sky, seeking them out, one by one.

"I don't know how much of this I should chronicle for you, since I can understand what your attitude must be. Could it have been some animal, do you think? Some prehistoric animal which had lain hidden for years in the depths of the pine forest near Stillwater, that perhaps had been preserved alive by the cold and revived again by the warmth of the giant fires to become the god of the mad Stillwater people? This seems to me the only other logical explanation, but there still remain so many things not yet accounted for, that I think it would be much better to leave the Stillwater mystery among the unsolved cases.

"MACDONALD died this morning at 10:07. Wentworth had not spoken since dawn, but he resumed shortly after Macdonald's death, repeating again the same vague sentences which we first heard from him. His incoherent murmurings leave us no alternative in regard to where he spent the past year. He seems to believe that he was carried along by this wind thing, this air elemental. Though it is fairly certain that neither of the missing men were anywhere reported throughout the past year, this story may be simply the product of an overburdened mind, a mind suffering from a great shock. And the seemingly vast knowledge of the hidden places of the earth, as well as the known, may have been derived from books.

"I say *may* have been derived, because in view of Wentworth's suggestive, almost convincing murmurings, it becomes only a tentative possibility. I know of no book which chronicles the mystic rites at the Lamasery in Tibet, which tells of the secret ceremonies of the Lhassa monks. Nor do I know of any book which reveals the hidden life of the African Impi, nor of any pamphlet or monograph even so much as hinting at the forbidden and accursed designs of the Tcho-Tcho people of Burma, nor of anything ever written which suggests that there are strange hybrid men living under the snow and ice of Antarctica, that there exists to-day a lost kingdom of the sea, accursed R'lyeh, where slumbering Cthulhu, deep in the earth beneath the sea, is waiting to rise and destroy the world. Nor have I ever heard of the shunned and forbidden Plateau of Leng, where the Ancient Ones once ruled.

"PLEASE do not think I exaggerate. I have never heard of these things before, yet Wentworth speaks as if he had been there, even hinting that these mysterious people have fed him. Of Lhassa I have heard vague hints, and of course I do remember having once seen a cinema containing what the producer called 'shots of Africa's vanishing Impi.' But of the other things, I know nothing. And if I can assume anything from the shuddering horror in Wentworth's semiconscious voice as he spoke of these hidden things, I do not want to know anything.

"There was a constant reference, too, in Wentworth's mutterings, to a Blackwood, by whom he evidently meant the writer, Algernon Blackwood, a man who spent some time here in Canada, says Dr. Jamison. The doctor gave me one of this man's books, pointing out to me several strange stories of air elementals, stories remarkably similar in character to the curious Stillwater mystery, yet nothing so paradoxically definite and vague. I can refer you to these stories if you do not already know them.

"The doctor also gave me several old magazines, in which are stories by an American, a certain H. P. Lovecraft, which have to do with Cthulhu, with the lost sea kingdom of R'lyeh and the forbidden Plateau of Leng. Perhaps these are the sources of Wentworth's apparently authentic information, yet in none of these stories appears any of the horrific details of which Wentworth speaks so familiarly.

"WENTWORTH died at 3:21 this afternoon. An hour before, he passed into a coma from which he did not emerge again. Dr. Jamison and the coroner seemed to think that the exposure to warmth had killed the two men, Jamison telling me candidly that a year with the Wind-Walker had so inured the men to cold, that warmth like ours affected them as extreme

cold would affect us normal men.

"You must understand that Dr. Jamison was entirely serious. Yet, his medical report read that the two men and the girl had died from exposure to the cold. In explanation he said, 'I may think what I please, Norris, and I may believe what I please—but I dare not write it.' Then, after a pause, he said, 'And, if you are wise, you will withhold the names of these people from the general public because questions are certain to arise once they become known, and how are you people going to explain their coming to us from the sky, and where they spent the year since the Stillwater mystery? And finally, how are you going to react against the storm of criticism which will fall on you once more when the Stillwater case is reopened with such strangely unbelievable facts as we have gathered here from the lips of a dying man?'

"I think Dr. Jamison is right. I have no opinion to offer, absolutely none, and I am making this report only because it is my duty as an officer to do so, and I am making it only to you. Perhaps it had better be destroyed, rather than kept in our files from which it might at some future time be resurrected by a careless official or inquiring newspaper man.

"AS I have already told you, any opinion that I have to offer would be worthless. But, in closing, I want to point out two things to you. I want to refer you first to the report of Peter Herrick, in charge of the investigation at Stillwater last year, under date of 3 March, 1930. I quote from the report which I have at hand:

> "On the Olassie trail, about three miles below Stillwater, we came upon the meandering tracks of three people. An examination of the tracks seemed to indicate that there were two men and one woman. A dog sled had been left behind along the trail, and for some inexplicable reason these three people had started running along the trail toward Nelson, evidently away from Stillwater. The tracks halted abruptly, and there was no trace of where they might have gone. Since there had been no snow since the night of the Stillwater mystery, this is doubly puzzling; it is as if the three people had been lifted off the earth.
>
> "Another puzzling factor is the appearance, far off to one side of this point in the trail, in a line with the wandering footsteps of the three travelers, of a huge imprint, closely resembling the foot of a man—but certainly a giant—which appears to have been made by an unbelievably large thing, and the foot, though like that of a man, must have been webbed!

"To this I want to add some information of my own. I remember that last night, when I threw that startled glance into the sky and saw that the stars had been blotted out, I thought that the 'cloud' which had obscured the sky looked curiously like the outline of a great man. And I remember, too, that where the top of the 'cloud' must have been, where the head of the thing should have been, there were two gleaming stars, visible despite the shadow, two gleaming stars, burning bright—*like eyes!*

"One more thing. This afternoon, a half mile behind Dr. Jamison's house, I came upon a deep depression in the snow. I did not need a second glance to tell me what it was. A half mile on the other side of the house there is another im-

print like this; I am only thankful that the sun is rapidly distorting the outlines, for I am only too willing to believe that I have imagined them. *For they are the imprints of gigantic feet, and the feet must have been webbed!"*

THUS ends Robert Norris's strange report. Because he had carried it for some time with him, I did not receive the report until after I had learned of his disappearance. The report was posted to me on the 6th of March. Under date of March 5th, Norris has scrawled a final brief and terrible message in a hand which is barely legible:

"5 March—Something is pursuing me! Not a night has passed since the occurrence at Navissa Camp to give me any rest. Always I have felt strange, horrible, yet invisible eyes looking down at me from above. And I remember Wentworth saying that none could live who had seen the thing that walked on the wind, and I cannot forget the sight of it against the sky, and its burning eyes looking down like stars in the haunted night! It is waiting."

It was this brief paragraph which caused our official physician to declare that Robert Norris had lost his mind, and had wandered away to some hidden place from which he emerged months later only to die in the snow.

I WANT to add only a few words of my own. Robert Norris did not lose his mind. Furthermore, Robert Norris was one of the most thorough, the keenest men under my orders, and even during the terrible months he spent in far places, I am sure he did not lose possession of his senses. I grant our physician only one thing: Robert Norris *had* gone away to some hidden place for those months. But that hidden place was not in Canada. no, nor in North America, whatever our physician may think.

I arrived at Navissa Camp by plane within ten hours of the discovery of Robert Norris's body. As I flew over the spot where the body was found, I saw far away on either side, deep depressions in the snow. I have no doubt what they were. It was I, too, who searched Norris's clothes, and found in his pockets the mementoes he had brought with him from the hidden places where he had been: the gold plaque, depicting in miniature a struggle between ancient beings, and bearing on its surface inscriptions in weird designs, the plaque which Dr. Spencer of Quebec University affirms must have come from some place incredibly old, yet is excellently preserved; the strange and horrible book in Chinese that tells of ghastly things in secret Tibet; and *the revolting and bestial stone miniature of a hellish monstrosity walking on the winds above the earth!*

The Legend of Gogmagog's Leap

WHEN Gogmagog's Leap, at Plymouth, England, was preserved near the fortress built there, it was said that "at the last digging of the Haw for the foundation of the citadel of Plymouth, the great jaws and teeth therein found were those of Gogmagog." This recalls an old and interesting legend.

The legend is that when Brutus and Corineus, with their Trojan hosts, landed at Plymouth, they wisely sent parties into the interior to explore the country and learn something of the people.

At the end of the first day the soldiers who had been sent out returned in great terror pursued by several mighty giants. Brutus and Corineus were not, however, to be terrified by the immense size of their enemies or the frightful noises they made, and they rallied their forces and marched to meet them. They made a furious assault, hurling their spears and flinging their darts against the huge bodies of the giants to such good effect that they gave way, and eventually fled to the hills of Dartmoor.

Gogmagog, the captain of the giants, was unable to flee because of a wound in his leg, and so he hid himself in a bog; and there, by the light of the moon, he was found by the Trojan soldiers, bound with strong cords and carried back to the Hoe at Plymouth, where the camp was.

He was treated kindly by his captors, and his wounds quickly healed. Then one day Brutus, who desired to make terms with the giants, was made a proposition by his captive. Gogmagog was to try a fall with the strongest man in the invading host, and whoever came off the winner was to be proclaimed the King of Cornwall, and hold possession of all the western land.

Corineus at once accepted the challenge of the giant himself, and, notwithstanding the fact that he was but little above the ordinary size of a man, he felt confident of victory.

On the day fixed for the wrestling the huge Gogmagog was allowed to send for his giants and they were assembled on one side of a cleared space on Plymouth Hoe, while the Trojan soldiers occupied the other. All arms were thrown aside, and, fronting each other, naked to the waist, stood the most lordly of the giants and the most noble of the men.

They wrestled for a long time, with the issue remaining long in doubt. On one side was brute strength, and on the other trained skill. But at length Corineus succeeded in seizing Gogmagog by the waist, and by regularly repeated impulses made the monster undulate like a tree shaken by a winter storm, until at length, by the use of his remaining strength in one great effort, he forced the giant to his back on the ground. The earth shook with Gogmagog's weight, and the air echoed with the thunder of his mighty groan as the breath was forced from his body by the terrific momentum of the fall; and there he lay, unable to move, while all the other giants stood appalled at the power they could not understand, but which they saw was superior to the mere physical strength they possessed.

Corineus took a moment to recover his breath; then he rushed upon his prostrate foe, and, dragging him to the edge of the cliff, threw him over the verge. The giant fell on the sea-touched rocks below, where his body was broken into fragments, and the water turned purple from his gushing life-blood.

The Terror by Night

By Charles Willard Diffin

ONE by one the twelve men and women filed in and faced the prisoner. And the man before them, still mute, stood quietly, with his fine gray head erect, while he met with expressionless eyes the gaze of each juror in turn.

"Guilty," the foreman said, and the gray eyes, which had been so unyielding, inscrutable, so unchanging through all the long days of the trial, locked with theirs steadily and unflinchingly.

Then the judge spoke, though only fragments of his denunciation reached the conscious mind of the man before him.

". . . This hideous crime . . . most coldblooded—most revolting murder that has ever . . . your education, your training, your wealth and standing in this community . . . your refusal to defend yourself, if intended to elicit sympathy, has failed . . . the court is glad there has been no recommendation for mercy. . . ."

Until at last the bare white walls echoed again the fateful words they had so often heard: "The judgment of this court is that you shall be hanged by the neck until you are dead!" And only then did the steady gray eyes close, and, for an instant, the man falter like a fighter struck to the heart.

Out of the unknown dark Whitmore unwittingly evokes a thing of horror.

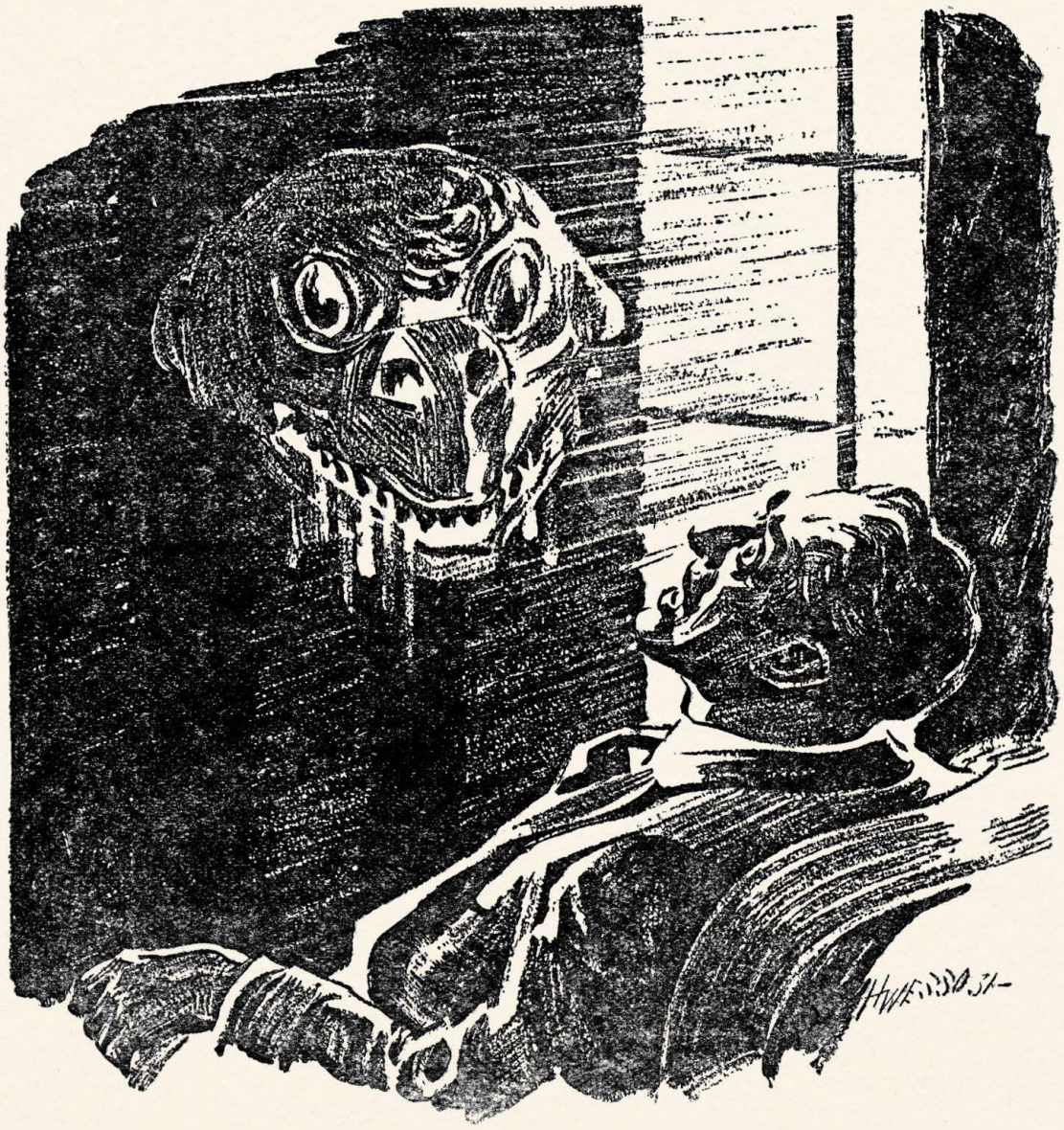
Hanged by the neck until you are dead! Only hard, calloused and unfeeling nerves can remain unmoved by those words, and this man was not entirely unaffected. But when the stern voice had ceased he bowed slightly toward the judge, then whirled quickly to face the spectators in the courtroom.

Somewhere in that crowded room was a pair of eyes that met his in understanding. . . .

"They've had all the facts, Jim," he called in a clear voice, and for one fleeting instant his lips twitched in a wry, enigmatical smile, "they've had the facts. When it's all over, you give them the truth—the whole damnable truth! They won't believe it, but tell them anyway—" Then the sound of the judge's gavel.

FACTS sent that silent man to the gallows. Sent him with a smile on lips that had almost forgotten how to smile and with glad welcome for the release which only death could bring. He did not want to die—not by hanging—but, God knows, he certainly didn't want to live.

"Tell them the truth," he ordered. And, may God help him wherever he is now, this is the truth:



A head, of mottled green and brown!

IN the darkened room Whitmore raised his head that had drooped sleepily. He could see nothing at first; but the touch of the table about which they were seated was reassuring. On his left was Jim; and Jim's wife, Sally, was seated at his right. One hand of each was held in each of his. Two or three others were there too, all good friends. Directly across from him, hidden in the darkness, was his wife, Betty Whitmore; and in the same concealing darkness there was, of course, the medium who was conducting the seance.

Even in the utter blackness of the great living-room where heavy drapes had been drawn across every window, Whitmore might have sent an unseen smile toward the blond head of the beautiful girl he called Betty. He was looking toward her now but he was not smiling. Rather,

his eyes, wide in the darkness, were trying to focus upon something closer by.

Smoke in the moonlight—in a room that held neither smoke nor light! Lazily twisting convolutions of gray-green; almost invisible, almost unreal! Yet it was there, a ghostly mist that rolled lazily in the darkness where only its own dim light could be seen.

And then from the mist came something more substantial. Formless at first, it hardened, took on shape and substance, until it became a hand, a woman's hand . . . and Whitmore released the living human hand of the woman at his right and reached out in slow wonder to touch that other ghostly hand before him.

Slender, soft and warm, it clasped his own fingers; and then, while still he held it in amazement, it was gone, melted to mist within his grasp.

"Great!" he exclaimed when the lights were on. "That's great, I tell you. You all saw it, but I touched it. I took right hold of it. It was real, material, a genuine materialization."

"I don't like it," said Betty. "I don't like it a bit, Jack. I'm going to be honest,"—her voice trembled a little here—"I'm going to admit I'm afraid."

"Afraid?" laughed Whitmore. "Afraid of a woman's hand? Great Scott, Betty, I didn't know you were that jealous."

ELIZABETH WHITMORE tried to smile in response, but appeared to find it difficult. "No," she said slowly, and her lovely violet eyes were troubled as they rested upon her husband and the flush of enthusiasm that had swept his face. "No," she repeated slowly. "Not afraid of a woman's hand. But Jack, dear, what else is there where that came from? How do we know it will always be a *kindly* hand? How do we know it will be *human?*"

It was the medium who cut short Jack Whitmore's roaring laughter. She was a foreigner, short and squat. The fat folds of her face perspired easily. But her eyes buried in those folds could still flash fire.

"Monsieur laughs too easily," she snapped. "Ze little lady, she is right. There is more things out there zan what you call human. Some are not human yet. In time zey will be—maybe! And some—" The eyes now were completely lost in the folds of that fat face that was twisted into lines of horror which seemed somehow absurd. She uttered a series of quick exclamations.

"Some of zese things, zey are not dead; zey have nevaire lived—not like you and me."

Here she shrugged her ample shoulders in a gesture that was meant to be reassuring. "But nossing is to fear," she told Elizabeth Whitmore. "I protect myself; I protect you, always!"

"All right," Whitmore agreed. "You seem to know your stuff, anyway. I'll take your word for all that.

"Twenty, I think you said." He was writing a check and doubled the amount as he wrote, then slipped it into the woman's hand. "We'll expect you next week this same time. And in the meantime we may have a seance or two of our own."

THE medium had reached the outer door, both Mr. and Mrs. Whitmore accompanying her. She whirled sharply on them at Jack's remark.

"No," she said sharply. *"C'est impossible!* I forbid!"

And again Whitmore laughed, this time more to cover his annoy-

ance than from any appreciation of the unintentional humor of this woman's command.

"Oh, come now—" he began; and again she cut him short.

"Listen," she exclaimed. "I tell you somesing—

"I did not do that which to-night you have behold. I am ze voice medium: always do my controls speak with ze voice. In all my life nevaire have I produced ze materialization. Someone else has made to accomplish this. It was yourself, I think, Monsieur, who was ze medium to-night."

The door closed noisily, and Whitmore crossed to a big French plate to regard himself in the mirror. "J. P. Whitmore, Medium!" he announced. "Readings by appointment only. I'm going to be good, Betty; wait till you see me in my full regalia."

Then, at sight of the troubled look in the violet eyes, he threw one arm about his wife and waltzed her gaily back into the room where the others waited.

"Ze circle, she will form about ze table," he announced in burlesque imitation of the medium. "Boys and girls, you are about to see something real in the way of materializations." He was reaching for the light switch as he spoke.

IT was perhaps a half hour later that Elizabeth Whitmore screamed. A heavy chair crashed in splintered fragments in the far corner of the room. Then her voice cut the darkness with the keen lash of terror:

"Jack, it's touching me! Its hair—all matted and shaggy!" Again she screamed, "Jack, help me; take it away! Take it—"

She was still standing, a pathetic figure in the middle of the room, when the lights flashed on. Her eyes were wide with terror, hands outstretched, as if warding off the thing those eyes had seen. And in that timeless second, while yet she stood stiffly erect, there dropped from her hand to the rug below three flecks of white foam that might have clung to the jowls and slavering mouth of some prowling beast.

Her eyes were still round with fright as she fell unconscious to the floor. Jack Whitmore leaped in the same instant and managed to save her from the worst of the fall. Her weight drew him down; he was half-fallen, half-stooped, above her when one of her hands that had been tightly clasped fell open directly below her face. And Whitmore threw himself back with a strangled oath.

"Look!" he choked. "Hair! Matted hair and flesh!"

He was staring at a dark mass in Elizabeth's opened hand—a clump of clotted black hair—and, hanging to it, a mass of what might have been flesh from which every vestige of blood had been drained . . . and his own eyes opened wide with horror as he saw that hair and flesh undergoing a change.

Its paleness turned purple; then was transformed to iridescent, brown ooze—until only a pool of horrible liquid lay in the palm of Elizabeth Whitmore's inert, unmoving hand. The black clot of hair was the last thing to go . . . then that, too, was gone, and in the nostrils of every person in the room was that stench which can carry only one suggestion—death and dissolution.

TO almost every man there comes at times that heart-freezing, blood-congealing sensation we know as fear. Yet Jack Whitmore, had he been pressed for an answer, might have admitted laughingly and with entire honesty that to him fear was an unknown emotion. And on this night, whatever

there may have been of terror in the minds and hearts of the others in that room, there was no least thought of fear to distort the calm judgment of J. P. Whitmore.

So, too, on the following night, though the horror of it was still with him, and though still at times he seemed to be filled again with that revolting odor, there still was no fear. Even horror had been mastered by a stronger urge.

Curiosity, and something more than curiosity—he was possessed by a wild, insatiable desire to know more of this. And even the imploring look in the lovely eyes of Elizabeth Whitmore could not deter him.

"Jack," she said through bloodless lips, "—that *thing!* How can you want to know more—see more—of it? It wasn't"—she paused at a loss for a suitable word—"it wasn't *decent,* Jack! I've tried to tell you—but I can't!"

"No," Whitmore agreed slowly, "it was too utterly damnable for words; but just what it was, just where it came from, I'm going to know." And no arguments or entreaties from his wife could change that decision.

"You'll not be there, nor any of the others," he told her. "I don't know that I can get the results alone, but I'm going to try, Betty."

Entirely lovely was Elizabeth Whitmore as she stood beneath the rose light of her boudoir, her robe of filmy lace falling softly about her; and her husband took her in his arms for one moment to kiss away the tears which were so near the surface of those beautiful eyes. "Lord, but you're an angel, Betty!" he exclaimed. "And don't you worry—not for a minute. I can take care of myself."

"AN angel," he was repeating as he went down the broad staircase, "—and I think it's something pretty damn close to the other extreme that I'm looking for to-night!" He jerked savagely at the weighted cord that drew the heavy drapes across the living-room windows, then seated himself in the same place at the table.

He did not know how to bring the results he was after. He could only sit in the dark that was almost tangible, where it seemed that the blackness was something that he could reach out and actually take in his two hands. And at last the turmoil within his mind subsided. He was thinking of Betty, and, "Lord, but I'm one lucky man," he was telling himself, when something drove these wandering thoughts out of his mind.

It was not fear, but a prickling sensation that almost stung him as it moved swiftly up his spine. He knew now he had felt it the night before, and now there came, too, a lethargy that swept quickly through him.

How he knew it was the same thing that had returned, Whitmore could never have explained, but he knew it by some new and added sense when first that ghostly glimmering appeared in the far corner of the room. Certainly he could not have recognized it by sight for in this place of darkness his eyes were of little use. Only by some inner vision did he know that here was no clumsy body such as Elizabeth's description had led him to expect, yet knew, too, that it was the same fearful visitor as before.

A waving cloud of gray-green light that spread out over the floor, that reached almost to the ceiling! That and only that was all his straining eyes could see.

It had been light with a light of its own, like fox-fire in the woods, this unnamable thing in the corner of the room. Now, suddenly, it was dark, and still Whitmore knew that it was there.

HE forced his laggard muscles to raise one heavy hand to the holster under his arm. That hand held a .45 automatic when it dropped heavily back to his lap.

"This throws a heavy enough slug to stop anything that's able to move," he had told himself an hour before. But now he was not so confident—not here in the dark where some strange power had already reached out to paralyze his muscles; where something that had become invisible still hovered, its presence made known to him by that strange sense. No, decidedly, even the clutch of a heavy caliber gun did not instil its customary confidence. And with that feeling of helplessness there came to Mr. Whitmore the knowledge of fear.

He tried to raise the gun and found it too heavy for his waning strength. He could not move; and suddenly, with a sharp abruptness that sent a chill along his spine, he knew that he *must* move; he knew with a knowledge that transcended all sense of sight or sound that something unthinkably beastly and vile was coming toward him, closer . . . closer. . . .

Jack Whitmore had yet to learn the full meaning of fear. The understanding of its uttermost depths was to come later. But, for the first time in his life, beads of cold perspiration gathered slowly across his forehead and trickled into his eyes. And then—

Those velvet shades he had drawn so savagely across the window were hung on iron rings; sharply now through the silence he heard them tinkle. He heard one slip with a tiny metallic clang, and, as the drapes fell of their own weight and adjusted themselves from the slight confusion into which he had drawn them, they opened to make one narrow crack, that a band of moonlight might throw itself softly across the middle of the room.

Just one narrow line of light, one single band of silver against the dull red of the rug—against that and on something else that caused Whitmore's breath to stop.

AHEAD, of mottled green and brown. It must have been a foot across; flat and triangular like that of a venomous snake. There were leathery lips, wet and dripping; and curved teeth that shone yellow against the dark wetness of the jaws. There were fleshy tendrils like thick hair hanging from flabby-pouched cheeks, and above all this nameless horror were two eyes that the band of silvery light brought suddenly to life. Eyes of fire, eyes so full of hatred, of blood-lust, of demoniac fury that Whitmore's own eyes came to them in irresistible fascination.

One instant only—one instant of utter horror, of a terrible conviction that here was nothing of earth; nothing, even, of hell. This was something that could have been nurtured only amid the dark recesses of some half-world!

One instant only while Whitmore's brain raced like an engine gone wild as if to make up for his deadened, helpless body. Then even that instant ended, and, where the moonlight had disclosed a thing of frightful visage, there was only a viscous pool . . . and still the moonlight shone wanly while that, too, vanished to blue-white mist and was gone.

Forgotten was the gun as it thudded upon the floor. Forgotten was all but one recollection—the remembrance of the brilliant light that would come with the opening of the door . . . and somehow Whitmore lashed those reluctant muscles and forced them to carry him across the room in one drunken, stumbling run until he crashed heavily against the door, flung it open, and clung weakly to the paneled wood.

The blinding glare of light was about him; he felt that he was safe, yet there was that which drove him on. And his last blind rush across the room ended in a crashing of glass where he thrust his bare fist through a window that he might fill his lungs with air pure enough to wash them clean of the foulness they contained.

One wrist was bleeding where the glass had raked it. He paid no heed but struggled to fling open the window, lean out, and let the nausea that had swept him have its way —for, with the first touch of that soft moonlight, there had come to him again that intolerable scent of decay.

"I'M through!" Whitmore admitted. "Don't say another word, Betty dear, nor give it another thought. I know when I have had enough."

But he was evasive when his wife questioned him as to the happenings of the night before. Nor could he have had any slightest knowledge of the terrible forces he had put into motion; for he smiled happily into the violet eyes that smiled back as he said: "Never again, angel-child! There'll be no more of that deviltry in this house. . . . Now, what show do you want to see to-night? I'll phone Jim and Sally to join us. I want to talk with Jim anyway—tell him about last night."

They returned well after midnight. Whitmore's man was waiting for him; he handed his employer a packet of papers. "They were left for you, sir," he said.

Jack Whitmore swore softly under his breath as he hurriedly inspected the documents. "It's that confounded subway extension matter," he explained to his wife. "You run along to bed, Betty; I'll follow after a while. I've got to go over an unholy mess of figures; got to be ready for a directors' meeting to-morrow."

He threw off hat and coat, switched on a shaded lamp at the table in his big living room, and, instead of taking the papers to his study, he dropped unthinkingly into the same chair he had occupied the night before.

The lamp made a circle of light upon the table where Whitmore scanned endless figures and estimates. He was not aware of the darkness that filled the rest of the room; he was not aware of his own solitude; and his mind was entirely engaged with the engineers' report and what their test borings had disclosed. . . . The first sound that reached his ears went unheard.

CONCLUSIVE proof, this, of how far from his mind was anything more supernatural than the modern magic of the machine age in which he lived. The sound was repeated twice before he realized that he was hearing something like the whistling intake of an asthmatic breath. Then his head snapped up sharply, and, for a moment, he stared incredulously about him.

"Absurd!" he said half aloud; "I've seen men go to pieces—get the shakes—but, by the gods, I thought I was immune!"

His eyes had gone unconsciously toward that place where, one night earlier, they had stared into eyes of flaming red. He found nothing, although that same strange chill sensation along his spine had half prepared him to see a gray-green whirl of mist in the darkness. By sheer will power he brought his gaze back to the papers and the circle of light, and he forced his mind once more to concentrate upon the figures there.

". . . And it is the recommendation of our Mr. Donnelly that further borings should be made at the

points indicated on the attached layout—" He pushed the papers quietly aside; his mind refused to be coerced when, in his ears, there sounded again the labored breathing. And the same mysterious something that had spoken to him on that other occasion told him again that here was the loathsome, nameless thing, returned this time unbidden.

AND again there came to the stout heart of Whitmore that gripping fear, for, though he had not yet turned to look, he knew that this time the thing had come to him in the light. Dim, that light in the big room where it reflected and was diffused from the lighted circle of the table, but even this subdued glow was brighter than the impenetrable darkness of those other nights . . . and Whitmore realized that light, the only weapon he knew, was losing its effectiveness.

He did not turn at once; that chill that was gripping his heart was spreading in ever-widening waves throughout his body.

In all the high-ceilinged room there was but one sound: the whistling intake of that horrible breath through a tight throat, and a softer, deeper-toned *huff!* as the breath was released. This eery combination of sounds was repeating itself with gruesome regularity. . . .

In that instant the mind of Jack Whitmore split sharply into two halves; he was two selves, and one of those selves swore and cursed at the other:

"Coward! Fool! Turn around, you poor damned idiot. There's nothing there—nothing to be afraid of! And if there is anything there, you're man enough to wring its ugly neck!"

But that other self stood in frozen, terror-stricken immobility. Not until the rasping breath grew perceptibly louder did Whitmore move. Then there clamored in his brain one thought, repeating itself over and over: "It's coming! It's coming nearer. In another minute it will touch you!" It was the thought of that touch that gave the man strength to turn slowly about.

AT first there was nothing! Then half-way between him and the far corner of the room, amid the heavy shadows, was something darker even than darkness itself. Those white papers gleaming in the oright light had been blinding; there was time needed for Whitmore's eyes to adjust themselves—time in which every second seemed like a lagging hour.

Dimly in that darkened room he saw first only the outline of a body, a stooped, shrunken body it seemed. The figure of a man, standing motionless. Then, while Whitmore watched, that creature of the shadows took one halting, forward step, and even in the dim light Whitmore could see the sunken cheeks, the long, matted, gray hair that hung in a bedraggled fringe half over the face, as ragged seemingly as the tattered fragments of cloth that clung to the gaunt frame below.

Then one hand was slowly raised, a hand more like a claw of some carrion bird than anything resembling a human hand. But it come tremblingly upward to the face and brushed aside the hanging hair, and, with that, Whitmore for the first time saw the eyes!

They were cavernous eyes, deeply sunken in their sockets. which, in that emaciated face, were like the two black openings in a skull; yet from their shadowed depths they blazed as Whitmore watched, blazed redly with the same menacing look he had seen in the reptilian eyes that had stared at him the night before.

It was the same *thing!* Whitmore knew in one intuitive flash that

these horrible bodies were so many disguises for a still more horrible, more venomous and loathsome creature that was using them for some terrible purpose. And as before, it announced its coming in a manner unmistakable.

The charnel-house odor which assailed the senses of the helpless man was almost more than human nerves could bear; and still Whitmore stood, not moving, beside that big table with its single light where a scattered litter of papers shone whitely. And the thing came on.

THAT single light shed a mellow glow; it reflected softly throughout the room; shone dully here and there on polished mahogany and lost itself at last in the neutral tints of the textured walls. And with equal delicacy it illumined the face from which Jack Whitmore could not remove his horrified gaze.

Not one single muscle of that face moved; and, rigidly set in the cold grip of death, there was no mistaking the meaning of the waxen pallor nor, more horrible yet, the discoloration that spread across half the face. Only the flashing hatred of those eyes gave visible manifestation of the fearful light that had forced itself into this body.

And for Jack Whitmore, standing there unmoving, hardly breathing, time lost all meaning and measure; all comprehension of normal things, all memories of the every-day world were lost. They were erased from his mind as if they had never been, and in all the great universe there was nothing but this nameless horror, nothing but two eyes that blazed redly with malevolent menace meant unmistakably for him.

One slow step; another as dreadful, as inexorable; and another—and, with that slow measured approach of something which had no right to existence in the world of living men, the fear which had been born in Jack Whitmore's heart that other night seemed to have reached its full stature. Had one of those dreadful claw-like hands reached within his breast to close about his heart, that deathly clutch could have been no colder than the grip of the fear that seized upon him now. Dimly he felt his whole body shiver; there were spasms of trembling that jerked and twitched at his deadened muscles.

SOME part of Whitmore's mind was reaching deep among buried memories for phrases half forgotten. His lips were moving stiffly.

"Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness . . ." he murmured. But Whitmore *was* afraid, and the ghoulish visitant came slowly, haltingly forward; inch by inch it forced the helpless, dead body to drag itself along in the dim light.

Closer! And now one bony, claw-like hand rested upon the table. . . .

Closer yet it came, and the hand at the end of an arm whose thinness was apparent through the half-rotted cloth came slowly up and out out toward Whitmore's face!

Reaching and straining it hung there until the dreadful body took one last forward step . . . and with the first touch of long fingernails to his cheek, that other half of Whitmore's mind, that self which had never yielded, took quick command. The response of his muscles might have followed a tremendous electric shock.

One hand which had hung limply at his side shot up and out. It contracted into a hard fist, and that fist came up from below carrying all the force and driving power that Whitmore's heavy body could impart.

Where or how he struck the thing

Whitmore never knew. That other self which was in control was shouting frantically to him, driving him in one backward spring towards the drawer in the end of the table, and his searching hand found the long flashlight that he sought, and pressed the switch.

No dim light then; Whitmore had had this lamp made for his own use underground. The beam which he directed toward a huddled mass on the floor seemed in that dark room like a blazing headlight of a locomotive. It was like a solid bar of light, like a torrent of liquid force that battered and poured upon that huddled heap of rags and flesh . . . and the thing which had maintained a semblance of wholeness in the dim light lost all form, became a pool of utter horror, and then was gone. And only the strangling air of the room told of that vileness which had lately been there.

IT was a pale and shaken man who left his car that following day to walk up to a house whose door bore a card announcing that within could be found one Madame Zembla. Whitmore's sleepless eyes in his fear-paled face seemed almost as dark and sunken as those other terrible eyes had been.

All this, it seemed, was noted by the searching eyes in the medium's fat, expressionless face. "Ah," she said softly, without waiting for Whitmore to announce his errand. "It is zat you have done as you say. You would have your own way about this. And now. . . ." She shrugged her broad shoulders disdainfully and waited for Whitmore to complete the sentence.

"For God's sake—" began Whitmore. There seemed no words by which he might convey to another human even a faint understanding of this dreadful truth.

"Oui," said the Madame softly. *"Pour le bon Dieu*—and for the sake of your little lady who was 'fraid. Now tell me," she demanded sharply, "is it that you have done—what?"

And Jack Whitmore told—not as Mr. Whitmore, capitalist and builder of subways might have spoken condescendingly to a disreputable charlatan; this was another Whitmore who spoke contritely and humbly and who implored the fat, ill-dressed woman before him to come to his aid.

"It is," she said at last, "zat you have left ze door open, and there has walked in a somesing that seizes any dead body it can for to make it live. You have left it open, that door, and once open, it is hard to close. It may be I can help, but, of a truth, it is *dificile!"*

WITH this promise of help another thought came uppermost in Whitmore's questioning mind. "This thing," he stated abruptly, "it was alive, I tell you. I don't mean the body. That was dead, dead! I mean the thing that was in that body.

"Where did it come from? Where is it now? Are there," he demanded, "things like that in the world of the dead? Is that what we have to meet when we go on from here?" For the first time in his life, J. P. Whitmore had turned his inner vision away from the things of this world toward a future that seemed highly problematical, and the visions he saw with that inner gaze were disturbing.

Something of this may have shown in his face, so pale and drawn; his hoarse tones may have hinted at the questions he had been asking himself. At least, there was something which made the medium lean forward and place one pudgy hand on his knee. "In your language," she said, "you have ze—what you say?—quotation: 'a little knowledge is a so-dangerous thing,'

and even ze little knowledge you have, it is all bad.

"No," she stated, and her voice rang clearly with conviction, "there is heaven and there is hell—though not such a hell as you might think. We will know more about both of them some day, I think, you and I." She touched herself swiftly in the sign of the cross, then went on:

"But zis thing, it comes from neither place; it has, perhaps, escaped. There are those over there who will help us to send it back where it belong. . . .

"No, not to-night," she told Whitmore. "My help, it is needed by others than you. But to-morrow night I come."

With one sharp look she checked Whitmore's hand that had half withdrawn a bill-fold. "This," she told him, "is not a matter of ze money. It is a matter of somesing even more important—*vraiment!*—a great deal more important!"

THERE was a door—how well he knew it now—a door to some hideous half-world that held things neither of heaven nor hell, nor yet of the world of men. And he had left that door open!

J. P. Whitmore at his beautiful home some hours later faced the oncoming night with trepidation ill concealed.

"No, no," he said with unwonted irritation, "don't wait for me, Betty dear. You go along. I—I've—some matters to attend to, some very important matters.

"Jack," she began hesitantly, "you're not going to—"

"No; there'll be no more of that," was Whitmore's brusque response.

Jack Whitmore who had known pretty women beyond number had found, as others have done, that true beauty is confined to the few. Betty Whitmore's position in that restricted group could not be questioned. With beauty of form and feature, and that added beauty which comes from something within, the wife of J. P. Whitmore had all of loveliness that might be desired

And Whitemore could not face that appealing figure standing at the foot of the broad staircase; he could not meet the troubled look in her eyes gone suddenly deep and dark. He could only repeat his reassuring words and hope they might bring greater conviction to his listener than they did to himself.

"No, no; nothing of that sort, Betty! Just business, my dear. Now run along." He turned without the customary good-night kiss and entered the living room.

HE was to remember that last caress he had failed to give—remember it while he stared with hot, dry eyes unseeingly into a future where there was only darkness and in which there was nowhere an answer to the questions that hammered and beat within his brain . . . but now Whitmore was thinking only of light.

He switched on every lamp in the room, then dropped into his big chair and resolutely forced his eyes away from that far corner toward which they turned fearfully.

There were business papers upon which he tried vainly to focus his attention; he threw them aside for a book. That too failed.

He found a pencil in his hand: reached for a pad of paper and made meaningless marks—meaningless to him, although their significance to a psychiatrist might have been startling. From geometrical figures the pencil point passed on to more rhythmic, swinging lines. It was some time later that Whitmore realized, with a start, that his hand was moving unguided by himself.

The paper where he had been writing was black with a crisscross

of confused marks over its upper half, while, below, it bore regular lines. Here was the writing of a cramped hand where one word was repeated over and over throughout all the lines.

J. P. Whitmore's big sprawling chirography was as individual as the man; had he consciously tried, he could not possibly have imitated the crowded, vertical letters of this writing at which he stared. But neither, for that matter, would he have written the one word, "don't," again and again.

Only in the last line did an additional word appear. And here this repeated command became, "Don't go—don't go."

WITH an abruptness which indicated the nervous tension that possessed the man, Whitmore suddenly revolted against his own inexplicable conduct.

"To hell with it!" he exploded. "To hell with it all! I'm sick of it; sick—sick—sick! Sitting up here like a scared schoolboy, afraid of the dark, afraid to go to bed."

He crossed swiftly and snapped off a master switch, and without another look toward the threatening darkness behind him, he passed out of the room and up the broad stairs where Betty Whitmore had stood.

He saw her through the door that connected their two rooms. She was asleep, breathing softly and regularly, and from some window of her room a broad band of moonlight threw itself irregularly across her bed. It showed the regular rise and fall of her breast, showed, too, the faintest ghost of a smile that tugged at the corners of her lips as, even in sleep, some memory moved her to that ever-ready mirth.

And Whitmore's eyes shone with tenderness and admiration as he tiptoed quietly away and reached for the switch that plunged his own room into darkness. But from where he lay he turned that he might look through that open doorway where a band of moonlight lay caressingly across Betty's bed.

HOW long he slept Whitmore never knew. He knew only that he had gone to sleep with a mind at rest; and farthest from his thoughts was any suspicion that the repeated warning of "Don't go—don't go" might have ended with the words, "to sleep!" But he knew it when he awoke—knew it with a certainty that sent that gripping hand of fear once more about his heart.

What was it? Where was it? Something threatened, some danger more terrible than any that had come to him before. Almost it was as if a voice had been shouting to him, as if it were this voice that had wakened him, and with that he knew that the warning concerned his wife.

Betty! She was alone in her room! He cursed the muscles that were slow in sending him out of bed and toward that communicating door.

And at last Whitmore learned the full meaning of fear. Like one who has been dashed through treacherous ice into the black waters waiting beneath, that inner self which was the real Jack Whitmore found itself plunged down and yet down into depths of nerve-gripping terror whose frigid chill checked his heart in the very middle of a beat. And this fear was all for his wife.

That band of moonlight had moved. It lay now across the pillow where Betty's face would have been.

Would have been! For Whitmore, his rush checked for one frozen instant as he reached the doorway, stared with straining eyes; yet where his wife had been he could see only an irregular blur.

Horrified, stricken with a paralysis that left him clinging to the doorway for support, he saw that blur take form and become a furred animal whose hair, like that of a monkey, was long and stringy.

ONE strangled cry escaped from his throat, and at the sound the crouching thing leaped to the floor with a motion too quick for the eye to follow. Creatures of the wild can do it; they can move so quickly that it is as if they were in two positions at the same instant. And this nameless thing that had been huddled over the face and figure of lovely Betty Whitmore was abruptly there no longer, but stood beside the bed looking squarely at the man. . . . And Jack Whitmore, who now knew fear learned also to recognize hate.

That same red fire was in the creature's eyes; it might have been a reflected glow from some smoldering pit of hell. Here was hatred, yet not a human hatred; nor was it the ferocity of a wild beast. Here was something that defied all words or thought to compass it, and it shone from narrowed eyes in the head of a great cat-beast like nothing Whitmore had ever seen.

Still that dreadful paralysis held him in its grip. He knew, though his eyes were fastened on the beast, that his wife was in her bed. He sensed too that that regular breathing had ceased. He heard her give one feeble, gasping moan.

In the moonlight a curtain fluttered. The soft breath of the summer night touched Whitmore's face, and his own indrawn breath died strangling in this throat, as again there came to him the horrible stench of putrefying flesh.

There was no measure of time, nor none to measure it. It one instant the throbbing, beastly carcass was standing erect, held there by that hideous something within it that gave it the semblance of life. In the same instant, while yet that one feeble moan whispered through the room, it was back where it had been.

IT landed, straddling awkwardly the silken folds under which was the lovely figure of Betty Whitmore. Her head that had fallen to one side upon the pillow was swung face upward as the creature landed. And now Whitmore could see in that band of moonlight that which transcended all else there had been of horror.

Her eyes were closed in a face that was waxen pale; her lips, soft as the innermost petals of a rose, had gone dry and colorless; and suddenly those lips were covered by a beastly mouth in a face where decay had already left its mark.

The scream that burst from Whitmore's tight throat was that of a raging animal. He launched himself in one spring that threw him heavily against the bed while his two outstretched, straining hands tore frenziedly at something of flesh and fur into which his fingers sank.

Then he found himself standing once more; he was breathing heavily, mumbling over and over in a broken, hollow voice, while he stared with unbelieving eyes at the thing upon the soft floor-coverings of Betty's room.

A dead thing!—yet a thing where the workings of death had been thwarted. And now that process of dissolution, which by some devilish magic has been checked, went on with terrible speed, and before his eyes, Whitmore saw that which darkness should always conceal.

Betty! It was his next conscious thought. Betty was safe. But Betty must not see *this!* He tore his eyes away, then turned swiftly with the sudden realization that Betty needed help.

HE must get a doctor at once. His arms were outstretched to reach her, to raise her up—but they were checked. For the figure that had been that of Betty Whitmore, the silent body that had lain so quietly was galvanized to life; while yet he reached forward, it snapped abruptly to a sitting position. Then, in the merest flash of time it threw itself out from under the silken robes, the soft, rose-colored coverlets that had sheltered Betty Whitmore, and sprang from the bed.

And still the moonlight followed it. Still that broad band of silver touched softly on those features that Jack Whitmore had loved. And the eyes that stared back in fierce triumph were red with the fires of hate, red as some glowing reflection from the deepest pits of hell, and the rose-petal lips drew back in an animal snarl.

Only for a moment did Whitmore see this malevolent transformation. Then between him and the face of his wife that had become so unbelievably beastly there came other pictures.

So plainly he saw them! They blocked out even the face, distorted with fiendish exultation. . . .

There was the open door . . . and through that door there came a formless, slow-rising cloud. . . . In its folds were faces, horrible faces, of what had once been animals and men, and Whitmore, staring at that ever-moving spectral cloud, knew that within it was a nameless horror, something beyond the comprehension of men. It had found the open door and was using these putrescent bodies as a vehicle. It was imparting to them its own quivering, vibrating life and it was seeking another, more desirable way to manifest itself. It was searching for a living human being whose soul it could displace!

STILL it was a small thing which broke the spell in which Whitmore was held. A bit of lace at the V-shaped throat of the dainty robe that Betty had worn! It rose and fell softly in the moonlight with the regular breathing of that horrible breath that had been blown into her body . . . and with that Jack Whitmore went quite mad.

Betty was dead. He knew it without any emotion. She was dead; and this—this thing!—

The throat above that lace-edged robe was white and soft. Jack Whitmore's hands were still about it when the police broke in; his fingers were sunk into that soft flesh with a grip they loosened only with difficulty. . . .

"The poor young thing," said an Irish officer compassionately as he stared at the body on the floor, at its soft half-opened lips, its drooping lids. "Like an angel she looks! . . . And why did you do it?" he demanded of Whitmore. "Only a fiend from hell—"

He did not complete the sentence, nor did Whitmore reply. There had begun for him the long silence which was to last throughout the trial; which, except for that outburst in court, was to continue until his death.

"They've had all the facts," he cried. "Give them the truth—the whole damnable truth. They won't believe it, but—"

White Lady

By Sophie Wenzel Ellis

BRYNHILD knew that something had waked her, something pleasant and exhilarating, which was to be expected on this strange island in the most remote corner of the warm Caribbean sea, where André Fournier, her fiancé, experimented fantastically with tropical plant life.

Presently she heard it again, music so wild and delicate that she felt its rapturous vibrations in her nerves, rather than heard them.

Below her, from the house to the placid sea in the distance, spread an unnatural panorama, lighted by the sun's gaudy hood just coming out of the water. She looked, and was glad that she had accepted the invitation of Madame Fournier, André's gracious mother, to visit their lonely Ile-de-Fleur.

In a few minutes she was dressed and on the trail of the puzzling music. When she closed the back door behind her, she was immediately in a curious maze of floral wonders, unreal as a painting by Doré. The jungles of the sun-warmed lands had given to André their rarest treasures, which now sucked a richer life from the black soil of the Ile-de-Fleur. Nature, in her most whimsical mood, had not been permitted to rule here; everywhere, among frond and spray and giant runner, bloomed hybrid blossoms whose weird forms and colors suggested André's tampering with Nature.

Brynhild heard the music clearer now, long notes that had an eery, half-human sound, like the tuneless music of a demented savage. It baffled her, teased her into wilder plunges through the flower thickets, all jeweled with liquid beads.

In purest love André served his weirdly beautiful flower — his White Lady of passion, of jealousy, of hate.

WHEN she mounted a hillock and saw, just beyond, a tiny cage built of copper screen, she knew that she had reached her goal. The music seemed to come from this little bower, which was puzzling, for the sole occupant was a blooming plant.

A golden gauze seemed to drop suddenly from the sky, which was the tropical sun's first rays shooting from the sea. The stronger light brought a gasp from Brynhild, for now she could see that even in this land of queer vegetation, the imprisoned plant was a monstrous alien.

From a mass of thick frondage, white and fleshy as her own bare arms, reared a flower whose round, pallid petals formed a face like the caricature of a woman. Draped around this eldritch flower-face and

flowing down to meet the colorless foliage, was a mass of gauzy matter that had the startling appearance of a bridal veil.

But what brought a cry from Brynhild was not the human look of this fantastic plant, but what it was doing. Just below the head, almost as large as her own, protruded two slender, dagger-pointed white spines, set in sockets in such a manner that they could be moved like arms. These two spines, rubbing together, produced the music that had captivated her.

After the first frightful moment of comprehension, she longed to see the spectacle closer. She pressed her forehead against the copper screen.

Instantly the spines ceased their serenade, the white flower-face turned and fronted her, and she felt eyes watching her, eyes she could not see. For a moment, flower and foliage remained rigid; then

"My own White Lady!"

a spasm passed through the entire plant, the arms came together again, and hideous discord shrieked out.

Brynhild, sensing that her presence had caused the change from elfin music to the blood-freezing dissonance, dropped behind a concealing thicket and watched.

WHILE she waited, footsteps approached. André was coming. Like a tall young pagan priest he came forward, arms and shoulders naked, sunshine splashing his bronze curls. He had a beautiful, poetic face and a luminous smile that was now turned on the strange plant.

Instantly the flower music commenced again, louder and more seductive than ever, the queer blossom reeling on its stem as though animal excitement quivered through its pallid flesh.

André called out in his soft French:

"*Bon jour,* White Lady. Are you happy this morning, eh?"

The woman-face swayed toward him; the dagger arms caressed each other rapturously.

Brynhild crouched lower behind her hiding-place, each moment more astonished and horrified. André lifted the latch on the door and went inside.

The music sank to a low, plaintive throbbing, tender as a bird's love-song. André came closer to the flower and touched the white foliage with gentle fingers. Down drooped the flower head until the fleshy cheeks brushed his face.

"Ah, *ma petite!*" André whispered. "My own White Lady! If I could but bridge the gap!"

Brynhild could endure no more.

"André!" she shrieked, leaping from her hiding-place.

Instantly the flower-head stiffened, and turned toward her with a gesture so human that the girl sickened. As André called out an impulsive greeting and came toward her, the unnatural foliage quivered violently and the daggers came together with a piercing din.

ANDRÉ laughed. "She's jealous, the White Lady!" His English had the barest accent. "Did you ever imagine such a flower, Brynhild? Should you have believed if someone had told you of this?"

"It is a nightmare!" She covered her eyes with soft, beautifully formed hands.

"No, Brynhild. She is my dream materialized."

"Stop! I can't bear to hear you speak of it as though it were a woman." Her face had blanched until it was as pale as the flower before her.

In the cage, a terrific noise was going on, shocking in its metallic harshness.

André turned around and looked at the flower. "I'd better go to it for a moment, dear. Come! White Lady is like a dog: if you are good to her, she'll respond with love that is almost human."

Hesitant, as though she feared something evil, Brynhild entered the cage behind André. André caressed the leaves and put his face against the humanlike head. The daggers, rubbing together, gave forth a feline purr.

"Come, Brynhild," said André, with his lucent smile, "pet her."

Brynhild shrank back. How could she touch those leprous, fleshy leaves, that flower-face as unnatural as a vampire's? Trembling, she reached out her little hand to the bleached foliage.

Quick as a streak of lightning, the daggers struck at her, viciously, inflicting a long, bleeding scratch on her hand. The girl screamed and fell into André's arms.

"Darling!" groaned the young man, bending over her solicitously. "I never thought—"

Brynhild buried her golden curls against his shoulder.

"André!" she sobbed. "I can't endure it. That monster—it hates me." Her voice rose hysterically. "Why did you create it?"

"Hush!" He spoke sternly. "She never would have scratched you if she hadn't sensed that you are an enemy."

"You're mad!" She broke from his arms and raised her beautiful face angrily. "This vile monster has gone to your head. Now, as always, you prefer your unnatural flowers to me."

HER white skirt flashed through the open door and on out between the flowery tangle beyond. He followed her, calling a contrite apology. When he caught her and again held her fast in his arms, they were both breathless.

"Pardonne-moi!" he pleaded, his thin, spiritual face full of penitence. "But, Brynhild, I'd give half my life if you'd love plants as I do."

And with his hand pressing hers, he told her, in his peculiarly quiet voice, of the supreme joy that can be had from a sympathetic understanding of Nature's strange ways.

"Man has a connection with plant life," he said, "which all scientists will some day concede. Naturalists already agree that there is no real dividing line between the lowest forms of plant and animal life. And what is man but the highest animal?"

He had grown excited, as he always did when discussing plants. His sensitive face glowed with earnestness.

"Who can say," he continued, "how close is the kinship between animals and the carnivorous plants that devour meat? White Lady is not the only plant that has voluntary motion; nor is she the only one that senses instantly the presence of the destroyer." He looked at her intently. "Some of our commonest garden plants have eye-cells in the epidermis of leaves and stalks—eyes that have lenses and are sensitive to light. White Lady is the result of careful cross-breedings that have developed the most humanlike traits found throughout plant life. Oh, Brynhild!" He held her hand against his cheek. "If you could only understand, dear! You would not be shocked that my White Lady is more than an animal plant; that the exquisite, lovely thing has intelligence!"

A LONG shiver ran through the girl's slender body.

"It is wrong to bring such a monstrosity into existence, André!"

"No!" His eyes filmed with tears. "My only sin is that I developed just one. Had I developed two, White Lady would not now be the loneliest living thing in existence." He flushed as he spoke.

Sudden horrible understanding gripped Brynhild, understanding so overwhelming that she swayed dizzily.

"That monster—it loves you, André! It loves you as a dog loves its master."

He stroked the gleaming gold of her hair, all alive under the sunlight.

"Don't go near it again, dear one," he soothed. "There might be real danger for you. Now there! Mother is calling us to breakfast. Be happy and smiling, won't you?" He tilted up her chin and kissed her gently.

At the breakfast table, Madame Fournier was very much disturbed; André took nothing except milk, into which he dissolved a pinkish pellet.

"No coffee this morning, son?" asked the mother, anxiously.

André flushed. "No, mother; just milk."

"Why, André!" protested Brynhild. "You scarcely eat enough to live. I watched you last night. You actually shivered over the lettuce mother made you eat. Don't you feel well?"

"Excellent. Remember that I drink quantities of milk."

After breakfast, Madame Fournier drew Brynhild aside.

"I'm uneasy," she said. "André's is becoming fanatical in his love for growing things. Think of it! He says he can hear his lettuce cry out when he cuts into it."

"A year ago," shivered Brynhild, "I'd have called that nerves; but now that I've seen that monstrous White Lady thing—" She put her hands over her eyes.

NO more that day did Brynhild go near White Lady. That night, while the island slept, she sat by her window and enjoyed the splendor of the moon-bathed panorama. Dimly, from the enchanted flowery reaches, came stealing the wild music of White Lady. With the first note, Brynhild stiffened, but, as the seductive sounds sent their sorcery through her, she listened with increasing delight, forgetful of her horror of the morning. Within a few moments, she was reaching for her dressing gown.

Following where White Lady's music pulled her, Brynhild stepped lightly through the thick leafage, exalted as though she were blown along by a jubilant wind.

André's strange world of flowers was like the inside of a giant pearl, for the Caribbean moon, riding full and low, had bleached the island to a luminous whiteness. From the pale hypnosis above and from the honeyed breaths that trembled over the flowers, she drew a new kinship with Nature. There was solemn joy in knowing that the same mysterious force called life which animated her own young body also sent the sap flowing through the plants about her.

Every growing thing on the island seemed to respond to the beauty of the night as happily as she. On all sides, flower-faces that seemed delirious with the joy of living lifted to the white radiance above.

The beauty of the world, then, did not exist for man's sole enjoyment.

Perhaps there was truth in André's contention that plants, with their partially developed consciousness, respond with more delicate delight than cultivated man to such elemental joys as the beauty of moonlight and the soft kisses of the night wind.

She was sure of this when she saw White Lady. The mysterious woman-flower was moon-mad. The roof of the bower, built to shade partially, cut off the moon which was directly above, but White Lady had curved her stem so that her face reached the light.

THE music that throbbed from the rubbing arms was so rapturous that Brynhild felt her senses reel. She threw herself upon the grassy ground directly in front of the cage.

Instantly the music ceased, and the monstrous blossom withdrew to the shadows, where it stood tall and straight on its rigid stem, spectral in its veil and cadaverous foliage. Brynhild was prepared for the hideous discord that she had heard in the morning, but from the shadows came such low, enticing harmonies, sweet as the breathings of a wind harp, that she drew closer. The nearer she approached, the dimmer came the music, until the horrible thought came to her that White Lady was enticing her within the cage.

Pressing her hands over her ears,

she fled, frightened with the paralyzing fear of the unknown.

The next morning, when she told André, he caught her in his arms and cried out:

"Keep away from her! As you value your life, keep away. She has intelligence, but no conscience—no pity for what she hates."

"But, André!" She searched his ascetic face closely. "Will you let such a thing live? Shan't you cut it down?"

"Cut down my White Lady, the supreme achievement of my life?" He looked as though he thought her insane.

"Not even though it hates me, André? Not even though it is trying to destroy me?"

"But I warned you to keep away. Wouldn't you—wouldn't any human being have a right to fight an enemy? You are her enemy, and she knows it."

The dispute ended with Brynhild in tears, but with André as firm as ever about not cutting down his unnatural creation.

BRYNHILD was jealous, jealous of a flower, and her jealousy increased with the passing of time. Whenever she heard the seductive song of White Lady, elemental hate surged in her heart. She wanted to destroy it, to tear apart those thick, white leaves, to crush that singular woman-face under her heel.

She was afraid to go too close to the screen cage, but sometimes she stole near enough for a good glimpse of the flower. Always she was delighted to see the rage of the horrible thing, and, at a safe distance, laughed at the shrieking dissonance that the flower's striking daggers made. At times, when she approached the cage, White Lady merely stiffened, and then Brynhild knew that it watched her as a cat watches a mouse. André had told her that the invisible eyes in the leaves and stem were very highly developed.

It gave Brynhild unholy delight to know that her very presence was torment to this human flower that seemed to adore André. As though the thing could understand, she would stand at a safe distance and tell how André loved her, and of the wedding which was only three weeks distant. Once, after a scene like this, White Lady lunged at her so viciously with her daggers that Brynhild was barely able to escape.

And the girl knew that, sooner or later, one would succumb to the other.

"It shall be that *bête blanche*," vowed Brynhild, quoting the name that Madame Fournier had given the plant.

AS the days passed, André grew thinner, whiter, more spiritual. He was absolutely unlike the brown young athlete with whom Brynhild had fallen in love, two years ago, in Bermuda.

"It's the way he eats," moaned his mother. "How can a strong man who works live on little else than milk? What are we to do, Brynhild? He is killing himself. Sometimes I even wonder if his mind is not going." She began to cry softly. "Did you notice him in the rain yesterday?"

"No. Tell me."

"He walked around as in a dream, with his white face held up toward the dripping sky. When I went to him and asked him to come in, he refused. He told me to leave him alone, because he had found the mood in which he could react to the cool rain just as a plant. He's doing something mysterious to make himself as much as possible like things that grow in the ground."

"It's that White Lady!" said Brynhild bitterly. "Constant brood-

ing over a monster like that will unhinge anyone's mind. The horrible freak is getting on my nerves, too. I do silly things." She blushed, thinking of her own scenes with the strange plant.

"We'll have to watch him, Brynhild."

Brynhild did watch, and thereby brought greater suffering to herself, for her surveillance revealed that he not only spent much of the day with White Lady, but that he often went to the plant at night.

Much of his passion for herself had died. His love seemed to have ascended to a spiritual plane which was ethereal in its purity and tenderness. He spoke no more of their approaching marriage, seemed almost to have forgotten it.

When the two were alone, he frequently turned the conversation to morbid subjects.

"Death is beautiful in a land of flowers like this," he told her. "Isn't it a happy thought, Brynhild, to know that when you are put into the warm, sweet earth, your body resolves into its chemical elements and again reaches up to the light in leaf and stalk and fragrant bloom?"

ONE night, when the forgotten wedding was only a week off, André fainted. After he had responded to the frantic ministrations of his mother and Brynhild, he turned his great, dark eyes pleadingly to them and gasped:

"I want you both to make me a promise."

"What, son?" asked the mother.

"That when I'm dead, you'll bury me, not too deep, under my White Lady." His tired lids fluttered down. "Oh, mother! To think of the roots of that sweet creature reaching down, down for me and resurrecting my atoms to a newer and sweeter life."

"André, darling! Don't! You're breaking our hearts!"

"But will you promise?"

"Yes! Oh, God—help me!"

With André restored and quiet in his room, Brynhild and Madame Fournier sought a secluded corner for their frantic grief.

"It can't go on another day, daughter," said the mother. "André will die before the wedding. We must destroy that *bête blanche*."

"But, mother, wouldn't that grieve him too much at this time?"

"Rather a few days' grief than a grave under that monster." Madame Fournier shuddered.

"Where is the ax, mother?" Brynhild's face was as pale as her dress.

"I'll do it, my dear. I'm an old woman and his mother. Perhaps it might be something like murder to kill that human thing, but I have a mother's right."

"No!" Brynhild's voice was almost fierce. "I want to do it. White Lady hates me, and I hate her. Where is the ax?"

"Wait a little. It is early. One of the Negroes might see you."

AND Brynhild waited until the night grew older and blacker, when she crept from the house with an ax and a flash-light. There was no moon to-night to guide her through the flowery mazes. A strong wind, coming from the sea, followed behind her like an animal sniffing her footprints. It pulled her skirts and her long, flowing sleeves and whipped her hair across her face.

She had the furtive feeling of one who plans a deed of blood and violence. In her mind she outlined what she must do. She would place the flash-light so that its light could fall upon White Lady. Then she would quickly unlatch the door and chop.

Never had White Lady been so beautiful. In the glow of the flash-light, she stood straight and silent

in her waxy foliage, with the gossamer veil whipping around her airily and her dagger arms folded like a demure bride waiting for her bridegroom. Brynhild never knew what to expect from this unnatural creature, and its silence frightened her more than the wildest noise it had ever produced.

Before lifting the latch, Brynhild stood regarding it, horrified, trembling, pitying. White Lady was watching, too, and waiting.

The moment Brynhild opened the door and went inside, a scream like the piercing voice of a woman tore through the night. Again and again the awful shriek wailed from the scraping dagger arms, and Brynhild knew that it rode on the wind to the ears of listeners in the house beyond.

Her nerveless hands almost dropped the ax. How could she wield her weapon against that fleshy, human face—against a thing that could cry out like a woman?

But André's burning eyes haunted her. She must, for his sake.

GRASPING and raising the ax, she went forward, with the wind pushing at her body and snatching her hair over her eyes. The ax fell, with poor aim. It merely crashed through part of the foliage, which cracked with a sickening snap as of crushed bones.

One more dreadful shriek rent the night, a shriek of murder and of rapine; but before its shrill echoes died, another and less hideous woman-voice gave an agony cry.

It was Brynhild.

The wind, tampering with her clothes, had blown her long, loose sleeve against White Lady, where it caught or was grasped by one of the dagger arms. The other dagger arm lifted and plunged, lifted and plunged.

The girl was wild with pain and fright. Held fast as she was, she could scarcely use the ax to ad-advantage, especially as she was forced to avoid the stabbing dagger.

The white veil fell from the thing's head. Before Brynhild could again wield the ax, another dagger thrust found her body. Through the flesh of her left shoulder it cut this time, and she crumpled, half fainting.

Even as she fell, she heard running feet. André's voice called out:

"Brynhild!"

Instantly White Lady paused in her stabbing and sent forth another shriek of triumph. Then again the dagger plunged, and Brynhild felt the warm blood flow from her arm.

She never completely lost consciousness, and dimly she was aware of chopping blows made by another, and of her left arm coming away from its horrible mooring. She felt herself lifted and carried for several yards. She felt André's rough, unshaved cheek against her own, and heard soft love words fall from the lips that bent to hers.

André laid her down carefully and shouted for help. Poor fellow! There had been a time when he could have carried her all around the island.

With a supreme effort, Brynhild opened her eyes. The flashlight was still where she had placed it, so that its round eye fell upon White Lady, or what was left of her. Now the plant was only a mass of crushed leaves and petals.

"Yes, I did it," came André's stern voice. "The *bête blanche* would have killed you, darling!" He kissed her hungrily. "I've been a beast, myself—and a fool. Forgive me!"

And later after Brynhild's gaping wounds were dressed, she heard André say four simple words that filled her with delight.

"I am hungry, mother."

"Back!" Paul cried. "Back!"

Murgunstrumm

A Complete Novelette

By Hugh B. Cave

CHAPTER I

3 A. M.

THE night hours are terrifying in that part of the country, away from traveled roads and the voices of sane men. They bring the moan of lost winds, the furtive whisper of swaying trees, the agony wail of frequent storms. They bring madness to men already mad, and fear and gibbering and horrible screams of torment. And sometimes peals of wild hideous laughter a thousand times worse.

And with the dread of darkness, that night, came other fears more acute and more terrifying, to clutch viciously at the man who sought to escape. Macabre horrors of the past, breeding anew in the slough of his

memory. Visions of the future, huge and black before him. Grim dread of detection!

The square clock at the end of the long corridor, radium-dialed for the guard's benefit, told him silently that the hour was 3 A. M. The hour when darkness deepens before groping dawn; when man is so close to that other-world of mystery that a mere closing of his eyes, a mere clutching of the subconscious, brings contact with nameless shapeless entities of abhorrent magnitude. The hour when the night watch in this grim gray structure, and the solitary guard on the outer walls, would be least alert. *His* hour, for which he had waited seven months of eternity!

Candle-lit and decayed is the Gray Toad Inn, where Murgunstrumm receives each lovely, unsuspecting guest.

His eyes were wide, staring, fearful. He crept like a cat along the corridor, listening for every separate sound. Somewhere in the tiers

above him a man was screeching violently, thumping on a locked door with frenzied fists. That would be Kennery, whom they had dragged in only a week ago. They had warned him to be still at night, poor devil. In the morning he would learn the awful loneliness and silence of solitary confinement. God! And men like that had to go on living, had to wait for death, slowly!

He prowled forward again, trembling, hugging the wall with thin fingers. Three more corridors now and he would be in the yard. He clutched the key feverishly, looking down at it with hungry eyes. The yard, then the last great gate to freedom, and then. . . .

HIS groping hands touched a closed door. He stopped abruptly. Over his head hung the number 23. The V. D. ward. And he shuddered. Someone was mumbling, laughing, inside—Halsey, the poor diseased idiot who had been here eighteen endless years. He would be on hands and knees, crawling over the floor, searching for beetles. He would seek and seek; and then, triumphant at last, he would sit for hours on his cot, holding a terrified insect cupped in his huge hands while he laughed gleefully at its frantic struggles.

Sickness surged over the fugitive's crouching body. He slunk on again quickly. God, he was glad when that mad caterwauling was smothered by a bend in the corridor! It clung in his brain as he tiptoed to the end of the passage. He fingered the key savagely. Eagerness glared in his eyes.

That key was his. His own! His own cunning had won it. During the past month he had obtained an impression of every separate lock between him and escape. Furtively, secretly, he had taken chewing-gum forms of every infernal slot. And no one knew. No one but Martin LeGeurn, Ruth's brother, who had come once each week, on visiting day, and carried the impressions back to the city, and had a master key made. A master key! Not successful at first. But he himself, with a steel nail file, had scraped and scraped at the thing until it fitted. And now, tonight. . . .

He descended the staircase warily, feeling his way every step. It was 3:10 now. The emergency ward would be open, with its stink of ether and its ghastly white tables on wheels. He could hide there until the guard passed. Every move according to schedule!

The door was open. He crept toward it, reached it, and stopped to peer anxiously behind him. Then he darted over the threshold and clung silently to the wall, and waited.

HOURS passed. Frantic hours of doubt and uncertainty. Strange shapes came out of nowhere, out of his distorted mind, to leer and point at him. God! Would those memories never die? Would the horrors of that hour of madness, seven months gone, torment him forever, night after night, bringing back visions of those hideous creatures of living death and the awful limping thing of the inn? Was it not enough that they had already made a soul-twisted wreck of him and sent him to this black house of dread? Would they—

Footsteps! They were audible now, approaching down the corridor outside. They came closer, closer. They scuffed past with an ominous *shf-shf-shf,* whispering their way. With them came the muffled clink of keys, dangling from a great ring at the guard's belt. And the sounds died away.

The fugitive straightened up and

stepped forward jerkily. And then he was running wildly down the passage in the opposite direction. A massive door loomed before him. He flung himself upon it, thrusting his own key into the lock. The door swung open. Cold, sweet air rushed into his face. Outside lay the yard, bleak, empty, and the towering walls that barred the world beyond.

His terror was gone now. His movements were mechanical and precise. Silently he locked the barrier behind him and slunk sideways along the wall of the building. If he made the slightest sound, the slightest false move, those glaring, accusing, penetrating searchlights would clank on and sweep the enclosure from one end to the other. The great siren would scream a lurid warning for miles and miles around, howling fiendishly that Paul Hill had escaped.

But if he went cautiously, noiselessly, he would be only a part of the darkness. There was no moon. The night was like pitch. The guard on the wall would not see.

A step at a time he moved along the stone, hesitating before each venture. Now a hundred feet lay between him and the gate. Now fifty; and the guard had not heard. Now twenty. . . .

His breath caught in his throat as he darted across the final ten feet. Flat against the last barrier of all, he fumbled with the huge lock. His fingers turned the key with maddening slowness, to muffle any fatal thud. Then, putting his shoulder to the mass, he pushed. The big gate inched outward.

Without a sound he squeezed through the narrow aperture. His teeth were clenched; his lips tasted of blood. But he was out, outside! No one had seen him! Feverishly he pushed the great block of iron back into place. On hands and knees he crawled along the base of the wall, crawled and crawled, until the guard's turret was only a grim gray blur against the black sky. Then, rising abruptly to his feet, he stumbled into the well of darkness beyond.

"Thank God!" he whispered hoarsely. And then he was hacking, slashing his way through tangled black underbrush, with huge trees massed all about him and the inky sky blotted out overhead.

CHAPTER II

Armand LeGeurn

NO one, that night, saw the disheveled gray-clad figure that stumbled blindly from the woods and slunk silently, furtively down the state road. No one saw the unholy lust for freedom in his eyes, or the thin whiteness of his compressed lips.

He was violently afraid. He turned continually to glance behind him. But his fists were clenched viciously. If that hideous siren sounded now, when he was so close to ultimate freedom, they would never take him back there alive. Never! Once before, during his seven hellish months of confinement, the siren had screamed. That was the time Jenson—foolish, idiotic Jenson, mad as a hatter—had scaled the walls. The bloodhounds had uncovered his hiding place in the heart of the woods, and he had been dragged back, whimpering, broken.

But not this time! This time the escaped fugitive was no madman. Horror, not madness, had thrust him into that den of cackling idiots and screeching imbeciles. Stark horror, born of an experience beyond the minds of men. Horror of another world, a world of death and undead demons. And to-night, at four o'clock, Martin LeGeurn would be waiting at the crossroads, with a car. Martin would not be late.

Paul Hill began to run. On and on he ran. Once he turned abruptly

and plunged into the edge of the woods as a passing bus roared up behind him. Then, as the bus bellowed past, he leaped to the shoulder of the road again, racing frantically.

A sob of relief soughed through his lips as he rounded the last sharp bend and saw, far ahead, a pair of stationary headlights glaring dimly toward him. He stumbled, caught himself. His legs were dead and heavy and aching sullenly, but he lurched on. And then he was gripping the side of the car with white nerveless hands, and Martin LeGeurn was dragging him into the seat.

There was no delay now. Everything had been arranged! The motor roared sharply. The roadster jerked forward and gathered momentum. The clock on the dash said five minutes past four. By five o'clock they would be in the city. The city, and Ruth, and—and then he would be free to finish it in his own way. Free to fight!

He fumbled with the leather bag under his feet.

"Why didn't Ruth come to see me?"

"Listen!" Martin LeGeurn said sibilantly.

PAUL stiffened. He heard it. The sound was a moaning mutter, trembling on the still air, somehow audible above the drone of the motor. It rose higher, clearer, vibrating like a living voice. Paul's fingers dug cruelly into the leather seat cushion. The color seeped out of his face.

He knew that sound. It was a lurid screaming now, filling the night with shrill significance. The night watch had discovered his absence. He had blundered somewhere. Some door left open; some twist of unforeseen fate—and now, up there in the tower, a black-faced fiend was whirling the handle of the great siren faster and faster, gloating over its hellish voice. The same awful wail had seared the countryside when Jenson had fled into the woods, four months ago.

A terrible shudder shook Paul's body. He cringed against his companion. Courage left him. Incoherent mumblings came from his mouth.

"They know," Martin said jerkily. "In ten minutes the road will be patrolled. Every car will be stopped. Get into your clothes. Quick!"

Paul stiffened. Suddenly he sat erect, fists clenched savagely.

"They'll never take me back! I'll kill them! Do you hear? I'll kill them all!"

Then he was tearing at the leather bag between his knees. He got it open, dragged out the light brown suit and tan shirt, the necktie and shoes. Feverishly, as the car rushed on at reckless speed with Martin LeGeurn hunched over the wheel, he ripped off his asylum garb and struggled into the other. Deliberately he stuffed the gray clothes into the bag, and snapped the lock.

"Get off this road. Take the first right."

Martin glanced at him quickly, frowning.

"It's madness. If we hurry, they may not—"

"We can't make it. The state police will—"

"But if we turn off—"

"I know the way, I tell you! Let me drive!"

MARTIN'S foot jammed on the brake. Even before the car had trembled to a stop, Paul snapped his door open and leaped out. And he was no longer a ghastly spectre in gaunt gray as he stumbled in the glare of the headlights. He was a lean, powerful young man, decently dressed, reso-

lute and determined and fighting viciously to overcome his own natural terror. He slid behind the wheel without a word. The car shot forward again under more expert hands. Roaring over the crest of the hill, it swerved suddenly to the right and lumbered into a narrow sub-highway of dirt and gravel.

And the siren screeched behind it. The whole of creation was vibrant with that infernal moan. It would throb and throb all through the night, flinging its message over an unbelievable radius. It would never stop!

But Paul paid no attention to it. He said curtly: "Heave that bag out. They'll never find it in here." And later, when Martin had obeyed, he said abruptly, scowling: "Why didn't Ruth come to see me?"

"She—she just couldn't, Paul."

"Why?"

"You wouldn't understand."

"She's waiting for me now. Is she?"

"I"—Martin stared straight at the windshield, biting his lips—"I don't know, Paul."

"She never tried to help me," Paul said bitterly. "Good God, she knew why I was in there! She could have gone to Kermeff and Allenby and made them listen."

"They left the city," Martin mumbled.

"That's a lie."

"She—"

"I know," Paul said heavily. "She went to them and they wouldn't listen. They're not supposed to listen. Doctor Anton Kermeff and Doctor Franklin Allenby," —the words were bitter as acid— "that's who they are. Too big to believe the truth. Their job was to put me away and sign a statement that I was mad. That's all they cared."

"I don't think Ruth went to see them, Paul."

Paul's hands tightened on the wheel. The stiffening of his body was visible, so visible that Martin said abruptly, as the car lurched dangerously to the side of the road and jerked back again:

"You—you don't understand, Paul. Please! Wait until you've talked to Father."

"Father?" And the voice was tinged with sudden suspicion. "Why not Ruth?"

"You'll know everything soon, Paul. Please."

Paul was silent. He did not look at his companion again. A vague dread caught at him. Something was wrong. He knew it. He could feel it, like a lurking shape leering and grinning beside him. Like those other lurking undead demons of seven months ago. But Martin LeGeurn could not tell him. Martin was his friend. Someone else would have to blurt out the truth.

The big roadster droned on through the night.

IT was daylight when they reached the city. Murky, sodden daylight, choked with drizzling rain. Street lights still smirked above drooling sidewalks. The elevated trestle loomed overhead, a gleaming, sweating mastodon of steel. Silence, which had held sway for the past hour over black country roads, gave way to a rumble of sound.

"Better let me take the wheel," Martin LeGeurn said dully. And when Paul had swung the car to the curb: "We're safe now. They won't look for you here. Not yet."

Not yet! Paul's laugh was mockery. Before the day was over, the news of his escape would be in every headline, glaring over town. Newsboys would be shrilling it. News flashes on the radio would blurt it to millions of listeners. "Special Journal Dispatch! At an early hour this morning, Paul Hill, twenty-three-year-old inmate of the

State Insane Asylum, escaped. . . ."

The car moved on again through slanting rain. The windshield wiper clicked monotonously, muttering endless words to the beat of Paul's brain. "Police of this state and neighboring states are conducting an unceasing search for the escaped madman who eluded the dragnet last night. . . ."

"You want to go straight to the house?" Martin LeGeurn said suddenly.

"Of course. Why shouldn't I?"

"I'm not going in with you."

"Why?"

"I've got something to do. Got to go to Morrisdale, and get there before night. But Father's waiting for you. You can talk to him."

HE drove on. The streets were deserted, here in the lower downtown sector. The roadster picked its way through intricate short cuts and sideways, and emerged presently on the South Side, to purr softly along glistening boulevards.

"You're going to Morrisdale?" Paul frowned.

"Yes."

"What for?"

"For—Ruth," Martin said grimly. "It's your own idea, Paul. Your method of escape. Just what I couldn't think of myself, though I sat up night after night, half mad."

"What do you mean?"

"I'll tell you—when it's over," Martin muttered. He was staring through the crescent of gleaming glass before him. His lips were tight, bloodless. "We're almost there," he said abruptly.

They were entering the residential sector of the South Side. The car groped its way more slowly. Paul stared on both sides, remembering the houses, the great church on the corner, the rows of stores: things he had forgotten during the past months. And presently Martin swung the wheel. The roadster skidded into a tree-lined road. Lovely homes with immaculate driveways and wide lawns loomed gray in the drizzle. The car slowed to an awkward stop. Martin turned abruptly, thrusting out his hand.

"Good-by, Paul. Don't worry."

"But—"

"I've got to go. Got to reach Morrisdale on time to-night. Talk to Father, Paul. And trust me."

Paul gripped the outstretched hand. Then he was out of the car, hurrying up the drive. And the car was roaring down the road again, into the murk, like a great greyhound.

PAUL'S fingers pressed the bell. He waited, nervously. The door opened. Old Armand LeGeurn, Ruth's father, stood there on the sill, arms outthrust.

After that, things blurred. The door closed, and Paul was pacing down the thick carpet with LeGeurn's arm around him. Then he was in the luxurious library, slumped in a huge chair, folding and unfolding his hands, while Old LeGeurn talked slowly, softly.

"She couldn't come to see you, Paul. They've sent her away. The same two physicians, Kermeff and Allenby. Less than a week after they sent you. Mad, they said. They're big men, Paul. Too big. She never returned here after leaving the hospital at Marssen. They took her straight from there to Morrisdale."

"Morrisdale," Paul muttered feebly. Suddenly he was on his feet, eyes wide and body tense. "That's where Martin's gone!"

"He's been often, Paul. That's how you got your letters. He mailed them from here. She didn't want you to know."

"But there *must* be some way of getting her out."

"No, Paul. Not yet. We've tried. Tried everything—money, influence, threats. Kermeff and Allenby are bigger than that, boy. They put their names to the paper. No power on earth can convince them they're wrong. No power on this earth—yet."

"Then she's got to stay?" Paul pleaded. "She's got to. . . ." He relaxed again with a heavy shudder. "It's not right, Mr. LeGeurn! It's horrible! Why, those places are—are. . . ."

"I know what they are, boy. We're doing all we can. But we must wait. She still remembers those other things: Murgunstrumm and the awful creatures of the inn. They rush upon her. They affect her—queerly. You understand, boy. You know what it means. Until she's forgotten all that, we can only wait. No physician in the country would disagree with Kermeff and Allenby. Not with such evidence. In time she'll forget."

"She'll never forget, in there!" Paul cried harshly. "At night, in the dark, the whole thing comes back. It's awful. Night after night it haunted me. I could hear that horrible laughter, and the screams. And those inhuman shapes would come out of nowhere, grinning and pointing and leering. She'll never forget. If we don't get her away. . . ."

"Escape, son?"

"Yes! Escape!"

"It won't do. She couldn't face it. She's not strong enough to be hunted down as you'll be."

PAUL stood up savagely, pushing his fingers through his hair. He stared mutely at the man before him. Then his nerves gave way. He buried his face in his hands, sobbing.

"You'll stay here to-night, Paul?" he heard Armand LeGeurn asking.

Paul shook his head heavily. No, he couldn't stay here. The first place they'd look for him would be here in Ruth's home. As soon as they discovered that he had wriggled through their unholy dragnet, they'd come here and question, and search, and watch.

"I want to think," he said wearily. "It's all so tangled. I want to be alone."

"I know, son." Armand LeGeurn rose quietly and offered his hand. "Let me know where you are, always. If you need money or help, come here for it. We believe in you."

Paul nodded. He didn't need money. There was a wallet in the pocket of the coat Martin had given him. He could go and get a room somewhere, and think the thing out alone. More than anything else he wanted to be by himself.

"I'll go to the North End," he said, "and—"

But Armand LeGeurn was pacing to the door. When he returned, he carried a small suit-case in his hand.

"Take this," he advised. "It won't do for you to go prowling about the stores, getting what you need. Everything is here. And—be careful, Paul."

Paul took the suit-case silently. Abruptly he thrust out his hand. Then he hurried down the hall and went out the front door.

CHAPTER III

"To Rehobeth"

PAUL found lodgings in a third-rate rooming house, deep in the twisted cobblestoned streets of the North End slums. There, late in the afternoon, he sat on the slovenly bed and stared fixedly at the single window. The suit-case, open but not unpacked, lay between his feet; and on top, grinning up at him like a black beetle nestling in the clean

white folds of the shirt beneath it, lay a loaded revolver. Armand LeGeurn, acting evidently on the spur of the minute, had dropped it there just before clicking the bag shut.

It was raining. A drooling porous mist fogged the window pane. The room was a chill, dark, secluded retreat high above the muttering side street below. A radio, somewhere in the bowels of the house, mumbled dance music and crooning voices.

Paul sat motionless. He was not afraid of realities any more. It was not fear of tangible things that kept the color out of his face and made him sit rigid. The police would never look here for him, at least not until they had combed the rest of the city first. He was in no immediate danger. He had money, clothes, and friends if he needed them.

But the torment had returned—torment a hundred times more vicious than fear of capture. Macabre shadows stalked the room. Nameless voices laughed horribly. Fingers pointed at him. Red, red lips, set fiendishly in chalk-colored dead-alive faces, curled back over protruding teeth to grin malignantly. A significant malicious name hissed back and forth, back and forth, never ceasing. *Murgunstrumm! Murgunstrumm!*

Ruth was in the asylum at Morrisdale. Martin LeGeurn had gone there. Something was wrong. Martin had seemed preoccupied, mysterious. He hadn't wanted to talk. Now he was gone. Only Armand LeGeurn was left, and Armand had tried every method possible; had tried to convince Kermeff and Allenby that she was not mad.

Paul's fists clenched. He mouthed the two names over and over, twisting them bitterly. Kermeff and Allenby. It was their fault! He jerked to his feet, clutching at the wooden bed-post with both hands, cursing loudly, violently.

Then he sat down again, staring at the black revolver which leered up at him. A truck rumbled over the cobblestones, far below. Someone was turning the dials of the radio, bringing in snatches of deep-throated music and jangling voices. Paul reached down slowly and took the revolver in his hands. He fingered it silently, turning it over and over. Then he sat very still, looking at it.

TEN minutes later, without a word, he stood up and put the revolver in his pocket. He bent over the suit-case. Very quietly he walked to the door. His lips were thin and tight, and his eyes glaring.

He paced noiselessly down the narrow stairs to the lower hall. The street door opened and closed. He hurried out into the rain, along the sidewalk.

Suit-case in hand, he groped his way through the maze of gleaming streets, avoiding the lighted thoroughfares as much as possible, yet bearing ever toward the uptown sector. He glanced neither to right nor left, but strode along without hesitating, carried forward recklessly by the hate in his heart and the sudden resolution which had come to him. Not until he reached the outskirts of the slums did he consider his own peril again. Then he stopped, stepped quickly into a black doorway, and stared furtively about him.

He was mad, walking through the streets like this. What if the police down here had been given his description? What if they were even now looking for him? Probably they had and they were. If he stepped on a bus or boarded a street car, or even hailed a cab, he would be playing squarely into their hands. He couldn't reach the LeGeurn home that way. And he

couldn't go on walking, like a blind fool, waiting for some stranger to peer suddenly into his face and scream an alarm.

HE studied the street in both directions. A hundred yards distant, on the corner, a red-and-white electric sign, blinking in the drizzle, designated a drugstore. Warily Paul crept out of the doorway and moved along the sidewalk. He was afraid again now, and nervous. He kept his face hidden when hurrying men and women brushed past him. Reaching the drugstore, he slipped inside without attracting attention and looked quickly for a telephone booth. An instant later, with a little gasp of relief, he swung the booth door behind him and groped in his pockets for a coin.

The nickel jangled noisily. With stiff fingers Paul dialed the LeGeurn number and waited fretfully until the resultant hum clicked off.

A masculine voice, Armand LeGeurn's, answered almost inaudibly.

"Mr. LeGeurn," Paul said slowly, fumbling for the right thing to say. "I want to—"

His words had a surprising effect. LeGeurn, instead of waiting for him to finish, interrupted with a hearty laugh and sputtered quickly:

"Hello, Frank, hello! By the Lord, man, it's a downright joy to hear that voice of yours. I'm all tied up here. Police watching the house, and the phone wires tapped in the bargain. Damned inconvenient, I'm telling you! What's up? What d'you want?"

Paul's reply choked on his lips. He stiffened, and his fingers tightened on the receiver. Phone wires tapped! Police at the house! Then abruptly he understood Armand LeGeurn's ruse. Regaining his composure, he answered with assumed astonishment:

"Police? Why, what's wrong?"

"What's wrong! Don't you read the papers?"

"You don't mean," Paul said, frowning, "it's about that chap who got away from the nut house? Good Lord, what's that got to do with you?"

"Plenty. Tell you later, when you're sober."

"I'm sober now. That is, almost."

"What's on your mind then?"

"Nothing much." Then Paul added quickly: "That is, nothing but the fact that I'm getting thoroughly soaked and I'm stranded in the slums without a sou in my pocket, old man. I was going to demand your car to escort me home, if your pugilistic chauffeur isn't asleep or something. But if you're tied up. . . ."

"The car, eh? Where'd you say you were?"

"Down in the heart of the most miserable, sloppy, filthy section of this confounded city, my boy." Paul flung back desperately. "And not enjoying it a bit."

"Really? Well, you can have the car. Welcome to it. Where'll I send it?"

Paul named the streets hurriedly. As an afterthought he said as carelessly as he could: "Tell Jeremy to pull up at the dinky little drugstore just around the corner of Haviland. Yeah. I'll be in there getting my feet dry. And say—thanks, mister. Thanks a lot. I appreciate it."

THE telephone clicked ominously. Releasing it, Paul leaned against the side of the booth, limp, frightened, with cold sweat trickling down his face. It was another moment before he could steel himself to open the door and step out. Then, with a forced slouch, he picked up his bag, pushed the door wide, and strode across the tile floor.

He couldn't wait in the store.

That would be dangerous. The police might see fit to check the call and send someone to investigate. But he could wait outside, in some convenient doorway a short distance up the street. And then, when he saw the car coming, he could walk casually toward it without being seen.

Outside, with the rain beating in his face, he sought a suitable niche and found one. Huddled there, he wondered if his plan was plausible. It wasn't. The element of risk was too great. If the police came to the drugstore, seeking him, they would be suspicious when they found him gone. They too would wait for the car. Then, if he stepped out. . . .

But the car, coming from the suburbs, would have to pass along the avenue before turning into Haviland Street. That was it! Paul knew the machine by sight—a long low black roadster, inconspicuous among others, but easily discerned by one who knew it intimately. And it would have to cross the avenue intersection, have to pass the lights.

Very quickly Paul slipped out of the doorway and hurried into the rain.

HE had to wait long when he reached the square. While he waited, leaning against the wall of a building, with his coat collar pulled high above his neck and face, he watched the lights blink from red to green and green to red, endlessly. Slow lights they were, and the corner was a dangerous one, choked with traffic and scurrying pedestrians. The cars that snaked past, scintillating and gleaming, were like huge moving gems as they groped their way with sluggish caution.

The whole square was bright with illumination. Brilliant store windows threw out walls of color. Sparkling electric signs twinkled overhead. Street-lamps glared accusingly, sullenly, striving to penetrate the rain. It was maddening to stand there, waiting and waiting. . . .

Once a policeman, in rustling rubber coat, swung past with mechanical steps. Paul stiffened and watched him. But pedestrians were waiting at the same time for the traffic lights to become red and yellow; and the policeman paid no attention. He passed on idly, and Paul relaxed with a shudder.

Five minutes passed, and ten. And then the car came. The lights were against it. It slowed cautiously as it approached; and as it stopped, Paul darted forward across the gleaming avenue. Skirting two intervening machines, he leaped to the running-board and clawed the door open. And then he was in the seat beside the lean, wiry form of Matt Jeremy, and muttering harshly:

"I prayed for that light, Jeremy, prayed it would be red when you came. If you hadn't stopped. . . ."

Jeremy glanced at him quickly, bewildered.

"What's wrong, sir? I was going to the drugstore, like you told Mr. LeGeurn. I thought you wanted—"

The light changed. Paul clutched the man's arm and said abruptly, thickly:

"Turn right. Get out of here quickly!"

Jeremy grunted. The car jerked forward, hesitated an instant to nose its way through cross traffic, and swung sharply off the avenue. Gaining speed, it droned on through the rain, leaving the clamor and congestion of the main thoroughfare behind.

"You'll have to get home the best way you can," Paul said evenly, a little later. "I've got to have the machine."

"That's what Mr. LeGeurn said, sir," Jeremy nodded.

"He'll understand. That's why I phoned."

"Yes, sir. He understands all right. He said for me to go with you."

"What?"

"I'm to stick with you, sir. That's what he said. If you want me."

Paul drew a deep breath and stared squarely into the man's grinning face.

"Want you! Jeremy, I—"

"I might come in handy, maybe," Jeremy shrugged. "Trouble's my middle name, sir. Where to?"

"To Rehobeth," Paul said grimly. "To Rehobeth and the Gray Toad Inn. And the rest is up to God, if there is a God in that unholy place."

CHAPTER IV

"They Don't Come Out, Sir."

FOR years, old Henry Gates had squeezed a meager existence out of the ancient Rehobeth Hotel. For years he had scuffed quietly about the village, minding his own affairs and seldom intruding, but wise in his knowledge of what went on about him. For years he had lived in silent dread of what might some day happen.

To-night he stood silently on his veranda, gazing down into the deepening dusk of the valley below. The air was cold and sweet with the smell of rain-soaked earth. Darkness was creeping in on all sides, hovering deep and restless above the village.

Across the way a light blinked, announcing that Tom Horrigan's boy was working in the stables. Other lights, feeble and futile, winked on either side. Beyond them the woods were still and dark, and the leaden sky hung low with threatening rain.

"A night of evil," Gates mumbled, sucking his pipe. "There'll be doin's to-night. There'll be laughin' and screamin' on the Marssen Road."

The light across the way went out suddenly. A boy appeared, framed in the stable doorway. The door creaked on rusty wheels, jarring shut. The boy turned, glanced toward the hotel, waved his hand.

"Hi there, Mr. Gates! A fair black night it'll be, hey? I was walkin' to town."

"Ye've changed your mind, I'm thinkin'," Gates retorted.

"That I have. I'll be goin' home and to bed, and lockin' my windows this night."

The boy hurried away. Other lights blinked out. Henry Gates gazed into the valley again, muttering to himself.

"There'll be screamin' and laughin' in the old inn to-night."

He turned and hobbled inside. The door closed; the bolt thudded noisily. The village of Rehobeth was dormant, slumbering, huddled and afraid, waiting for daylight to arouse it.

AN hour later the black roadster purred softly out of the darkness. The car was a dusty gaunt shape now, after three hours travel over sixty-odd miles of paved highways and black, deserted country roads. Matt Jeremy hung wearily over the wheel. Paul Hill, slumped beside him, stretched arms and legs with a grumble of complaint, and opened the door.

Shadows filled the valley below. Here the road, after climbing steadily for five miles, rested in the uncouth little hamlet before venturing the last mile or so over the ridge into the next state. And Rehobeth had not changed since that day, more than seven months past, when Paul Hill had stood in this same spot—stood here with Ruth LeGeurn and laughed, because they were marooned with a broken-

down car and had to spend the night in the ancient hotel beside them.

No, Rehobeth had not altered. It was still the same lonely isolated village, looking down upon a world all its own—a shadowed gray world, blanketed with bleak snow during the long winter months, swathed in murky sunlight through the summer. Only sixty miles from the big city, only twenty-odd miles from civilization, but in reality a million miles from anywhere, sordid, aloof, forgotten.

"Well, what do you think?" Paul said with a shrug. "Like the place?"

"Not much, sir," Jeremy confessed. "Still, I reckon it's a pretty good hideaway, and it ain't so far you can't keep track of things."

"I'm not hiding, Jeremy."

"No? Then what are we doin' here, sir? I thought"—Jeremy released the wheel and slid out—"I thought we were just goin' to lay low and wait."

Paul climbed the hotel steps slowly. The door was locked. Evidently it was bolted on the inside, and the inmates of the place had gone to bed.

"Old Gates," Paul smiled, "must be upstairs. They don't expect visitors at this hour."

He hammered loudly. "Gates!" he called out. "Henry Gates!"

A LONG interval passed, and presently a *scuff-scuff* of footsteps was audible inside. But the door did not open immediately. A face was suddenly framed in the window at the right, and a groping glare of lamplight illuminated the veranda. Then the face and the light vanished, and the bolt rattled. The door opened cautiously.

"Ye're lookin' for me, sir?"

"You're Gates?" Paul said, knowing that he was.

"Yes, sir. I am that."

"Good. We're staying here a day or two, Gates. You've two good rooms vacant?"

"Ye're stayin' here, sir? Here?"

"Yes. Why not? Full up, are you?"

"No, no, sir. I've got rooms. Sure I've got 'em. Only the likes of you, with an automobile like that un, don't generally—"

Paul forced a laugh. He knew what Gates was thinking.

"That's all right," he shrugged. "Quite all right. We want to do a bit of looking around. Might even decide to set up a hunting camp around here somewhere. Just show us the rooms and never mind about the car."

Old Gates was willing enough, once his fears were allayed. He held the door wide. Paul and Jeremy passed inside casually and gazed about them.

There was nothing inspiring. Bare, cracked walls leered down as if resenting the intrusion. A musty lounge, long unused, leaned on scarred legs. A squat table, bearing the flickering oil lamp which Gates had first held, stood in the middle of the floor. Beyond, a flight of stairs angled up into darkness.

"D'YE mind tellin' me your names, sir?" Gates said hesitantly. "I'll show ye to your rooms, and then I'll be makin' out the register."

"Mr. James Potter will do," Paul nodded. "James Potter and chauffeur. And by the way, Gates, have you a typewriter?"

"Typewriter, sir?" Gates hobbled behind the desk and took down a key. "Afraid not, sir. I used to have, but you see business ain't what it used to be." He wheezed up the stairs with Paul and Jeremy following him. "Rehobeth be such an out-of-the-way place, sir, and nobody comes this way very often lately, and. . . ."

The rooms were at the end of the

upper corridor, adjoining each other and connected by an open door. Paul inspected them quietly and smiled, and pressed a bill into the old man's hand. And presently, alone in Paul's chamber with the hall door shut, the two newcomers stared at each other and nodded grimly. That much was over with.

"Didn't recognize me," Paul said evenly.

"Recognize you, sir?" Jeremy frowned.

"This is the place, Jeremy, where Miss Ruth and I stopped that night. You don't know the details. You were in Florida with Mr. LeGeurn."

"Oh. I see, sir. And you thought he might—"

"Remember me? Yes. But seven months is a long time. The madhouse can change a man in less time than that. Open the bag, Jeremy, will you?"

Jeremy did so, putting his knee to the leather and jerking the straps loose. Lifting the suit-case to the bed, Paul fumbled a moment with the contents, then stepped to the old-fashioned desk and sat down with paper and fountain pen in hand.

And he wrote two letters, one to Doctor Anton Kermeff, the other to Doctor Franklin Allenby, addressing both to the State Hospital in the city he had just left. The letter to Kermeff read:

"My dear Kermeff:

You will, I am sure, consider this note most carefully and act upon it as soon as possible. Mr. Paul Hill, the young man whom you and Allenby declared insane some seven months ago, and who escaped only very recently from confinement, is now at the Rehobeth Hotel in a state of most complete and mystifying coma. Fortunately I am on my vacation and was passing through Rehobeth at the time of his attack, and I am now attending him.

The case, I assure you, is worth your gravest attention. It is the most unusual condition I have ever had the fortune to stumble upon. Of course, I am remaining here incognito. The name is James Potter. I suggest that you come at once, saying nothing to arouse undue attention to yourselves or to me. Later, of course, the patient must be returned to confinement; but meanwhile I believe I have something worthy of your esteemed consideration.

A copy of this letter I am also sending to Allenby, since you are both equally interested in the case.

Yours in haste,
Hendrick Von Heller, M.D."

The letter to Allenby was an exact duplicate. Paul sat very still, staring at what he had created. He was gambling, of course. Only one thing he was sure of: that Von Heller, the very noted specialist, was actually somewhere in this part of the state, on vacation. Von Heller had discussed that with the doctors at the asylum, on one of his regular visits.

As for the rest, Von Heller was known, by reputation at least, to both Kermeff and Allenby. But would the handwriting of the letters prove fatal? That was the risk. It might; it might not. Possibly Kermeff and Allenby had never seen, or never particularly noticed, Von Heller's script. Perhaps—and it was very likely, considering the man's importance and prestige—he had employed a secretary. At any rate, the element of chance was there. A typewriter would have lessened it, and could easily have

been purchased on the way here. But old Gates had none, and it was too late now.

"We'll have to face it," Paul shrugged. "We can't be sure."

"If it means a scrap, sir. . . ."

"It might, Jeremy. Part of it might. But we'll need minds, as well. *Wills.*"

"Well now—"

"Never mind," Paul said. "It's getting late. Come."

HE shoved the door open. Henry Gates had lighted the oil burners in the corridor, filling the upper part of the inn with a furtive, uneasy, yellowish glare. Probably those burners had not been ignited in months past. Perhaps not for seven months. And the lower lobby, illuminated only by the oil lamp on the desk, was deep with moving shadows, gaunt and repelling.

Gates was writing in the register when Paul and Jeremy descended. He looked up and grunted, obviously startled. Holding his pen at an awkward angle, he said hurriedly:

"Just puttin' your names down, sir, I was. Be ye goin' out?"

"For a short drive," Paul nodded.

"M-m-m. It be a dark night, sir. Not a star in the sky when I looked out the window just now. And no moon at all to speak of. These be lonely roads about here."

Paul smiled bitterly. Lord, what mockery! Gates, huddled here, mumbling to him—to *him*—about the loneliness of the surrounding roads! As if he didn't know! As if he hadn't learned every conceivable horror there was to learn, seven months ago!

"You've a mail box here?" he questioned curtly.

"I'll take it, sir," Gates replied, eyeing the white oblongs in Paul's hand. "Two of 'em, hey? Ain't often the postman gets anythin' here, sir. He'll be comin' by in the mornin', on his route."

"They'll get to the city before night?"

"Well, sir, the postman takes 'em to Marssen in his tin lizzie."

"That's quite all right, then. Come, Jeremy."

"Be ye goin' anywheres in particular, sir?" Gates blinked, raising his eyebrows.

"I THOUGHT we might turn down the old road that cuts in a mile or so below here. Looked rather interesting when we came through. Leads to Marssen, doesn't it?"

"It does that."

"Hm-m. I think I've been over it before. Vaguely familiar, somehow. If I'm right, there ought to be an old inn about two miles down. The Gray Goose, or the Gray Gull, or—"

"Ye mean the Gray Toad?"

"That's it, I guess. Closed up, is it?"

"No, sir," Gates' voice was a whisper as he came out from behind his barlike desk and scuffed forward ominously. "It ain't closed, sir. And if I was you—"

"Who runs the place, I wonder? Do you know?"

"I know, sir. Yus, I know. It's a queer cripple as runs it, sir. A queer foreigner what never goes nowhere nor comes into the village, nor ever does anythin' but limp around inside his own dwellin'. Murgunstrumm is his name, sir. Murgunstrumm."

"Strange name," Paul mused, keeping his voice level with an effort. "And what's so wrong about the place, Gates?"

"I dunno, sir. Only I've heard noises which ain't the kind I like to hear. I've seen automobiles stop there, sir—fine automobiles, too—and ladies and gentlemen go inside, all dressed up in fine clothes.

But I ain't never seen 'em again. They don't come out, sir. And I know one thing, as I'm certain of."

"Yes?"

"ABOUT seven months ago it happened, sir. I'm sittin' here behind my desk one night along about evenin', and a young couple comes walkin' down the road from the woods. A pretty girl she was, if ever there was one; and the young man was about your height and looks, only not—excusin' me, sir—so kind of pale-lookin' and thin. They said as how their car was broke down about a mile up the road, and could they use my telephone to call a garage feller in Marssen. And then—"

Gates peered furtively about him and came a step nearer. He was rubbing his hands together with an unpleasant sucking sound, as if he feared the consequences of saying too much.

"They had supper here, sir, the two of them, and then they went out for a walk. Said they might walk down the valley, seein' as how it was such a fine night. But they didn't get there, sir. No, sir, they didn't ever get there."

"They got lost?" Jeremy said curtly.

"I'm not knowin'. All I know is, I'm sittin' here about one o'clock in the mornin', havin' a bite to eat with the garage man after he'd got their automobile fixed up and waitin' for them to come back for it—and we sudden hear footsteps stumblin' up the steps. There's a shout, and we run out. And it's the young man, sir, walkin' like one in a dream and white as a ghost. And he's carryin' the girl in his arms, like she's dead; only she ain't dead, sir, because she's moanin' and mumblin' like she's gone clean mad. . . ."

Gates' voice choked off to a faltering hiss, leaving only a feeble echo to chase fretfully around the room. Jeremy was staring at him with wide eyes. Paul stood very stiff, white and silent.

"And what happened then?" Jeremy whispered.

"WELL, the young man fell down on the floor here like a dead one for sure, and he never moved a muscle when me and the garage feller bent over him. The girl, she lay here twitchin' and sobbin' and talkin' a lot of words which didn't make sense. Then the garage man and me, we got both of 'em into the young man's car, and the garage feller he drove 'em as quick as he could to Marssen, to the hospital there. They called up the city for some real good doctors, and"—Gates shuddered violently and peered around him again—"and both the young man and his lady friend was put away in the insane-house," he finished fearfully.

There was silence for an instant. An unnatural, ugly silence, broken only by the sound of men breathing and the *pft-pft-pft* of the oil lamp on the desk. Then Paul laughed softly, queerly.

"The insane-house, eh?" he shrugged. "A good story, Gates. Not bad at all. And they're still there?"

"It's the God's honest truth, sir. I swear it is. And the young people are still locked up, they are. I'm tellin' ye, sir, I think of it even now on dark nights, sir, and I fair get the horrors from it!"

"Thanks. I guess we'll be moving along, Gates. We'll have a look at your ghastly inn."

"But nobody goes along that road no more, sir. Not after nightfall!"

"All right, old man," Paul shrugged, knowing that his voice faltered slightly and his assumed indifference lacked the sincerity he strove to stuff into it. "Don't sit up and worry about us. We won't

come back the way the others did. I'd have a hard job carrying you, eh, Jeremy?"

Jeremy's laugh, too, was vaguely harsh. But he turned and followed to the door. And an instant later, leaving Gates stiff-legged and staring in the middle of the unclean floor, with the sputtering oil lamp casting spider-shadows on the wall behind him, Paul and Jeremy stepped over the threshold. The door creaked shut behind them. They descended the wooden steps slowly.

CHAPTER V

Murgunstrumm

THE lonely untraveled road between Rehobeth and the buried little town of Marssen, twelve miles distant, was particularly black and abandoned that night. Leaving the main dirt highway a mile or so below the last of Rehobeth's straggling houses, it plunged immediately into sullen unbroken woods, where all sounds died to nothingness and the light was a dim, uneven, flickering gloom.

The mud-crusted black roadster, with Jeremy at the wheel, careened recklessly down the main road, boring its way with twin beams of bright light. At the intersection, it slowed to a crawl, and Jeremy swung the wheel. Then, more slowly, the car proceeded down the Marssen road; and presently it was moving at snail-speed, groping along a snake track of deep ruts and loose, damp sand.

"It ain't," Jeremy said laconically, "what you'd want to call a pleasure drive, sir. Fair gives me the creeps, it does, after the old guy's talk."

Paul nodded. He said nothing. He was thinking again, and remembering, in spite of himself. What Gates had narrated back at the hotel was true, and the old man's words had awakened memories which were better a thousand times dead.

Paul's face was strained, colorless now. His hands were clenched defensively. He stared straight ahead of him through the dirty windshield, watching every sudden twist of the way, every looming shadow. Once he touched the revolver in his pocket and felt suddenly relieved. But he remembered again, and knew that the weapon would mean nothing. And presently, after ten minutes of slow, cautious progress, he said quietly:

"Stop the car here, Jeremy."

"Here, sir?"

"We'll walk the rest. It isn't far. They mustn't see us."

Jeremy grunted. The roadster turned to the side of the road, scraped noisily against the thick bushes, and came to a jerky stop.

"Will I lock it, sir?"

"Yes. And keep the key in your hand. We may need it quickly."

Jeremy glanced at him quizzically. Then, with a shrug, he turned the ignition key, removed it, and slid out of his seat. In a moment Paul was beside him, gripping his arm.

"Sure you want to come, Jeremy?"

"Why not, sir? I'm pretty handy with my fists, ain't I?"

"That won't help, Jeremy. Nothing will help, if we're seen."

"Well then, we won't be seen. You're shiverin', sir!"

"Am I?" Paul's laugh was harsh, toneless. "That's bad. I shouldn't be. Not after what happened before. Shivering won't help, either. Come on."

THEY passed down the narrow road, leaving the roadster half hidden, black and silent, behind them. Paul, thinking again, peered furtively on either side, fighting

back his fear of the darkness. Shadows leaped at him from matted walls of gloom. Faint whispers sucked down from above as the night breeze whimpered and muttered through rustling leaves. The horrors of the madhouse came back, vivid and close. Supernatural voices laughed hideously and screamed, and everywhere ahead, in the gloom, a limping shape seemed to be waiting and leering and pointing triumphantly.

Jeremy, more or less indifferent to intangible terrors, plodded along with a set frown on his square features. Shadows and whispers did not trouble him. He did not know. And Paul, pressing close to him, found relief in the man's presence, and courage in his stolidness.

So they walked on and on, until presently out of the darkness ahead of them, on the right, a gray mass took form with maddening slowness. Paul stood quite still, drawing his companion close.

"That's the place," he said almost inaudibly.

"There's a light, sir," Jeremy observed.

Yes, there was a light. But it was a feeble thing, a mere oblong slit of illumination, visible faintly through a cracked shutter. And the house itself, upstairs and down, was sinister with darkness. Like an enormous humpbacked toad it squatted just off the road, isolated in its own desolate clearing, hemmed in on three sides by unbroken walls of gloom and silence.

NOT a lovely place, the Gray Toad Inn. Not any more. At one time, Paul reflected, it had been a roadhouse of gay repute, situated pleasantly on an out-of-the-way road between semi-dead villages, with desirable seclusion a strong point in its favor. Here, night after night, had come revelers from the nearby city and even nearer towns, to laugh and drink and fill the big house with youthful clamor.

But not any more. All that had changed. The inn had grown cold and lonely. The road itself had fallen more and more into disuse and obscurity. That very isolation which had made the place a popular resort had now buried it in abject solitude and left it dark and dismal, hoary with interred memories, sinking into slow rot.

Yet a light glowed now in the lower level, winking out into the darkness. A wan yellow light, filtered through a cracked blind, clutching outward like a thin bony finger, as if pleading for old times to return. And Paul and Jeremy, staring at it, crept slowly, noiselessly, through the deep grass of the overgrown clearing toward it.

And there was something else, which the inn had never known in its days of laughter and gaiety —something which even Jeremy, who lacked imagination and feared no foe but of flesh and form, noticed furtively.

"There's somethin'," he whispered, reaching out to grasp Paul's coat, "there's somethin' awful queer here, sir. The air. . . ."

PAUL stiffened. Fifty yards before him, the humpbacked structure bulged sullenly against the crawling sky above. Deep grass rustled against his legs. He stared suddenly into Jeremy's set face.

"What do you mean?" he said thickly. But to himself, in his mind, he muttered triumphantly: "He's noticed it too! He's noticed it too! Ruth wouldn't believe me when we came here before, but it's true, it's true!"

"The air has a funny smell, sir," Jeremy said slowly. "Like—like earth, or dirt. Like a mushroom cellar or somethin'. I must be crazy, sir, but it seems to hang all around here, heavy-like."

Crazy? Paul choked out a jangling laugh, full of triumph. No, not crazy. Not yet. Jeremy was right. This place—this ancient abode of infernal silence and monstrous horror—was alive within itself. It breathed and felt. It was no part of the woods around it.

But Jeremy wouldn't understand. The explanation was far too intricate and vague and impossible for him. Yet it was true. The atmosphere surrounding this structure before them, the air that clung tenaciously to the entire clearing, was a living entity, a dull leaden *thing*, visible to eyes that dared seek it out. It was a part of the inn itself, having no connection, no acquaintance, with the air about it. It reeked up out of the very earth, and from the decaying walls of the building, and from the bodies of the dead-alive creatures who inhabited the place.

But to Jeremy it was simply a creepy sensation, vaguely inexplicable and unpleasant. And so Paul moved on, more and more slowly, cautioning his companion to complete silence.

THUS they reached the side of the inn itself, and Paul crouched there in utter darkness, with the great structure hunched over him, mastodonic and gaunt, enveloped in its pall of dull, moving, viscous exhalation.

For an instant Paul clung there, unable to put down his deepening dread. All the ancient horrors rushed upon him viciously, striving to shatter the walls of his mind and send him back, back down the road, reeling and laughing and screaming in madness, as they had done on that other night seven months ago. And then, slowly, he stood erect until he could peer through the cracked shutter. And hung there, rigid and flat-pressed against the window-ledge, staring.

Only a vague semicircle of illumination was visible inside through the filthy window glass. There at a small square table against the farther wall, unaware of Paul's presence, sat a long figure. The oil lamp on the table, peculiarly shaded with an agate cup-shaped globe, cast a restless, unreal glow into the man's face.

An ugly face it was, in the full horrible significance of the word. A sunken savage gargoyle, frog-like in shape, with narrow close-set eyes blinking continually beneath beetled brows that crawled together, like thick hairy fingers, in the center. The broad nose, twisted hookwise, seemed stuck on, like a squatting toad with bunched legs. And the mouth was wide, thick, sensuous, half leering as if it could assume no other expression.

THE man made no movement. Apparently in a state of semi-stupor, he leaned on the table in the near gloom. Beyond him the feeble light played up and down the cream-colored wall and over the worn green carpet, revealing shadowed shapes of other tables and other chairs and objects without definite form.

Paul stared, utterly fascinated and terrified, clutching the window-sill with white hands, standing stiff and unalive in the darkness. He might have clung there indefinitely, remembering every separate fear of his last visit here, had not Jeremy's guarded voice hissed suddenly behind him:

"Somethin's comin', sir! A car!"

Paul turned. A faint purring sound came to his ears from somewhere down the road. He stepped forward violently and seized Jeremy's arm.

"Down!" he cried sharply. "Get down, man!" And then he was flat in the deep grass, heaving, breathing heavily, with Jeremy prone be-

side him, so close that their bodies fused together.

"What is it, sir?" Jeremy whispered.

"Be still!"

In the road, the purring became an audible drone, as of a motor Nearer and nearer it came, and then, just once, a muted horn shrilled out, sending a muffled blast through the night. Twin headlights took form and grew into glaring, accusing orbs.

At that moment the door of the inn opened, creaking back softly. A lantern swung in the aperture, dangling from an uplifted hand; and the man with the toad face scuffed slowly over the threshold, muttering to himself and blinking his eyes. Bent, twisted grotesquely, he limped down the stone flagging a dozen paces and stood still, holding the lantern high.

THE headlights of the oncoming car became brilliant bowls of fire, cutting slantwise through the unearthly mist of the grounds. They slowed and stopped, and the drone of the engine became suddenly still. The lights were extinguished. The car door clicked and swung open. A voice—a girl's voice, vaguely timid and afraid and fantastically out of place in such sordid surroundings—said:

"This—this is the place you are bringing me?"

And the voice that answered her was somehow packed with subtlety, gloating and possessive in spite of its quite smoothness.

"Certainly, my dear. You **will** enjoy yourself."

Two shapes materialized. Shadows in the gloom, nothing more, they moved down the path to where the lantern swayed before them. Then the outer rays of the light encompassed them, and Paul stared mutely with every ounce of color ebbed from his face.

A man and a girl. Man-and-a-girl. It surged over and over in his brain. God! After seven months, the horror was still going on, still happening! The man—the man was like all the others, tall, straight, smiling, attired in immaculate evening clothes. The girl was young and lovely and radiant in a trailing white gown and flame-colored velvet wrap. But she was not happy; she was not a willing guest. She was afraid and helpless, and her oval face was pathetically pale in the lantern glow—pale as alabaster; the face of one who was very close to death, and knew it, and had no resistance left in body or soul to fight against it.

SHE walked mechanically, staring straight ahead of her. And then the glare of the lantern swept full over her, revealing a mark—but no one would have seen it who did not look closely. Jeremy did not notice it, certainly. Only Paul discerned it—Paul, who was praying that the mark would not be there.

A mere patch of whiteness, where the girl had tried in vain to cover, with powder, a pair of ghastly crimson incisions, fiendishly significant. And the marks themselves were faintly visible as she came closer in the accusing halo of the uplifted lantern.

She stopped very abruptly then, and peered at the hideous face behind the upraised arm. She trembled and shrank away from it, and a subdued frightened whisper came involuntarily from her lips. Her companion put his arm about her and laughed, glanced indifferently at the man with the lantern, and laughed again, mockingly.

"It's only Murgunstrumm, my dear. He wouldn't harm a fly. He wouldn't know how, really. Come."

The girl paced on, walking like one already dead, like one who had

been so long in the clutch of fear that nothing more mattered. The lantern cast a long gaunt shadow on the walk as she stepped in front of it. One long shadow—only one. The man in evening clothes, pacing just behind his lovely comrade, left nothing. Nothing but empty glaring whiteness. . . .

THEY went inside; and Murgunstrumm, scuffing over the sill behind them, reached out an abnormally long arm to swing the heavy door shut. The last thing Paul saw, as the lantern light died behind the closing barrier, was the unholy grin which transfigured that toadlike face. Then—then something possessed him.

He was on his feet blindly, fists clenched until the palms of his hands stabbed with pain.

"Great God, don't let them do it! Don't—"

He stumbled forward, thrashing through the deep grass, retching with the sudden turmoil which roared within him. Frantically he staggered toward the door of the inn; mad, unreasoning, knowing only that he could not stand still and let the horror continue.

He would have rushed to the door, then, and hammered upon it, screaming to the heavens above him; would have slashed his way into the house and fought—fought with hands and teeth and feet in a mad attempt to drag the girl from that foul embrace; would have continued until they overwhelmed him, killed him. All to no purpose!

But luck saved him. His blundering foot twisted beneath him as it cracked against an immovable something in the grass. Agony welled up through his leg, letting him down. He pitched violently forward and plunged headlong.

And the madness left him as he lay there, gasping. Ahead of him he heard the door of the inn creak open. A probing shaft of lantern light swept the clearing, and Murgunstrumm stood there on the threshold, peering out. Then the innkeeper muttered something inaudible, and the door closed again. The light vanished. The clearing was very dark and still.

WHAT a fool he was! In the fury of a moment's insanity he had come within an inch of condemning Ruth forever to the asylum. He had come within an instant of awful death, when life was the most necessary possession in the world.

The girl in the flame-colored wrap was beyond his power to save. Beyond any power, except of a merciful God. The mark of the vampire was already imprinted in her throat. She was a slave of the demon who had stolen her soul. Nothing could help her now.

Paul's hands dug savagely into his face. A snarl came from his throat as he lay there in the deep grass. And then another sound, behind him, took his attention as something wriggled close. Jeremy's voice said in a thick whisper:

"You—you're all right, sir?"

"Yes, I'm all right."

"You ain't hurt, sir?"

"No. Not—hurt."

"Will we try to break into the place? That girl, she looked as if they might mean to do some damage—"

"No. It's too late."

Paul reached out and gripped the big man's arm. He lay still for a moment then, waiting for strength to return. Then, with a warning whisper, he began to crawl backward through the glass. Not once did he take his gaze from that closed barrier. Inch by inch he retreated until at last the deep grass gave way to underbrush and crackling bushes, and sheltering black trees loomed over him.

Rising, he stood in the darkness until Jeremy joined him. Then together they crept silently back to the road.

"Listen," Jeremy cautioned him suddenly.

THEY stood quite still. A burst of laughter—feminine laughter, wild and shrill and vaguely mad—pursued them. Paul shuddered, took a step forward. Then, with an effort, he turned and hurried on again. He said nothing until the roadhouse, with its pall of evanescent vapor, was buried again in the gloom behind them. Then he muttered grimly:

"Did you see, clearly, the man in evening clothes?"

Jeremy's big body twitched as if something had jostled him. He turned a white, frightened face.

"That feller, sir," he whispered huskily, "there was somethin' creepy about him. When he stepped in front of the lantern back there—"

"You saw it too?"

"I don't know what it was, sir, but he didn't seem natural."

"I know," Paul said.

"Who is he, sir?"

"I don't know. I only know what he is."

"And the cripple, sir. He's the same Murgunstrumm feller the hotel man was tellin' us about?"

"The cripple," Paul replied, and his voice was low and vibrant and full of hate, "is Murgunstrumm."

They paced on in silence after that. Reaching the car, they got in quickly. Jeremy stuck the key in the slot and turned it. The motor coughed, purred softly. The black roadster jerked backward, swung fretfully about, reversed again, and straightened with a lunge.

"Back to the hotel, sir?" Jeremy said sharply.

Paul answered, almost inaudibly: "Yes. Back to the hotel."

CHAPTER VI

Kermeff and Allenby

AT seven o'clock the following evening a large gray touring car, smeared and panting from sixty miles of fast travel, crunched to a stop before the Rehobeth Hotel. Twilight had already swooped down on the little community. A murky gloom welled up from the valley below. Lights blinked in the shadows, and the village lay silent and peaceful in the lassitude of coming night.

The car door clicked open. A gray-coated figure slid from the chauffeur's seat and moved quietly to the rear, glancing queerly, frowningly at the hotel. Mechanically he pulled open the rear door.

The two men who descended after him were, it was evident, somehow ill at ease and vaguely apprehensive. For an instant they clung close to the car, scowling unpleasantly and impatiently. They exchanged glances and comments. Then, with a word to the driver, they advanced to the steps.

Old Gates, aroused by the sound of the machine's arrival, met them in the doorway. Squinting at them, he asked hesitantly:

"Be ye lookin' for someone, sirs?"

"For Mr. James Potter," the larger of the two said distinctly. "He expects us. We should like to go directly to his rooms, if you please."

"To be sure, sir," Gates grimaced. "I'll take ye right up now, I will. Come this way, sir."

"Er—it will perhaps be better if we go up alone. Will you direct us?"

Gates blinked, and stared more intently then, as if distrustful. But he turned with a shrug and said, rather stiffly:

"Of course, sir. Walk right through the lobby here and up the stairs, and turn right and go

straight down the hall to the last door."

"Thank you."

KERMEFF and Allenby ascended the stairs slowly, with Kermeff in the lead. They were strange companions, these two. Of different nationalities, they differed also in face and form, and obviously in temperament. Kermeff, the larger, was a bull-shouldered, aggressive man with huge hands that gripped the railing viciously. He possessed a sensitive mouth and keen eyes that declared him fiery, alert, possibly headstrong, and as stubborn as stone.

Allenby, trailing behind him, was smaller, wiry in stature, stern and deliberate of movement. Sullen, aloof, he climbed without a word and without a backward glance.

Together they strode along the upper landing to the door of James Potter's room. Kermeff knocked sharply. The door opened, framing Matt Jeremy on the threshold.

"Mr. Potter?" Kermeff said gutturally.

"Yes, sir," Jeremy nodded. "Come right in."

Kermeff stepped over the sill. Allenby, hesitating an instant, peered up and down the corridor, shrugged and followed him closely. Very quietly, unobtrusively, Jeremy closed the door as he had been told to do.

A single lamp, not too efficient, burned on the desk in the corner. Beside it Paul Hill leaned silently against the wall, waiting. Kermeff and Allenby, pacing into the room, saw him each at the same moment.

The big man stiffened as if a wire had been drawn taut within him. He flung up his head and stared. He wet his lips and sucked a long noisy breath into them. Allenby took a sudden step forward, stopped abruptly and stood quite still.

"You!" Kermeff rasped violently. "Where is Doctor Von Heller?"

"Sit down, gentlemen," Paul said evenly.

"Where is Von Heller?"

"Von Heller is not here."

"What? What are you saying? Are you. . . ?"

"I wrote the letters myself, gentlemen," Paul shrugged, "to bring you here."

KERMEFF realized the truth. He had been trapped. He had gulped the bait completely. His one desire now was to spit it out again, to leave before the madman before him became violent. Kermeff swung about with a lurid growl.

But the exit was barred, and the physician stiffened again. The door was closed; Jeremy leaned against it. Kermeff stood on braced legs, swaying. He gathered himself. With a great oath he flung himself forward.

He stopped almost in the same movement. Jeremy's hand, sliding out of a bulging pocket, gripped a leveled revolver. Kermeff glared at it with animal hate. Turning again, very slowly and deliberately, he faced Paul.

"Sit down," Paul ordered.

"You are mad!"

"Sit down, I said."

Kermeff sank into a chair. He was trembling not with fear, but with rage. He sat like a coiled spring, ready to leap erect. He glared sullenly at his colleague, as if expecting Allenby to work the impossible.

Instead, Allenby glanced furtively from the rigid revolver to Paul's set face, and sat down also. Not until then did Paul move away from the wall. He, too, drew a revolver from his pocket.

"It is your car outside, I suppose?" he said quietly, addressing Kermeff. "Yes?"

"Yes."

"Come with me, then. At once, please."

KERMEFF stood up, watching every move with smoldering eyes that threatened to blaze any moment into flame. He said harshly, gutturally:

"Why did you summon us here?"

"You will see, in time."

"It is an outrage! I demand—"

"Demanding will do you no good," Paul said crisply. "You are here and you will stay here. There will be no argument."

"I will have you arrested for forgery!"

"You are going downstairs with me and instruct your driver to return to town. You will tell him, very simply, that you have no further need for him. And you will make no false move, Kermeff. I didn't bring you here for pleasure or for any petty hate. If you attempt in any way to trick me, I will kill you."

Kermeff faltered. For an instant it seemed that he would give way to his violent anger and rush forward blindly, despite the twin revolvers that covered him. Then, trembling from head to foot, he turned to the door.

Jeremy held the door open as the physician strode into the hall. Paul followed silently, close enough behind to keep his protruding coat pocket, with his revolver buried in it, on a direct unwavering line with the man's back.

And Kermeff tried no tricks. Obviously he realized the grim severity of his position. He walked deliberately down the corridor, descended the stairs, and strode across the lobby. Gates, glancing at him from behind the desk, mumbled an inaudible greeting. Kermeff, without replying, went directly to the door and stepped out on the veranda, with Paul only inches behind him.

THE chauffeur stood there, leaning indifferently against the rail. Kermeff looked squarely at him and said distinctly:

"We are staying here, Peter. You may go back to the city. We shall not need you."

"You won't want me, sir?"

"When we do, I will send for you."

The chauffeur touched his hand to his cap and turned to the steps. Kermeff, swinging on his heel, reentered the hotel. He climbed the stairs with methodical precision. He said nothing. With Paul still behind him, very close and silent, he returned to the room he had just left.

And there, with the door closed again, Paul said evenly:

"That is all, gentlemen. I must ask you to remain here quietly until it is dark. Then. . . ." He shrugged his shoulders.

Allenby, peering at him sharply, said in a thick voice:

"Then what?"

"I don't know. Perhaps we shall go mad."

Paul sat down, toying with the revolver. Kermeff and Allenby glared at him, then glanced significantly at each other. Jeremy, stolid and silent, remained standing at the door.

THAT occurred at seven-thirty o'clock. At nine, Paul glanced at his watch, stirred impatiently in his chair, and stood up. Crossing quickly to the window, he drew the shade and peered out. It was very dark outside. The village was a thing of brooding silence and blackness. The sky held no twinkling points of light, no visible moon. There was no need to wait longer.

He stepped to the bed and drew back the covers, exposing the white sheets beneath. Methodically he pulled the top sheet free and tore

it into inch-wide strips and ripped the strips into sections. Jeremy was watching queerly. Kermeff and Allenby stared and said nothing. Perhaps they thought he was mad.

And perhaps he was! Certainly it was a mad thing he was doing—a crazy, fantastic idea which had crept into his mind while he sat there in the chair, thinking of what the night might hold. And now, as he pulled his suit-case from the corner and rummaged through it in search of the needle and thread which Armand LeGeurn had stowed there, a thin smile played on his lips. Without a doubt they would think him mad in another moment.

He found what he sought. Crossing quietly to the door, he put his revolver into Jeremy's hand and said simply: "Be careful." To do what he intended, he would have to bend over within reach of Kermeff's thick arms and then within reach of Allenby's. It would not do to leave the gun unguarded in his pocket, for a groping hand to seize.

HE turned and gathered up the strips of white cloth. To Kermeff he said evenly:

"Put your hands behind you."

"What are you going to do?"

"Nothing to hurt you. Perhaps something that may save you from harm later. Put them behind you."

With a shrug, as if to imply that insane men must be humored, the big man complied.

Paul bent over him. Across the front of the man's vest he stretched a twelve-inch strip of cloth and sewded it quickly into place. A second strip, somewhat shorter, he sewed across the first, forming a large gleaming cross. The stitching was crude and clumsy, but it would hold. Unless clutching fingers or teeth tore the sheeting loose, the thing would remain in place.

Kermeff, meanwhile, was watching with hostile eyes. When the operation was finished he relaxed and held his coat open, studying the cross as if he could not quite believe. Then he scowled unpleasantly and peered again into Paul's face.

"In God's name, what is this for?"

"For your protection," Paul said grimly. "And you are right. Protection in God's name."

Kermeff laughed—a strained unnatural laugh that was more animal than human. But Paul was already at work upon Allenby, and presently he was attaching a third cross to his own body, in such a position that a single outward fling of his coat would reveal it to anyone who stood before him. Finally, pacing to the door, he took the two revolvers from Jeremy's hand and said quietly:

"Do the same to yourself, Jeremy. I'll stand guard. As soon as you've finished, we'll be leaving."

CHAPTER VII

The Innkeeper

THE Gray Toad Inn was half a mile ahead. Paul, huddled over the wheel of the roadster, glanced quickly into the face of the man beside him and wondered if Anton Kermeff were afraid. But there was no trace of fear in the big man's features. They were fixed and tense; the thick brows were knitted together in a set frown, the eyes focused straight ahead, unblinking. If anything, Kermeff was violently angry.

But he was also helpless. He was unarmed, and the door-pocket under his right hand contained nothing which might serve as a weapon. Paul had seen to that before leaving the hotel. And Paul's own hand, resting carelessly on the rim of the wheel, hovered only a few

inches above the revolver in his coat pocket. If Kermeff made a single treacherous move, that hand could sweep down in a scant second and lash up again.

Moreover, the roadster's convertible top was down; and Matt Jeremy, in the spacious rumble-seat beside the huddled form of Franklin Allenby, commanded a view of the front. If Kermeff moved, Jeremy had orders to strike first. As for Allenby, the very presence of the powerful Jeremy beside him seemed to have driven all thought of resistance from his mind.

The car purred on, eating its way with twin shafts of light drilling the uncanny darkness. The Gray Toad Inn was just ahead.

This time Paul did not stop the car. Approaching on foot, under cover, would avail nothing to-night. The car was part of the plan. Paul clung to the wheel and drove steadily along the unused road, until at last the massive grotesquery of the inn materialized in the gloom on the right.

As before, a light glowed on the lower floor, struggling feebly to grope through the atmosphere of abomination that hung over the entire building. The car slowed to a groping pace, approaching almost noiselessly. Kermeff was staring. Paul looked at him, smiled thinly, and said in a low voice:

"The Gray Toad, Kermeff. You've heard of it before?"

THE physician said nothing. He sat very stiff, his hands clenching and unclenching nervously. Obviously he was beginning to realize the peril of his position, the danger of being hauled blindly through the night, on a strange mission, by a madman who presumably sought revenge.

Ahead, the light winked suddenly as if an obstruction inside the grim walls had stepped momentarily in front of it. Then it glowed again. The door of the inn swung back.

Instinctively Paul's foot touched the brake. The car stopped with a tremor. With sudden dread Paul waited for whatever would emerge.

At first he saw nothing. He was looking for the wrong thing. He expected a human shape—the hunched body of Murgunstrumm or perhaps one of the immaculate evening-attired inhabitants. But it was no human form that slunk over the threshold into the night. It was an indistinct creature of low-slung belly and short legs. It crept forth, hugging the ground, and broke into a loping run straight for the road. A long thin howl rose on the still air. The howl of a wolf.

Paul shuddered, still staring. Wolves, here in Murgunstrumm's house, meant only one thing! They were not flesh and blood, but—

Kermeff cried aloud. The loping thing ahead had reached the road and stopped quite still. Crouching, it swung about to face the car, as if seeing the machine for the first time. The twin lights fell full upon it as it bellied forward, revealing a sleek black body and glittering eyes of fire.

THERE was an instant of emptiness, of stiffening inaction, while the thing's eyes glared balefully. Then, all at once, it rushed forward with amazing speed, hurtling through the intervening space so quickly that it seemed to lose form as it came.

And it had no form! Even as it swept the last few yards it became a shapeless blur and vanished utterly; and in its place, swooping up before the headlight, came a flapping winged thing which drove straight at Paul's face.

Just once it struck. An unearthly stench invaded Paul's nostrils. The

smell of the grave enveloped him, choking him. Then the creature was high above, hanging like a painted shape against the sky, with wings swaying slowly. And Kermeff was laughing in a peculiarly cracked shrill voice:

"It's a bat! It's only a bat!"

Paul's foot hit the accelerator sharply. The car jerked forward, careening down the road. But even as it groaned to a stop again before the driveway of the inn, Paul looked up again apprehensively, muttering to himself. And the bat still hovered near, seeming to eye the occupants of the room with a malicious hungry glare of hate.

"Come," Paul said sharply, climbing out. "Hurry!"

He strode toward the door. Somehow the thought that Kermeff and Allenby might choose this moment to chance an attack, or to attempt escape, seemed insignificant. The other peril was so much greater and closer that he could consider nothing else.

He was a fool—that was it! No sane man would be deliberately walking into the horrors of this diabolical place after once having had the luck to escape. Yet he was doing precisely that. He was risking something more than life, more than the lives of his three companions—for Ruth.

STILL he advanced, not daring to hesitate or look above him. He knew, without looking, that the same significant shape hovered there—the thing which had once been a wolf and now was a bat, and in reality was neither. And it was there for a reason. Pangs of hunger had driven it out into the night, to prowl the countryside or perhaps to pay a visit to one of the nearby villages. And here—here at hand was a means of satiating that hunger, in the shape of four unwary visitors to the abode of evil. Four humans of flesh and blood. Flesh which meant nothing; blood which meant everything!

But it was too late to turn back. The door creaked open in Paul's face. A glare of light blinded him. A lantern swung before him, and behind it gleamed a pair of penetrating, searching eyes. Paul gazed fearfully into the eyes, into the contorted frowning mask of features in which they were set at incredible depth. With an effort he smothered his increasing fear and said in an uneven voice:

"You—you're still open, my good man?"

The repulsive face shook sideways. The thick lips parted soundlessly, mouthing an unspoken negative.

"Oh, come," Paul insisted, forcing something like a careless laugh. "We're hungry. We've come a long way and have even farther to go. Can't you stretch it a bit and scrape up something for us to eat and drink?"

Again Murgunstrumm shook his head without answering. The lantern swayed directly in front of Paul's face, vivid and repelling.

"WE'LL make it worth your while," Paul argued desperately. "We'll pay you—"

He did not finish. That same nauseating stench assailed him abruptly and a distorted black thing flopped past his head to careen against the lantern and lurch sideways into Murgunstrumm's face. Paul recoiled with an involuntary cry. But the thing had no evil intentions; it merely circled Murgunstrumm's shoulders erratically, uttering queer whispering sounds. And then all at once it darted away.

"We'll pay you double," Paul said again, recovering himself and stepping forward crisply. "We'll—" He stopped. Murgunstrumm was no longer scowling. The twisted

face was fixed in a hungry grin. The sunken eyes were riveted, like the eyes of a starved animal, squarely in Paul's face. Murgunstrumm lifted the lantern higher and said thickly:

"You come in."

Paul stepped forward, knowing only that he felt suddenly weak and very afraid. Mechanically he crossed the sill. Kermeff followed him, and Allenby, and Jeremy entered last. Then the door swung shut and Murgunstrumm was leaning against it, the lantern dangling in his hand. His lips were spread in a huge idiotic grin. His eyes were twin sloes of fire, fixed and unmoving.

IT was a queer room. The only two sources of light, the lantern and the slender-necked oil lamp on the table, were feeble and flickering, filling the entire chamber with a faltering, dancing yellow glow and uncouth crawling shadows. A bare floor, evidently once a polished dance surface, but now merely a layer of blackened boards, extended away into unlimited gloom. The walls were mere suggestions of shapes in the semidark, visible only when the fitful lamps were generous enough to spurt into restive brilliance.

There were tables—three, four of them. Round squat tables of dark color, holding candle stumps with black dejected wicks set in green glass holders, which threw out tiny jeweled facets of light.

And it was the light—lamplight and lanternlight—which put the room in motion and lent it that restless, quivering sensation of being furtively alive. First the lamp flare, sputtering and winking, fighting against stray drafts which came out of cracked walls and loose windows. And then, more particularly, the glare of the lantern in Murgunstrumm's hanging fist, jerking slowly into the center of the room as the cripple limped forward.

"Sit down, sirs," Murgunstrumm leered. "We be all alone here tonight."

He scuffed past, seeming to sink into the floor each time his twisted right foot came in contact. His guests stared at him, fascinated utterly, as he hobbled to the farther wall. There, grinning at them indifferently, he raised the lantern face high and clawed up its globe with crooked fingers, and peered fixedly at the burning wick as if it were a thing of evil significance.

And his face was full in the realm of it—a gargoyle of malicious expectation. A contorted mass of shapeless features, assembled by some unholy chance or perhaps developed by some unholy habit. And then the lips protruded, the cheeks bloated for an instant. The thick tongue licked out, directing a gust of air into the lantern. The flame expired.

AFTER that, Paul and his companions retreated to an out-of-the-way table, as near the door as possible, and sat very close together, in silence.

Murgunstrumm vanished, to reappear a moment later with a cloth, ghastly white in the contrasting gloom, slung over his stiffened arm. Grinning, he bent over the table, lifted the lamp, and spread the cloth in place. Lowering the lamp again, he said gutturally:

"Ye'll be wantin' food, huh?"

"Anything," Paul said, cringing from the hovering face. "Anything will do."

"Uh-uh. I'll find somethin', I will."

"And—er—"

"Yus?"

"Can't we have a bit more light here? It's—it's ghastly."

The innkeeper hesitated. It seemed to Paul for an instant that

the man's lips tightened almost imperceptibly and the dull sheen of his eyes brightened as if some nerve, buried in that venomous head, had been short-circuited. Then with a shrug the fellow nodded and said:

"Yus, sir. We don't generally have much light here. I'll touch up the candles, I will."

He groped to the other tables and bent over them, one after another, scratching matches and holding his deformed, cupped hands over the cold candle wicks. And presently four tiny flames burned in the thick gloom, like tiny moving eyes, animal eyes glowing through fog.

"WHO"—it was Anton Kermeff speaking for the first time—"who is that man?"

"Murgunstrumm," Paul said dully.

"He is horrible. Horrible!"

"He is more than that," Paul replied bitterly.

"I refuse to remain here. I shall go—"

"No." Paul bent over the table, gazing straight into the physician's face. "You will not leave so easily, Kermeff."

"You have no right!"

"I have nothing to do with it."

Kermeff's mouth tightened in the midst of a guttural exclamation. He said very sharply: "What?"

"You would never leave here alive. Wait, and watch."

Kermeff's face whitened. Allenby, sitting just opposite him, looked sharply, furtively, at Paul and trembled visibly. He licked his lips. He said falteringly, in a whisper:

"Why did we come here?"

"To wait—and watch."

"But it is madness! That man—"

"That man is all you imagine," Paul said, "and more. You will see, before the night is over."

His voice choked off. He was aware of no sound behind him, no scuff of feet or suck of breath; only of a ghastly sensation that something, someone, was very close and gloating over him. He could feel eyes, boring through and through, with the awful penetrating power of acid.

Abruptly he swung in his chair. He found himself staring straight into Murgunstrumm's prognathous countenance, and the man's mouth was lengthened in a mocking grin. Not of humor, but of mocking hate. And the eyes were boring, unblinking, unmoving.

AN instant passed while Paul returned the glare. Then Allenby cracked under the strain. Half rising, he said in a sharp, childishly shrill voice:

"What do you want? Don't glare like that, man!"

The grinning lips opened. Murgunstrumm laughed. It seemed no laugh at all; it was soundless, merely a trembling of the man's breath.

"I bring wine now, or later? Huh?"

Allenby relaxed, white, trembling. Paul turned, released from the binding clutch of that unholy stare, and looked mechanically, mutely, at his companions. Kermeff nodded slowly. Jeremy, with fists clenched on the table, said raspingly:

"Tell him to bring some wine, sir. We need it."

Murgunstrumm, without a word, limped back into the gloom. His boots scraped ominously, accenting every second beat as his crooked leg thumped under him. There was no other sound.

And the silence persisted for many maddening minutes. The massive structure seemed to have stopped breathing. Paul's voice, when he spoke at last, was a sibilant hiss, whispering into the shad-

ows and back again like a thing of separate being.

"Your watch, Kermeff. What time is it?"

"Eleven," Kermeff said lifelessly.

"Seven hours," Paul muttered. "Seven hours until daylight. They will soon be returning."

"They?"

"The others. The inhabitants. The awful—"

Paul's voice died. He twitched convulsively, as if a hand had been clapped across his mouth. But it was no hand; it was a sound—a sound that jangled down from far above, from the blackness beyond the cracked ceiling, seemingly from the very depths of the night; a mocking, muffled laugh that hung endlessly in the still air, like the vibrating twang of a loose violin string. Then silence, dead, stifling. And then, very suddenly, a thin scream of utter terror.

THERE was nothing else. The sound lived and died and was not reborn. Silence, as of the grave, possessed the room. Then, violently, Kermeff flung back his chair and lurched to his feet.

"What was that?"

No one answered him. Jeremy was without motion, gripping the table with huge hands. Allenby sat like a man dead, stark white, eyes horribly wide and ivory-hued. The lamp's flame gutted the dark. Paul said mechanically:

"Sit down."

"What was it?"

"I was wrong," Paul mumbled. "The inhabitants have not all left. One—at least one—is here still."

"That scream! It was a girl! A girl!"

"A girl," Paul said in a monotone. "A girl in a flame-colored wrap. But we can do nothing. It is too late. It was too late last night, when she came here. It is always too late, here."

"What do you mean?"

"Sit down, Kermeff."

Kermeff floundered into his chair and hunched there, quivering. Muttering aloud, he clawed at his throat and loosened his shirt collar. His hands slid down jerkily, fumbling with the buttons of his coat.

But Paul's hand, darting forward with incredible swiftness, closed over the man's wrists, holding them rigid.

"No, Kermeff."

"What?"

"Keep your coat buttoned, if you love life. Have you forgotten what we did at the hotel?"

KERMEFF faced him without understanding. His hands unclenched and fell away.

"It is hot in here," he choked. "Too hot. I was going to—"

But another voice, soft and persuasive, interrupted him. Something scraped against the back of his chair. A long, deformed arm reached over his shoulder to place a tray with four glasses—thick greenish glasses, filled with brilliant carmine liquid—on the white cloth before him. And the voice, Murgunstrumm's voice, announced quietly:

"It be good wine. Very good wine. The meat'll be near ready, sirs."

Something snapped in Kermeff's brain. Perhaps it was the shock of that naked arm gliding so unexpected before his face. Perhaps it was the sight of the red liquid, thick and sweet smelling and deep with color. Whatever it was, he swung about savagely and seized the cripple's arm in both hands.

"That scream!" he shouted luridly. "You heard it! What was it?"

"Scream?"

"You heard it! Don't deny it!"

The innkeeper's mouth writhed slowly into a smile, a significant,

guarded smile. And his lips were wet and crimson—crimson with a liquid which had only recently passed through them.

"It was the night, sir," he said, bending forward a little. "Only the night, outside. These be lonely roads. No one comes or goes."

"You are lying! That sound came from upstairs!"

But Murgunstrumm released his arm from the clutching fingers and slid backward. He was grinning hideously. Without a word he retreated into the shadows of the doorway and vanished.

And Kermeff, turning again in his chair, sat quite without motion for more than a minute. He gazed at the glasses of red wine before him. Then, as if remembering something, he lifted both his hands, palms up, stared fixedly at them, and mumbled slowly, almost inaudibly:

"His arm—his arm was cold and flabby—cold like dead tissue. . . ."

CHAPTER VIII

The Winged Thing

MURGUNSTRUMM did not return. The four guests sat alone at their table, waiting. The room, with its pin points of groping, wavering, uncertain candlelight, was otherwise empty and very still. Paul, bending forward quietly, abnormally calm and self-contained now that the moment of action had arrived, said in a low voice:

"It is time to do what we came here to do."

Kermeff studied him intently, as if remembering all at once that they had come here for a reason. Allenby remained motionless, remembering other things more close at hand and more Tartarean. Matt Jeremy's fists knotted, eager to take something in their powerful grip and crush it.

"What do you mean?" Kermeff said warily.

"We must overpower him."

"But—"

"If I once get that filthy neck in my fingers," Jeremy flared, "I'll break it!"

"There are four of us," Paul said evenly. "We can handle him. Then, before the others return, we can explore this house from top to bottom."

"It won't take four, sir," Jeremy growled. "I'm just itchin' to show that dirty toad what two good human hands can do to him."

"Human hands?" It was Allenby interrupting in a cracked mumble. "Do you mean. . . ?"

"I mean he ain't human, that's what! But when he comes back here, I'll— Jeremy gulped a mouthful of red wine and laughed ominously in his throat—"I'll strangle him until he thinks he is!"

"Not when he first returns," Paul commanded sharply. "He suspects us already. He'll be on guard."

"Well, then—"

"Let him bring food. Then I'll ask him for—"

A sudden hissing sound came from Allenby's tight lips. Paul turned quickly. The door of the inner room had opened, and Murgunstrumm stood there, watching wolfishly, listening. He glared a moment, then vanished again. And presently, carrying a tray in his malformed hands, he limped into view again.

HE said nothing as he lowered the tray to the table and slid the dishes onto the white cloth. Methodically he reached out with his long arms and placed four cracked plates in their proper positions. Knives and forks and spoons, black and lustreless, as if removed from some dark drawer for the first time in years, clinked dully as he pushed them before each of his

guests. Then he stood back, his fists flat and bony on the cloth.

"It ain't often we have visitors here no more," he said curtly, looking from one face to another with intent eyes. "But the meat's fresh. Good and fresh. And I'll be askin' you to hurry with it. Near midnight it is, and I'm wantin' to be closin' up for the night."

Kermeff lifted his knife and touched the stuff on his plate. It was steak of some sort, red and rare in brown gravy. The vegetables piled about it were thick and sodden and obviously very old.

Paul said abruptly: "You're expecting visitors?"

"Huh?"

"You're expecting someone to come here?"

The innkeeper glared. His eyes seemed to draw together and become a single penetrating shaft of ochre-hued luminosity.

"No one comes here, I told you."

"Oh, I see. Well, we'll hurry and let you go to bed. Fetch some bread, will you?"

Murgunstrumm swept the table with his eyes. Mumbling, he limped away; and as he reached the doorway leading to the other room he turned and looked sharply back. Then he disappeared, and Paul said viciously, crowding over his plate:

"This time, Jeremy. As soon as he returns. If we fail—"

"Listen!"

There was a sound outside. The sound of a motor. It seeped into the room with a dull vibrant hum, growing louder. Out there in the road a car was approaching, Paul's hands clenched. If it were coming here—

He heard something else then. The shrill blast of a horn, just once. And then, from the inner room, Murgunstrumm came limping, one-two, one-two, one-two, with quick steps. He seized the lantern from its hook on the wall. He lit it and proceeded to the door, without a glance at the table.

Jeremy clutched the cloth spasmodically, ready to rise.

"No!" Paul cried in a whisper. "No! Not now!"

The door creaked open. Murgunstrumm scraped over the threshold. A breath of cold sweet air swept into the room, rustling the table cloth. The four men at the table sat quite still, silent, waiting.

THERE were voices outside, and the drone of the car's engine was suddenly still. Then footsteps crunched on the gravel walk and clicked on the stone flagging as they neared the door. An accusing, resentful voice, low yet audible, said thickly:

"That other car, Murgunstrumm? You have visitors?"

The innkeeper's reply was a whisper. Then, in a shrill feminine voice, lifted in mock horror, so typical of character that Paul could almost see the dainty eyebrows go up in assumed consternation:

"Goodness, what an odd hangout! I shan't stay here long. Why, I'd be thoroughly frightened to death."

Laughter—and then the door opened wider, revealing two figures very close together, and behind them the restive halo of Murgunstrumm's bobbing lantern.

The man was in evening clothes, straight, smiling, surveying the room with slightly narrowed eyes. Certainly he seemed out of place here, where every separate thing reeked of age and decay. Yet something about him was not so incongruous. His eyes glittered queerly, with a phosphorescent force that suggested ancient lust and wisdom. And his lips were thick, too thick, curled back in a sinister scowl as he peered suddenly at the four men at the table, and nodded. Then, whispering something to his companion, he moved toward the flick-

ering candle-points in the misty gloom.

The woman was younger, perhaps twenty, perhaps less. A mere girl, Paul decided, watching her covertly. The sort of girl who would go anywhere in the spirit of reckless adventure, who ridiculed conventions and sought everlasting excitement, fearing nothing and conquering all doubts with ready laughter.

And she was lovely. Her gown was of deep restless black, trailing the crude floor as she moved into the shadows. Her white wrap—ermine, it must be—was a blob of dazzling brilliance in the well of semidarkness which leaped out to engulf her.

To a remote table near the wall they went together, and their conversation was merely a murmur, containing no audible words. They leaned there close to each other, their hands meeting between them. And Murgunstrumm, flat against the closed door with the lantern fuming in his dangling hand, followed their movements with eyes of abhorrent anticipation—aloe eyes that seemed to be no part of the man himself, but separate twin orbs of malice.

THEN it was that Jeremy, bending close over the table, said almost inaudibly:

"Shall I go for him, sir? Them others won't interfere."

"No," Paul said quickly. "Wait."

Jeremy subsided, muttering. His hands knotted and unclenched significantly. Then he stiffened, for Murgunstrumm was groping over the floor toward them, swinging the lantern. Stopping just behind Paul's chair, the proprietor blinked sullenly into each man's face, and said harshly, nervously:

"Ye'll have to go."

"But we've only just been served. We haven't had time to—"

"Ye'll have to go. Now."

"Look here," Paul said impatiently. "We're not bothering your guests. We're. . . ."

He stopped. Gazing at Murgunstrumm, he saw something in the far part of the room that caused the words to die on his lips and made him recoil involuntarily. His hands gripped the table. Murgunstrumm, seeing the sudden intentness of his gaze, turned slowly and peered in the same direction.

There in the near darkness a door had opened noiselessly. It hung open now, and the threshold was filled with a silent, erect human figure. Even as the four men at the table watched it fearfully, the figure moved out of the aperture and advanced with slow, mechanical steps.

The man was in black and white, the contrasting black and white of evening attire. But there was nothing immaculate about him. His hair was rumpled, crawling crudely about his flat forehead. His chalk-colored face was a mask, fixed and expressionless. He walked with the exaggerated stride of a man seeped, saturated with liquor. His eyes were wide open, gleaming. His lips were wet and red.

And there was something else, visible in ghastly detail as the lantern light fell upon it. A stain marred the crumpled whiteness of his stiff shirt-front—a fresh glistening stain of bright scarlet, which was blood.

HE stood quite still, staring. For an instant there was no other movement in the room. Then, mumbling throaty words, Murgunstrumm placed the lantern on the table and cautiously advanced to meet him.

And then Paul and the others heard words—guarded, strangely vague words that for all their lack of meaning were nevertheless hid-

eously suggestive, significant and, to Paul, who alone understood them, the ultimate of horror.

"You have finished?" Murgunstrumm demanded eagerly.

The other nodded heavily, searching the cripple's face with his eyes.

"I am finished. It is your turn now."

Trembling violently, Murgunstrumm reached out an unsteady hand to claw the man's arm.

"Now?" he cried hungrily, sucking his lips. "I can go now?"

"In a moment. First I would talk to you. These strangers here. . . ."

But Paul heard no more. The table quivered under his hands and lurched suddenly into him, hurling him backward. A harsh, growling cry came from the other side of it; and then, all at once, someone was racing to the door. It was Allenby, utterly unnerved by what he had just seen, and seeking desperately to escape.

And he was quick, amazingly quick. The door clattered back on its hinges before any other inmate of the room moved. Arms outflung, Allenby clawed his way through the aperture, shouting incoherently. And then Paul was on his feet, lurching forward.

"Stay here!" he cried to Jeremy, who would have followed him. "Hold Kermeff!"

THE threshold was empty when he reached it. He stopped, bewildered by the vast darkness before him. Vaguely he saw that Murgunstrumm and the creature in black and white, standing in the middle of the room, were quite motionless, watching every move. Then he stumbled over the sill, into the gloom of the path.

Nothing moved. The clearing was a silent black expanse of shadow, flat and empty under its pall of decayed atmosphere. The air was cold, pungent, sweeping into Paul's face as he swayed there. High above, feeble stars were visible.

Blindly Paul ran down the driveway, staring on either side. He stopped again, muttering. There was no movement anywhere, no sign of the man who had fled. Nothing but night and cold darkness. And a low-hanging windingsheet of shallow vapor, swirling lazily between earth and heaven.

But Allenby had to be found. If he escaped and got back to the Rehobeth Hotel, he would use Henry Gates' phone to summon help. He would call the police at Marssen. He would lead a searching party here. And then everything that mattered would be over. The madhouse again. And Ruth would never be released from the asylum at Morrisdale.

Savagely Paul slashed on through the deep grass, moving farther and farther from the open door of the inn. Allenby had not reached the road; that was certain. He was hiding, waiting for an opportunity to creep away unobserved.

PAUL'S lips whitened. He glanced toward the car. The car—that was it. The key was still in the lock. Allenby knew it was. Paul stood stock still, watching. Then, smiling grimly, he deliberately turned his back and moved in the opposite direction.

Without hesitating, he blundered on, as if searching the reeds for a prone figure which might be lying there. A long moment dragged by, and another. There was no sound.

And then it came. A scurrying of feet on the gravel walk, as a crouching figure darted from the shadows under the very wall of the house. An instant of scraping, scuttling desperation, as the man flung himself across that narrow stretch of intervening space. Then a sharp thud, as the car door was flung back.

Paul whirled. Like a hound he leaped forward, racing toward the road. The motor roared violently, just ahead of him. The car door was still open. Allenby was hunched over the wheel, struggling with the unfamiliar instruments.

And he was fiendishly quick, even then. Too quick. The car jerked forward, bounding over the uneven surface. Like a great black beast it swept past the man who ran toward it, even as he reached the edge of the road. Then, with a triumphant roar, it was clear.

Clear! Paul stumbled to a stop. A dry moan came from his lips as his prey screamed beyond reach. He stood helpless—for a fraction of an instant.

THEN, out of his pocket, his revolver leaped into his fist. He spun about. Twin spurts of flame burned toward the fleeing shape which was already careening from side to side in wild sweeps. There was an explosion, sharp and bellowing. The car lurched drunkenly, whirled sideways. Brakes screeched. Like a blundering mastodon the machine shot into the deep grass as the bursting tire threw it out of Allenby's feeble control.

And Paul was running again. He was beside the groaning shape before the driver could get out from behind the wheel. The revolver dug viciously into Allenby's ribs.

"Get out!"

Allenby hesitated, then obeyed, trembling.

"I—I won't go back there!"

The gun pressed deeper. Allenby stared suddenly into Paul's face. What he saw there made him shudder. He stood quite still. Then, pushing the revolver away nervously, he mumbled.

"You—you are not as mad as I thought."

"You should have known that before you tried to get away."

"Perhaps I should have."

"You're going back with me."

Allenby's voice trembled. "I have no alternative?"

"None."

With a shrug of defeat, the physician walked very quietly, very slowly, back toward the house.

THE Gray Toad Inn had not changed. At one table Kermeff sat stiff and silent, under Jeremy's cold scrutiny. In the corner, among the shadows, sat the girl of the ermine wrap with her escort, only vaguely interested in what had happened.

Murgunstrumm still stood in the center of the floor, staring. The creature who had come, only a few moments before, from the bowels of the house, now sat alone at a nearby table. He glanced up as the door closed behind Paul and the physician. Then he looked down again, indifferently. And then, eagerly, Murgunstrumm approached him.

"Can I go now?" the cripple demanded.

"Yes. Get out."

Murgunstrumm rubbed thick hands together in anticipation. Breathing harshly, noisily, he wheeled about and limped quickly back to the table where his four guests were once again sitting quietly. His mouth was moving as he swept the lantern away and turned again.

He had forgotten, now, the presence of his undesirable guests. He did not look at them. His eyes, stark with want, were visioning something else—something he had waited for for hours. And he was trembling, as if in the grip of fever, as he started toward the door where the strange gentleman had first appeared.

But he did not reach it. Before he had covered half the intervening distance he stopped very

abruptly and wheeled with a snarl of impatience, glaring at one of the covered windows. He stood rigid, listening.

WHATEVER he heard, it was a sound so inaudible and slight that only his own ears, attuned to it by long habit, caught its vibrations. The men at the table, turning jerkily to peer in the same direction, at the same window, saw nothing, heard nothing. But Murgunstrumm was scraping hurriedly toward the aperture, swinging his lantern resentfully.

He twisted the shade noisily. As it careened up, exposing the bleak oblong of unclean glass, the lantern light fell squarely upon the opening, revealing a fluttering shape outside. More than that the watching men did not discover, for the innkeeper's hands clawed at the window latch and heaved the barrier up quickly.

It was a winged thing that swooped through the opening into the room. The same hairy obscene creature that had whispered to Murgunstrumm, more than an hour ago, to admit the four unsuspecting guests! Rushing through the aperture now, it flopped erratically about the lantern, then darted to the ceiling and momentarily hung there, as if eyeing the occupants of the inn with satisfaction. Murgunstrumm closed the window hurriedly and drew the shade again. And the bat—for bat it was—dropped suddenly, plummet-like, to the table where sat the man who had recently come from the inner rooms.

It happened very quickly. At one moment, as Paul and his companions gazed in sudden dread, the winged thing was fluttering blindly about the ghastly white face of the man who sat there. Next moment there was no winged thing. It had vanished utterly, disintegrated into nothingness; and there at the table, instead of a solitary red-lipped man in evening clothes, sat two men. Two men strangely alike, similarly dressed, with the same colorless masks of faces.

THEY spoke in whispers for a moment, then turned, both of them, to glance at the four men near them. And one—the one who had appeared from the mysterious internals of the inn—said casually:

"We have visitors to-night, eh, Costillan?"

The answer was a triumphant gloating voice, obviously meant to be overheard.

"Ay, and why not? They were coming here as I was leaving. Our fool of an innkeeper would have refused them admission."

"So? But he was afraid. He is always afraid that he will one day be discovered. We must cure that, Costillan. Even now he has told your guests to leave."

The man called Costillan—he who had an instant before been something more than a man—turned sharply in his chair. Paul, staring at him mutely, saw a face suddenly distorted with passion. And the man's voice, flung suddenly into the silence, was vibrant with anger.

"Murgunstrumm!"

Hesitantly, furtively, the cripple limped toward him.

"What—what is it, sir?"

"You would have allowed our guests to depart, my pretty?"

"I—I was—"

"Afraid they would learn things, eh?" The man's fingers closed savagely over Murgunstrumm's wrist. He made no attempt to guard his voice. Obviously he held only contempt for the men who were listening. "Have we not promised you protection?"

"Yes, but—"

"But you would have let them leave! Did I not order you to keep them here? Did I not whisper to

you that I might return—hungry?"

Murgunstrumm licked his lips, cringing. And suddenly, with a snarl, the creature flung him back.

"Go down to your foul den and stay there!"

At that Murgunstrumm scuttled away.

NO sound came from Paul's lips. He sat without stirring, fascinated and afraid. And then a hand closed over his arm, and Jeremy's voice said thickly, harshly:

"I'm goin' to get out of here. This place ain't human!"

Paul clutched at the fingers and held them. Escape was impossible; he knew that. It meant death, now. But he had only two hands: he could not also hold Kermeff and the physician's terrified companion. Lurching to his feet, Kermeff snarled viciously:

"If we stay here another instant, those fiends will—"

"You cannot leave," Paul countered dully.

"We shall see!" And Kermeff kicked back his chair violently as he reeled away from the table. Allenby, rising after him, clung very close.

A revolver lay in Paul's pocket. His hand slid down and closed over it, then relaxed. Jeremy, frowning into his face, muttered thickly. The two physicians stumbled toward the door.

Sensing what was coming, Paul sat quite still and peered at the nearby table. The two men in evening attire had stopped talking. They were watching with hungry, triumphant eyes. They followed every movement as Kermeff and Allenby groped to the door. And then, silent as shadows, they rose from the table.

The two fleeing men saw them each at the same instant. Both stood suddenly still. Kermeff's face lost every trace of color, even in the yellow hue of the lamp. Allenby cried aloud and trembled violently. The two creatures advanced with slow, deliberate steps, gliding steps, from such an angle that retreat to the door was cut off.

And then, abruptly, Paul saw something else, something infinitely more horrible.

THE remaining two inhabitants of this place of evil—the man and woman who had entered together but a short time ago—were rising silently from their table near the wall. The man's face, swathed in the glow of the candlelight beneath it, was a thing of triumph, smiling hideously. The girl—the girl in the white ermine wrap—stood facing him like one in the grip of deep sleep. No expression marred her features; no light glowed in her eyes.

The candle flame flickered on the table between them. The man spoke. Spoke softly, persuasively, as one speaks to a mindless hypnotic. And then, taking her arm, he led her very quietly toward the door through which Murgunstrumm had vanished.

And, as on that other occasion when he had lain in the deep grass of the clearing outside, Paul's mind broke with sudden madness.

"No, no!" he shrieked. "Don't go with him!"

He rushed forward blindly, tumbling a chair out of his path. At the other end of the room, the creature turned to look at him, and laughed softly. And then the man and the girl were gone. The door swung silently shut. A lock clicked. Even as Paul's hands seized the knob, a vibrant laugh echoed through the heavy panels. And the door was fast.

Savagely Paul turned.

"Jeremy! Jeremy, help me! We can't let her go—"

The cry choked on his lips.

Across the room, Jeremy was standing transfixed, staring. Kermeff and Allenby huddled together, rigid with fear. And the two macabre demons in evening clothes were advancing with arms outthrust.

CHAPTER IX

A Strange Procession

THEY were no longer men. Like twin vultures they slunk forward, an unholy metamorphosis already taking place in their appearance. A misty bluish haze enveloped them, originating it seemed from the very pores of their obscene bodies, growing thicker and deeper until it was in itself a thing of motion, writhing about them like heavy opaque fog moved by an unseen breeze. More and more pungent it grew, until only a single feature of those original loathsome forms was visible—until only *eyes* glowed through it.

Kermeff and Allenby retreated before those eyes in stark terror. They were stabbing pits of swirling green flame, deep beyond human knowledge of depth, ghastly wide, hungry. They came on relentlessly, two separate awful pairs of them, glittering through dimly human shapes of sluggish, evil-smelling vapor.

As they came, those twin shapes of abomination, uncouth hands extended before them. Misty, distorted fingers curled forth to grope toward the two cringing victims. Allenby and Kermeff fell away from them like men already dead: Kermeff stiff, mechanical, frozen to a fear-wracked carcass of robotlike motion; Allenby mumbling, ghastly gray with terror.

Back, step by step, the two physicians retreated, until at last the wall pressed into their bodies, ending their flight. And still the twin forms of malevolence came on, vibrant with evil.

Not until then did reason return to the remaining two men in the room. Jeremy flung himself forward so violently that his careening hips sent the table skidding sideways with a clink of jumping china. Paul, rushing past him, flung out a rasping command.

"The cross! The cross under your coats!"

PERHAPS it was the stark torment of the words, perhaps the very sound of his voice, as shrill as cutting steel. Something, at any rate, penetrated the fear that held Kermeff and Allenby helpless. Something drove into Kermeff's brain and gave him life, movement, power of thought. The physician's big hands clawed up and ripped down again. And there, gleaming white and livid on his chest, hung the cross-shaped strips of cloth which Paul had sewn there.

Its effect was instantaneous. The advancing shapes of repugnance became suddenly quite still, then recoiled as if the cross were a thing of flame searing into them. Kermeff shouted luridly, madly. He stumbled a step forward, ripping his coat still farther apart. The shapes retreated with uncanny quickness, avoiding him.

But the eyes were pools of absolute hate. They drilled deep into Kermeff's soul, stopping him. He could not face them. And as he stood there, flat-pressed against the wall, the uncouth fiends before him began once again to assume their former shape. The bluish haze thinned. Outlines of black, blurred with the white of shirt-fronts, glowed through the swirling vapor. When Paul looked again the shapes were men: and the men stood close together, eyeing Kermeff and Allenby—and the cross—with desperate diabolical eyes.

Suddenly one of them, the one called Costillan, moved away.

Swifty he walked across the floor—was it walking or floating or some unearthly condition halfway between?—and vanished through the doorway which led to the mysterious rear rooms. The other, retreating slowly to the outside door, flattened there with both arms outflung, batlike, and waited, glaring with bottomless green orbs at the four men who confronted him.

AND then Paul moved. Shrill words leaped to his lips: "That girl—we've got to get to her before—"

But the cry was drowned in another voice, Jeremy's. Stumbling erect, Jeremy said hoarsely:

"Come on. I'm gettin' out of here."

"Look out! You can't—"

But Jeremy was already across the intervening space, confronting the creature who barred the barrier.

"Get out of the way!" he bellowed. "I've had enough of this."

There was no answer. The vulture simply stood there, smiling a little in anticipation. And suddenly, viciously, a revolver leaped into Jeremy's fist.

"Get out of the way!"

The creature laughed. His boring eyes fixed themselves in Jeremy's face. They deepened in color, became luminous, virulent, flaming again. And Jeremy, staggering from the force of them, reeled backward.

"I'll kill you!" he screeched. "I'll—"

He lost control. Panic-stricken, he flung up the revolver and pulled the trigger again and again. The room trembled with the roar of the reports. And then the gun hung limp in Jeremy's fingers. He stood quite still, licking his lips, staring. Amazed, he stepped backward into the table, upsetting a glass of red liquid over the white cloth.

For the man in evening clothes, despite the bullets which had burned through him, still stood motionless against the closed door, and still laughed with that leering, abhorrent expression of triumph.

THERE was silence after that for many minutes, broken finally by the familiar *shf-shf-shf* of limping feet. Into the room, glaring from one still form to another, came Murgunstrumm, and behind him the companion of the undead fiend at the door.

Costillan pointed with a long thin arm at Kermeff, and at the white cross which hung on the physician's breast.

"Remove it," he said simply.

Murgunstrumm's lips curled. His huge hands lifted, as if only too eager to make contact with the cross and the human flesh beneath it. Slowly, malignantly, he advanced upon Kermeff's stiff form, arms outstretched, mouth twisted back over protruding teeth. And the mouth was fresh with blood—blood which had not come from the cripple's own lips.

But Paul was before him, and a revolver lay in Paul's fingers. The muzzle of the gun pointed squarely into the innkeeper's face.

"Stand back," Paul ordered curtly.

Murgunstrumm hesitated. He took another step forward.

"Back! Do you want to die?"

Fear showed in the cripple's features. He came no closer. And a thin breath of relief sobbed from Paul's lips as he realized the truth. He had not known, had not been sure, whether Murgunstrumm was a member of the ghoulish clan that inhabited this place, or was a mere servant, a mere confederate.

"Jeremy," Paul's voice was level again with resolution.

"What—what do you want, sir?"

"Lock every window and door in this room except the one behind me."

"But, sir—"

"Do as I say! We've got to find that girl before any harm comes to her—if it's not already too late. When you've locked the exits, take— You have a pencil?"

Jeremy groped in his pockets, frowning. Fumbling with what he drew out, he said falteringly:

"I've a square of chalk, sir. It's only cue chalk, from the master's billiard room."

"Good. When you've locked the doors and windows, make a cross on each one as clear and sharp as you can. Quickly!"

JEREMY stared, then moved away. The other occupants of the room watched him furtively. Only one moved—Costillan. And Costillan, snarling with sudden vehemence, stepped furtively to the door and flattened there.

One by one Jeremy secured the windows and marked them with a greenish cross, including the locked door in the farther shadows, through which the girl in the white wrap had vanished. When he turned at last to the final barrier, which led to the gravel walk outside, his way was blocked by the threatening shape which clung there, glowering at him, waiting for him to come within reach.

"One side," Jeremy blurted. "One side or I'll—"

"Not that way!" Paul cried sharply. "The cross on your chest, man. Show it."

Jeremy faltered, then laughed grimly. Deliberately he unbuttoned his jacket and advanced. The creature's eyes widened, glowing most strangely. Unflinching, Jeremy strode straight toward them.

Just once, as if fighting back an unconquerable dread, Costillan lifted his arms to strike. Then, cringing, he slunk sideways. And at the same moment, seeing the barrier unguarded, Kermeff lurched forward.

"I'm getting out of here!"

"You're staying, Kermeff."

The physician jerked around, glaring. Paul's revolver shifted very slightly away from Murgunstrumm's tense body to include Kermeff in its range of control. Kermeff's forehead contracted with hate.

"I tell you I won't stay!"

But he made no attempt to reach the door, and Paul said evenly to Jeremy:

"Lock it."

JEREMY locked it and made the sign of the cross. And then Paul's finger curled tighter on the trigger of the gun. The muzzle was still on a line with Murgunstrumm's cowering carcass. Paul said roughly:

"Allenby!"

"Yes?"

"You are remaining here, to make sure nothing attempts to enter from the outside. Do you understand? And if the girl in the white wrap comes back through that door"—Paul pointed quickly to the locked barrier which had baffled him only an instant before—"or if that fiend comes back alone, lock the door on this side and keep the key!"

"I can't stay here alone!"

"Nothing will harm you, man. Keep your coat open, or strip it off. They can't come near the cross. Sit at the table and don't move. We're going."

"You're going? Where?" Allenby croaked.

"To find that girl, you fool! And you"—Paul glared into Murgunstrumm's bloated face—"are going to lead us."

A bestial growl issued from the innkeeper's lips. He fell back, rumbling. But the revolver followed him and menaced him with dire meaning, and he thought better of his refusal. Silently he scuffed backward toward the inner door.

"For your life, Allenby," Paul snapped, "don't lose your head and

try to escape." He took the chalk from Jeremy's hand and dropped it on the table. "As soon we've passed through this door, mark it with the sign of the cross, then stay here on pain of death. You're safe here, and with the door sanctified, and locked on the outside, these—these blood-hungry ghouls cannot escape. Do you hear?"

"I'll stay," Allenby muttered. "For the love of Heaven, come back soon. And—and give me a gun!"

"A gun is no good to you."

"But if I've got to stay here alone, I—"

Paul glared at the man suspiciously. But there was no sign of treachery in Allenby's white face. No sign that he perhaps wanted the revolver for another reason, to use on the men who had brought him here. And a gun might really prove valuable. It would give the man courage, at any rate.

But Paul took no chances. "Put your revolver on the table, Jeremy," he said curtly. "If you touch it before we're out of this room, Allenby, I'll shoot you. Do you understand?"

"I—I only want it for protection, I tell you!"

JEREMY slid the weapon within reach of the man's hand. Allenby stood stiff, staring at it. And then Paul's revolver pressed again into the thick flabbiness of Murgunstrumm's shrunken body, forcing the cripple over the threshold.

"Take the lantern, Jeremy."

The door closed then, shutting out the last view of the chamber—the last view of two thwarted demons in evening clothes, standing motionless, staring; and Allenby, close to the table, reaching for the revolver and flinging back his coat at the same time, to expose the stern white mark of protection on his chest.

The lantern sputtered eerily in Jeremy's hand. He turned, locked the door carefully, removed the key. Murgunstrumm watched silently.

"Now." Paul's weapon dug viciously into the cripple's abdomen. "Where is she? Quickly!"

"I—I ain't sure where they went. Maybe—"

"You know!"

"I tell you they might've gone anywhere. I ain't never sure."

"Then you'll show us every last room and corner of this devilish house until we find her. Cellar and all."

"Cellar?" The repeated word was a quick, passionate whisper. "No, no, there be no cellar here!"

"And if you try any tricks, I'll kill you."

IT was a strange procession filing silently through the musty rooms and corridors of the ancient structure. Murgunstrumm, a contorted, malformed monkey swathed in dancing lantern light, led the way with limping steps, scraping resentfully over the bare floors. Very close behind him strode Paul, leveled revolver ready to cut short any move the man might make to escape or turn on his captors. Jeremy came next, huge and silent; and last of all, Kermeff, in whom all thought of rebellion had seemingly been replaced by deepening dread and his acute realization that here were things beyond the minds of men.

Room after room they hurried through—empty, dead rooms, with all windows locked and curtained, and every shutter closed. In one, obviously the kitchen, an oil stove was still warm and a large platter of fresh meat lay on the unclean table.

Room after room. Empty, all of them, of life and laughter. In some stood beds, stripped to bare springs; bare tables; chairs coated with dust.

Like cells of a sunken dungeon the chambers extended deeper and deeper into the bowels of the house. From one to another the strange procession moved, eating its anxious way with the clutching glare of the lantern.

"There is nothing here," Kermeff said at last, scowling impatiently. "We are fools to go farther."

"There is something, somewhere."

Murgunstrumm, leering crookedly, said:

"They might've gone outdoors. I ain't never sure where."

"We have not yet explored upstairs."

"Huh?"

"Or down."

"Down? No, no! There be no downstairs! I told you—"

"We'll see. Here; here's something." Paul stopped as the advancing lantern rays touched a flight of black stairs winding up into complete darkness. "Lead on, Murgunstrumm. No tricks."

MURGUNSTRUMM scuffed to the bottom of the steps and moved up with maddening slowness, gripping the rail. And suddenly, then, the man behind him hesitated. A single word, "Listen!" whispered softly through Paul's lips.

"What is it?" Kermeff said thickly.

"I heard—"

"No, no!" Murgunstrumm's cry was vibrant with fear. "There be no one up here!"

"Be still!"

The cracked voice subsided gutturally. Another sound was audible above it. A strange nameless sound, vaguely akin to the noise of sucking lips or the hiss of gusty air through a narrow tube. A grotesque sound, half human, half bestial.

"An animal," Kermeff declared in a low voice. "An animal of some sort, feeding—"

But Paul's shrill voice interrupted.

"Up, Murgunstrumm! Up quickly!"

"There be nothin', I tell you!"

"Be quiet!"

The cripple advanced again, moving reluctantly, as if some inner bonds held him back. His face was convulsed. He climbed morosely, slowly hesitatingly before each step. And his move, when it came, was utterly unexpected.

He whirled abruptly, confronting his captors. Luridly he cried out, so that his voice carried into every corner of the landing above:

"I tell you there be no one! I tell you—"

Paul's hand clapped savagely over his mouth, crushing the outcry into a gurgling hiss. Jeremy and Kermeff stood taut, dismayed. Then Paul's gun rammed into the cripple's back, prodding him on. No mistaking the meaning of that grim muzzle. One more sound would bring a bullet.

GROPING again, Murgunstrumm at last reached the end of the climb, where the railing twisted sharply back on itself and the upper landing lay straight and level and empty before him. The sucking sounds had ceased. The corridor lay in absolute uncanny silence, nerve-wracking and repelling.

"That noise," Paul said curtly, "came from one of these rooms. We've got to locate it."

"What—what was it?"

There was no answer. The reply in Paul's mind could not be uttered aloud. Kermeff did not know, and the truth would make a gibbering idiot of him. Kermeff, for all his medical knowledge, was an ignorant blind fool in matters macabre.

And another array of gloomy rooms extended before them, waiting to be examined. With Murgunstrumm probing the way, the four men stole forward and visited each chamber, one after another. There

was nothing. These rooms were like those below, abandoned, sinister with memories of long-dead laughter, dust-choked, broodingly still.

"Something," Kermeff gasped suddenly, "is watching us. I can feel it!"

The others glanced at him, and Jeremy forced a dry laugh. Half the corridor lay behind them; the remaining doors stretched ahead beyond the restless circle of light. Paul muttered fretfully and pushed the innkeeper before him over the next threshold. His companions blundered close behind. The lantern light flooded the chamber, disclosing a blackened window and yellowish time-scarred walls. A four-poster bed stood against the wall, covered with mattress and crumpled blanket.

And Paul, too, as he bent over the bed examining the peculiar brownish stains there, felt eyes upon him. He whirled about bitterly, facing the doorway—and stood as if a hand of ice had suddenly gripped his throat, forcing a frosty breath from his open mouth.

A MAN stood there, garbed meticulously in black evening clothes, smiling vindictively. He was the same creature who earlier in the evening had escorted the girl in the white ermine wrap into the inn. The same, but somehow different; for the man's eyes were glowing now with that hellish green light, and his lips were full, thick and very red.

He said nothing. His gaze passed from Paul's colorless face to Murgunstrumm's, and the cripple answered it with a triumphant step forward. Kermeff shrank back until the bed post crushed into his back and held him rigid. Jeremy crouched, waiting. The creature stirred slightly and advanced.

But Paul did not wait. He dared not. In one move he wrenched his coat open, baring the white sign beneath, and staggered forward. The intruder hesitated. The green eyes contracted desperately to slits of fire. The face writhed into a mask of hate. Violently the man spun back, recoiling with arms upflung. And the doorway, all at once, was empty.

For an instant Paul was limp, overcome. Then he was across the threshold, lurching into the hall in time to see a shape—a tawny, four-legged shape, wolfish in contour—race down the corridor and bound into darkness, to land soundlessly upon the stairs and vanish into lower gloom.

There was nothing else. Nothing but Kermeff, dragging at his arm and saying violently:

"He'll overpower Allenby downstairs!"

"Allenby's safe," Paul said dully, mechanically. "He has the cross."

He remembered the revolver in his hand and raised it quickly, swinging back to face Murgunstrumm. But the cripple was helpless, held in Jeremy's big hands, in the doorway.

AND so they continued their investigation, and at the end of the long passageway, in the final room of all, found what Paul in the bottom of his heart had expected. There, on the white sheets of an enameled bed, lay the lady of the ermine wrap, arms outflung, head lolling over the side, lifeless hair trailing the floor.

Murgunstrumm, seeing her there, rushed forward to stand above her, glaring down, working his lips, muttering incoherent words. He would have dropped to his knees beside her, clawing at her fiendishly, had not Jeremy flung him back.

For she was dead. Kermeff, bending above her, announced that with-

out hesitation. Her gown had been torn at the breast, exposing soft flesh as delicately white as fine-grained gypsum. An ethereal smile of bewilderment marred her lips. And upon her throat, vivid in the ochre glare of the lantern, were two blots of blood, two cruel incisions in the jugular vein.

Paul stepped back mutely, turning away. He waited at the door until Kermeff, examining the marks, stood up at last and came to him.

"I don't understand," the physician was saying stiffly. "Such marks—I have never encountered them before."

"The marks of the vampire," Paul muttered.

"What?"

"You wouldn't understand, Kermeff." And then Paul seized the man's arm abruptly, jerking him around. "Listen to me, Kermeff. I didn't force you to come to this horrible place for revenge. I only wanted to prove to you that I'm not mad. But we've got to destroy these fiends. It doesn't matter why we came here. We've got to make sure no one else ever comes. Do you understand?"

Kermeff hesitated, biting his lips nervously. Then he stiffened.

"Whatever you say," he said thickly, "I will do."

Paul swung about then, and called quickly to Jeremy. And Jeremy, looking up from the limp figure on the bed, had to drag Murgunstrumm with him in order to make the innkeeper move away. A fantastic hunger gleamed in Murgunstrumm's sunken eyes. His hands twitched convulsively. He peered back and continued to peer back until Jeremy shoved him roughly over the threshold and kicked the door shut.

"Lead the way, Murgunstrumm," Paul snapped. "We have not yet seen the cellars."

The cripple's lips twisted open.

"No, no! There be no cellars. I have told you—"

"Lead the way!"

CHAPTER X

A Girl's Voice

THE cellars of the Gray Toad Inn were sunken pits of gloom and silence, deep below the last level of rotted timbers and plastered walls. From the obscurity of the lower corridor a flight of wooden steps plunged sharply into nothingness; and Murgunstrumm, groping down them, was forced to bend almost double lest a low-hanging beam crush his great malformed head.

No amount of prodding or whispered threats could induce the captured innkeeper to hurry. He probed each step with his clublike feet before descending. And there was that in his eyes, in the whole convulsed mask of his features, which spoke of virulent dread. The revolver in Paul's hand did not for an instant relax its vigil.

Like a trapped beast, lips moving soundlessly and huge hands twisting at his sides, the cripple reached the bottom and crouched there against the damp wall, while his captors crowded about him, peering into surrounding darkness.

"Well," Paul said curtly, "what are you waiting for?"

A mutter was Murgunstrumm's only response. Sluggishly he felt his way; and the lantern light, hovering over him, revealed erratic lines of footprints, old and new, in the thick dust of the stone floor. Footprints, all of them, which harmonized with the shape and size of the cripple's own feet. He alone had visited these pits, or else the other visitors had left no marks! And the signs in the dust led deeper and deeper into a labyrinth of impossible gloom, luring the intruders onward.

AND here, presently, as in the central square of some medieval, subterranean city, the floor was crossed and recrossed with many lines of footprints, and chambers gaped on all sides. chambers small and square, with irregular walls of stone and high ceilings of beams and plaster.

Broken chairs, tables, choked every corner, for these rooms had been used, in the years when the house above had been a place of merrymaking and laughter, as storage vaults. Now they were vaults of decay and impregnable gloom. Spiderwebs dangled in every dark corner; and the spiders themselves, brown and bloated and asleep, were the only living inhabitants.

And with each successive chamber Murgunstrumm's features contracted more noticeably to a mask of animal fear. Not fear of the revolver, but the dread of a caged beast that something dear to him—food, perhaps, or some object upon which he loved to feast his eyes—would be taken from him. As he approached a certain doorway, at last, he drew back, muttering.

"There be nothing more. I have told you there be nothing here."

Only the pressure of the revolver forced him on, and he seemed to shrivel into himself with apprehension as he clawed through the aperture and the lantern light revealed the chamber's contents.

There was a reason for his reluctance. The room was large enough to have been at one time two separate enclosures, made into a whole by the removal of the partition. And it was a display gallery of horrible possessions. The three men who entered behind Murgunstrumm, keeping close together, stood as if transfixed, while utter awe and abhorrence welled over them.

IT was a vault, choked with things white and gleaming. Things moldy with the death that clung to them. And there was no sound, no intruding breeze to rustle the huge shapeless heap. It was death and mockery, flung together in horror. And the men who looked upon it were for an interminable moment stricken mute with the fiendishness of it.

Then at last Kermeff stepped forward and cried involuntarily:

"Horrible! It is too horrible!"

Jeremy, turning in a slow circle, began to mumble to himself, as if clutching eagerly at something sane, something ordinary, to kill the throbbing of his heart.

"Bones! God, sir, it looks like a slaughterhouse!"

The lantern in Paul's hand was trembling violently, casting jiggling shadows over the array, throwing laughter and hate and passion into gaping faces which would never again, in reality, assume any expression other than the sunken empty glare of death. And Murgunstrumm was in the center of the floor, huddled into himself like a thing without shape. And Kermeff was pacing slowly about, inspecting the stack of disjointed things around him, poking at them professionally and scowling to himself.

"Women, all of them," he announced gutturally. "Young women. Impossible to estimate the number—"

"Let's get out of here!" Jeremy snarled.

Kermeff turned, nodded. And so, jerking Murgunstrumm's shoulder, Paul forced the cripple once again to lead the way. And the inspection continued.

Other chambers revealed nothing. The horror was not repeated. As the procession moved from doorway to doorway, Jeremy said bitterly, touching Paul's arm:

"Why don't you ask him what those things are, sir? He knows."

"I know, too," Paul said heavily.

Jeremy stared at him. The big man fell back, then, as Murgunstrumm, taking advantage of their lack of attention, attempted to scuff past a certain doorway without entering. Fresh footprints led into that particular aperture. And Kermeff was alert. Ignoring the cripple, Kermeff strode into the chamber alone, and suddenly cried aloud in a cracked voice.

THERE, upon a table, lay a thing infinitely more horrible than any heap of decayed human bones. Murgunstrumm, forced into the room by Paul, strove with a sharp cry to fall back from it, until he was caught up in Jeremy's arms and hurled forward again. And the three intruders stood mute, staring.

A sheet of canvas, ancient and very dirty, partly covered what lay there. A long, bone-handled knife was stuck upright beside it, in the table.

The operation, if such a fiendish process could be so termed, was half completed. Kermeff, faltering to the table, lifted the blanket halfway and let it drop again with a convulsive twitch. Jeremy looked only once. Then, twisting with insane rage, he seized Murgunstrumm's throat in his big hands.

"You did this!" he thundered. "You came down here when that rat came up and told you—told you he was finished. You came down here and—"

"Jeremy." Paul's voice was mechanical, lifeless. "Do you recognize her?"

Jeremy stiffened and looked again. And then a glint of mingled rage and horror and pity came into his eyes. He released the cripple abruptly and stood quite still.

"It's—it's the girl who came in here last night, sir!" he whispered hoarsely. "When you and I was outside alone, in the grass, watchin'—"

"God in Heaven!" Kermeff cried suddenly, reached up with both hands.

Paul had had enough. He swung about to grope to the door, and froze like a paralytic in his tracks.

THERE in the doorway a revolver was leveled at him in the hands of a leering creature in evening clothes. The revolver was Allenby's; and the man behind it, Costillan, was standing very still, very straight, with parted lips and penetrating eyes that were hypnotic.

Paul acted blindly, desperately, without thinking. Flinging up his own gun, he fired. An answering burst of flame roared in his face. Something razor-sharp and hot lashed into his shoulder, tearing the flesh. He stumbled back, falling across the table where lay that mutilated body. The gun slipped from his fingers; and the creature in the doorway was still there, still smiling, unharmed.

It was Jeremy who leaped for the fallen gun, and Murgunstrumm who fell upon it with the agility of a snake. The man in evening clothes, advancing very slowly, pointed his own weapon squarely at Jeremy's threatening face and said distinctly:

"Back, or you will taste death."

Then Murgunstrumm was up, to his knees, to his feet, clutching the retrieved gun in quivering fingers. Like an ape he stood there, peering first into the stark white faces of Paul's companions, then into the drilling eyes of his master. And Paul, at the same instant, staggered erect and stood swaying, clutching at his shoulder where blood was beginning to seep through the coat.

At sight of the blood, the crea-

ture's eyes widened hungrily. He glided forward, lips wide. Then he stopped, as if realizing what he had forgotten. To Murgunstrumm he said harshly:

"Remove that—that abomination! Tear down the cross and rip it to shreds!"

And Murgunstrumm did so. Protected by the menacing revolver in Costillan's hand, and the gun in his own fist, he tore the white cross from Paul's chest and ripped it apart. To Kermeff and Jeremy he did the same. And when he had finished, when the rags lay limp at his feet, the creature in black and white said, smiling:

"Upstairs it will be more pleasant. Come, my friends. This is Murgunstrumm's abbatoir, unfit for the business of fastidious men. Come."

Outside, two more of the macabre demons were waiting. They came close as the three victims filed out of the chamber. One of them was the man who had fled from the upper room where lay that other half-naked body with twin punctures in its crushed throat. The other was the companion of the smiling Costillan—the second of the two who had been left in the central room under Allenby's guard.

In grim silence the three horribles led their victims out of the pits, with Murgunstrumm limping triumphantly behind.

COLD dread clawed at Paul's soul during that short journey out of one world of horror into another; dread combined with a hopelessness that left him weak, shuddering. Somehow, now, the resistance had been drawn out of him. Further agony of mind and spirit could drag no more response from flesh and muscle.

He had been so close to success! He had learned every secret of this grim house of hell, and had shown Kermeff the same.

But the truth would avail nothing now. Paul, climbing the stairs slowly, mutely, glanced at Kermeff and moaned inwardly. Kermeff was convinced. Kermeff would have freed Ruth, signed a statement that the girl, after escaping from this house of evil seven months ago, had been not mad but horrified and delirious. But now Kermeff himself would never leave; there would be no statement. Ruth would remain indefinitely in the asylum.

A sound rose above the scrape of footsteps—a sudden hammering on some distant door, and the muffled vibration of a man's voice demanding entrance. The creatures beside Paul glanced at each other quickly. One said, in a low voice:

"It is Maronaine, returning from the city."

"With good fortune, probably. Trust Maronaine."

"Murgunstrumm, go and open the door to him. Wait. One of these fools has the key."

"This one has it," the cripple growled, prodding Jeremy.

"Then take it."

Jeremy stood stiff as the innkeeper's hands groped in his pockets. For an instant it seemed that he would clutch that thick neck in his grip and twist it, despite the danger that threatened. But he held himself rigid. Murgunstrumm, key in hand, stepped back and turned quickly into the dark, swinging the lantern as he limped away.

The revolver pressed again into Paul's back. His captor said quietly, in a voice soft with subtlety:

"And we go in the same direction, my friend, to pay a visit to your friend Allenby."

ALLENBY! What had happened to him? How had the vampires escaped from the prison chamber where he had been left to guard them? Pacing through

the gloom, Paul found the problem almost a relief from the dread of what was coming. In some way the monsters had overcome Allenby. Somehow they had forced him to open one of the doors, or the windows. . . .

"Did you hear that, my friend?"

Paul stopped and peered into the colorless features of his persecutor. Kermeff and Jeremy were standing quite still.

"Hear what?"

"Listen."

It came again, the sound that had at first been so soft and muffled that Paul had not heard it. A girl's voice, pleading, uttering broken words. And as he heard it, a slow, terrible fear crept into Paul's face. The muscles of his body tightened to the breaking point. That voice, it was—

The gun touched him. Mechanically he moved forward again. Darkness hung all about him. Once, turning covertly, he saw that the gloom was so opaque that the moving shapes behind him were invisible. Only the sound of men breathing, and the scrape of feet; only the sight of three pairs of greenish eyes, like glowing balls of phosphorus. There was nothing else.

But resistance was madness. The demons behind him were ghouls born of darkness, vampires of the night, with the eyes of cats.

And so, presently, with deepening dread, he stumbled through the last black room and arrived at the threshold of the central chamber. And there, as his eyes became accustomed again to the glare of the lantern which stood on the table, he saw Allenby lying lifeless on the floor, just beyond the sill. The door closed behind him and he was forced forward; and suddenly the room seemed choked with moving forms. Kermeff and Jeremy were close beside him. The three macabre demons hovered near. Allenby lay there, silent and prone. Murgunstrumm—

Murgustrumm was standing, batlike, against the opposite barrier which led to the night outside, glaring, peering invidiously at two people who were visible at a nearby table. These were the guests whom the innkeeper had just admitted. Man and woman. The man, like all the others, was standing now beside the table with arms folded on his chest, lips curled in a hungry smile. The girl stared in mute horror straight into Paul's frozen face.

The girl was Ruth LeGeurn.

CHAPTER XI

Compelling Eyes. . . .

"YOU see, your friend possessed a weakling's mind."

The man with the gun kicked Allenby's dead body dispassionately, grinning.

"He had no courage. He was bound with fear and unable to combat the force of two pairs of eyes upon him. He became—hynotized, shall we say? And obedient, very obedient. Soon you will understand how it was done."

Paul hardly heard the words. He still stared at the girl, and she at him. For seven mad months he had longed for that face, moaned for it at night, screamed for it. Now his prayers were answered, and he would have given his very soul, his life, to have them recalled. Yet she was lovely, even in such surroundings, lovely despite the ghastly whiteness of her skin and the awful fear in her wide eyes.

And her companion, gloating over her, was telling triumphantly how he had obtained her.

"There were three of them," he leered, "in a machine, moving slowly along the road just below here. I met them and I was hungry, for nothing had come to me this

night. There in the road I became human for their benefit, and held up my hand as befitting one who wishes to ask directions. They stopped. And then—then it was over very quickly, eh, my lovely bride? The boy, he lies beside the road even now. When he awakes, he will wonder and be very sad. Oh, so sad! The older man hangs over the door of the car, dead or alive I know not. And here—here is what I have brought home with me!"

"And look at her, Maronaine!"

"Look at her? Have I not looked?"

"Fool!" It was another of the vampires who spoke. "Look closely, and then examine this one!"

Eyes, frowning, penetrating eyes which seemed bottomless, examined Paul's features intently and turned to inspect the girl.

"What mean you, Francisco?"

"These are the two who came here before, so long ago, and escaped. Look at them, together!"

"Ah!" The exclamation was vibrant with understanding.

"These are the two, Maronaine."

A WHITE hand gripped Paul's shoulder savagely. The face that came close to his was no longer leering with patient anticipation of satisfaction to come, but choked with hate and bestial fury.

"You will learn what it means to escape this house. You have come back to find out, eh? You and she, both. No others have ever departed from here, or ever will."

"They should be shown together, Francisco. No?"

"Together? Ah, because they are lovers and should be alone, eh?" The laugh was satanic.

"Up there"—an angry arm flung toward the ceiling—"where it is very quiet. You, Maronaine, and you, Costillan, it is your privilege. Francisco and I will amuse ourselves here with these other guests of ours."

A grunt of agreement muttered from Maronaine's lips. His fingers clasped the girl's arm, lifting her from the chair where she cringed in terror. Ugly hands dragged her forward.

"Paul—Paul! Oh, help!"

But Paul himself was helpless, caught in a savage crip from which there was no escape. His captor swung him toward the door, Struggling vainly, he was hauled over the threshold into the darkness beyond, and the girl was dragged after him.

The door rasped shut. The last Paul saw, as it closed, was a blurred vision of Jeremy and Kermeff flattened desperately against the wall, staring at the two remaining vampires; and Murgunstrumm, crouching against the opposite barrier, cutting off any possibility of retreat.

Then a voice growled curtly:

"Go back to your feast, Murgunstrumm. We have no use for you here. Go!"

And as the two victims were prodded up the twisting stairs to the upper reaches of the inn, the door below them opened and closed again. And Murgunstrumm scurried along the lower corridor, mumbling to himself, clawing his way fretfully toward the stairway that led down into the buried pits.

IT was a cruel room into which they were thrust. Situated on the upper landing, directly across the hall from where that pitiful feminine figure lay on the musty bed, it was no larger than a dungeon cell, and illuminated only by a stump of candle which lay in a pool of its own gray wax on the window sill.

Here, forced into separate chairs by their captors, Paul and Ruth stared at each other—Ruth sobbing, with horror-filled eyes wide open;

Paul sitting with unnatural stiffness, waiting.

Powerful hands groped over Paul's shoulders and held him motionless, as if knowing that he would soon be straining in torment. At the same time, the door clicked shut. The candlelight wavered and became smooth again. The second vampire advanced slowly toward Ruth.

A scream started from the girl's lips as she saw that face. The eyes were green again. The features were voluptuous, bloated beyond belief.

"We will show them what it means to escape this house. Her blood will be warm, Costillan. Warm and sweet. I will share it with you."

The girl struggled up, staring horribly, throwing out her hands to ward off the arms she expected to crush her. But those arms did not move. It was the eyes that changed, even as she cringed back half erect against the wall. The eyes followed her, boring, drilling, eating into her soul. She stood quite still. Then, moaning softly, she took a step forward, and another, faltering, and slumped again into the chair.

The creature bent over her triumphantly. Fingers caressed her hair, her cheeks, her mouth—the fingers of a slave buyer, appraising a prospective purchase. Very slowly, gently, they thrust the girl's limp head back, exposing the white, tender, lovely throat. And then the creature's lips came lower. His eyes were points of vivid fire. His mouth parted, his tongue curled over a protruding lower lip. Teeth gleamed.

PAUL'S voice pierced the room with a roar of animal fury. Violently he wrenched himself forward, only to be dragged back again by the amazingly powerful hands on his shoulders. But the demon beside Ruth straightened quickly, angrily, and glared.

"Can you not keep that fool still? Am I to be disturbed with his discordant voice while—"

"Listen, Maronaine."

The room was deathly still. Suddenly the man called Costillan strode to the door and whipped it open. Standing there, he was motionless, alert. And there was no sound anywhere, no sound audible to human ears.

But those ears were not human. Costillan said curtly:

"Someone is outside the house, prowling. Come!"

"But these two here. . . ?"

"The door, Maronaine, locks on the outside. They will be here when we return, and all the sweeter for having thought of us."

The chamber was suddenly empty of those macabre forms, and the door closed. A key turned in the slot outside. And then Paul was out of his chair with a bound. Out of it, and clawing frantically at the barrier.

A mocking laugh from the end of the corridor was the only answer.

NO amount of straining would break that lock. An eternity passed while Paul struggled there. Time and again he flung himself again the panels. But one shoulder was already a limp, bleeding thing from that bullet wound, and the other could not work alone. And presently came the voice of Ruth LeGeurn behind him, very faint and far away.

"They said . . . someone outside, Paul. If it is Martin and Von Heller. . . ."

"Who?"

"I escaped from Morrisdale last night, Paul. Martin told me how to do it. He met me outside the walls. We drove straight to the city, to find you. You were gone."

Paul was leaning against the door, gasping. Wildly he stared about the room, seeking something to use as a bludgeon.

"Martin went to the hospital, to plead with Kermeff and Allenby for both of us, Paul. Your letters were there. He knew the handwriting. We traced you to Rehobeth to-night and—and we were on our way here when that horrible man in the road—"

"But Von Heller!" Paul raved. "Where does he come into it?"

"He was at the Rehobeth Hotel. He—he read the account of your escape and said he knew you would return there."

"He'll be no help now," Paul said bitterly, fighting again at the door. "I can't open this."

Ruth was suddenly beside him, tugging at him.

"If we can find some kind of protection from them, Paul, even for a little while, to hold them off until Martin and Von Heller find a way to help us! Von Heller will know a way!"

Protection! Paul stared about him with smoldering eyes. What protection could there be? The vampires had torn away his cross. There was nothing left.

SUDDENLY he swept past Ruth and fell on his knees beside the bed. The bed had blankets, sheets, covers! White sheets! Feverishly he tore at them, ripping them to shreds. When he turned again his eyes were aglow with fanatical light. He thrust a gleaming thing into Ruth's hands—a crudely fashioned cross, formed of two strips knotted in the center.

"Back to your chair!" he cried. "Quickly!"

Footsteps were audible in the corridor, outside the door. And muffled voices:

"You were hearing sounds which did not exist, Costillan."

"I tell you I heard—"

"Hold the cross before you," Paul ordered tersely, dragging his own chair close beside Ruth's. "Sit very still. For your life don't drop it from fear of anything you may see. Have courage, beloved."

The door was opening. Whether it was Costillan or Maronaine who entered first it was impossible to say. Those ghastly colorless faces, undead and abhorrent, contained no differentiating points strong enough to be so suddenly discernible in flickering candlelight. But whichever it was, the creature advanced quickly, hungrily, straight toward Ruth. And, close enough to see the white bars which she thrust out abruptly, he recoiled with sibilant hiss, to lurch into his companion behind him.

"The cross! They have found the cross! Ah!"

Nightmare came then. The door was shut. The candle glow revealed two crouching creeping figures; two gaunt, haggard, vicious faces; two pairs of glittering eyes. Like savage beasts fascinated by a feared and hated object, yet afraid to make contact, the vampires advanced with rigid arms outthrust, fingers curled.

"Back!" Paul cried. "Back!"

HE was on his feet with the cross clutched before him. Ruth, trembling against him, did as he did. The two horribles retreated abruptly, snarling.

And then the transformation came. The twin bodies lost their definite outline and became blurred. Bluish vapor emanated from them, misty and swirling, becoming thicker and thicker with the passing seconds. And presently nothing remained but lurking shapes of phosphorescence, punctured by four glaring unblinking eyes of awful green.

Eyes!

Paul realized with a shudder what they were striving to do. He fought against them.

"Don't look at them," he muttered. "Don't!"

But he had to look at them. Despite the horror in his heart, his own gaze returned to those advancing bottomless pits of vivid green as if they possessed the power of lodestone. He found himself peering into them, and knew that Ruth too was staring.

Ages went by, then, while he fought against the subtle numbness that crept into his brain. He knew then what Allenby had gone through before merciful death. Another will was fighting his, crushing and smothering him. Other thoughts than his own were finding a way into his mind, no matter how he struggled to shut them out. And a voice—his own voice, coming from his own lips—was saying heavily, dully:

"Nothing will harm us. These are our friends. There is no need to hold the cross any longer. Threw down the cross. . . ."

Somehow, in desperation, he realized what he was doing, what he was saying. He lurched to his feet, shouting hoarsely:

"No, no, don't let them do it! Ruth, they are fiends, vampires! They are the undead, living on blood!"

HIS careening body struck the window ledge, crushing the last remnant of candle that clung there. The room was all at once in darkness, and the two mad shapes of bluish light were a thousand times more real and horrible and close. Completely unnerved, Paul flung out his hand and clawed at the window shade. It rattled up with the report of an explosion. His fingers clutched at the glass. He saw that the darkness outside had become a sodden gray murk.

Then he laughed madly, harshly, because he knew that escape was impossible. Death was the only way out of this chamber of torment. The window was high above the ground, overlooking the stone flagging of the walk. And the eyes were coming nearer. And Ruth was screeching luridly as two shapeless hands hovered over her throat.

Somewhere in the bowels of the house, under the floor, a revolver roared twice in quick succession. A voice—Jeremy's voice—bellowed in triumph. A long shrill scream vibrated high above everything else. There was a splintering crash as of a door breaking from its hinges —and footsteps on the stairs, running.

Paul hurled himself upon the bluish monstrosity which hung over Ruth's limp body. Wildly, desperately, he leaped forward, thrusting the cross straight into those boring eyes.

SOMETHING foul and fetid assailed his nostrils as he tripped and fell to the floor. He rolled over frantically, groping for the bits of white rag which had been torn from his hands on the bedpost as he fell. He knew that Ruth was flat against the wall, holding out both arms to embrace the earth-born fiend which advanced toward her. Her hands were empty. She had let the cross fall. She was no longer a woman, but a human without a will, utterly hypnotized by the eyes.

Paul's fingers found the bit of white rag. Instinctively he twisted backward over the floor, avoiding the uncouth hands that sought his throat. Then he was on his feet, leaping to Ruth's side. Even as that ghoulish mouth lowered to fasten on the girl's throat, the cross intervened. The mouth recoiled with a snarl of awful rage.

"Back!" Paul screamed. "Look, it is daylight!"

The snarling shape stiffened abruptly, as if unseen fingers had snatched at it.

"Daylight!" The word was a thin frightened whisper, lashing through the room and echoing sibilantly. The green eyes filled with apprehension. Suddenly, where the distorted shapes of swirling mist had stood, appeared men—the same men, Costillan and Maronaine, with faces of utter hate. The candlelight was not needed to reveal them now. The room was dim and cold with a thin gray glare from the window.

"DAYLIGHT," Costillan muttered, staring fixedly at the aperture. "We have only a moment, Maronaine. Come quickly."

His companion was standing with clenched hands, confronting the two prisoners.

"You have not won," he was saying harshly. "You will never escape. To the ends of hell we will follow you for what you have done this night."

"Come, Maronaine. Quickly!"

"Yours will be the most horrible of all deaths. I warn you—"

A mighty crash shook the door, and another. With sharp cries the two undead creatures whirled about. Triumphantly, Paul knew the thoughts in their malignant minds. They were demons of the night, these fiends. Their hours of existence endured only from sunset to sunrise. If they were not back in their graves. . . .

And now they were trapped, as the barrier clattered inward, torn and splintered from its hinges. A battering ram of human flesh—Jeremy—hurtled over the threshold. Other figures crowded in the doorway.

And suddenly the two vampires were gone. Even as the men in the corridor rushed forward, the twin shapes of black and white vanished. And only Paul saw the method of it. Only Paul saw the black-winged things that swirled with lightning speed through the aperture, into the gloom of the corridor beyond.

CHAPTER XII

The Vault

STRONG hands held Paul up then. Jeremy and Martin LeGeurn stood beside him, supporting him. Kermeff was on his knees beside the limp unconscious form on the floor. And a stranger, a huge man with bearded face and great thick shoulders, was standing like a mastodon in the center of the room, glaring about him—Von Heller, the mightiest brain in medical circles; the man who understood what other men merely feared.

"Where are they?" he roared, whirling upon Paul. "Stand up, man. You're not hurt. Where did they go?"

"It was daylight," Paul whispered weakly. "They—"

"Daylight?" Von Heller swung savagely to face the window. "My God, what a fool I— Where are the cellars? Hurry. Take me to the cellars."

To Paul it was a blurred dream. He knew that strong hands gripped him and led him rapidly to the door. He heard Von Heller's booming voice commanding Kermeff to remain with the girl. Then moving shapes were all about him. Jeremy was close on one side. Martin LeGeurn was supporting him on the other, talking to him in a low voice of encouragement. Von Heller was striding furiously down the corridor.

The darkness here was as opaque as before, as thick and deep as the gloom of sunken dungeons. But there was no sound in the house; no sound anywhere, except Paul's own voice, muttering jerkily:

"Thank God, Martin, you came in time. If those demons had hurt Ruth or killed Jeremy and Kermeff. . . ."

The answer was a guttural laugh from Jeremy. And in the dark Paul saw on Jeremy's breast a gleaming green cross, glittering with its own fire. He stared mutely at it, then turned and looked back toward the room they had just left, as if visualizing the same on Kermeff's kneeling body. And he knew, then, why his companions were still alive; why they were not now lying lifeless and bloodless on the floor of the downstairs chamber.

One of them—Jeremy, probably—had rushed to Allenby's dead body and seized the square of chalk in the pocket of the corpse. And the pantomime of the upper room had been reenacted in the lower room, the same way, until Martin LeGeurn and Von Heller had battered down the outside door.

The revolver shots—Martin had fired them, more than likely. Martin did not know that bullets were useless.

"Thank God," Paul muttered again. And then he was descending the stairs to the lower floor, and descending more stairs, black and creaking, to the pits.

"WHICH way?" Von Heller demanded harshly. "We must find the coffins."

"Coffins?" It was Jeremy frowning. "There ain't no coffins down here, sir. We looked in every single room. "Besides"—viciously—"them two fiends upstairs won't never need coffins any more. When you leaped on 'em sir, and made that cross mark over their filthy hearts with the chalk, they just folded up. Shriveled away to dust, they did. Lord, what a stench! I'll never forget—"

"Never mind that. Where is the burial vault?"

"But there ain't any burial vault. We were just—"

Jeremy's words ended abruptly. He stood still, one hand gripping the lower end of the railing, the other uplifted.

"Listen to that!"

There was a sound, emanating from somewhere deep in the gloom of the cellar—a sucking, grinding sound, utterly revolting, mingled with the mumbling and gurgling of a man's voice.

"An animal, eating," Von Heller said in a whisper.

"It ain't an animal, sir."

"My God! Murgunstrumm. Well, he'll be able to show us where the coffins are."

Von Heller groped forward, eyes burning with terrible eagerness. He was a man no longer, but a hound on a hot scent which meant to him more than life and death. Crouching, he advanced noiselessly through the pits, staring straight ahead, ignoring the chambers on all sides of him as he went deeper and deeper into the maze. And the others followed right at his heels in a group.

And the sight that met the eyes of the intruders, when they reached at last the threshold of the slaughter room, soured the blood in their veins and made them rigid. The lantern flared there, on the floor again the wall. The sodden canvas sheet had been torn from its former position and lay now in an ugly gray heap on the floor.

MURGUNSTRUMM crouched there, unaware of the eyes that watched him.

Von Heller was upon him before he knew it. With awful rage the physician hurled him back from the table. Like a madman Von Heller stood over him, hurling frightful words upon the cripple's malformed head.

And the result was electrifying.

Murgunstrum's face whipped up. His sunken eyes, now completely mad with mingled fear and venom, glared into Von Heller's writhing countenance and into the masks of the men in the doorway. Then, with a great suck of breath, Murgunstrumm stiffened.

The jangling words which spewed from his lips were not English. They were guttural, thick Serbian. And even as they echoed and reechoed through the chamber, through the entire cellar, the cripple sprang forward.

There was no stopping him. His move was too sudden and savage. Hurling Von Heller aside, he lunged to the table, grabbed the huge knife, then was at the threshold, tearing and slashing his way clear. And with a last violent scream he vanished into the outer dark.

A MOMENT passed. No man moved. Then Von Heller seized the lantern and rushed forward.

"After him!"

"What did he say?"

"He thinks his masters betrayed him. Thinks they sent us here. He will destroy them, and I want them alive for research. After him, I say!"

Footprints led the way—footprints in the dust, twisting along the wall where other prints were not intermingled. With the lantern swaying crazily in his outflung hand, Von Heller ran forward. Straight to the smallest of the cell-like chambers the trail led him; and when the others reached his side he was standing in the center of the stone vault, glaring hungrily at a tall, rectangular opening in the wall.

Seeing it, Paul gasped. Jeremy said hoarsely:

"We looked in here before. There wasn't no—"

"You were blind!"

And Von Heller was striding forward again, through the aperture. It was a narrow doorway; the barrier hung open, fashioned of stone, on concealed hinges. Little wonder that in the gloom Paul and Jeremy and Kermeff had not discovered it before. Every chamber had been alike then.

But not now. Now they were pacing onward through a blind tunnel. The stone walls were no longer stone, but thick boards on both sides and above and below, to hold out the earth behind them. This was not the cellar of the inn, but a cunningly contrived extension, leading into subterranean gloom.

Strange realizations came into Paul's mind. The Gray Toad had not always been an inn of death. At one time it had prospered with gaiety and life. Then the decay had come. Murgunstrumm had come here to live. And these creatures of the night had discovered the place and come here, too, and made Murgunstrumm their slave, promising him the remains of their grim feasts. They had brought their grave earth here. . . .

FOR twenty yards the passage continued, penetrating deeper and deeper at a sharp incline. And then it came to an end, and the lantern light revealed a buried chamber where every sound, every shred of light, was withheld by walls of unbroken earth. A tomb, sunk deep beneath the surface of the clearing above.

And the lantern disclosed other things. Long wooden boxes lay side by side in the center of the vault. Seven of them. Seven gaunt ancient coffins.

They were open, all but one. The lids were flung back. The corpses had been hauled out savagely, madly, and hurled upon the floor.

They lay there now like sodden heaps of flesh in a slaughterhouse, covered with strips and shreds of evening clothes. Great pools of blood welled beneath them. The lantern glare revealed sunken shriveled faces, hideous in decay, already beginning to disintegrate. Gaunt bones protruded from rotting flesh.

And Murgunstrumm was there. He was no longer human, but a grave robber, a resurrection man with hideous intentions, as he crouched over the lid of the last oblong box, tearing it loose. Even as the men watched him, stricken motionless by the fiendishness of it, he leaped catlike upon the enclosed body and dragged it into the open. The man was Maronaine. And there, with inarticulate cries of hate, Murgunstrumm fell upon it, driving his knife again and again into the creature's heart, laughing horribly. Then he stumbled erect, and a discordant cackle jangled from his thick lips.

"Betrayed me! Betrayed me, did yer! Turned on old Murgunstrumm, which served yer for 'most twenty-eight years! Yer won't never betray no one else! I'll tear every limb of yer rotten bodies—"

HE looked up then, and saw that he was not alone. His rasping voice stopped abruptly. He lurched back with uncanny quickness. His hands jerked up like claws. His convulsed face glared, masklike, between curled fingers. A screech of madness burned through his lips. For an instant he crouched there, twisting back into the wall. Then, with a cry tearing upward through his throat, he hurled himself forward.

In his madness he saw only Von Heller. Von Heller was the central object of his hate. Von Heller was the first to step forward to meet him.

It was horror, then. It was a shambles, executed in the gloom of a sunken burial vault with only the sputtering, dancing glow of the lantern to reveal it. Four men fought to overpower a mad beast gone amuck. Four lunging desperate shapes blundered about in the treacherous semidark, clawing, slashing, striking at the horribly swift creature in their midst.

For Murgunstrumm was human no longer. Madness made a bestial mask of his features. His thick, flailing arms possessed the strength of twenty men. His heaving, leaping body was a thing of unbound fury. His eyes were wells of gleaming white, pupil-less. His drooling mouth, curled back over protruding teeth, whined and whimpered and screamed sounds which had no human significance.

HE had flung the knife away in that first vicious rush. Always, as he battled, his attention was centered on Von Heller. The others did not matter. They were only objects of interference to be hurled aside. And hurl them aside he did, at last, with the sheer savagery of his attack.

For a split second, alone in the center of the chamber, he crouched with arms and head outthrust, fingers writhing. He glared straight into Von Heller's face, as the physician flattened against the wall. And then, oblivious of the revolver which came into Von Heller's hand, the cripple leaped.

Von Heller's revolver belched flame directly in his path, again and again.

In mid-air, Murgunstrumm stiffened. His twisted foot struck the edge of the open coffin before him. He tripped, lunged forward. His writhing body sprawled in a shapeless mass.

A long rattling moan welled through his parted lips. He

struggled again to his knees and swayed there, shrieking. His hands flailed empty air, clawed at nothingness. And then, with a great shudder, he collapsed.

His broken body crashed across the coffin lid. His head snapped down, burying itself in Maronaine's upturned features. And then he lay quite still, staring with wide dead eyes at the ceiling.

IT was Von Heller who spoke first, after many minutes of complete silence. With a last glance at the scene, the physician turned very quietly and motioned to the doorway.

"Come."

Thus, with the lantern finding the way, the four men left the cellar of horror and returned to the upstairs room where Kermeff and Ruth LeGeurn awaited them. Kermeff, standing quickly erect, said in a husky voice:

"You found them?"

"It is over," Von Heller shrugged. "Quite over. As soon as Miss LeGeurn is better, we shall leave here and return—"

"To Morrisdale?" Paul cried, seizing the man's arm.

"To Miss LeGeurn's home, where Doctor Kermeff will sign the necessary papers. Kermeff made a very natural mistake, my boy. But he will rectify it."

"I was ignorant," Kermeff muttered. "I did not know."

"There was only one way to know, to learn the truth. Paul has shown you. Now we shall leave and. . . ."

But Paul was not listening. He was sitting on the edge of the bed, holding the girl's hands. The room was sweet and clean with daylight, and he was whispering words which he wished no one but Ruth to hear.

And later, as the big car droned through sun-streaked country roads toward the distant city, Ruth LeGeurn lay in the back seat, with her head in Paul's arms, and listened to the same whispered words over again. And she smiled, for the first time in months.

Albertus Magnus

ONE of the most famous of the reputed necromancers of old was Albertus Magnus, a Dominican monk, who was born in either 1193 or 1205 A. D.

It is said that in his earlier years he was a very dull person, and so incapable of receiving instruction that he was on the point of quitting the cloister in despair of ever learning what his orders required, when the Blessed Virgin appeared to him in a vision and gave him the choice of excelling in philosophy or divinity. He chose philosophy, and he was assured that he would become incomparable in that; but she decreed that, as a punishment for not having chosen divinity, he would relapse into his former stupidity before he died. He showed the highest intelligence and capacity after this episode, and advanced so rapidly in science as to astonish his masters.

It is said that Albertus constructed a man entirely of brass, taking no less than thirty years to finish it because of the need he found for assembling its parts during certain conjunctions and aspects of the planets. This man would answer questions of any kind, and it was even employed by its maker as a domestic. It had, however, the fault of talking too much, a fault which eventually grew into sheer garrulousness; and one day Thomas Aquinas, a pupil at that time of Albertus, finding himself continually disturbed in his abstruse speculations by its never-ending chatter, in sudden rage caught up a hammer and beat it to pieces.

Other accounts have it that the man Albertus constructed was fashioned, not of brass, but of flesh and blood like other men; but this was later judged to have been impossible.

One of the extraordinary stories told of Albertus Magnus was in connection with William, Earl of Holland and King of the Romans. The king was expected at a certain time to pass through Cologne, and Albertus, having set his heart upon obtaining from him the cession of a certain tract of land whereon to erect a convent, evolved the following scheme: he invited William to partake of a magnificent entertainment; and, to the surprise of everyone, when they were all assembled, they found the preparations for the banquet spread in the open air. Now, the season was the dead of winter, and the air was bitter cold and the face of the earth hidden under a blanket of snow, so the retinue of the king expressed their displeasure in loud murmurs.

No sooner had William and his courtiers and Albertus seated themselves at the table, however, than the snow instantly disappeared, the sun burst forth in dazzling splendor and balmy air of summer fanned their cheeks. The ground grew a cover of richest verdure; the trees clothed themselves with foliage, flowers and fruits, and a vintage of the choicest grapes invited the spectators to partake. Birds sang on every bush. A train of pages, fresh and graceful in person and attire, mysteriously appeared to serve their every want, and all wondered who they were and whence they had come. The guests doffed their outer garments the better to keep cool. All were delighted with the entertainment. Albertus easily obtained his land of the king.

And the moment the banquet was over, that place grew bleak and wintry as before; the blanket of snow again appeared over the ground; and the guests hastily snatched up the garments they had discarded and hurried indoors to remove the chill that had descended on their bones.

The Napier Limousine

By Henry S. Whitehead

THE nursemaid let go the handle of her perambulator, froze into an appearance of devastated horror and screamed.

Just what there might be about the sight of two gentlemen, dressed formally for the morning, stepping out of an impeccable town-car upon the curbstone in front of No. 12, Portman Terrace—one of an ultra-conservative long row of solid family mansions in London's residential West End—to throw their only beholder into such a state of sudden, horrified terror, was a mystery. What drove home the startling implication that there was something rather dreadfully wrong, made a benumbing little chill course devastatingly up and down my spine, was the fact that I was one of them. My companion was James Rand, Earl of Carruth, back in London now after twenty years' continuous service in India as Chief of the British Government's Secret Service and armed with an experience which might well have filled the measure of life for a dozen ordinary men.

The beautifully-kept limousine had stopped with a jarless pause like the alighting of a poised hawk. Portman Terrace was empty of pedestrians with the exception of the liveried, middle-aged, sensible-looking servant with her glistening custom-built perambulator.

For my own part, if I had been alone, I suppose I should have followed my instinct, stopped, and made some attempt to restore to a normal condition this stricken fellow human being, inexplicably seized in the ruthless grasp of cold fear. But it took more than the eccentricity of a casual nursemaid to upset Lord Carruth's iron self-control. My companion glanced appraisingly at this strange disturbance of the King's Peace and led the way up the high flight of marble steps to the front doorway of No. 12, his normal expression of facial placidity altered by no more than a raised eyebrow. Still under the compulsion of our determination to meet the emergency with which we had hastened here to cope, I followed him across the broad sidewalk and ran up the steps just behind him.

Out of the Light comes the hand of Sir Harry's deliverance.

CARRUTH'S finger was already on the silver doorbell-button when I came up beside him, and this circumstance gave me my first occasion to turn and look behind me. I did so, at once, because it occurred to me that the very smart, gray-haired footman whom the car's

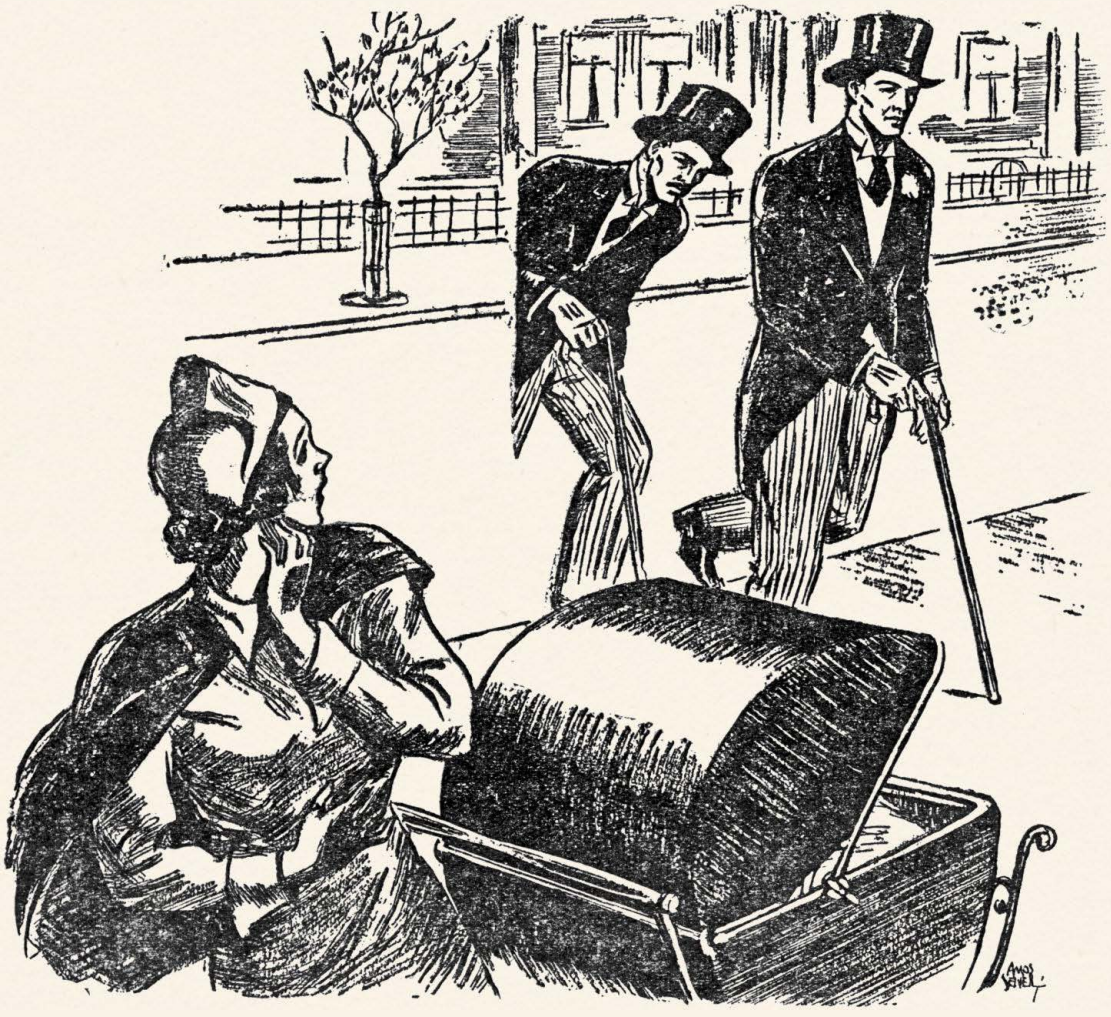
owner had addressed as "Baines," should have been there, pressing that button with an efficient black-gloved finger.

Below on the sidewalk the nursemaid was retreating as rapidly as she could walk, and, as she looked back over her shoulder, I saw that her apple cheeks had gone to a kind of oyster-gray, and that her terrified mouth hung open like a Greek tragic mask.

But the nursemaid, strange sight that she presented, got only a passing glance from me, for I brought my eyes around to the curb where we had alighted, a matter of seconds before, to see what had happened to the footman, Baines, who, like any proper footman, should have been up the steps before us. It seemed inconceivable that such a man should be remiss in his duties, and yet—

I brought my eyes around, I say, and looked down there, and—there was no Baines. Neither was there any driver beside the footman in the chauffeur's seat. There was no seat. *There was no car!* The limousine, an old-model Napier, was clean gone. The street in front of No. 12, Portman Terrace was entirely empty and deserted. . . .

It is hard to set down in words how very serious a jar this dis-



Two gentlemen, out of nowhere, had suddenly stepped on the curb in front of her!

covery was. I *knew* that the car was still there before I turned around to look for Baines.

I knew that because I had not heard the inevitable slight sounds made in starting even by the most soundless of cars, under the ministrations of the most perfectly trained chauffeur such as ours had shown himself to be on our ride from in front of St. Paul's Cathedral to Portman Terrace.

There it was, that empty street; the agitated back of the rapidly retreating nursemaid receding into the distance; the car gone, chauffeur, footman, and all! My first sense of surprise rapidly mounted to the status of a slow shock. That car *must* be there! I could take my oath it had not started. It could not move off without some sound. It was unthinkable that I should not have heard it. Yet—it was not there. No. 12, Portman Terrace stands in its own grounds in the middle of a long block of solid houses. Starting with absolute noiselessness, even a racing car could not have reached the corner—either corner. And, to get to the nearer of the two corners, the car would have had to turn around. I looked up and down the broad, empty street in both directions. The Napier limousine, unmistakable in its custom-built lines, somewhat old-fashioned, conspicuous, was, simply, not there. I started to speak to Rand, but was interrupted by the opening of the door. A stout, florid, family-retainer of a butler stood there, bowing.

"The Earl of Carruth, and Mr. Gerald Canevin," said Rand, reaching for his card case, "and it is imperative that we see Sir Harry Dacre immediately, in spite, even, of his possible orders that he is engaged."

I followed Rand's motion for my card case mechanically and produced a card. The butler benignly ushered us within. He took our coats and hats and sticks. He showed us into a small drawing-room overlooking the square, just to the left of the entrance hall with its black marble paving.

"I will take your names to Sir Harry at once, m'Lord," announced the butler urbanely, and disappeared up a wide flight of stairs.

THIS errand to Sir Harry Dacre, whom neither had ever seen, but who had been of late a familiar name to the newspaper-reading public, had been thrust upon Rand and myself in a somewhat remarkable manner. I had been, as it happened that morning, to my London tailor's, whose shop is in Jermyn Street, for a fitting. Finishing this minor ordeal and emerging upon Jermyn Street, the very first person I encountered was Rand. We had been together two nights previously, at a small men's dinner at Sir John Scott's. It was at Sir John's house that I had met him several months before. Anyone met there would be apt to be worth while. Sir John Scott presides over no less an institution than Scotland Yard. I had been immediately fascinated by Rand's grasp of the subject which has always more intrigued me—that of magical beliefs and practices and the occult among native peoples.

We had talked eagerly together, absorbingly, that first evening of our acquaintance. We talked, in fact, almost too late and too continuously for courtesy to one's host, even at a men's dinner. We outstayed our three other fellow guests. A brief note, received the next day from Sir John, had expressed—to my relief—his gratification that we had found so much to say to each other, had proved to be congenial. Rand, he explained briefly—as I, an American, might not be aware—was the world's first

authority on the subject I have named. He had been almost continuously away from England now for more than a score of years, serving the Empire in innumerable strange corners of its far-flung extent, but chiefly in India. A significant phrase of the note read: "It is unquestionably due to Lord Carruth's remarkable abilities that the Indian Empire is now intact." I considered that a very open admission for an Englishman, particularly one in Sir John Scott's position.

MEETING on the sidewalk that way, unexpectedly, we had stopped to chat for a moment, and, as it turned out that we were going in the same direction, we began to walk along together, arm in arm. As we came abreast of St. Paul's Cathedral, an elderly lady, very well dressed in plain black, came diagonally down the steps directly towards us, meeting us precisely as she reached the bottom. She addressed Rand directly.

"Will you be good enough to spare me a minute of your time, Lord Carruth?" she inquired.

"Assuredly," replied Rand, bowing. We paused, removing our hats.

"It is a very pressing matter, or I should not have put you to this trouble," said the lady, in a very beautiful, softly modulated voice, in which was to be clearly discerned that unmistakable tone of a class born to rule through many generations: a tone of the utmost graciousness, but nevertheless attuned to command. She continued:

"I beg that you will go at once to Sir Harry Dacre. It is number 12, Portman Terrace. My car is here at your disposal, gentlemen." She included me with a gracious glance. "It is an emergency, a very pressing affair. If you will start at once, you will perhaps be in time to save him"

As she spoke, the lady, without seeming to do so consciously, was approaching the curbstone, edging, and we with her, diagonally across the wide pavement. At the curb, as I now observed, stood a very beautifully kept and well appointed town car, a Napier of a dozen-years-ago model. The chauffeur, in a black livery, sat motionless at the wheel. A very smart-looking, alert though elderly footman—his close-cropped hair was quite white, I observed—stood at rigid attention beside the tonneau door, a carriage-rug, impeccably folded into a perfect rectangle, across his angular arm.

The footman saluted, snapped open the door of the car, and we were inside and the lady speaking to us through the open door almost before we realized what we were doing. Her last words were significant, and spoken with the utmost earnestness and conviction.

"I pray God," said she, "that you may be in time, Lord Carruth. Sir Harry Dacre's, Baines." This last she spoke very crisply, her words carrying an unmistakable undernote of urgency. The footman saluted again, very smartly; he draped the rug with practised skill across our four knees; the door was snicked to; and the old but beautifully appointed car, glistening with polish and good care, started almost simultaneously, the elderly footman snapping into his seat beside the chauffeur with an altogether surprising agility, and coming into position there like a ramrod, his arms folded before him with stiff precision.

THROUGH London's traffic now sped the Napier, as smoothly as a new car, the driving a very model of accuracy and sound form. It was plain that the unknown elderly lady was very well and promptly served. Not a single instant was lost,

although there was no slightest feeling of being hurried such as ordinarily communicates itself to a person riding in an automobile when the driver is urged for time.

I glanced at Rand beside me. His ordinarily inscrutable, lean face was slightly puckered as though his mind were working hard.

"Who was the lady?" I ventured to inquire.

"That is what is puzzling me just now," returned Rand. "Frankly, I do not remember! And yet, at the same time, I'm quite sure I do know her, or know who she is. I simply cannot place her, although her face is familiar. She knew me, clearly enough. It is very unusual for me to forget like that."

In a surprisingly short time after our start on this strange drive we had turned into Portman Terrace, stopped, had the door snapped open for us by the agile old footman and were out on the sidewalk. My last glimpse of the equipage as a whole was the salute with which the footman dismissed us. Then the strange conduct of an otherwise commonplace nursemaid, to which I have alluded, took all my attention. The nursemaid acted in her crude manner, as nearly as I can manage to describe her motivation, precisely as though we had landed —the thought struck me even at that time—in front of her from nowhere, instead of having merely, as I have said, stepped to the curbstone beside her out of a very well appointed town-car.

I COULD see that nursemaid now on the far side of the street and at some distance, as we sat in Sir Harry Dacre's small drawing-room, through the large window which looked out upon Portman Terrace. I even got up and walked to the window for the purpose. She was now talking with animation to a policeman, a big fellow. I watched with very great interest. I could not, of course, because of the distance and through a closed window, hear what she was saying, but I could follow it almost as well as though I could, from her gestures and the expressions on both their faces.

The woman pantomimed the entire occurrence for the policeman, and I got it now from her point of view, very clearly and plainly. My first impression of her possible reason for having behaved so insanely was amply corroborated. She had been placidly wheeling her charge along the walk when *plop!* two gentlemen, out of nowhere, had suddenly stepped on the curb in front of her! She had, of course, screamed. The gentlemen had looked at her as though surprised. They had then gone up the steps of Number 12, had rung and been admitted. These two visitors from Mars, or whatever they were, were now in Sir Harry Dacre's house. Hadn't the policeman better go and ring the area bell and make sure the silver was safe?

The policeman, a respectable-looking middle-aged man, probably accustomed to the vagaries of nursemaids, and doubtless with womenfolk of his own, sought to reassure her. Finally, not succeeding very well, he shrugged, left her expostulating and continued his dignified beat.

Learning in this way what had come over the nursemaid failed to make the mystery any clearer, however, than it had for the policeman, who had had the advantage of hearing her words. I was intensely puzzled. I turned away from the window and addressed Rand, who had been sitting there waiting in complete silence.

"HAVE you any idea what's wrong here?" said I. "Here in this house, I mean."

"You've read the papers, of course?" said Rand after a moment's consideration of my question.

"I know young Dacre's got himself rather heavily involved," I replied. "It's one of those infatuation affairs, is it not? A woman. She turns out to be mixed up, somehow, with Goddard, the impresario, or whatever he is. Isn't that about the case?"

Rand nodded. "Yes. Apparently Goddard has him on toast. Rather a beast, that Goddard person. Goddard is not his name, by the way. A very clever person in the heavy-blackmail line. The Yard has never been able to 'get anything on him,' as you Americans put it. He has his various theatrical connections largely for a cover; but his real game is deeper, and blacker. It is rumored in certain circles that Goddard has ground poor Dacre here down to the very last straw in his garret; made him sign over all his holdings to avoid a show-up. Just how far he is committed with 'The Princess Lillia' of the Gaieties, nobody seems to know. But that she is Goddard's wife, or at least that they are working together in close collusion, seems beyond question. That has not come out, of course. It is inside information."

"But," said I, "just how, if I may ask, does that give them so complete a hold on Dacre? Why doesn't he simply repudiate them, now that he must know they set a trap for him? As nearly as I can figure it out from what I've seen in the papers and what you have just now told me, it's nothing more or less than an old-fashioned attempt at blackmail. And besides, it's had a certain amount of publicity already, hasn't it? Just what does Dacre stand to lose if Goddard does go to a show-down with him?"

"The point is," explained Rand, "that Dacre is engaged to be married to one of the loveliest girls in England. If it should really come out that 'The Princess Lillia' is Goddard's wife, that would be off entirely. Lord Roxton would make that distinction very emphatically.

"To a man of his known views, a fine young fellow like Dacre would be more or less entitled to what Roxton would call 'his fling.' That would be typical, of course—British—to be expected. A well-to-do, unattached young man about town—and a lady from the Follies. Then the young blood really falls in love, drops his light-o'-love, is very devoted, marries, 'settles down.' But—if the lady from the Follies turns out to be the wife of Somebody, somebody as much in the public eye as Leighton Goddard, and the matter of merely discontinuing that sort of thing is complicated by a law-suit brought by the outraged husband—you can see how ruinous it would be, can you not, Canevin? The more especially when one is dealing with one of those rather narrow, puritanical old hoddy-doddies like Lord Roxton, who is so consciously upright that he positively creaks with piety when he gets up or sits down. He would never allow his daughter to marry Dacre under those circumstances. He's the President of the Evangelican League, a reformer. Incidentally, he is one of the richest men in England; has tremendously strong views on how people should behave, you know. And Dacre's financial affairs, his investments, are to a considerable extent tied up with Lord Roxton's promotions and companies."

THIS much of the background—though nothing whatever of the immediate urgency of the case which confronted us—we knew when the dignified butler returned

with the announcement that Sir Harry Dacre would receive us at once. We followed the butler up a magnificent flight of stairs to the story above, and were shown into a kind of library-office, from behind whose enormous mahogany desk a handsome young fellow of about twenty-five rose to receive us. Sir Harry Dacre said nothing whatever, and I observed that his drawn face was lined and ghastly, plainly enough from the effects of lack of sleep. It was obvious to me that Lord Carruth's name alone had secured us admittance. The man whose abilities had served to keep the Indian Empire intact could hardly be gainsaid by anyone of Sir Harry Dacre's sort.

Rand went straight to the desk, and without any ceremony picked up and pocketed a .38 calibre American automatic pistol which lay directly in front of Sir Harry Dacre's chair.

"Perhaps you know I am accustomed to meeting emergencies halfway sir," said Rand, bluntly but not unkindly. "I will not ask you to forgive an intrusion, Sir Harry. I am Carruth; this is Mr. Canevin, an American gentleman visiting in London."

"Thanks," said young Dacre, dully. "I know you mean very well, Lord Carruth, and I appreciate your kindness in coming here. I have had the pleasure of reading Mr. Canevin's remarkable tales," he added, turning and bowing in my direction. We stood there, after that, in a momentarily tense, and indeed slightly strained silence.

"SUPPOSE we all sit down, now that we are all together," said our host. We followed the suggestion, making, as we sat, a triangle; Dacre behind his great desk; I facing him, with my back to the door through which we had entered the room; Rand at my right and facing a point between Dacre and me, and so commanding a view of him and also of the door.

"We are here to serve you, Sir Harry Dacre," began Rand, without any preamble, "and, judging by this,"—he indicated the automatic pistol—"it appears that you need assistance and countenance. In a case like this it is rather futile to waste time on preliminaries or in beating about the bush. Tell us, if you will, precisely what we can do, and I assure you you may count upon us."

"It is indeed very good of you," returned Dacre, nodding his head. Then, with a wry and rueful smile: "I do not see that there is anything that anybody can do! I suppose you know something of the situation. I am to marry the Lady Evelyn Haversham in a month's time. I have, I suppose, made a complete fool of myself, at least for practical purposes. As a matter of plain fact, there has been, really, nothing—nothing, that is, seriously to trouble one's conscience. But then, I'll not trouble to excuse myself. I am merely stating the facts. To put the matter plainly, this Goddard has me where he wants me—a very clever bit of work on his part. Here are the freeholds of every bit of property I own, piled up in front of me on this desk. He's coming for them this morning—eleven—should be here now. *That's* the price of his silence about the apparent situation, you see. 'The Princess Lillia' is his wife, it appears."

"But," Rand put in, briskly, "how about this?" Once more he indicated the pistol. The young man's face flushed a dull red.

"That was for him," he said quietly, "and afterwards"—he spread his hands in a hopeless gesture—"for me."

"But, why, why?" urged Rand, leaning forward in his chair, his

lean, ascetic face eager, his eyes burning with intensity. "Tell me—why resort to such a means?"

"Because," returned Sir Harry Dacre, "there would be nothing left. On the one hand, if I were to refuse Goddard's terms, he would bring out the whole ugly business. Oh, they're clever: a case in court, one of those ruinous things, and an action for alienation of his wife's affections; a divorce case, with me as the villain-person. On the other hand—don't you see?—I'm flatly ruined. These papers convey everything I own to him in return for the release which lies here ready for him to sign. Even with the release signed and in my possession I could not go on with the marriage. I'd be, literally, a pauper. It is, well, one of those things that one does not, cannot, do."

"Let me see the release," said Rand, and rose, his hand outstretched. He glanced through it, rapidly, nodding his head, and returned it to its place on the desk. "There is little time," he continued. "Will you do precisely as I say?"

"Yes," said Sir Harry Dacre laconically, but I could see no appearance of hope on his face.

"Go through with it precisely as arranged," said Rand.

A rap fell on the door, and it was opened slightly.

"Mr. Leighton Goddard," announced the butler, and I saw Rand stiffen in his chair. The look of hopeless despair deepened in the lined face of the young man behind the desk. He had, I surmised, as he had reasoned out this sordid affair, come to the last act. The curtain was about to fall. . . .

THE man who now entered radiated personality. He was tall, within half an inch or so of Rand's height, and Rand is two inches over six feet. There was a suggestion of richness about him, sartorial richness, an aura of something oriental which came into that Anglo-Saxon room with him. One could not put a finger on anything wrong in his really impeccable appearance. Bond Street was written upon his perfect morning coat; but I would have guessed, I think, almost instinctively, that his name was not really Goddard, even if no one had suggested that to me. He glanced about the room, very much self-possessed, and with an air almost proprietary, out of shining, sloe-black eyes set in a face of vaguely Asiatic cast: a suggestion of olive under the pale skin of the night-club habitué; a certain undue height of the cheekbones.

"Now, this isn't according to agreement, Dacre!" He addressed his host in a slightly bantering tone, almost genially, indeed; a tone underneath which I could feel depths of annoyance; of a poisonous, threatening malice. He had stopped between Rand and me.

"We merely dropped in," said Rand, in a flat voice, and Goddard glanced around at him out of the corner of his eye. Dacre picked up the hint. "This is Mr. Gerald Canevin, the writer," said he, and I rose and nodded to Goddard. As I did so, I caught Rand's eye, with warning in it. I thought I grasped his meaning. If he had formulated any definite plan for dealing with this ugly situation there had been no time to warn me of it before Goddard's rather abrupt arrival, several minutes late for his appointment. I did some very rapid thinking, came to a conclusion, and spoke quietly to Goddard in a tone of voice that was intentionally somewhat slow and deliberate.

"This is Mr. Rand," said I; and Rand flashed me a quick, commending look of relief. He did not want Goddard to know his true identity. That had been my conclusion from his warning look. Fortunately, I

had struck the nail on the head that time. The two men nodded coolly to each other, and it seemed to me that suspicion loomed and smouldered in those oriental eyes.

Dacre came to the front.

"We can get our business over very easily," said Dacre at this point. "Here are the things you want, and here is the place to sign." He stood up behind the desk, holding a sheaf of legal looking documents.

Goddard walked firmly over to the desk, took across it the papers out of Dacre's hand, glanced through them rapidly, nodded as he checked each mentally, and at last relaxing his tensely held body thrust them, all together, into the inside pocket of his morning coat. He smiled quickly, as though satisfied, took a step nearer the desk, stooped over, and, still standing, reached for a pen and scrawled his name on the paper Dacre indicated.

This done, he straightened up, though still retaining his slightly stooping position, and turned away from the desk. I was watching him narrowly, and so, too, I knew, was Rand. Triumphant satisfaction was writ large on his unpleasant face. But that look was quickly dissipated. He turned away from the desk at last, and met Rand facing him, Dacre's pistol pointed straight at his heart. I, standing now behind Goddard, could look straight into Rand's face, and I do not care ever to have to look into such an expression of rigid determination and complete, utter self-confidence behind any weapon pointed in my direction.

"YOU will take those deeds out of your pocket, Wertheimer," said Rand, in a deadly, cold, quiet voice, "and drop them on the floor. Then you will go out of here without any further parley. Otherwise I shall take them from you; if necessary, kill you as you stand there; arrange the matter with Downing Street this afternoon, and so rid the world of a very annoying scoundrel. I am the Earl of Carruth. I came here without Dacre's knowledge, to deal with this situation. What you have to decide, rather quickly, is whether you will go on living on what you have already stolen, without this of Dacre's, or whether you will put me to the inconvenience of—removing you."

From my position I could not, of course, see Goddard's—or Wertheimer's—face. But I did observe the telltale hunching of a shoulder, and cried out in time to warn Rand. But Rand needed no warning, as it happened. He met the rush of the big man with his disengaged hand, now a fist, and Wertheimer, catching that iron fist on the precise point of the chin, slithered to the floor, entirely harmless for the time being.

Rand looked down at the sprawled body, then walked over to the desk and laid the automatic pistol down on the place from which he had picked it up. Then, returning to the prostrate Wertheimer, he knelt beside him and removed the packet of deeds from the man's pocket. He rose, returned to the desk, and handed them to young Dacre, who, during the few seconds occupied by all these occurrences, had remained standing, silent and collected, behind his desk.

THE transaction, of course, was illegal," remarked Rand, looking down at the crumpled torso of Wertheimer. "You need have no compunction whatever, Dacre, my dear fellow, in retaining the release which he signed. 'Goddard' is not his name, of course. But I imagine that fact would have no bearing

upon the efficacy of the release. He has gone under that name and is thoroughly identified with it here in London, Sir John Scott informs me, for the past four or five years. You heard me call him 'Wertheimer,' but even that is not his real name. He is a Turk, and his right name is Abdulla Khan ben Majpat. However, he was a German spy during the War, and in Berlin he is very well known as 'Wertheimer.' I think I may say that you are now quite free from the complication which was distressing you."

It was a very subdued Goddard-Wertheimer-ben Majpat who left the house a quarter of an hour later, after a few crisply spoken words of warning from Rand. And it was a correspondingly jubilant young man who besieged Rand with his reiterated thanks. Sir Harry Dacre was, indeed, almost beside himself. In the stimulating grip of a tremendous reaction such as he had just experienced, a man's every-day composure is apt to go to the winds. This unexpected release from his overpowering difficulties which Rand's intervention had brought about had, for the time being, caused Sir Harry Dacre to seem like a different person. There had not been any statements in the newspapers of sufficiently definite nature to injure his cause with his future wife or with his future father-in-law, the austere Lord Roxton, and now, as Rand took care to assure him, there would be no further press comment. The situation seemed entirely cleared up.

Young Dacre, looking years younger, with the lines of harassment and care almost visibly fading out of his face under the stimulation of his new freedom and the natural resiliency of his youth, would be quite all right again after a proper night's rest. He confessed to us that it was the best part of a week since he had so much as slept. His gratitude knew no bounds. It was almost effusive and really very touching. He pressed us to remain for luncheon. This we declined, but we could not very well refuse his request that we should have a Scotch and soda with him. While this refresnment was being brought by the butler, Rand stepped around to the other side of the desk and picked up a framed photograph which stood upon it.

"AND who, if I may venture to ask, is this?" he inquired.

"It was my mother's sister, the Lady Mary Grosvenor," said young Dacre. "You may remember her, perhaps. It was she, you know, who organized the Red Cross at the beginning of the War. I was only a little chap of seven or eight then." He took the photograph from Rand and stood looking at it with an expression of the deepest affection.

"A wonderful woman!" he added, "and the best friend I ever had, Lord Carruth. She took me into her house here when I was a tiny little youngster. My own mother died when I was four. The house came to me in her will, eight years later. Dear Aunt Mary—her kindness and goodness never failed. She took me, a rather forlorn little creature, I dare say, into her care. She found time to do everything for me. She was a woman of manifold interests and activities, as you may remember, Lord Carruth, and even high in the counsels of the great, the affairs of the Empire. Cabinet members, even the Prime Minister himself, sought her advice, kept her occupied with all kinds of difficult tasks. In spite of all these engagements, she was, as I have said, and in all ways, a mother to me—yes, more than a mother. I naturally revered her."

Young Sir Harry Dacre paused, sitting there in his office-library, with his guests to whom he was

thus opening his heart with sudden, wistful seriousness. When he spoke again it was in a much quieter tone than that of the little panegyric he had just ended.

"Do you know," said he, "I—I thank God that the dear soul was at least spared any knowledge of this—this dreadful affair which is —I can hardly realize, gentlemen, that it is over, done, a thing of the past."

Again he paused, sat for a moment very quietly in a natural silence which neither Rand nor I desired to break.

Then, in a hushed tone, his words coming slowly and very reverently, he spoke again.

"And if," he began, as though concluding a thought already partly uttered, "—if she *has* been enabled to see it all—from her place in Paradise, as one might say—she is rejoicing now, and thanking you. She would have moved Heaven and earth to help me."

Then, as I looked into the face of Sir Harry Dacre, I saw a slow flush mounting upon it. That curious sense of shame which seems common to every Englishman who allows himself to show others something of his inmost feeling, had overtaken the young man. He resumed his discourse in an entirely different and rather restrained tone.

"But that, of course, is impossible," said he. "I hope that I have not made myself ridiculous. Naturally I should know better than to bore you in this way. Reasonable people should not allow themselves to be moved by such old sentimentality. And, I—I was educated Modern Side."

"I do not think we are bored by what you have said," remarked Rand, quietly, and added nothing to that.

Dacre paused, rose, and replaced on the desk the framed photograph which he had been holding and looking at while he spoke. As yet, except from the back, I had not had a view of it. Returning to where we were seated, Dacre took a chair between Carruth and me.

"CURIOUS!" exclaimed our host, breaking a brief silence. "I mean to say, my aunt, there, was very active in the War, you know. As a matter of fact, she visited every front, and never received as much as a scratch! People used to say that she seemed to bear a charmed life. Then, back home here in England, driving one afternoon through Wolverhampton in her old town-car—it was just two days before the Armistice, in 1918—I was just twelve at the time—a bomb from a raiding German airplane took her, poor lady; and along with her old Baines, her footman—been with her thirty-four years—and the chauffeur. Killed all three, snuffed 'em right out, and there wasn't enough of the old Napier town-car left to identify it! The way things happen. . . ."

Carruth nodded, sympathetically. It was plain that young Dacre had been much moved by his recital. He must have had an extraordinarily high regard for the splendid woman who had mothered him. At this moment Dacre's butler appeared with a tray and bottles, ice, tall glasses and siphons of carbonated water.

While he was arranging these on a table, I walked over to the desk and took up the large framed photograph.

There, in the uniform of the British Red Cross, looked out at me the splendid face of a middle-aged lady, the face of a true aristocrat, of one born to command. It was kindly, though possessing a firm, almost a stern, expression, the look of one who would never give up!

I replaced the photograph, my hands shaking. I turned about quickly and walked across the room. I wanted rather urgently to be quite close to living, breathing human beings like Carruth and our host—fellow-men, creatures of common, everyday flesh and blood. I stood there among them, between Rand and Dacre, and almost touching the urbane butler as he prepared our Scotch and soda with admirable professional deftness. I confess that I wanted something else, besides that sense of human companionship which had come upon me so compellingly that I had found my hands shaking as I set the framed photograph back into its original place on Sir Harry Dacre's desk.

Yes—I wanted that high, cool, iced tumbler of Scotch whiskey and soda the butler was handing me. I barely waited, indeed, until the others had been served to raise it to my lips, to take a great, hasty drink which emptied the glass halfway to its bottom.

For—I had seen that photograph of Dacre's aunt, the Lady Mary Grosvenor, that firm gentlewoman who had, in the goodness of her noble heart, stolen precious time from the counsels of a great Empire to comfort a pathetic little motherless child; who would have moved Heaven and earth; a woman who would never give up. . . .

". . . old Baines, her footman—been with her thirty-four years. . . ."

". . . killed all three, snuffed 'em right out. . . ."

". . . not enough of the old Napier town-car left to identify it. . . ."

And I had looked at that photograph.

I FINISHED my Scotch and soda and set my glass down on the butler's silver tray. I drew in a deep breath. I was coming back satisfactorily to something like normal.

I raised my eyes and looked over at Rand. It had just occurred to me that he, too, was now aware of the identity of the lady who had sent us here in that old Napier with the two perfectly trained servants in its driving seat, to save Sir Harry Dacre. Rand had seen the photograph, too, well before I had picked it up and looked at it.

I found quite as usual the facial expression of the man who had held the Indian Empire together resolutely for twenty years—the man who had learned that iron composure facing courageously all forms of death and worse-than-death in the far, primitive places of the earth, places where transcendent evil goes hand in hand with ancient civilizations.

Even as I looked, James Rand, Lord Carruth, was turning to our host and addressed him in his firm, courteous, even voice:

"I take it that—with Mr. Canevin to corroborate what I would say, speaking as an eye-witness—you would accept my word of honor—would you not, Dacre?"

Young Dacre stared at him, almost gulped with surprise when he replied to so unusual a question:

"Of course, Lord Carruth; certainly, sir. Your word of honor—Mr. Canevin to corroborate! Of course such a thing would not be necessary, sir. Good Heavens! Of course, I'd believe anything you chose to say, sir, like the Gospel itself."

"Well, then," said Rand, smiling gravely, "if it is agreeable to Mr. Canevin, I think we shall change our minds and remain to luncheon with you. There is something I think you should know, and the period of luncheon will just give us time to tell you the circumstances behind our arrival here at about the right time for our business this morning."

RAND looked over at me, and I nodded, eagerly.

"Splendid!" said Sir Harry Dacre, rising alertly and ringing the bell for the butler. "I had, of course, been awfully keen to know about that. Hardly cared to ask, you know."

"My reason for suggesting that we tell you," said Rand gravely, "goes rather deeper than merely satisfying a very reasonable curiosity. If by doing so we can accomplish what I have in mind, it will be, my dear fellow, a more important service in your behalf than ridding you of that Wertheimer."

The butler came in and our host ordered the places set. Then, very soberly, he inquired:

"What, sir, if I may venture to ask, is the nature of that service?"

Rand answered only after a long and thoughtful interval.

"It may seem to you a rather odd answer, Dacre. I want to clear up in your mind, forever, the truth of what the religion we hold in common—the religion of our ancient Anglican Church here in England—teaches us about the souls in Paradise. . . ."

Headless Ghosts

THOSE uncanny apparitions known as "headless ghosts" are frequently supposed to haunt localities where any fatal accident has happened, and many curious tales are told of them by people throughout the world.

It has often been a puzzle to the folk-lorist why ghosts should assume this form.

Midnight is the time when almost all of the headless ghosts make their appearance. It might be thought that they are unable to speak, but there is evidence, on the contrary, that they can, for the story of "The Golden Mountain" relates how a servant without a head informed the fisherman-hero of the enchantment of the king's daughter, and of the way in which she could be liberated.

A large proportion of headless ghosts continue to set up their carriage after death. Sir Walter Scott wrote: "It put me in mind of a spectre of Drumlanrick Castle, of no less a person than the Duchess of Queensberry . . . who, instead of setting fire to the world in mama's chariot, amuses herself with wheeling her own head in a wheelbarrow through the great gallery." It has long been firmly believed that Lady Anne Boleyn rides down the avenue of Blickling Park once a year, with her bloody head in her lap, sitting in a hearselike coach drawn by four headless horses, and attended by coachmen and attendants who have, out of compliment to their mistress, also left their heads behind.

Nor, it is said, is her father any better off than she, for Sir Thomas Boleyn is obliged to cross forty bridges to avoid the torments of his furies, and has, like her, to drive about in a coach and four with headless horses, and carry his own head under his arm.

Young Lord Dacre, said to have been murdered at Thetford by the falling of a wooden horse, pur-

posely rendered insecure, did his nocturnal prancing on the ghost of a headless rocking horse.

There is a legend that a long time ago a bridal party driving along the old Norwich Road near Great Melton was accidentally upset into the water of a deep hole by the road, and was never seen again; and that, ever since then, "every night at midnight, and every day at noon, a carriage drawn by four horses, driven by headless coachmen and footmen, and containing four headless ladies in white, rises silently and dripping wet from the pool, flits stately and silently around the field, and sinks as silently into the pool again."

Another story has it that on the anniversary of the death of the man whose spectre he is supposed to be, a gentleman ghost rides up to his old family mansion, where he drives through the wall, carriage and horses and all, and is not seen again for a year. He leaves, however, the traces of his visit behind him, for, in the morning, the stones of the wall through which he had ridden the night before are found to be loosened and fallen; and though the wall is repaired year after year, the stones in that place as regularly come loose.

At Beverly, in Yorkshire, the headless ghost of Sir Joceline Percy drove four headless horses at night, above its streets, passing over a certain house which was said to contain a chest with one hundred nails in it, one of which dropped out every year. It is considered dangerous to meet such spectral teams, for fear of being carried off by them, so violent and threatening are their movements.

In some places it is thought that the death of some considerable personage in the town is sure to occur at no distant period when the death-hearse, drawn by headless horses and driven by a headless driver, is seen at midnight proceeding rapidly towards the churchyard.

Places where suicides have been buried are often supposed to be haunted by headless ghosts attired in white grave-clothes. Many years ago as a Shropshire farmer was passing in a wagon with three horses the spot where a man was buried with a forked stake run through the body to keep it down, a woman in white was seen walking without a head. The horses took fright and ran away, upsetting the wagon and pitching the man into the Drumby Hole, where the wagon and shaft horse fell upon him. The other two horses broke loose and galloped home, where they arrived covered with foam; and on a search being made the driver was found at the point of death in the hole. Exactly twelve months afterwards his son was killed by the same horses on the same spot.

It is said that at a certain house at Hampton's Wood, Shropshire, six illegitimate children were murdered by their parents and buried in a garden, and that soon after this a ghost in the form of a man, sometimes headless, at other times not so, haunted the stables, insisted on riding the horses to water and talked to the stableman. Once it appeared to a young lady who was passing on horseback, and rode before her on her horse. Eventually, after much difficulty, this troublesome ghost was laid; but, according to the story, "the poor minister was so exhausted by the task that he died."

The "Glasgow Chronicle" of a century ago recorded how a very unpleasant kind of headless ghost used to drive every Saturday night through the town of Doneraile, Ireland, knocking at the doors of various houses; and if anyone was so foolhardy as to open the door, a basin of blood was instantly flung in his face.

The Cairn on the Headland

By Robert E. Howard

"And the next instant this great red loon was shaking me like a dog shaking a rat. 'Where is Meve MacDonnal?' he was screaming. By the saints, it's a grisly thing to hear a madman in a lonely place at midnight screaming the name of a woman dead three hundred years."

—The Longshoreman's Tale.

"THIS is the cairn you seek," I said, laying my hand gingerly on one of the rough stones which composed the strangely symmetrical heap.

An avid interest burned in Ortali's dark eyes. His gaze swept the landscape and came back to rest on the great pile of massive weather-worn boulders.

"What a wild, weird, desolate place!" he said. "Who would have thought to find such a spot in this vicinity? Except for the smoke rising yonder, one would scarcely dream that beyond that headland lies a great city! Here there is scarcely even a fisherman's hut within sight."

"The people shun the cairn as they have shunned it for centuries," I replied.

"Why?"

"You've asked me that before," I replied impatiently. "I can only answer that they now avoid by habit what their ancestors avoided through knowledge."

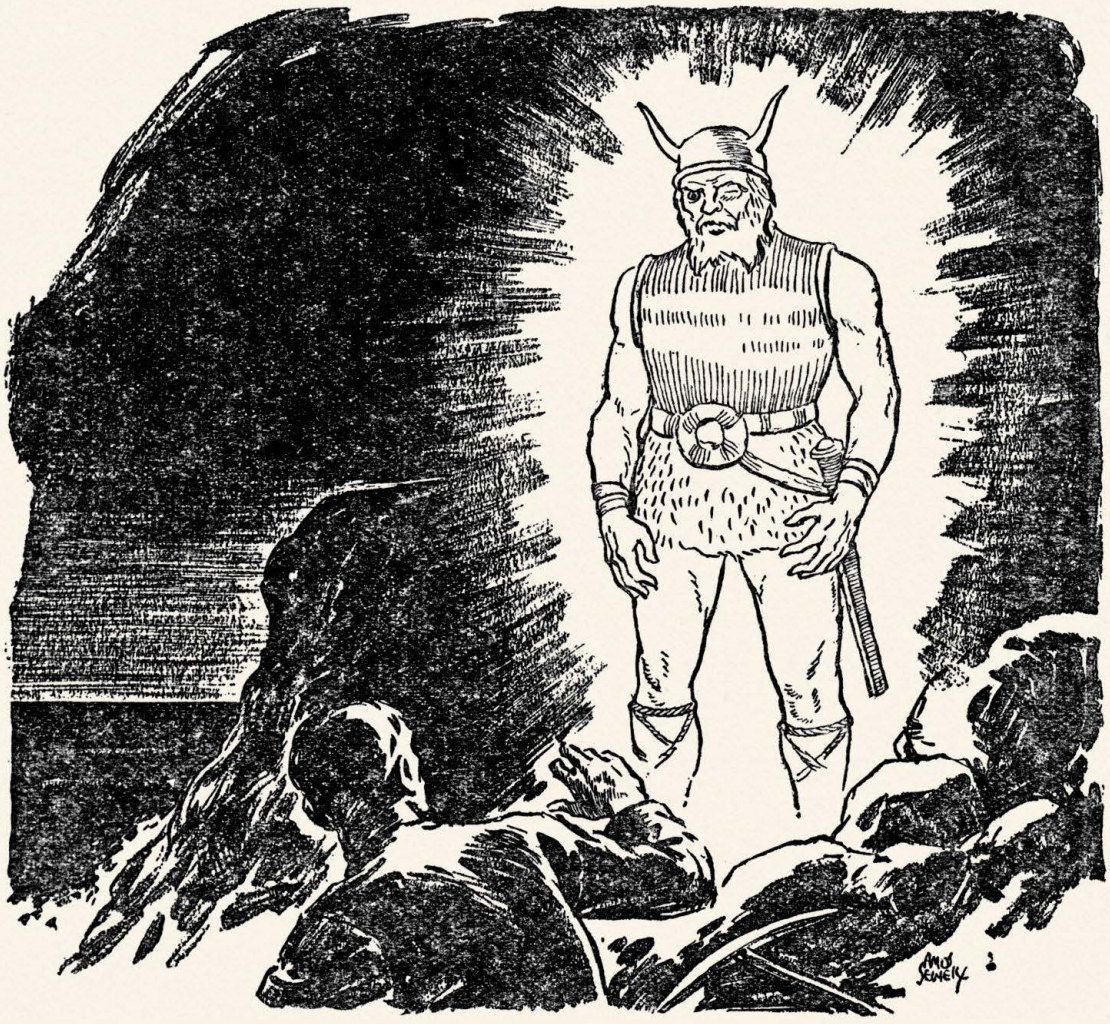
"Knowledge!" he laughed derisively. "Superstition!"

I looked at him somberly with unveiled hate. Two men could scarcely have been of more opposite types. He was slender, self-possessed, unmistakably Latin with his dark eyes and sophisticated air. I am massive, clumsy and bear-like, with cold blue eyes and touseled red hair. We were countrymen in that we were born in the same land; but the homelands of our ancestors were as far apart as South from North.

Terribly play the Northern Lights on Grimmin's Cairn.

"Nordic superstition," he repeated. "I cannot imagine a Latin people allowing such a mystery as this to go unexplored all these years. The Latins are too practical—too prosaic, if you will. Are you sure of the date of this pile?"

"I find no mention of it in any manuscript prior to 1014 A. D.," I growled, "and I've read all such manuscripts extant, in the original. MacLiag, King Brian Boru's poet, speaks of the rearing of the cairn immediately after the battle, and



Out of the cairn he rose.

there can be little doubt but that this is the pile referred to. It is mentioned briefly in the later chronicles of the Four Masters, also in the Book of Leinster, compiled in the late 1150's, and again in the Book of Lecan, compiled by the MacFirbis about 1416. All connect it with the battle of Clontarf, without mentioning why it was built."

"Well, what is the mystery about it?" he queried. "What more natural than that the defeated Norsemen should rear a cairn above the body of some great chief who had fallen in the battle?"

"IN the first place," I answered, "there is a mystery concerning the existence of it. The building of cairns above the dead was a Norse, not an Irish, custom. Yet according to the chroniclers, it was not Norsemen who reared this heap. How could they have built it immediately after the battle, in which they had been cut to pieces and driven in headlong flight through the gates of Dublin? Their chieftains lay where they had fallen and the ravens picked their bones. It was Irish hands that heaped these stones."

"Well, was that so strange?" per-

sisted Ortali. "In old times the Irish heaped up stones before they went into battle, each man putting a stone in place; after the battle the living removed their stones, leaving in that manner a simple tally of the slain for any who wished to count the remaining stones."

I shook my head.

"That was in more ancient times; not in the battle of Clontarf. In the first place, there were more than twenty thousand warriors, and four thousand fell here; this cairn is not large enough to have served as a tally of the men killed in battle. And it is too symmetrically built. Hardly a stone has fallen away in all these centuries. No, it was reared to cover something."

"Nordic superstitions!" the man sneered again.

"Aye, superstitions if you will!" fired by his scorn, I exclaimed so savagely that he involuntarily stepped back, his hand slipping inside his coat. "We of North Europe had gods and demons before which the pallid mythologies of the South fade to childishness. At a time when your ancestors were lolling on silken cushions among the crumbling marble pillars of a decaying civilization, my ancestors were building their own civilization in hardships and gigantic battles against foes human and inhuman.

"Here on this very plain the Dark Ages came to an end and the light of a new era dawned faintly on a world of hate and anarchy. Here, as even you know, in the year 1014, Brian Boru and his Dalcassian ax wielders broke the power of the heathen Norsemen forever—those grim anarchistic plunderers who had held back the progress of civilization for centuries.

"It was more than a struggle between Gael and Dane for the crown of Ireland. It was a war between the White Christ and Odin, between Christian and pagan. It was the last stand of the heathen—of the people of the old, grim ways. For three hundred years the world had writhed beneath the heel of the Viking, and here on Clontarf that scourge was lifted forever.

"THEN, as now, the importance of that battle was underestimated by polite Latin and Latinized writers and historians. The polished sophisticates of the civilized cities of the South were not interested in the battles of barbarians in the remote northwestern corner of the world—a place and peoples of whose very names they were only vaguely aware. They only knew that suddenly the terrible raids of the sea kings ceased to sweep along their coasts, and in another century the wild age of plunder and slaughter had almost been forgotten—all because a rude, half-civilized people who scantily covered their nakedness with wolf hides rose up against the conquerors.

"Here was Ragnarok, the fall of the gods! Here in very truth Odin fell, for his religion was given its death blow. He was last of all the heathen gods to stand before Christianity, and it looked for a time as if his children might prevail and plunge the world back into darkness and savagery. Before Clontarf, legends say, he often appeared on earth to his worshipers, dimly seen in the smoke of the sacrifices where naked human victims died screaming, or riding the wind-torn clouds, his wild locks flying in the gale, or, appareled like a Norse warrior, dealing thunderous blows in the forefront of nameless battles. But after Clontarf he was seen no more; his worshipers called on him in vain with wild chants and grim sacrifices. They lost faith in him, who had failed them in their wildest hour; his altars crumbled, his

priests turned gray and died, and men turned to his conqueror, the White Christ. The reign of blood and iron was forgotten; the age of the red-handed sea kings passed. The rising sun slowly, dimly, lighted the night of the Dark Ages, and men forgot Odin, who came no more on earth.

"Aye, laugh if you will! But who knows what shapes of horror have had birth in the darkness, the cold gloom, and the whistling black gulfs of the North? In the southern lands the sun shines and flowers blow; under the soft skies men laugh at demons. But in the North who can say what elemental spirits of evil dwell in the fierce storms and the darkness? Well may it be that from such fiends of the night men evolved the worship of the grim ones, Odin and Thor, and their terrible kin."

ORTALI was silent for an instant, as if taken aback by my vehemence; then he laughed. "Well said, my Northern philosopher! We will argue these questions another time. I could hardly expect a descendant of Nordic barbarians to escape some trace of the dreams and mysticism of his race. But you cannot expect me to be moved by your imaginings, either. I still believe that this cairn covers no grimmer secret than a Norse chief who fell in the battle—and really your ravings concerning Nordic devils have no bearing on the matter. Will you help me tear into this cairn?"

"No," I answered shortly.

"A few hours' work will suffice to lay bare whatever it may hide," he continued as if he had not heard. "By the way, speaking of superstitions, is there not some wild tale concerning holly connected with this heap?"

"An old legend says that all trees bearing holly were cut down for a league in all directions, for some mysterious reason," I answered sullenly. "That's another mystery. Holly was an important part of Norse magic-making. The Four Masters tell of a Norseman—a white-bearded ancient of wild aspect, and apparently a priest of Odin—who was slain by the natives while attempting to lay a branch of holly on the cairn, a year after the battle."

"Well," he laughed, "I have procured a sprig of holly—see?—and shall wear it in my lapel; perhaps it will protect me against your Nordic devils. I feel more certain than ever that the cairn covers a sea king—and they were always laid to rest with all their riches: golden cups and jewel-set sword hilts and silver corselets. I feel that this cairn holds wealth, wealth over which clumsy-footed Irish peasants have been stumbling for centuries, living in want and dying in hunger. Bah! We shall return here at about midnight, when we may be fairly certain that we will not be interrupted —and you will aid me at the excavations."

The last sentence was rapped out in a tone that sent a red surge of blood-lust through my brain. Ortali turned and began examining the cairn as he spoke, and almost involuntarily my hand reached out stealthily and closed on a wicked bit of jagged stone that had become detached from one of the boulders. In that instant I was a potential murderer if ever one walked the earth. One blow, quick, silent and savage, and I would be free forever from a slavery bitter as my Celtic ancestors knew beneath the heels of the Vikings.

AS if sensing my thoughts, Ortali wheeled to face me. I quickly slipped the stone into my pocket, not knowing whether he noted the action. But he must have seen the red killing instinct burn-

ing in my eyes, for again he recoiled and again his hand sought the hidden revolver.

But he only said: "I've changed my mind. We will not uncover the cairn to-night. To-morrow night perhaps. We may be spied upon. Just now I am going back to the hotel."

I made no reply, but turned my back upon him and stalked moodily away in the direction of the shore. He started up the slope of the headland beyond which lay the city, and when I turned to look at him, he was just crossing the ridge, etched clearly against the hazy sky. If hate could kill, he would have dropped dead. I saw him in a red-tinged haze, and the pulses in my temples throbbed like hammers.

I turned back toward the shore, and stopped suddenly. Engrossed with my own dark thoughts, I had approached within a few feet of a woman before seeing her. She was tall and strongly made, with a strong stern face, deeply lined and weather-worn as the hills. She was dressed in a manner strange to me, but I thought little of it, knowing the curious styles of clothing worn by certain backward types of our people.

"What would you be doing at the cairn?" she asked in a deep, powerful voice. I looked at her in surprise; she spoke in Gaelic, which was not strange of itself, but the Gaelic she used I had supposed was extinct as a spoken language: it was the Gaelic of scholars, pure, and with a distinctly archaic flavor. A woman from some secluded hill country, I thought, where the people still spoke the unadulterated tongue of their ancestors.

"We were speculating on its mystery," I answered in the same tongue, hesitantly, however, for though skilled in the more modern form taught in the schools, to match her use of the language was a strain on my knowledge of it. She shook her head slowly. "I like not the dark man who was with you," she said somberly. "Who are you?"

"I am an American, though born and raised here," I answered. "My name is James O'Brien."

A strange light gleamed in her cold eyes.

"O'Brien? You are of my clan. I was born an O'Brien. I married a man of the MacDonnals, but my heart was ever with the folk of my blood."

"You live hereabouts?" I queried, my mind on her unusual accent.

"Aye, I lived here upon a time," she answered, "but I have been far away for a long time. All is changed—changed. I would not have returned, but I was drawn back by a call you would not understand. Tell me, would you open the cairn?"

I STARTED and gazed at her closely, deciding that she had somehow overheard our conversation.

"It is not mine to say," I answered bitterly. "Ortali—my companion—he will doubtless open it and I am constrained to aid him. Of my own will I would not molest it."

Her cold eyes bored into my soul.

"Fools rush blind to their doom,' she said somberly. "What does this man know of the mysteries of this ancient land? Deeds have been done here whereof the world reechoed. Yonder, in the long ago, when Tomar's Wood rose dark and rustling against the plain of Clontarf, and the Danish walls of Dublin loomed south of the river Liffey, the ravens fed on the slain and the setting sun lighted lakes of crimson. There King Brian, your ancestor and mine, broke the spears of the North. From all lands they came, and from the isles of the sea; they came in gleaming mail and their horned hel-

mets cast long shadows across the land. Their dragon-prows thronged the waves and the sound of their oars was as the beat of a storm.

"On yonder plain the heroes fell like ripe wheat before the reaper. There fell Jarl Sigurd of the Orkneys, and Brodir of Man, last of the sea kings, and all their chiefs. There fell, too, Prince Murrogh and his son Turlogh, and many chieftains of the Gael, and King Brian Boru himself, Erin's mightiest monarch."

"True!" My imagination was always fired by the epic tales of the land of my birth. "Blood of mine was spilled here, and, though I have passed the best part of my life in a far land, there are ties of blood to bind my soul to this shore."

She nodded slowly, and from beneath her robes drew forth something that sparkled dully in the setting sun.

"Take this," she said. "As a token of blood tie, I give it to you. I feel the weird of strange and monstrous happenings—but this will keep you safe from evil and the people of the night. Beyond reckoning of man, it is holy."

I TOOK it, wonderingly. It was a crucifix of curiously worked gold, set with tiny jewels. The workmanship was extremely archaic and unmistakably Celtic. And vaguely within me stirred a memory of a long-lost relic described by forgotten monks in dim manuscripts.

"Great heavens!" I exclaimed. "This is—this must be—this *can* be nothing less than the lost crucifix of Saint Brandon the Blessed!"

"Aye." She inclined her grim head. "Saint Brandon's cross, fashioned by the hands of the holy man in long ago, before the Norse barbarians made Erin a red hell—in the days when a golden peace and holiness ruled the land."

"But, woman!" I exclaimed wildly, "I cannot accept this as a gift from you! You cannot know its value! Its intrinsic worth alone is equal to a fortune; as a relic it is priceless—"

"Enough!" Her deep voice struck me suddenly silent. "Have done with such talk, which is sacrilege. The cross of Saint Brandon is beyond price. It was never stained with gold; only as a free gift has it ever changed hands. I give it to you to shield you against the powers of evil. Say no more."

"But it has been lost for three hundred years!" I exclaimed. "How —where . . . ?"

"A holy man gave it to me long ago," she answered. "I hid it in my bosom—long it lay in my bosom. But now I give it to you; I have come from a far country to give it to you, for there are monstrous happenings in the wind, and it is sword and shield against the people of the night. An ancient evil stirs in its prison, which blind hands of folly may break open; but stronger than any evil is the cross of Saint Brandon which has gathered power and strength through the long, long ages since that forgotten evil fell to the earth."

"But who are you?" I exclaimed.

"I am Meve MacDonnal," she answered.

THEN, turning without a word, she strode away in the deepening twilight while I stood bewildered and watched her cross the headland and pass from sight, turning inland as she topped the ridge Then I, too, shaking myself like a man waking from a dream, went slowly up the slope and across the headland. When I crossed the ridge it was as if I had passed out of one world into another: behind me lay the wilderness and desolation of a weird medieval age; before me pulsed the lights and the roar of

modern Dublin. Only one archaic touch was lent to the scene before me: some distance inland loomed the straggling and broken lines of an ancient graveyard, long deserted and grown up in weeds, barely discernible in the dusk. As I looked I saw a tall figure moving ghostily among the crumbling tombs, and I shook my head bewilderedly. Surely Meve MacDonnal was touched with madness, living in the past, like one seeking to stir to flame the ashes of dead yesterdays. I set out toward where, in the near distance, began the straggling window-gleams that grew into the swarming ocean of lights that was Dublin.

Back at the suburban hotel where Ortali and I had our rooms, I did not speak to him of the cross the woman had given me. In that at least he should not share. I intended keeping it until she requested its return, which I felt sure she would do. Now as I recalled her appearance, the strangeness of her costume returned to me, with one item which had impressed itself on my subconscious mind at the time, but which I had not consciously realized. Meve MacDonnal had been wearing sandals of a type not worn in Ireland for centuries. Well, it was perhaps natural that with her retrospective nature she should imitate the apparel of the past ages which seemed to claim all her thoughts.

I turned the cross reverently in my hands. There was no doubt that it was the very cross for which antiquarians had searched so long in vain, and at last in despair had denied the existence of. The priestly scholar, Michael O'Rourke, in a treatise written about 1690, described the relic at length, chronicled its history exhaustively and maintained that it was last heard of in the possession of Bishop Liam O'Brien, who, dying in 1595, gave it into the keeping of a kinswoman; but who this woman was, it was never known, and O'Rourke maintained that she kept her possession of the cross a secret, and that it was laid away with her in her tomb.

At another time my elation at discovering this relic would have been extreme, but, at the time, my mind was too filled with hate and smoldering fury. Replacing the cross in my pocket, I fell moodily to reviewing my connections with Ortali, connections which puzzled my friends, but which were simple enough.

SOME years before I had been connected with a certain large university in a humble way. One of the professors with whom I worked—a man name Reynolds—was of intolerably overbearing disposition toward those whom he considered his inferiors. I was a poverty-ridden student striving for life in a system which makes the very existence of a scholar precarious. I bore Professor Reynolds' abuse as long as I could, but one day we clashed. The reason does not matter; it was trivial enough in itself. Because I dared reply to his insults, Reynolds struck me and I knocked him senseless.

That very day he caused my dismissal from the university. Facing not only an abrupt termination of my work and studies, but actual starvation, I was reduced to desperation, and I went to Reynolds' study late that night intending to thrash him within an inch of his life. I found him alone in his study, but the moment I entered, he sprang up and rushed at me like a wild beast, with a dagger he used for a paperweight. I did not strike him; I did not even touch him. As I stepped aside to avoid his rush, a small rug slipped beneath his charging feet. He fell headlong

and, to my horror, in his fall the dagger in his hand was driven into his heart. He died instantly. I was at once aware of my position. I was known to have quarreled, and even exchanged blows with the man. I had every reason to hate him. If I were found in the study with the dead man, no jury in the world would not believe that I had murdered him. I hurriedly left by the way I had come, thinking that I had been unobserved. But Ortali, the dead man's secretary, had seen me. Returning from a dance, he had observed me entering the premises, and, following me, had seen the whole affair through the window. But this I did not know until later.

THE body was found by the professor's housekeeper, and naturally there was a great stir. Suspicion pointed to me, but lack of evidence kept me from being indicted, and this same lack of evidence brought about a verdict of suicide. All this time Ortali had kept quiet. Now he came to me and disclosed what he knew. He knew, of course, that I had not killed Reynolds, but he could prove that I was in the study when the professor met his death, and I knew Ortali was capable of carrying out his threat of swearing that he had seen me murder Reynolds in cold blood. And thus began a systematic blackmail.

I venture to say that a stranger blackmail was never levied. I had no money then; Ortali was gambling on my future, for he was assured of my abilities. He advanced me money, and, by clever wire-pulling, got me an appointment in a large college. Then he sat back to reap the benefits of his scheming, and he reaped full fold of the seed he sowed. In my line I became eminently successful. I soon commanded an enormous salary in my regular work, and I received rich prizes and awards for researches of various difficult nature, and of these Ortali took the lion's share—in money at least. I seemed to have the Midas touch. Yet of the wine of my success I tasted only the dregs.

I scarcely had a cent to my name. The money that had flowed through my hands had gone to enrich my slaver, unknown to the world. A man of remarkable gifts, he could have gone to the heights in any line, but for a queer streak in him, which, coupled with an inordinately avaricious nature, made him a parasite, a blood-sucking leech.

This trip to Dublin had been in the nature of a vacation for me. I was worn out with study and labor. But he had somehow heard of Grimmin's Cairn, as it was called, and, like a vulture that scents dead flesh, he conceived himself on the track of hidden gold. A golden wine cup would have been, to him, sufficient reward for the labor of tearing into the pile, and reason enough for desecrating or even destroying the ancient landmark. He was a swine whose only god was gold.

WELL, I thought grimly, as I disrobed for bed, all things end, both good and bad. Such a life as I had lived was unbearable. Ortali had dangled the gallows before my eyes until it had lost its terrors. I had staggered beneath the load I carried because of my love for my work. But all human endurance has its limits. My hands turned to iron as I thought of Ortali, working beside me at midnight at the lonely cairn. One stroke, with such a stone as I had caught up that day, and my agony would be ended. That life and hopes and career and ambitions would be ended as well, could not be helped. Ah, what a sorry, sorry end to all my high dreams!

When a rope and the long drop through the black trap should cut short an honorable career and a useful life! And all because of a human vampire who feasted his rotten lust on my soul, and drove me to murder and ruin.

But I knew my fate was written in the iron books of doom. Sooner or later I would turn on Ortali and kill him, be the consequences what they might. And I had reached the end of my road. Continual torture had rendered me, I believe, partly insane. I knew that at Grimmin's Cairn, when we toiled at midnight, Ortali's life would end beneath my hands, and my own life be cast away.

Something fell out of my pocket and I picked it up. It was the piece of sharp stone I had caught up off the cairn. Looking at it moodily, I wondered what strange hands had touched it in old times, and what grim secret it helped to hide on the bare headland of Grimmin. I switched out the light and lay in the darkness, the stone still in my hand, forgotten, occupied with my own dark broodings. And I glided gradually into deep slumber.

AT first I was aware that I was dreaming, as people often are. All was dim and vague, and connected in some strange way, I realized, with the bit of stone still grasped in my sleeping hand. Gigantic, chaotic scenes and landscapes and events shifted before me, like clouds that rolled and tumbled before a gale. Slowly these settled and crystallized into one distinct landscape, familiar and yet wildly strange. I saw a broad bare plain, fringed by the gray sea on one side, and a dark, rustling forest on the other; this plain was cut by a winding river, and beyond this river I saw a city—such a city as my waking eyes had never seen: bare stark, massive, with the grim architecture of an earlier, wilder age. On the plain I saw, as in a mist, a mighty battle. Serried ranks rolled backward and forward, steel flashed like a sunlit sea, and men fell like ripe wheat beneath the blades. I saw men in wolfskins, wild and shock-headed, wielding dripping axes, and tall men in horned helmets and glittering mail, whose eyes were cold and blue as the sea. And I saw myself.

Yes, in my dream I saw and recognized, in a semidetached way, myself. I was tall and rangily powerful; I was shock-headed and naked but for a wolf hide girt about my loins. I ran among the ranks yelling and smiting with a red ax, and blood ran down my flanks from wounds I scarcely felt. My eyes were cold blue and my shaggy hair and beard were red.

Now for an instant I was cognizant of my dual personality, aware that I was at once the wild man who ran and smote with the gory ax, and the man who slumbered and dreamed across the centuries. But this sensation quickly faded. I was no longer aware of any personality other than that of the barbarian who ran and smote. James O'Brien had no existence; I was Red Cumal, kern of Brian Boru, and my ax was dripping with the blood of my foes.

The roar of conflict was dying away, though here and there struggling clumps of warriors still dotted the plain. Down along the river half-naked tribesmen, waist-deep in reddening water, tore and slashed with helmeted warriors whose mail could not save them from the stroke of the Dalcassian ax. Across the river a bloody, disorderly horde was staggering through the gates of Dublin.

THE sun was sinking low toward the horizon. All day I had fought beside the chiefs. I had

seen Jarl Sigurd fall beneath Prince Murrogh's sword. I had seen Murrogh himself die in the moment of victory, by the hand of a grim mailed giant whose name none knew. I had seen, in the flight of the enemy, Brodir and King Brian fall together at the door of the great king's tent.

Aye, it had been a feasting of ravens, a red flood of slaughter, and I knew that no more would the dragon-prowed fleets sweep from the blue North with torch and destruction. Far and wide the Vikings lay in their glittering mail, as the ripe wheat lies after the reaping. Among them lay thousands of bodies clad in the wolf hides of the tribes, but the dead of the Northern people far outnumbered the dead of Erin. I was weary and sick of the stench of raw blood. I had glutted my soul with slaughter; now I sought plunder. And I found it—on the corpse of a richly-clad Norse chief which lay close to the seashore. I tore off the silver-scaled corselet, the horned helmet. They fitted as if made for me, and I swaggered among the dead, calling on my wild comrades to admire my appearance, though the harness felt strange to me, for the Gaels scorned armor and fought half-naked.

In my search for loot I had wandered far out on the plain, away from the river, but still the mail-clad bodies lay thickly strewn, for the bursting of the ranks had scattered fugitives and pursuers all over the countryside, from the dark waving Wood of Tomar, to the river and the seashore. And on the seaward slope of Drumna's headland, out of sight of the city and the plain of Clontarf, I came suddenly upon a dying warrior. He was tall and massive, clad in gray mail. He lay partly in the folds of a great dark cloak, and his sword lay broken near his mighty right hand. His horned helmet had fallen from his head and his elf-locks blew in the wind that swept out of the west.

Where one eye should have been was an empty socket and the other eye glittered cold and grim as the North Sea, though it was glazing with the approach of death. Blood oozed from a rent in his corselet. I approached him warily, a strange cold fear, that I could not understand, gripping me. Ax ready to dash out his brains, I bent over him, and recognized him as the chief who had slain Prince Murrogh, and who had mown down the warriors of the Gael like a harvest. Wherever he had fought, the Norsemen had prevailed, but in all other parts of the field, the Gaels had been irresistible.

And now he spoke to me in Norse and I understood, for had I not toiled as slave among the sea people for long bitter years?

"THE Christians have overcome," he gasped in a voice whose timbre, though low-pitched, sent a curious shiver of fear through me; there was in it an undertone as of icy waves sweeping along a Northern shore, as of freezing winds whispering among the pine trees. "Doom and shadows stalk on Asgaard and here has fallen Ragnarok. I could not be in all parts of the field at once, and now I am wounded unto death. A spear—a spear with a cross carved in the blade; no other weapon could wound me."

I realized that the chief, seeing mistily my red beard and the Norse armor I wore, supposed me to be one of his own race. But a crawling horror surged darkly in the depths of my soul.

"White Christ, thou hast not yet conquered," he muttered deliriously. "Lift me up, man, and let me speak to you."

Now for some reason I complied, and as I lifted him to a sitting posture, I shuddered and my flesh crawled at the feel of him, for his flesh was like ivory—smoother and harder than is natural for human flesh, and colder than even a dying man should be.

"I die as men die," he muttered. "Fool, to assume the attributes of mankind, even though it was to aid the people who deify me. The gods are immortal, but flesh can perish, even when it clothes a god. Haste and bring a sprig of the magic plant —even holly—and lay it on my bosom. Aye, though it be no larger than a dagger point, it will free me from this fleshly prison I put on when I came to war with men with their own weapons. And I will shake off this flesh and stalk once more among the thundering clouds. Woe, then, to all men who bend not the knee to me! Haste; I will await your coming."

His lionlike head fell back, and feeling shudderingly under his corselet, I could distinguish no heartbeat. He was dead, as men die, but I knew that locked in that semblance of a human body, there but slumbered the spirit of a fiend of the frost and darkness.

Aye, I knew him: Odin, the Gray Man, the One-eyed, the god of the North who had taken the form of a warrior to fight for his people. Assuming the form of a human he was subject to many of the limitations of humanity. All men knew this of the gods, who often walked the earth in the guise of men. Odin, clothed in human semblance, could be wounded by certain weapons, and even slain, but a touch of the mysterious holly would rouse him in grisly resurrection. This task he had set me, not knowing me for an enemy; in human form he could only use human faculties, and these had been impaired by onstriding death.

MY hair stood up and my flesh crawled. I tore from my body the Norse armor, and fought a wild panic that prompted me to run blind and screaming with terror across the plain. Nauseated with fear, I gathered boulders and heaped them for a rude couch, and on it, shaking with horror, I lifted the body of the Norse god. And as the sun set and the stars came silently out, I was working with fierce energy, piling huge rocks above the corpse. Other tribesmen came up and I told them of what I was sealing up—I hoped forever. And they, shivering with horror, fell to aiding me. No sprig of magic holly should be laid on Odin's terrible bosom. Beneath these rude stones the Northern demon should slumber until the thunder of Judgment Day, forgotten by the world which had once cried out beneath his iron heel. Yet not wholly forgot, for, as we labored, one of my comrades said: "This shall be no longer Drumna's Headland, but the Headland of the Gray Man."

That phrase established a connection between my dream-self and my sleeping self. I started up from sleep exclaiming: "Gray Man's Headland!"

I looked about dazedly, the furnishings of the room, faintly lighted by the starlight in the windows, seeming strange and unfamiliar until I slowly oriented myself with time and space.

"Gray Man's Headland," I repeated, "Gray Man—Graymin—Grimmin — *Grimmin's Headland!* Great God, the thing under the cairn!"

SHAKEN, I sprang up, and realized that I still gripped the piece of stone from the cairn. It is well known that inanimate objects retain psychic associations. A round stone from the plain of Jericho has

been placed in the hand of a hypnotized medium, and she has at once reconstructed in her mind the battle and siege of the city, and the shattering fall of the walls. I did not doubt that this bit of stone had acted as a magnet to drag my modern mind through the mists of the centuries into a life I had known before.

I was more shaken than I can describe, for the whole fantastic affair fitted in too well with certain formless vague sensations concerning the cairn which had already lingered at the back of my mind, to be dismissed as an unusually vivid dream. I felt the need of a glass of wine, and remembered that Ortali always had wine in his room. I hurriedly donned my clothes, opened my door, crossed the corridor and was about to knock at Ortali's door, when I noticed that it was partly open, as if some one had neglected to close it carefully. I entered, switching on a light. The room was empty.

I realized what had occurred. Ortali mistrusted me; he feared to risk himself alone with me in a lonely spot at midnight. He had postponed the visit to the cairn, merely to trick me, to give him a chance to slip away alone.

My hatred for Ortali was for the moment completely submerged by a wild panic of horror at the thought of what the opening of the cairn might result in. For I did not doubt the authenticity of my dream. It was no dream; it was a fragmentary bit of memory, in which I had relived that other life of mine. Gray Man's Headland—Grimmin's Headland, and under those rough stones that grisly corpse in its semblance of humanity—I could not hope that, imbued with the imperishable essence of an elemental spirit, that corpse had crumbled to dust in the ages.

Of my race out of the city and across those semidesolate reaches, I remember little. The night was a cloak of horror through which peered red stars like the gloating eyes of uncanny beasts, and my footfalls echoed hollowly so that repeatedly I thought some monster loped at my heels.

THE straggling lights fell away behind me and I entered the region of mystery and horror. No wonder that progress had passed to the right and to the left of this spot, leaving it untouched, a blind back-eddy given over to goblin-dreams and nightmare memories. Well that so few suspected its very existence.

Dimly I saw the headland, but fear gripped me and held me aloof. I had a vague, incoherent idea of finding the ancient woman, Meve MacDonnal. She was grown old in the mysteries and traditions of the mysterious land. She could aid me, if indeed the blind fool Ortali loosed on the world the forgotten demon men once worshiped in the North.

A figure loomed suddenly in the starlight and I caromed against him, almost upsetting him. A stammering voice in a thick brogue protested with the petulancy of intoxication. It was a burly longshoreman returning to his cottage, no doubt, from some late revel in a tavern. I seized him and shook him, my eyes glaring wildly in the starlight.

"I am looking for Meve MacDonnal! Do you know her? Tell me, you fool! Do you know old Meve MacDonnal?"

It was as if my words sobered him as suddenly as a dash of icy water in his face. In the starlight I saw his face glimmer whitely and a catch of fear was at his throat. He sought to cross himself with an uncertain hand.

"Meve MacDonnal? Are ye mad?

What would ye be doin' with *her?*"

"Tell me!" I shrieked, shaking him savagely. "Where is Meve MacDonnal?"

"There!" he gasped, pointing with a shaking hand where dimly in the night something loomed against the shadows. "In the name of the holy saints, begone, be ye madman or devil, and l'ave an honest man alone! There—there ye'll find Meve MacDonnal—where they laid her, full three hundred years ago!"

Half heeding his words I flung him aside with a fierce exclamation, and, as I raced across the weed-grown plain, I heard the sounds of his lumbering flight. Half blind with panic, I came to the low structures the man had pointed out. And floundering deep in weeds, my feet sinking into musty mold, I realized with a shock that I was in the ancient graveyard on the inland side of Grimmin's Headland, into which I had seen Meve MacDonnal disappear the evening before. I was close by the door of the largest tomb, and with an eery premonition I leaned close, seeking to make out the deeply-carven inscription. And partly by the dim light of the stars and partly by the touch of my tracing fingers, I made out the words and figures, in the half-forgotten Gaelic of three centures ago: "Meve MacDonnal—1565-1640."

WITH a cry of horror I recoiled and, snatching out the crucifix she had given me, made to hurl it into the darkness—but it was as if an invisible hand caught my wrist. Madness and insanity—but I could not doubt: Meve MacDonnal had come to me from the tomb wherein she had rested for three hundred years to give me the ancient, ancient relic entrusted to her so long ago by her priestly kin. The memory of her words came to me, and the memory of Ortali and the Gray Man. From a lesser horror I turned squarely to a greater, and ran swiftly toward the headland which loomed dimly against the stars toward the sea.

As I crossed the ridge I saw, in the starlight, the cairn, and the figure that toiled gnomelike above it. Ortali, with his accustomed, almost superhuman energy, had dislodged many of the boulders; and as I approached, shaking with horrified anticipation, I saw him tear aside the last layer, and I heard his savage cry of triumph, that froze me in my tracks some yards behind him, looking down from the slope. An unholy radiance rose from the cairn, and I saw, in the north, the aurora flame up suddenly with terrible beauty, paling the starlight. All about the cairn pulsed a weird light, turning the rough stones to a cold shimmering silver, and in this glow I saw Ortali, all heedless, cast aside his pick and lean gloatingly over the aperture he had made—and I saw there the helmeted head, reposing on the couch of stones where I, Red Cumal, placed it so long ago. I saw the inhuman terror and beauty of that awesome carven face, in which was neither human weakness, pity nor mercy. I saw the soul-freezing glitter of the one eye, which stared wide open in a fearful semblance of life. All up and down the tall mailed figure shimmered and sparkled cold darts and gleams of icy light, like the northern lights that blazed in the shuddering skies. Aye, the Gray Man lay as I had left him more than nine hundred years before, without a trace of rust or rot or decay.

AND now as Ortali leaned forward to examine his find, a gasping cry broke from my lips—for the sprig of holly worn in his lapel in defiance of "Nordic superstition," slipped from its place, and

in the weird glow I plainly saw it fall upon the mighty mailed breast of the figure, where it blazed suddenly with a brightness too dazzling for human eyes. My cry was echoed by Ortali. The figure moved; the mighty limbs flexed, tumbling the shining stones aside. A new gleam lighted the terrible eye and a tide of life flooded and animated the carven features.

Out of the cairn he rose, and the northern lights played terribly about him. And the Gray Man changed and altered in horrific transmutation. The human features faded like a fading mask; the armor fell from his body and crumbled to dust as it fell; and the fiendish spirit of ice and frost and darkness that the sons of the North deified as Odin, stood up nakedly and terribly in the stars. About his grisly head played lightnings and the suddering gleams of the aurora His towering anthropomorphic form was dark as shadow and gleaming as ice; his horrible crest reared colossally against the vaulting arch of the sky.

Ortali cowered, screaming wordlessly, as the taloned malformed hands reached for him. In the shadowy indescribable features of the Thing there was no tinge of gratitude toward the man who had released it—only a demoniac gloating and a demoniac hate for all the sons of men. I saw the shadowy arms shoot out and strike. I heard Ortali scream once—a single unbearable screech that broke short at the shrillest pitch. A single instant a blinding blue glare burst about him, lighting his convulsed features and his upward-rolling eyes; then his body was dashed earthward as by an electric shock, so savagely that I distinctly heard the splintering of his bones. But Ortali was dead before he touched the ground—dead, shriveled and blackened, exactly like a man blasted by a thunderbolt, to which cause, indeed, men later ascribed his death.

The slavering monster that had slain him lumbered now toward me, shadowy tentacle-like arms outspread, the pale starlight making a luminous pool of his great inhuman eye, his frightful talons dripping with I know not what elemental forces to blast the bodies and souls of men.

BUT I flinched not, and in that instant I feared him not, neither the horror of his countenance nor the threat of his thunderbolt dooms. For in a blinding white flame had come to me the realization of why Meve MacDonnal had come from her tomb to bring me the ancient cross which had lain in her bosom for three hundred years, gathering unto itself unseen forces of good and light, which war forever against the shapes of lunacy and shadow.

As I plucked from my garments the ancient cross, I felt the play of gigantic unseen forces in the air about me. I was but a pawn in the game—merely the hand that held the relic of holiness, that was the symbol of the powers opposed forever against the fiends of darkness. As I held it high, from it shot a single shaft of white light, unbearably pure, unbearably white, as if all the awesome forces of Light were combined in the symbol and loosed in one concentrated arrow of wrath against the monster of darkness. And with a hideous shriek the demon reeled back, shriveling before my eyes. Then with a great rush of vulturelike wings, he soared into the stars, dwindling, dwindling among the play of the flaming fires and the lights of the haunted skies, fleeing back into the dark limbo which gave him birth, God only knows how many grisly eons ago.

"Fire burn and cauldron bubble"

A MEETING PLACE FOR SORCERERS AND APPRENTICES

A Daisy for Howard

Dear Editor:

After looking through the table of contents of the June Strange Tales I bought the magazine for the sole reason that it contained the story, "People of the Dark," by Robert E. Howard. Incidentally, I found that the magazine contained other good stories.

I have been reading Howard's stories in various magazines for several years. I always buy magazines that contain his stories because I like them. Please give us more of them.—Mrs. F. M. Torbett, Box 265, Marlin, Tex.

Expert Opinion

Dear Editor:

I've just finished reading the June issue of S. T., and must confess that I haven't much to say in criticism. It's an all round good issue, I think.

My personal rating of the stories is as follows: "The Nameless Offspring," surely the best, I think, "The Great Circle" coming very close to it. "Stragella," third. Then come in order, "People of the Dark," "The Emergency Call," "Dread Exile" and "The Golden Patio." (I am hardly able to assign a place to "The House in the Magnolias.") Ernst could have made a more powerful story out of his plot, and Feist's tale was pretty obvious from the moment he mentioned that his grandfather had died under odd circumstances abroad. All of which leaves this one of the best issues thus far.

The cover especially caught my eye. It is excellent, and its unquestionable attraction was well proved yesterday when S. T. hit the stands here at Sauk and sold out within 15 minutes—and not because a native son had a story in it, either!

I am glad, too, that the "Cauldron" got started. Reader opinion is interesting. I think in the long run opinion is

so balanced that magazines need never work any major changes. I am glad to notice the demand for a monthly S. T., and hope you will soon find it profitable to publish it that often.

Another thing I meant to comment on, the admirable balance of stories in this issue: vampire, Martian, elemental, zombie, reincarnation, ghost, re-enaction of a past occurrence, and cosmic evil. The next issue looks good, too.—August Derleth.

"All Good"

Dear Editor:

At last, in the June issue of Strange Tales, I found what I've been looking for in those pages for a long time—a story by Robert E. Howard. I enjoyed his "People of the Dark" very much.

I have been following the work of this able writer for several years, and hope to see more of his work in the Clayton publications in the future. In my opinion he is one of the best writers of this type of fiction we have to-day.

I might also add that I like all the stories in Strange Tales. They are all good. My only regret is that it is not a monthly publication.—F. T. Torbett, Box 265, Marlin, Tex.

Had a Treat

Dear Editor:

I am writing you because I feel that I should express my appreciation for the treat you have given me with the June issue of Strange Tales, and also to be ungrateful enough to remind you that two months is too long to wait between issues for your thrilling stories. Can't the publishers see fit to give us Strange Tales each thirty days? I am sure that they realize by this time, that their new venture is going to be a gorgeous success; at any rate, it will be if you continue to publish stories like those written by Robert E. Howard. He is, to my mind, the most delightful of your writers, and I consider his "People of the Dark" to be the best story you have printed to date. I hope that even Mr. Howard will eclipse himself in the future, though how anyone could ever write a more exciting story than his tale of reincarnation, I do not know.—Martha Rose Sims, Princeton, Ky.

I Wonder?

Dear Editor:

I have just gotten hold of your magazine and, believe me, it's a hummer! I read it from cover to cover the night I bought it, and my one plea is give us more stories by those masters of fiction, Robert E. Howard and Henry S. Whitehead. I wonder if there isn't an element of truth, at least, in Howard's story? It sounds realistic in spite of its subject.—Charles Roe, Y. M. C. A., 245-251 Madison Ave., Memphis, Tenn.

This and That

Dear Editor:

In the June "Cauldron" I noted that the honorable Michael Fogaris requested a story by H. P. Lovecraft or Robert E. Howard. Then in the very next letter Julius Schwartz requested a story in which "the type and words seem to stand out and shiver." I hope they're now both satisfied.

"People of the Dark" is a weird, strangely cruel, yet entrancing tale. The truth of it, the caverns, the effect of time on the world, the ancient Druids, etc., are woven into the story so gracefully that they add most fascinating elements to the story.

Let's have our mag 9" x 12" with color plates—as another writer says—inside, a statement of the contents outside, and pictures by Paul or Rafael de Soto rather than by Wesso. The girl in "Stragella" (which by the way, was a good story) was supposed to be beautiful, but by the picture of her on the front page I gather that Wesso's idea of beauty is cockeyed.

Make "our" mag a monthly without serials and with—as A. Lewis says—no stories over 10,000 words long. Say, you ought to get Lewis to write for your mag! He sounds as if he could write better stories than some of your authors (pardon!)!

I am a steady reader of A. S. and S. T., and hereby give three cheers for both of them.—Philip Turner, Hiram, Ohio.

The Tale of Macrocosmic Horror

Dear Editor:

I have read with much interest the fine letter from A. Lewis in the "Cauldron."

Mr. Lewis, in laying down rules for the development of the weird tale, has presented a viewpoint which will no doubt seem impregnable to the average intelligent person, in whom exclusively humanistic values of thought have been inculcated.

At the same time, however, I should like to indicate certain weaknesses and limitations which I see in this viewpoint, especially in regard to the tale of macrocosmic horror and fantasy. This type of story, because of its very character and purpose, should not, it seems to me, be bound strictly by "the practical requisites of literature in general." In a tale of the highest imaginative horror, the main object is the creation of a supernatural, extra-human atmosphere; the real actors are the terrible arcanic forces, the esoteric cosmic malignities; and the element of human character, if one is to achieve the highest, most ob-

jective artistry, is properly somewhat subordinated, as it cannot be subordinated in a tale of ordinary and natural happenings. One is depicting things, powers and conditions that are beyond humanity; therefore, artistically speaking, the main accent is on these things, powers and conditions.

A sense of the superhuman is to be conveyed; therefore one does not want the human—at least, not to an extent that would impair and detract from the proper focus of interest. For this reason, I fear that the weird tale, if written mainly as psychological analysis, would tend to forfeit some of its highest and rarest values. Modern literature has become so thoroughly subjective, so introverted in its tendencies, so preoccupied with the anthropocentric, that it seems desirable for one genre, at least, to maintain what one might call a centrifugal impetus, to make "a gesture toward the infinite" rather than toward the human intestines.

This is not saying that Weird Fiction would not gain by more verisimilitude in the presentation of its terrene actors. But their reactions can be indicated more succinctly, with more stress on events, outward forces and atmosphere, than in fiction dealing with the natural and the normal.

For instance, let us take some concrete examples from modern Weird Fiction. In authors such an Algernon Blackwood and Walter de la Mare, it seems to me that the accent is primarily on human character. But in their work (at least, in any of it that I have read) one fails to find the highest imaginative horror, the overwhelming sweep of black, gulf-arisen wings, such as is conveyed in the best tales of Ambrose Bierce, Poe and H. P. Lovecraft, where human character is treated more briefly and subversively.—Clark Ashton Smith.

"Have the Spirit"

Dear Editor:

Give us more stories by Robert E. Howard, that master of Weird Fiction, and by Henry S. Whitehead, another crackerjack writer, and I won't bother you any more; but if you don't give us a story each issue by these two writers, you will hear from me!

I also enjoy Sewell's illustrations. To my mind they have the spirit of the stories, something most illustrations do not possess.—J. McConnell, Bonham, Tex.

Like and No Like

Dear Editor:

I suppose that we are all welcome, now that Strange Tales has added its attractive and unique "Cauldron."

First place in the June issue goes to "The Nameless Offspring" and "Stragella," between which it is impossible to choose, because they are so totally different in theme. "Stragella" I would call the more weird and colorful, "The Nameless Offspring" the more horrible. Both are vivid and strikingly original, and are two of the best stories you have ever published.

I did not like "The Great Circle." After the same author's story, "Cassius," this was a terrible disappointment. It was neither strange, nor interesting. Perhaps Henry S. Whitehead believes it is "highbrow" to repeat every minute idea a dozen times and pack reams of heavy descriptions into the most commonplace happenings. Someone should tell him (that's your job, Mr. Editor!) that simplicity is the soul of art. I used to think Whitehead was the peer of all weird tale writers, but lately he has been overshadowed. Arthur J. Burks, Clark Ashton Smith, Hugh B. Cave, Gordon MacCreagh and other Strange Tales authors are all very much better. —J. A. Hall, 601 W. Pleasant St., Angola, Ind.

"Ghoulish Goulash"

Dear Editor:

I'm mighty glad to see that the June issue has a witches' campfire meeting around the dear old Shakespearean spook-pot, for, as one who is firmly determined to write well and weirdly enough to crash the unhallowed pages of your excellent publication, I certainly like to see what gets over and what does not.

I note with delight that all the readers with one accord urge the idea of monthly publication, but it does not seem to occur to more than one of them that mere demand by reader letters is insufficient to effect this commendable end. So, hoping that I may do what you are possibly too tactful to mention, I raise my voice above the sputter and gurgle of the "Cauldron" to point out that if every purchaser of the magazine will urge one friend to buy a copy and see for himself how good the stories are, a monthly issue will become a business possibility.

I second the various motions for stories complete in one issue, and hope you will keep them fairly varied in length. And as one who has read occult literature since boyhood, including fairy and folk lore, I stand a moment more on my trembling legs beside our ghoulish goulash kettle to wonder if we can't have more variety and not one more instance of a mere revival of an old wives' tale—such as the purely conventional vampire, always a black bat, always the two little tooth-marks on the throat, and so on.

Oh, yes—just a minute, folks, and I'll collapse into my proper place like a laughed-at ha'nt—and why not insist on

another point, not mentioned in Mr. Lewis' admirable letter-speech on character: one weird or occult principle is plenty for a single story. The thicker the miracles are laid on, the less are they convincing.

All right, witch-doctor, 'nother helping of the hell-broth, please! — Dudley Brooks, 2822 N. First St., Milwaukee, Wisc.

Would Have More Illustrations

Dear Editor:

I have just seen the first issue of Strange Tales. A bit late it is true, but nevertheless I cannot speak too highly of it. Are you thinking of running a readers' corner in this magazine? Please do; it helps immensely towards fellow feeling among your readers.

I have only one suggestion to make: the illustrations are good, but there are not enough of them. Why not have more than one per story? Personally, I would prefer to have, say, two pages less reading matter and three or four more illustrations.

I would very much like to hear from my friends across the sea.—John Y. Stapleton, 17a Ripple Rd., Barking, Essex, Eng.

Likes the "Cauldron"

Dear Editor:

Having read Astounding Stories for quite a while, I was tempted to try its companion magazine, Strange Tales. However, I was surprised to find a story so poor as "The Great Circle" taking up so much space in an interesting magazine.

Not satisfied with being a great Science Fiction writer, Clark Ashton Smith has scored again in the Weird Fiction field with his "The Nameless Offspring" —an excellent story. Good work, Mr. Smith! And I am glad to see another of yours coming!

I was very happy to find that Strange Tales has started the "Cauldron." A bigger and better department than even the old "Readers' Corner," and that's going some. Don't ask me why it's better, use your imagination!

You can improve the mag by putting it out every month and by having a serial. The second depends on the first, of course. This is probably the nth letter asking for these two points. So you have your course outlined for you, Mr. Editor. — Ben Freed, 6815 Frankstown Ave., Pittsburgh, Pa.

Best Be Left Alone?

Dear Editor:

Please stir this hideous ingredient into the seething "Cauldron," and if it causes the mixture to overflow, that is your affair.

Whatever background there is for that gruesome legendry of the Dark Ages, well-nigh forgotten but brought to sudden revival by the present vogue for Weird Fiction such as S. T. is guilty of maintaining, must have some scientific explanation. As I understand it, the power of malignant spirit-forms, elementals and the like depends upon mass psychology; they become powerful through the use of the mental energy emanating from credulous people en masse in the form of hideous creative imagination. In the Dark Ages when human credulity was at its height, when grotesque fear, horror and leanings toward the sub-human infested the minds of men because of abnormal political and social conditions—in those times the power of malign, inhuman intelligence also reached its zenith. Similar points of frequent manifestation—increased power —may have existed at almost regular intervals in the course of civilization, the earliest known probably being that created by the necromantic rites of the prehistoric orient.

Of late, human credulity and the social and psychological conditions necessary to maintain it have been decidedly on the decline, and "supernatural intelligences" have been regarded merely as figments of superstition. However—and I am trying to bring out the fact that perhaps you in S. T. and other sponsors of Weird Fiction, are playing with hell-fire that had, for the good of humanity, best be left alone—in being brought before the public eye it is possible that this revocation of undead horrors may stir into activity that old creative imagination—may produce again the favorable mass-psychological conditions for another period of prosperity and increased power for those very elemental horrors of which your excellent authors so realistically write!

Personally, I like Strange Tales and will read it as long as you publish it, but—take warning! If any of our readers think me rather far-fetched I will be glad to argue the matter out with them. —Arthur R. Hermann, 2460 N. 44th St., Milwaukee, Wisc.

From a Sorcerer's Apprentice

Dear Editor:

Last year when I saw a copy of Strange Tales on a newsstand I silently congratulated both myself and the Clayton Magazines; myself for being so fortunate as to find such a magazine, and the Clayton Magazines for putting on the market a magazine to fill the requirements that I thought Strange Tales would fill. I bought the first copy and, although I was somewhat disappointed, I nevertheless continued to buy it.

When I read your June issue, I discovered that you had started a readers' department. I found one letter with ex-

cellent criticism—that by A. Lewis. L. P. Rees also pointed out some good and bad things. The others were merely hasty notes from enthusiastic readers. If all readers of your magazine would think out the problems which are obvious, you would receive much better criticism.

Please do not make Strange Tales a monthly. The stories have been good as a whole, but, if you issue the magazine more often, writers will work overtime and turn out a lot of trash. Keep up a fairly high standard.

I am an amateur student in witchcraft and demonology, with spiritualism, demonolatry, etc., as sidelines. I am a disciple, so to speak, of the Rev. Montague Summers, who is probably the greatest living authority on witchcraft and demonology. This English scholar has written, translated, and edited numerous works on these subjects. "The Church and Witchcraft" and "The History of Demonology and Witchcraft" are among the best works on the subjects. Many of his books can be had at public libraries, and nearly any large university will have all of his books that are issued in limited and expensive editions.

The stories should be brief and the writers should know their subject. Beware of writers who quote glibly such names as: Roger Bacon, Cagliostro, Albertus Magnus, Theophrastus, Saint-Germain, Swedenborg, Leonardo da Vinci, Abu-Machaar, etc. If there were any manuscripts left by masters of black and esoteric arts, they are in museums, famous libraries or in the hands of large collectors. No such things as these can remain unknown because anyone who gets one immediately broadcasts the fact that he has it.

All interested in your magazine should read Arthur Machen, the best writer on mysterious subjects to-day.—Jack Foley, Minneapolis, Minn.

And That's That

Dear Editor:

In regard to your magazine, Strange Tales, all I can say is:

It is the best, most interesting, most unique, and best edited and published mag of its kind, and that it will be a low-down, measly, sneak-thief, double-crossing, gypping, snake-in-the-grass, inexcusable, unforgivable, preposterous, monstrous, provoking, unthought of, inhuman, heinous and mean trick if you don't soon bring it out once a month!—Ernest Toevs, Aberdeen, Idaho.

"The Cauldron"

All readers are extended a diabolical invitation to come over to "The Cauldron" and throw in everything you've got that may add to the potency of our brew. Garlic, carbolic acid, the left hind foot of a hump-backed rabbit, old human bones, gall, ideas, brimstone, roses, horseshoes and good old-fashioned bricks — *everything.* You must season the brew to taste: *any* good sorcerer will tell you that.

Brains burn and "Cauldron" bubble!
—The Editor.

My Story Preferences in the January Strange Tales

I enjoyed these stories most: **Remarks:**

1.....

2.....

3.....

I enjoyed these stories least: **Remarks:**

1.....

2.....

3.....

Name .....

Address .....

It will help us know your story preferences if you will fill out and mail this coupon to STRANGE TALES, 155 E. 44th St., New York City. Thank you!

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If you suffer from sour stomach, gas, bloating, Bad breath, Coated tongue, dizziness, heartburn, poor sleep, heart pressure, or biliousness, due to stomach acidity, don't take soda. It only makes matters worse. Thousands of sufferers say that the greatest medicine in the world for these troubles is Diotex. It checks stomach acidity in 15 Minutes and thus stops pain and distress and soon aids nature in restoring normal functions so that you can eat and drink what you like and sleep fine. Try Diotex under the fair-play plan to fix you up to your satisfaction or money back on return of empty package. Only 60c. If your druggist can't supply you, write the Knox Co., Kansas City, Mo.

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National will allow coach railroad fare to Los Angeles from any point in U. S. Will help you get a job to pay living expenses while learning. A few delightful months of training and you are qualified. Spend fall and winter in Los Angeles and enjoy countless pleasures while training. We reserve right to withdraw this liberal offer, so mail coupon at once while this bargain offer is still in effect. Free Book gives full details.

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Are You Out of a Job?

If You Need Money Send Me Your Name and I'll Show You How to Start Making Up to

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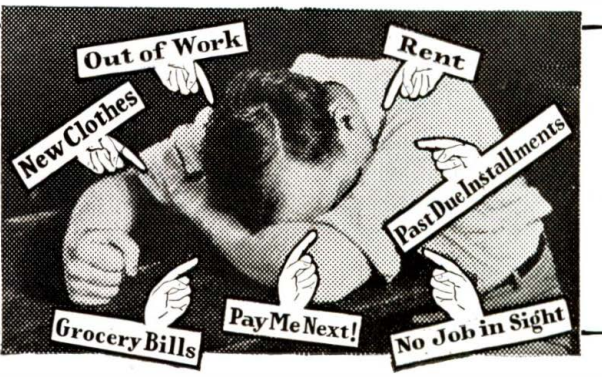


A Breath-Taking Announcement That Will Put Both Men and Women to Work at Once

Distributing Trial Packages

No More Worries - - - No More Bill Collectors - - - No More Skimping - - - Now You Can Have Money in Your Pocket All the Time - - - Here's the Quick New Way to Make It!

Your Own GROCERIES at Wholesale

When I send you instructions for making money on my new Trial Package Plan I also give you rock-bottom wholesale prices on your own groceries—about half of regular retail prices. This is in addition to your regular pay. So you can MAKE big money in cash and SAVE big money on the things you use in your own home.

I'M not much of a hand for fancy writing—but I can think up ideas. When I thought of my new Introductory Package Plan I knew it was going to be a great thing; a great thing for me—and a positive blessing to hundreds who had been out of work. Best of all, with my new system, you can make as much in "hard times" as in "boom" times. So if you're wondering where the money is coming from to pay your bills, you're just the person I'm looking for. Your worries are over right now.

GO TO WORK AT ONCE

My new plan provides immediate cash earnings for both men and women. So long as you're honest and reliable you're eligible for one of these jobs. And I want someone in every territory because this new Trial Package idea is sweeping the country. So you can go to work at once right in your own locality.

NOT AN EXPERIMENT—EARNINGS PROVED

You may think this sounds too good to be true. But that's not so. Before I announced the idea for national use I tried it out thoroughly, and the men and women who tested it made big money right from the start. For example, Sol. Korenblit of New York took in enough money in one week to make $110 for himself—when you count commissions. H. L. Lennon wrote me, "Started with you Friday morning and cleared $39.63 in 7½ hours." Mrs. Eva McCutchen, in Oklahoma, quit an office job and made $26.55 profit the first day with my system. Mrs. Jewel Hackett, here in Ohio, tried it and cleared $33 in 7 hours. I have hundreds of reports like these to prove that this Trial Package Plan is a winner.

NO DEPRESSION WITH A PLAN LIKE THIS

You may wonder at making such big money even in hard times. But this plan of Trial Package distribution is doing exactly that for hundreds. The "Trial Package" Plan is simple. Your first work on this new job will be to distribute introductory packages of my line to people in your neighborhood. After they have had a chance to use these products and see how they save money, they give you their orders for full size packages. You handle the money and deliver the goods. And a big share of every dollar we take in goes into your pocket as your pay. Pay for this work is frequently as high as $15 a day. Even at the start, delivering only 35 trial packages a day will pay you $8.75—regular and steady.

30 CUSTOMERS—$15 FOR YOU

In no time at all, you should have a big list of regular customers that you call on every two weeks. And with an established route which requires only 30 calls a day, your pay can easily be $15 a day steady. If you want to have only a 15-call route and work only half-days, you can still make up to $7.50 a day—and even that gives you $45 a week—not bad for half time.

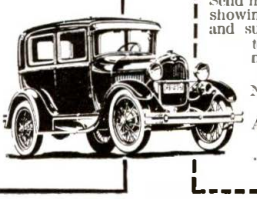
DON'T SEND MONEY—JUST NAME

I don't want your money. All I want is your name and address so I can lay before you bona fide proof of the success of this plan—proof that you too can make good money. Remember, you invest no money in a stock of goods. I furnish the capital, set you up in business, show you how to start earning money at once. It costs nothing to investigate. You read the proof, then decide for yourself. Since you can't lose and since you may find just the kind of steady, good-pay work you want, tear out this valuable blank right now, fill it in and mail it to me at once.

A. L. MILLS, President
516 Monmouth Ave., Cincinnati, Ohio

FREE AS AN EXTRA BONUS
NEW FORD TUDOR SEDAN!

This is NOT a contest or a "prize" for solving puzzles. This Ford is not given to you in place of your money. No! But to everyone who proves to me that he is "on the job" and building up a real trade through proper and courteous handling of customers, I give this car as an extra bonus—in addition to what you make every day in cash. If you already have a car I'll give you an equal amount in cash instead. I'll explain this fully when I send you details of my Trial Package Plan.



GOOD for FREE OFFER

A. L. MILLS, PRESIDENT,
516 Monmouth Ave., Cincinnati, Ohio

Send me full particulars of your Trial Package Plan showing how I can make up to $15 a day—steady and sure. This is not an order for any goods and the plan you send is not to cost me one cent, now or at any other time.

Name . . . . . .

Address . . . . . .

. . . . . .

(Please Print or Write Plainly)

—and raw tobaccos have no place in cigarettes

They are *not* present in Luckies . . . the *mildest* cigarette you ever smoked

WE buy the finest, the very finest tobaccos in all the world—but that does not explain why folks everywhere regard Lucky Strike as the mildest cigarette. The fact is, we never overlook the truth that "Nature in the Raw is Seldom Mild"—so these fine tobaccos, after proper aging and mellowing, are then given the benefit of that Lucky Strike purifying process, described by the words—"It's toasted" That's why folks in every city, town and hamlet say that Luckies are such mild cigarettes.

"It's toasted"

That package of mild Luckies

"If a man write a better book, preach a better sermon, or make a better mouse-trap than his neighbor, tho he build his house in the woods, the world will make a beaten path to his door."—RALPH WALDO EMERSON. Does not this explain the world-wide acceptance and approval of Lucky Strike?