

MARCH

# STRANGE TALES

OF MYSTERY

AND TERROR

25¢

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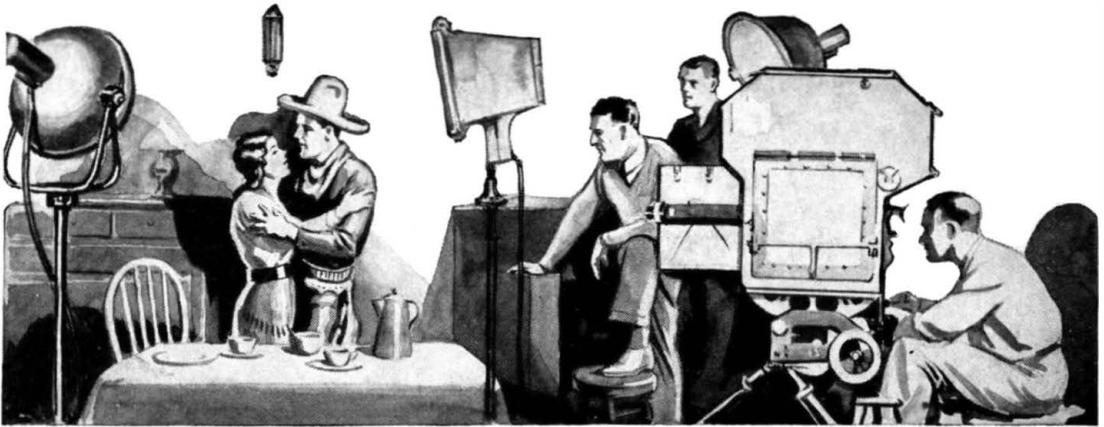


THE DUEL  
OF THE  
SORCERERS  
BY PAUL ERNST

March, 1932

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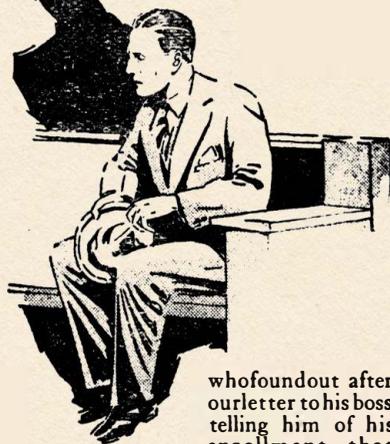
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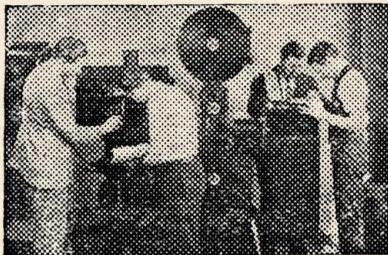
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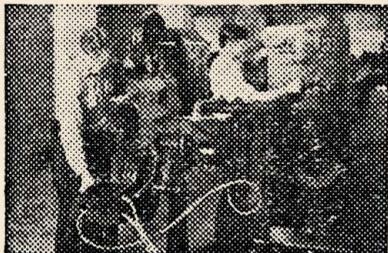
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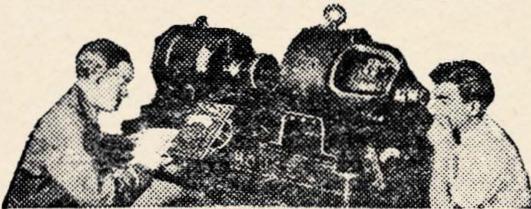
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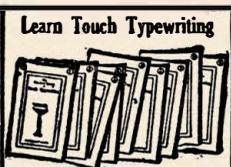
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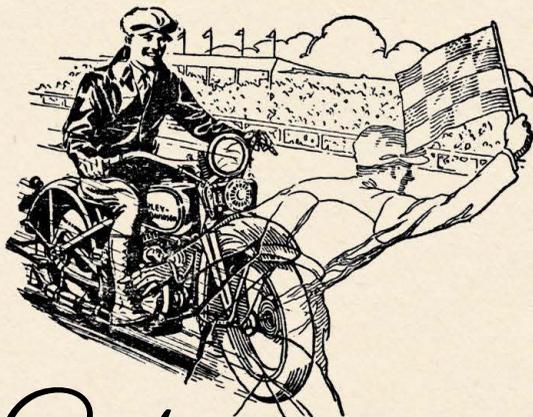
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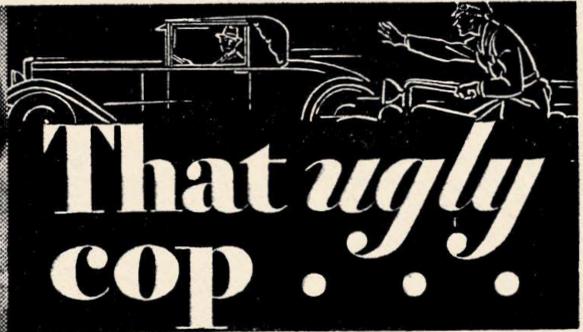
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*"Some cat must have got in through the window."*

# The Feline Phantom

By Gilbert Draper

**A**N old house made over into a modern apartment building is scarcely the place where one would expect to meet with a shocking experience; yet it was in the hundred-dollar-a-month home of my friend Horace Banks that the incident occurred.

Banks and I had been brought up together, for our respective families had purchased adjoining houses before we had reached our 'teens, and it was from these premises that we used to set off for school together every morning. In later life, as often happens with childhood chums, we drifted apart, Banks going abroad

"Humbug" and "rubbish," Banks called the strange tale of soul-tampering. And yet. . . . And yet. . . .

to study foreign languages and I entering upon a journalistic career at home, which, incidentally, is my present means of livelihood. When he returned after an absence of nearly a decade, I found him so changed intellectually that the old relationship was impossible, though

we still remained the best of friends.

Always of a studious nature, Banks had drifted

from philology to psychology, and his knowledge of these and countless other 'ologies impressed me not a little.

He had been made an orphan by the sudden death of his father, a prominent surgeon, who, being a

widower and having no other children, had left him with sufficient means to pursue his hobby of research. We dined together about once a fortnight, sometimes in his apartment and sometimes at the home of my aunt, with whom I boarded. Otherwise we seldom met, for his ways were not mine.

**O**N the night of which I write, we had finished dinner and were enjoying his highly palatable port before a log fire in the living room, when, after a long silence, he said, apropos of nothing in particular: "Harvey, how about letting me put you up for the night?"

The invitation was so unusual that I stared at him. I had not slept under Banks' roof since our school days.

"What in the world for?" I asked.

"When I tell you," he answered, smiling, "you may not want to. The truth is, I'm afraid to sleep here alone to-night."

Not having known my friend, you will not be able to appreciate the absurdity of his remark; but the idea of Banks being afraid to sleep alone so appealed to my sense of the ridiculous that I loudly guffawed. Banks, I should explain, was a most powerful man, with muscles like iron and a constitution envied by all who knew him. If he had any nerves, they were always under perfect control.

"Sorry, old man," I apologized. "I didn't mean to be rude, but you rather surprised me."

"And I'm going to surprise you still more," he returned, his face as solemn as ever.

Forthwith, he embarked upon an account of one of his experiences abroad that revealed to me a new Banks—a romantic Banks and an exceedingly credulous one. It was the story of an aristocratic Persian cat and its untimely end.

"This damn cat," Banks said,

"attracted me the moment I set eyes on her. She was a beauty, I can tell you, with a magnificent tail and eyes like glittering nuggets. I bought her in the slums of Cairo from a ragged street merchant whose only wares were a number of good, bad and indifferent cats. When I had paid him for Cina—that was the beast's name—he insisted upon dragging me into his filthy stall to warn me to protect her with my very life. For, he solemnly swore, were she to meet an unnatural death, whoever owned her at the time would be visited by her spirit on the first anniversary of her death. On the second anniversary, he avowed, the said owner would himself perish miserably.

"Although my common sense told me the old humbug was talking rubbish, I listened to him, at first with amused tolerance, but later with real interest.

**M**ANY years before, so the story went, Cina had come into the possession of one of Persia's greatest physicians, a man who combined modern scientific methods with some of the secrets of ancient sorcery—a rather sinister old gentleman, I gathered. At any rate, shortly after the advent of this cat into his household, he began to devote more and more time to practices that should never have attracted a reputable medical man. The number of his patients began to dwindle, not because his skill had diminished, but because they took exception to the way he treated them. In other words, they objected to being hypnotized instead of anesthetized."

"You mean he could render people insensible to pain by hypnotizing them?" I broke in.

"That's what my informant said. He told me that the doctor, after dabbling for a time in hypnotism,

began delving into the forbidden mysteries of metempsychosis, which, for the benefit of your uninformed mind, I will explain, has to do with the transmigration of the soul after death into the body of another man or lower animal."

"Thanks very much," I remarked dryly.

"Well," continued Horace, knocking his pipe against the grate, "things went from bad to worse, and the once eminent physician degenerated into a student of witchcraft. Now Cina, whose beautiful body was admired by her inhuman master, was made to play an important part in his experiments, and, while he didn't harm her physically, she must have endured the most unheard of tortures mentally, as a later happening proved."

"This sounds like the prologue to a first-class horror story," I put in flippantly, for I had a suspicion that the learned Horace was pulling my leg.

"That's precisely what it is," he replied, ignoring my levity. "And I want to assure you, Harvey, that I'm not telling you this for your entertainment. I'm really serious, and I'm in a worse predicament than I ever imagined a human being could find himself in."

**I** TRIED to look sympathetic. Banks' lugubrious tone was getting tiresome.

"One day," he went on, "a celebrated Indian fakir, who happened to be traveling through Persia, heard of these infamous exploits and, most likely jealous of his own reputation as a master of magic, decided to investigate. Accordingly he disguised himself as a wealthy victim of some obscure disease and called on the doctor for advice, fearing that if he revealed his identity he would not be admitted. At first the ruse succeeded, but when he attempted to go into the

details of his pretended sickness, the wily wizard exposed him as an impostor. Heated words were exchanged, in the course of which the fakir accused the doctor of being a charlatan. At this unpardonable insult, the latter volunteered to give a demonstration of his proficiency in metempsychosis.

"Just at this moment Cina emerged from a corner where she had been sleeping and walked with dignified tread across the room. As she passed her master, she recoiled, spitting viciously. I have already said she had ample reason to fear and hate him.

"The contemptuous fakir pointed triumphantly at the cat. 'The very thing,' he cried mockingly. 'I have no objection to temporarily possessing the body of that comely animal, and I am sure its soul, if it has one, would welcome the novelty of a brief sojourn in mine.' 'As you will,' replied the doctor craftily, seizing Cina by the scruff of the neck and avoiding, as the result of much practice, the waving talons that sought to tear his flesh. After chloroforming the unfortunate animal he placed the inert body on the floor and ordered his visitor to lie down beside it.

**H**ARVEY, I do not expect you to believe the outcome of that grotesque séance, and were it not for what has followed, I, too, would scoff. How he accomplished it, no one will ever know, but a veritable miracle was performed by that Persian doctor. Following God knows what horrible rites, the soul of the fakir entered the body of the cat and for a time lay dormant; but, as soon as Cina's soul, or spirit, had taken possession of the man's body, it realized its new strength, and, with the realization, came a desire for vengeance against the one who had subjected her feline form to such torment.

"A bitter struggle ensued, during which the doctor, stunned by the ferocity of one of his victims, was badly bitten and scratched. To save himself, he seized a heavy scalpel with a razor-like edge which happened to be lying on a nearby table and felled his antagonist with a single, desperate blow. In his terror he struck hard, and the fakir, or Cina, if you will, fell dead with an almost severed head.

"As the eyes of the cat slowly opened, the arch-magician became aware that behind them was an imprisoned soul, doomed to inhabit an animal's body. Aye, he had punished the fakir nicely for his insult! Now to rid himself of the creature, which might prove dangerous.

"Darting from the room, he ran out into the street, determined to rid himself of the cat. And here is where Fate took a hand, for who should be passing the house but my cat merchant with two of his pets in a cage on his back! Imagine his astonishment when the wild-eyed physician offered to give him a beautiful Persian for nothing!

"Of course the man gladly accepted. But as he was turning away, the doctor, doubtless because he knew that the animal's death would release his victim's soul, warned him that if any harm came to Cina, whoever possessed her at the time would be haunted by her spirit on the first anniversary of her death and again the following year, when the phantom would cause him to die in agony. Being superstitious and anxious to make his escape, and convinced he was dealing with a madman, the cat merchant readily promised to repeat the warning to all prospective buyers.

"IT was not until years afterwards that a dismissed servant of the doctor, who had overheard his fantastic conversation with the

fakir, told the story out of malice. Like ripples on a pond the tale spread until eventually it reached the ears of Cina's new master, who for some reason or other had refrained from selling her. I fancy, being superstitious, he had decided to keep the incomparable cat he had obtained for nothing in the hope that she would bring him further good fortune. Unluckily for me, I came upon him at a time when he was hard pressed for money."

Horace paused to re-light his pipe. My own had lain unheeded on the table beside me since shortly after he had started his idiotic reminiscences. To tell the truth, I was getting uneasy. Either he was trying to be facetious at my expense or something had happened to upset his reason.

"Harvey," he said suddenly, "I know that you are thinking this is rot, and I don't blame you. But please hear me out.

"With Cina in a basket under my arm I returned to my hotel. By a strange coincidence, I had been perusing an excellent book on metapsychics by a learned German scholar, who had devoted several chapters to phenomena similar to that recounted by the cat merchant. Under the circumstances, it is hardly to be wondered at that I spent the remainder of the day engrossed in the volume.

"Indeed, so interested did I become that I neglected to go downstairs for dinner, and it was nearly midnight when I finally laid the thing down.

"As I sat there musing over what I had read, my eye chanced to fall upon Cina, who was curled up on the foot of the bed fast asleep. Was it possible, I asked myself, that that sleek body harbored the soul of the fakir?

"At last, thoroughly weary, I went to bed. Cina looked so com-

fortable that I was loath to disturb her, though afterwards I wished I had, God knows.

"HOURS later I became conscious of an inexplicable weight on my chest. With a great effort I opened my sleepy eyes, but when I beheld the ferocity in the glaring yellow orbs of the animal that crouched over my prostrate body, I became stiff with fright.

"Well, I didn't hesitate. I flung the bed clothes over that poor bewitched cat before she could spring. I had to do it: there was not time for a less brutal counter-attack. Yet even now I shudder when I think of her death struggles.

"However, it was not until the squirming form beneath me had lain still for several minutes that I ventured to slide off the bed. I stood soaked in sweat, my body trembling in every limb as I stared with horror at that heap of bedding. Then, as God is my judge, the air was rent by a terrifying *human* groan. That was the last straw. I collapsed senseless on the floor, where I was found the next morning by a maid.

"For several days I tossed delirious on a hospital cot, mumbling God knows what rubbish. When eventually I recovered, I sought forgetfulness in other lands, and for months I wandered disconsolately through Europe. In time the adventure became only a dim memory, though at intervals my sleep was disturbed by nightmarish dreams of huge cats that prowled around my bed or sat back on their haunches regarding me with fearful saucer-like eyes. Naturally I had never taken the Persian doctor's warning seriously, and by the end of the first year I had ceased to even think of it. But the monstrous business was by no means finished, as I was soon to learn.

"ONE night, while staying at a quaint hostelry in Copenhagen, I retired, as was my wont, about midnight. Nothing unusual had happened since the Cairo incident, and I was in a particularly peaceful frame of mind. Certainly I did not expect to be awakened before morning, so you can imagine my sensations when I was aroused after a few hours' sleep by an uncomfortable weight on my chest. As on the previous occasion, I did not immediately open my eyes, but lay, wondering drowsily what was the matter. The first thought to cross my mind was that I had too many bed clothes on, and I was about to toss some of them off when a paralyzing premonition of danger gripped my heart. I lay there in the pitch blackness like a contemptible coward, afraid to open my eyes.

"Gradually a peculiar noise began to beat an insistent tattoo on my eardrums. At first it sounded like the faint hissing a radiator sometimes makes when a little steam is escaping; but, as I listened, with painfully thumping heart, it began to sound horribly like the breathing of a maddened animal—like that of a cat, for example!"

"Horace," I broke in, now thoroughly alarmed, "if this is a joke it has gone far enough. I enjoy a good yarn as much as anybody, but I draw the line when it is told as you are telling this one. Why, you look like a ghost! For Heaven's sake, man, snap out of it!"

"Damn your infernal stupidity, Harvey!" he cried angrily. "I'm not a fool and I don't take you for one. Will you let me finish?"

I subsided uneasily, convinced my friend was on the verge of a nervous breakdown, and permitted him to bring his preposterous story to a conclusion without again interrupting him.

"No man ever opened his eyes

with greater reluctance than I did. I had to look, though, even when I knew I should see something ghastly."

**H**ORACE paused dramatically. "Harvey," he continued, in a slow, impressive voice, "I saw a pair of familiar yellow eyes. They were about a foot from my face. That was all. Apparently the thing didn't have a body. Yet I could feel the weight of something just over my heart—a dead weight, if you understand me, without movement.

"My hands were involuntarily clutching the bed clothes in such a manner that I could easily fling them over the thing on top of me, just as I had over the live Cina the year before. But what was the use? You can't smother a ghost; you can't suffocate something that isn't real. Even in my terrified state, that much was clear.

"Presently came an idea, and no sooner did it occur to me than I acted. Picture me huddled up with my head under the bed clothes, waiting tremulously for that feline phantom to go away! Undignified and absurd, granted, but at least I had escaped temporarily. I could still feel the weight, though it seemed to have shifted. The next minute something was walking over me, back and forth across the bed as if in search of a hole in the covers. Soon my breath became labored, my supply of oxygen being limited; but I would have suffered death rather than move my head from beneath the comparative safety of the bed clothes.

"Harvey, that experience was awful, and I am sure that if I had not heard it jump to the floor and the sound of padded footsteps retreating towards the window, I should have died from suffocation. That would have been retribution with a vengeance, wouldn't it?

"Well, you won't be surprised

to hear that I waited for the dawn in what a rotten writer like you would call 'a cold sweat of terror.' I was afraid to get out of bed for fear of being attacked.

"That's all, Harvey, except that to-night's the night I'm to have a second visit from the departed Cina, who not unnaturally has a grudge against me. It was exactly a year ago that I slept in that Danish hotel, and I am sure the ghost of that cursed cat will come again to-night as I am that you're sitting there. That's why I want you here with me."

**F**OR several minutes after Horace had ceased speaking there was silence between us. My heart was full of pity mingled with contempt for the big man opposite me who had so let his nerves get the better of him that he had become convinced of the reality of some ordinary nightmare. Horace's hallucinations I put down to an unwise supper. Not for a moment did I believe his incredible story about that night in Copenhagen. Either he had had a bad dream or some stray cat had entered his room in search of a sleeping place. In the latter event, he was hardly to be blamed for fancying that Cina's ghost was paying the first of her two promised visits, especially as it happened to be the exact anniversary of her death. That, however, was simply coincidence.

Well, I certainly was not going to become a party to any such foolishness as sitting up to wait for the ghost of a dead cat. Horace, I felt, should be ashamed of himself for making so ridiculous a request. Probably he would apologize in the morning.

When I bade him good night a little later, he helped me into my overcoat without a word. I perceived he was offended that I would not humor him.

I WAS awakened about six o'clock the following morning by the telephone, which is on a table beside my bed. Fumbling for the receiver, I mumbled a sleepy "hello."

"Is that you, Harvey?" I heard my editorial chief inquire briskly. "Say, you'd better hurry over to your friend Horace Banks' place.

He's dead: died during the night. Looks like he'd had a fit in bed. Write us a good story, will you? Oh, and by the way, play up this part of it. Some stray cat must have got in through the window, probably looking for a place to sleep. They say you can see its footmarks on the sill. Too bad, eh!"

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## The Oracle of Delphi

THE origin of the Oracle of Delphi, most famous of the ancient oracles, is unique and most interesting.

One day a goatherd, while following his flocks on their search for food on the acclivity of Mount Parnassus, came to a long deep chasm which appeared in the rock ahead. From this chasm a vapor was issuing, and his goats had no sooner inhaled some of it than they began to play and frisk about with unwonted liveliness. Curious as to the cause, the goatherd himself breathed some of the vapor and shortly he too went into strange attitudes, uttering the while incoherent phrases which were supposed to have contained a prophetic meaning.

A temple to Apollo was erected on the spot, to take advantage of this phenomenon. It was believed that here was a center of divine inspiration.

The apartment of the oracle was placed immediately over the chasm from which the vapors issued. One day in every month a priestess, called the Pythia, delivered the responses to questions asked. She would be led with much ceremony to a tripod, a three-legged stool placed just over the chasm, and there she would sit until the inebriating fumes had taken full possession of her—until her bosom swelled, her features enlarged, her mouth foamed, her voice seemed supernatural and she uttered words hardly articulate. When she was wholly overpowered with the god she seemed with difficulty to be able to contain herself.

After this prelude of unintelligible sounds, uttered with fervor and a sort of frenzy, she became by degrees more distinct. She uttered incoherent sentences, the breaks and pauses filled with abortive efforts and distorted gestures. Priests standing by carefully recorded her words, reducing them to a sort of obscure signification. The fragments were then arranged, digested and delivered to the questioning votaries in hexameter verse.

It is a question to what extent the priests used deliberate cunning in interpreting her incoherences. Great ingenuity and contrivance were no doubt required to

uphold the credit of the oracle, as well as authority and boldness.

While they may have listened to the Pythia with superstitious reverence, they unquestionably took care to keep extensively informed on all matters on which their oracle was apt to be consulted; so, whatever in her wild declamation seemed to bear on the question proposed, they preserved, and whatever was rambling and inapplicable, disregarded.

Probably they had ways of ingeniously worming out the secrets of their suitors without letting the purpose of their questions be suspected. The main support to the prestige of their oracle was, however, the obscurity, almost amounting to unintelligibility, of their responses. Their prophecies in most cases required the connection of the event to make them understandable.

If the event so turned out that it could in no way be twisted to come within the scope of the response, the pious suitor would conclude that the apparent failure was due to the grossness and carnality of his own apprehension, and not to any deficiency of prophetic potency in the oracle; and so the oracle lost no credit even when its meaning remained forever in its original obscurity. When, by good chance, its predictions seemed to be verified, then the unerringness of the oracle was broadcast from nation to nation, and its omniscience admitted with astonishment and adoration.

It is not surprising that the priests who transmitted and interpreted the utterances of the Pythia arrived in time at an extraordinary degree of sagacity and skill. Granted the gullibility or faith of their votaries, their chance to omit what they felt it prudent to omit, to clothe the apparent meaning of their words in obscurity, to devise sentences of ambiguous interpretation that might accord with opposite issues as events fell out—granted this, they had all the trumps in their hand; and their process of "interpreting" the oracle's original ravings may or may not have been consistent with a high degree of sincerity and enthusiasm on their part.

# The Duel of the Sorcerers

*A Complete Novelette*

By Paul Ernst

It is magic in the dark—sorcerer  
against sorcerer—master against  
his hell-bound pupil.

## CHAPTER I

### *Mark of the Fang*

**R**ICK BALLARD gazed once again at the tiny inflamed marks on the throat of the unconscious girl. His face, drawn with worry over this mysterious illness that had attacked her, had grown even more pallid at the words of Tholl.

"But, Professor!" he exclaimed. "What you say is impossible. Impossible! No one but a superstitious child could believe in such things."

Professor Tholl shook his head impatiently. It was a noble head. White hair, cut long, cascaded down almost to his collar; his white beard suggested wisdom and venerability. A large, strong nose rose incisively over firm lips and chin. His eyes were gray, cool and piercing.

"If it is not that—what is it?"

Rick Ballard gnawed at his lip in perplexity.

"How should I know? Even the doctors couldn't tell."

The combined night staff of the hospital had just left the room, after having bent over the girl who lay like a pale statue in her trance-



like state, and studied those inflamed little marks on her throat with the grave profundity of ignorance. No two of the doctors had arrived at the same conclusion regarding the cause of the punctures.

"Of course they couldn't tell," said Professor Tholl. "But *I* can, although I wouldn't dream of declaring the truth to such advanced—scientists." His firm lips moved with a trace of contempt. "I tell

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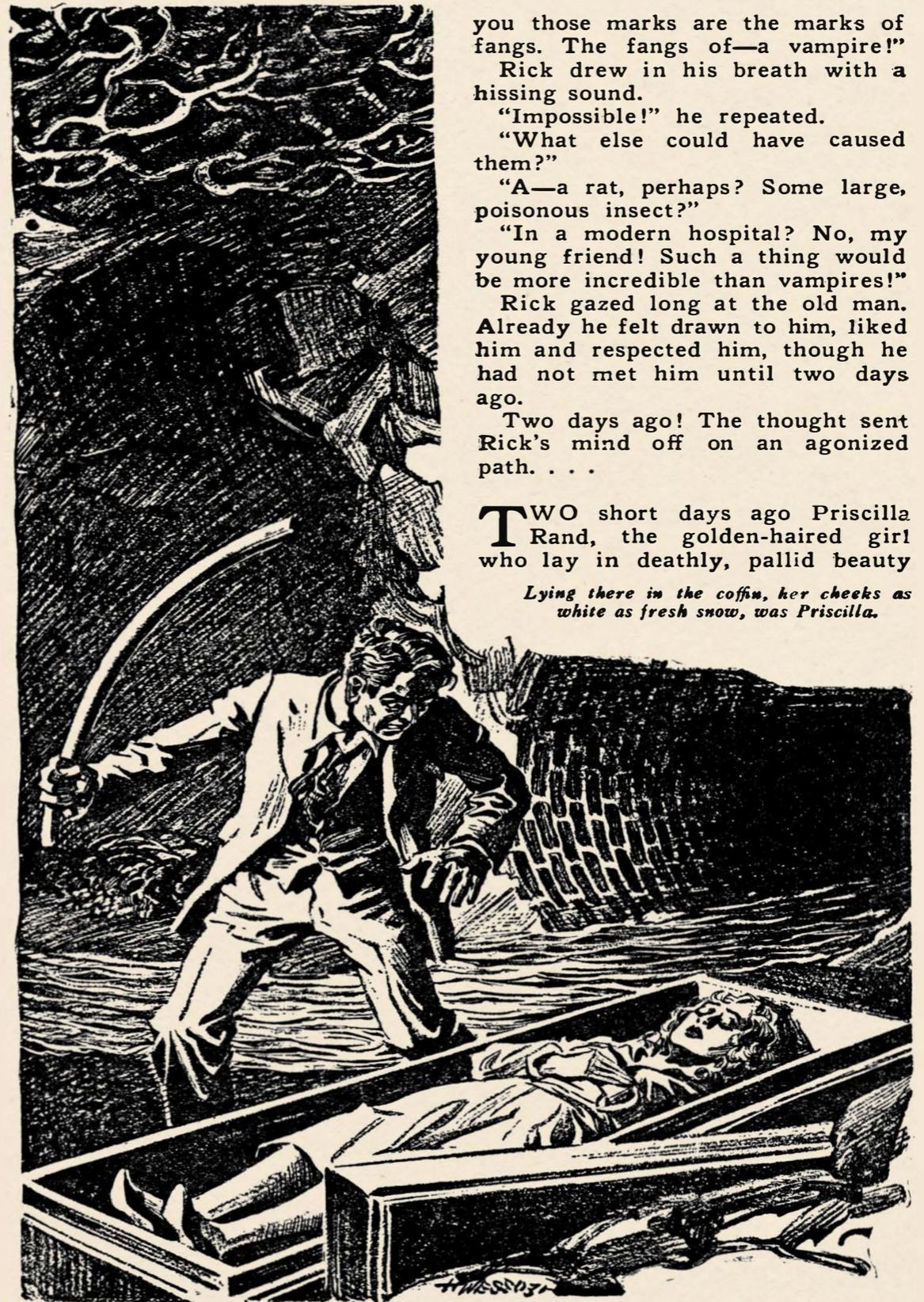
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you those marks are the marks of fangs. The fangs of—a vampire!"

Rick drew in his breath with a hissing sound.

"Impossible!" he repeated.

"What else could have caused them?"

"A—a rat, perhaps? Some large, poisonous insect?"

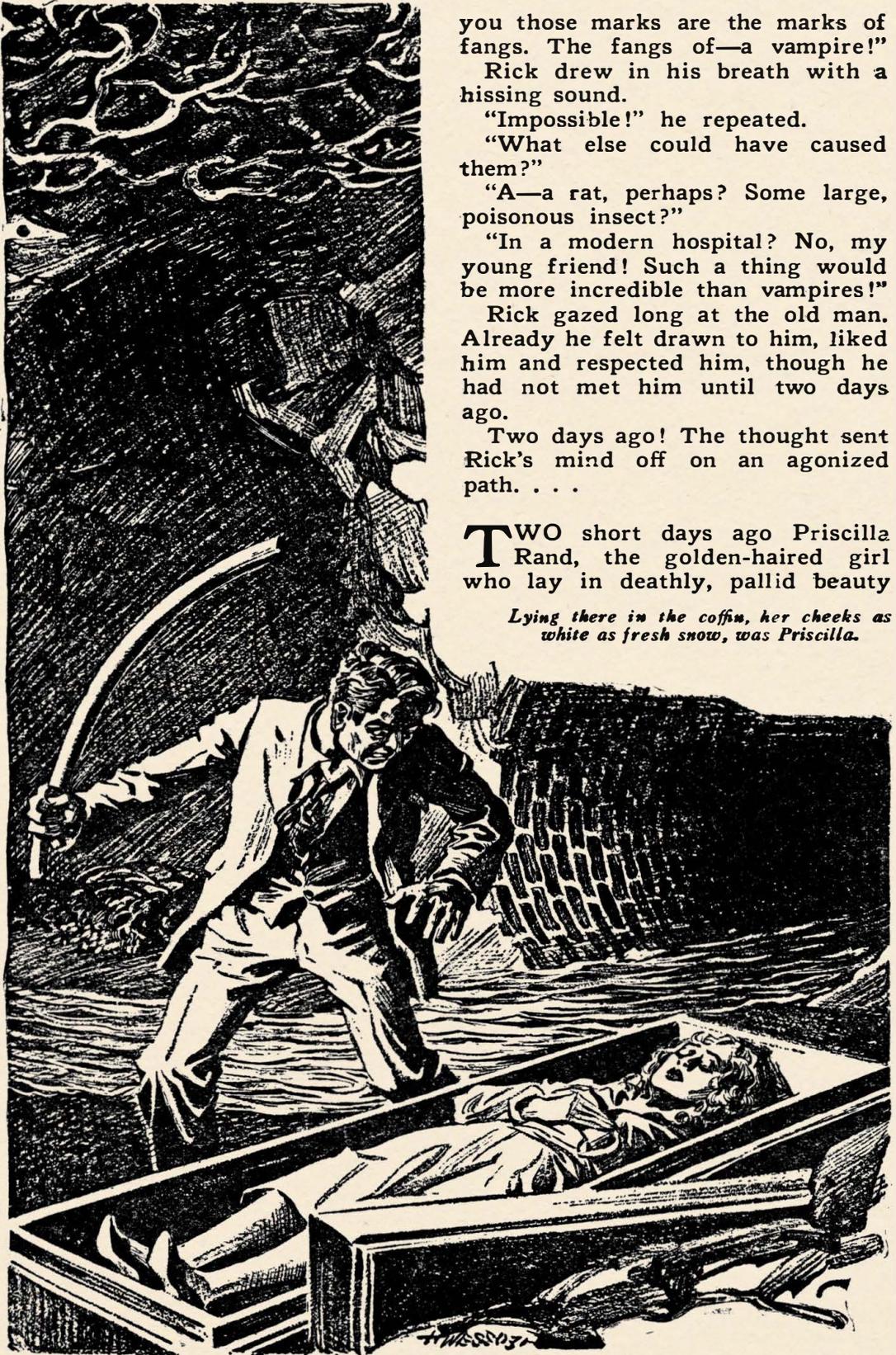
"In a modern hospital? No, my young friend! Such a thing would be more incredible than vampires!"

Rick gazed long at the old man. Already he felt drawn to him, liked him and respected him, though he had not met him until two days ago.

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on the narrow bed, had been normal and healthy. Rick Ballard and she had been an average young engaged couple, who were to be married as soon as his finances permitted. No cloud showed on their sky.

Then, two evenings ago, Rick had called at her home at eight-thirty, to find chaos there and to see the Rand family physician examining an unconscious girl, and to hear him admitting that he did not know what was wrong with her. All he could discover were the two marks on her throat—the marks that appeared to have been produced by some sharp-toothed, rodent thing.

There had followed a trip to the hospital, medical conferences which got nowhere, and forty-eight hours during which Priscilla Rand lay in a coma that defied attempts to bring her to consciousness. Also had followed a night in which two new marks appeared on her throat, just above the partly healed ones that had shown that first night.

On the first night, shortly after Priscilla had been brought in, this Professor Tholl had entered the room. No one of the doctors appeared to have more than a speaking acquaintance with him; none appeared to know just who he was or what he wanted; but he seemed to have unlimited permission in the hospital.

He had stayed with Rick the first night after the others had left, sympathizing with him and studying those small red marks—continually studying them. Now, to-night, he had remained again. And to-night he had made this amazing, the horrible declaration: "Only one thing could have made those marks. A vampire!"

Rick shuddered. Two days ago, at mention of that word, he would have laughed. Now, gazing at those sinister little red dots in the soft white flesh of Priscilla's throat,

and listening to the distinguished-looking elderly man beside him, Rick didn't know what to think!

PROFESSOR THOLL smiled at him. "Is it so hard to believe? But, I tell you, I *know!* Have I spent thirty years of study not to know something of vampirism? Why, the odor in the room, alone, is enough to tell infallibly what's wrong!"

"Odor?" echoed Rick almost stupidly. His eyes, blood-shot with worry, went questioningly toward the professor.

"Yes. Surely you've noticed it—both last night and to-night? I am surprised the physicians here didn't remark on it."

Rick sniffed. He *had* noticed a slight odor, a shade stronger than the smell of antiseptics usually to be found in a hospital, but he had dismissed it from his mind. He wasn't used to hospitals; he had accepted it as a natural odor. Now he concentrated on it again.

More distinctly it came to his nostrils; and now he shivered a little, and an inexplicable icy feeling crept up his spine. A faint but unmistakable smell of things moldering and ancient—a sort of stench of *death*—hung in the air of that small room. Or was it but the product of his imagination. . . .

"You're really smelling it," said Professor Tholl. "You're not imagining it. It is the odor of the vampire. The visiting card, so to speak, a vampire leaves behind. Well, are you convinced?"

"I don't know. . . ." whispered Rick.

"But you *must* be convinced!" said the professor earnestly. "I need your help, Mr. Ballard. And to help me—you must believe! I think I can prove to you that I am right."

"In heaven's name—how?" Rick burst out.

Tholl leaned again over the unconscious girl. He listened to her faint breathing, stared at the red marks. Then he nodded his head.

"I am almost certain that tonight the vampire was driven off by the appearance of the night nurse before he had completed his unearthly purpose. The regularity of Miss Rand's breathing, and the look of those fang marks, both indicate it. If that is true, he may return! We will watch and see."

"But—" Rick stopped. Then he spread his hands in a gesture of utter despair. "All right. I'll do anything you say. Anything! Consider me entirely in your hands."

**E**FFICIENTLY, methodically, Professor Tholl set the stage for the possible return of the thing he stated was responsible for Priscilla Rand's baffling illness.

He turned out the lights, save for a dim night-light. He opened the window, deliberately, a foot or more, and closed the transom. Then he called the night nurse and informed her that he would be in attendance on Miss Rand all night, and that she needn't come to her room unless specifically summoned. After that, calling an interne, he arranged for Rick and himself to spend the rest of the night in the room directly across the hall.

At five minutes past one they went to this room—to wait. Tholl closed the door. . . .

"But, assuming there really is truth in what you've told me," expostulated Rick, "how will you know when the—the thing has attacked her if you keep the door closed?"

"My boy," said Professor Tholl, laying his hand for a moment on Rick's shoulder, "a little later, when, God willing, we have trapped this creature of darkness, I will tell you something of myself and of the powers I have cultivated.

Just now I'll only say—I will know."

Rick's lips opened for a bewildered reply, but the professor held up his hand sharply for silence. He motioned to the bed. Rick sat down on it. The professor seated himself on the chair, and at once assumed an attitude so intent, so strained, that Rick could only stare at him with increased bewilderment in which was mingled a vague fear of imminent evil.

**T**HERE settled over them an intense, painful silence. Now and then soft footsteps sounded in the corridor outside as the night nurse for the floor answered some number flashed on the frosted glass of the callboard. From far away came the chime of a tower-clock marking the quarter-hours. Save for these sounds there was no noise.

Forty-five minutes passed, during which Rick felt a mounting premonition grow in his heart—a premonition that some dreadful thing was about to happen. Forty-five minutes in which the white-haired man beside him sat as motionless and rigid as a block of stone, concentrating in some obscure way on the strange thing he asserted threatened Priscilla Rand in the room across the hall.

And now the professor's attitude was broken. He sat up straighter. His hands clenched. His eyes narrowed to flaming gray slits.

"It's come!" he said tensely. "It's come! And—it is *he!*"

He started for the door, moving quickly but noiselessly.

"Follow me," he whispered to Rick. "But on your life make no sound."

Rick tiptoed after him, out the door, across the corridor, to the door of Priscilla's room. And as he went, he felt the cold perspiration start out on his body, felt his heart pounding violently. Professor

Tholl's every look and gesture implied authority and learning. In spite of all his training, in spite of all his sophisticated contempt for "superstitions," Rick felt that this man must be right in whatever he might say.

But, if Tholl was right, what awful spectacle would be revealed behind the closed door of Priscilla's room!

The professor glanced at Rick. "Steady!" he whispered. "Keep your head, whatever happens."

Then, with a long breath, the professor laid his hand on the knob, turned it abruptly, flung open the door and bounded into the dimly lit room with Rick close behind.

**N**EVER would Rick forget the sensation of that moment—the first dreadful knowledge of the presence they had surprised at its dread work within those four walls. The shock was stamped on his brain in lines of flame.

First there was the odor of corruption as they stood inside the closed doorway and blinked in the dim light. That terrible, sickening stench! Stronger, more intense it now was than it had been when Rick had first noticed it. This was the unmistakable odor of the grave—of rotting corpses and utter putridity. It was breath-taking, overpowering. He felt that if he was forced to breathe it any longer he would go mad!

And then he saw the thing they had come to seek; saw it on the bed with Priscilla—on her very pillow, half hidden by her long golden hair—next her bared throat.

Something small and dark and batlike, it was barely to be seen in the vague light. Something with a reddened and repulsive snout, that stared at them with beady, wicked eyes, and squeaked and mewed. Something that flapped loathsome wings and darted up in flight—even

as Professor Tholl leaped to the window and closed it shut.

"We've got him!" grated Tholl, his voice harsh with triumph. "By heaven, we've got him! My sin is expiated—"

Hoarse despair suddenly cracked his voice. "The transom!" he cried. "My God, the transom—"

Rick whirled to stare at it. They had left it closed when they left Priscilla's room, but now it was open. Even as he leaped to draw down the sliding transom-rod, there was a rapid rustling of the dry wings. A loathsome soft, furred thing darted up toward the transom. For an instant it darkened the light shining in from the hall outside. Then, with one final sharp squeak, it was gone.

## CHAPTER II

### *Doctor Quoy*

**T**HE professor groaned aloud. His shoulders drooped; his silvery beard swept his broad old chest as his head was bowed at an angle of utter defeat and abasement.

"Fool! Fool!" he muttered. "The chance of my lifetime to exterminate him like the deadly rat he is—and I hadn't wit enough to observe that he'd opened the transom to provide a way of escape for himself! May God forgive me."

Rick, meanwhile, was gasping in the poisonous air of the room.

"Do you mind—" he said finally, "is it all right to open the window? This sickening smell. . . ."

"Yes, yes, open it," said Tholl wearily. "It doesn't matter now. Nothing matters. He's escaped—gone. . . ."

Rick flung the window open, and gradually the odor of corruption and death faded from the room. Then he bent over Priscilla Rand, who still lay motionless on the bed—a marble white figure that

might have been mistaken for a statue save for her faint breathing.

In Rick's eyes was a new frenzy of fear for her, now that he had seen what he had, and could no longer believe that the impossible, the terrible diagnosis of Professor Tholl was incorrect.

He turned toward the old man. "And now?" he said.

"Now we'll go across to the room assigned us. But this time we'll leave the door open! Our enemy is still very near us. I can feel that . . . sense it. . . ."

Tholl started toward the door. But before he could reach it, it had swung open to reveal a figure.

**I**T was an ordinary figure, a body of average height, clad in the plain dark garments of the professional man. But the face atop the conventionally draped shoulders was far from average!

It was a long and narrow countenance, with a long, high-arched nose and a narrow, long chin. In the dead whiteness of the skin—an unwholesome, greenish pallor—were set blood-red lips like a fresh wound. The eyes were dark and narrow and had a hint of a slant like the eyes of an Oriental, but as none of the other features carried out the hint, this was probably an individual and not a racial peculiarity.

The man stood there a moment, peering at them out of his secretive, narrow, black eyes.

"What are you doing here?" he demanded curtly at last. "The hospital has long been closed to visitors for the evening."

Rick glared. He had seen this curious looking fellow, one of the staff doctors, once before; and he had formed for him one of the reasonless, instantaneous hatreds with which complete strangers now and then inspire one.

"We have permission to be here,"

he said angrily. He turned to the professor for confirmation. But Tholl seemed not to have heard what had been said. He was staring at the doctor, staring with an odd intensity that left deep puckers around his keen old eyes.

And then came a most unlooked-for interruption.

**F**ROM the bed behind them sounded a rustling of bed-clothes. Priscilla Rand, immobile as a statue for over forty-eight hours, was moving!

Both Rick and Tholl whirled to gaze at her. . . .

She was sitting bolt upright. Her pale lips were parted a trifle; her face, framed by her silky gold hair, had the dreamy look of a sleepwalker; and her wide eyes were turned full on the red-lipped, dark-eyed doctor.

Then, abruptly, she screamed. It was terrible, that sound, cutting like a knife thrust through the air of the bleak room.

"Oh!" she choked, raising her hand to point fearfully at the doctor. "Oh! Stop him! Stop—"

She fell back on the bed, as lifeless as before.

Tholl's bearded lips writhed back in a snarl that was almost animalistic as he turned to face the doctor.

"So it's you!" he grated. "You! Spawn of hell! And you dare to stand there and ask me what I'm doing here!"

Cold curiosity was the only emotion reflected on the doctor's face. He smiled, a maddening, supercilious smile that made Rick ache to plant his fist in the death mask of a countenance, though he had as yet no idea of the real significance of the scene.

"You have made a mistake in identities," the man told Tholl. "I'm quite sure we've never seen each other before. My name is—"

"Your name is Quoy!" burst out

the professor, his voice cracking with impotent rage. "And you saw me, just three minutes ago, in this room!"

"You must be insane," replied the doctor. "Come, will you leave here peaceably, or shall I have you thrown out?"

Tholl was so enraged he could not reply. For a moment Rick feared he might be about to have a seizure; but after a time the professor regained control of himself.

"We shall leave for the present, Doctor Quoy. But we shall spend the rest of the night across the corridor from this room, with both doors open so we can see this girl and be able to rush to her side at a moment's notice if necessary. And we shall not leave *you* for long. Your career is nearly done! You understand?"

**A** MOCKING glint appeared in the doctor's beady black eyes, but he only said: "I understand nothing save that you must be mad."

He stood aside in a manner so compelling that there was nothing for Rick and the professor to do but walk out of the room.

They crossed the corridor to the room given them earlier in the evening. The man, Doctor Quoy, watched them closely, his narrow eyes glittering in the corridor light.

"Good night, Professor," he said suavely, when they had reached their door, and stood pointedly holding it open so they could gaze across and see the sleeping girl.

Tholl glared at him, his shoulders erect and defiant. But when the doctor had turned and walked away, when the chalk-white, red-lipped countenance was no longer in sight, the professor's attitude changed. All the defiance went out of it.

"Who is he?" demanded Rick.

Tholl gazed at him with somber

eyes. "Can you ask? Didn't you notice his lips?"

"Yes, but—"

"You didn't notice anything peculiar about them?"

"It struck me they were unusually red, that's all."

"You didn't see—that tiny drop of blood at their corners?"

Rick felt the hair on his scalp crawl.

"You mean. . . ." he whispered at last, though now, of course, he knew.

"I mean that he is our antagonist—that smooth-spoken, snaky-eyed creature that just ordered us out of Miss Rand's room."

Rick started twice to speak before he could get his incoherent thoughts into words.

"Professor, this is—I can't quite—I think you'd better explain, as well as you can, what this is all about. I hope"—he smiled wanly—"you have a fairly reasonable explanation to make. I'm not feeling at all sure of my sanity right now!"

"You're sane enough, my son," sighed Tholl; "though perhaps, when you've heard the explanation you ask for, you'll wish for the forgetfulness of madness. But I'll tell you as simply as I can the events leading up to this scene you just witnessed in Miss Rand's room."

### CHAPTER III

#### *The Black Arts*

**T**HE things I am about to tell you," said Professor Tholl, pacing back and forth across the floor as he talked, "are things which, in this so-called civilized age, are held to be unbelievable. Nevertheless, I think you will believe them; you've seen the results of one of their manifestations!"

"Thirty years ago I was fortunate enough—or so I thought then—to receive an inheritance from an un-

cle that let me resign my chair at a western college and devote my time to a hobby that had fascinated me since childhood. That hobby was supernatural control of natural phenomena. In a word, what used to be called black magic.

"It was always a conviction of mine that there was some real basis for the old superstitions; that certain beings were able to do miraculous things as a result of their mastery of occult powers; that, centuries ago, there really existed such persons as wizards, witches, magicians.

"With this inheritance, I was able to go into the subject with perfect freedom and to give it my utmost powers of concentration. I devoted to the task the large amount of money I now had at my disposal, and a brain trained to think along logical, constructive lines.

"As a first step I accumulated a library such as never before in history had been collected under one roof. Every tattered old parchment on demonology and witchcraft that I could find I bought and studied. In my library I had over four thousand works of this sort, the majority of them being the only existing copies of their kind and, I am sure, unknown to any other collectors.

"In addition I equipped a chemical laboratory in my house and set out with the latest and most modern apparatus to test the ancient magic formulae listed in my dusty books to see if they would work. Some of them did! I won't go into details. I'll only say that some of the experiments I brought to successful conclusions there in my lonely laboratory should have driven any mortal into giving up the subject in terror and burning the whole gruesome library of formulae and incantations. I did burn it, later . . . too late. . . .

"**R**ASHLY, I went on and on with the work. And five years ago, after twenty-five years of intensive study that will certainly earn me an eternity in Hell, I learned something that I considered my crowning discovery.

"I learned that there existed a certain hitherto unheard of chapter of the works of Cagliostro, the great Italian necromancer, which contained texts more revolutionary, more staggering to the imagination in the power they gave their possessor, than all the works of all my library combined!

"I determined to get this fragment of Cagliostro's book of rituals. As I was getting old and knew there would be a long period of searching needed to uncover this rare document, I decided to hire an assistant to help me.

"Naturally, I picked an assistant with a great deal of care. Such work as mine was dangerous, not only because of the risk involved in dealing with supernatural things, but also because of the attitude the majority of the public has in regard to such matters. Most people haven't got out of the old witch-burning attitude; I didn't dare take any chances of my line of endeavor being made public.

"The man I finally hired seemed ideal. He was from a famous college, extremely intelligent, quiet and self-effacing. He was a graduate physician. From the very start, he showed an interest in demonology fully as great as my own—so great, indeed, that I could not resist the temptation to teach him all I knew and have him help me in the laboratory as well as in the work of tracing that fatal lost chapter of Cagliostro's. His name was Quoy—Doctor Herbert Quoy.

"**T**HREE years went by. Twice I sent Doctor Quoy to Italy to verify rumors of the location of

the document I sought. Each time he came back and reported failure to find it. Meanwhile, the student was surpassing the master! I was neither stupid nor ungifted at my chosen work; but he, it seemed, had pure genius for it. Rapidly I found my own knowledge and ability along the forbidden line of the black arts being eclipsed by his. It puzzled me that with three years of effort, he could go beyond the mark I had reached in nearly thirty years. But I soon found the reason for it!"

The muscles of Tholl's jaws set in harsh ridges.

"I came into the laboratory unexpectedly one day to find him attempting an experiment of his own—working on calculations which, it developed, were to cheat death in a way I will make clear in a moment or two.

"Warned by a queer new rebelliousness against my authority that had lately come into Quoy's bearing, I had forbidden him to use my apparatus or library alone. When I saw him now, I was angry; and I tiptoed toward him, intending to administer a punishment, with a simple occult formula I know, that should teach him manners in the future! So, moving softly, I got near enough to see over his shoulder, and to observe that he was reading a discolored old parchment written in Latin.

"I saw at a glance that it was not a parchment I was familiar with, so I looked closer. And, as he turned a page, I saw a heading—a name—that sent the lust of murder to my heart.

"The document was the lost chapter of Cagliostro! He had actually unearthed it on one of his trips to Italy, and had returned to lie about its discovery and keep it for himself! Wonderful, dreadful storehouse of supernatural power! *That* was why he had progressed so

swiftly in our experiments. *That* was why his three short years of experience had made him more adept at the dark arts than my thirty years had made me.

"**A**T this point he became aware of my presence. He jumped up, with the look of a fiend in his eyes, and his hands began to weave rapidly before my face in a way that would presently call down on me one of the deadliest spells described in my secret library.

"More quickly than I had thought I could force my old body to move, I had leaped at him and knocked him down. In the fall his head struck the corner of a workbench. . . ."

The professor's hands moved spasmodically at his sides.

"I went a little insane during the next few moments. I believe now he was dead with the force of the blow against the workbench. But I didn't think of that, then. I caught up a heavy stool, and my arms were tired before I stopped bringing it down, with all my strength, on his head. Minutes had passed before I regained my self control—to find myself gazing down at a man whom, in the eyes of our civilized laws, I had murdered.

"I had no remorse for that murder. I knew I had rid the world of a great potential menace, for I knew now that this man was all evil—an evil intelligence, linked with all the hellish knowledge contained in Cagliostro's document. What chaos the combination might not accomplish!

"I hid the body in a secret vault in the cellar of the big house I own, here in the city. I burned my library, all but the precious Cagliostro, which I couldn't bear to part with. I easily turned aside all inquiries into the disappearance of my employee, Doctor Quoy.

And I thought that the matter was closed. This was two years ago."

THE professor groaned and buried his head in his hands.

"I soon found that I was hideously wrong—that the matter was *not* closed! I discovered it because I came home late one evening from a visit with a friend to find my Cagliostro gone!

"The library, now furnished with ordinary books, had been double-locked when I went out, and when I came in was still double-locked. The safe, in which I had put the invaluable document, was still closed and showed no signs of having been tampered with. Yet when I opened it the chapter was gone!

"There could only be one answer to the problem of its theft. But for a time my mind refused to accept that answer. . . .

"I went upstairs to my laboratory, more dead than alive, and employed all my acquired powers of divination to the problem. All the rest of the night I worked. And I learned at last just what had occurred.

"Doctor Quoy had passed from life to death with full knowledge of Cagliostro's secret of circumventing death impressed on his intelligence. Of partially circumventing it, that is; only partially! Which is at once the most terrible part of the whole thing—and the chief weapon in our hands.

"The evil soul of the man had sought and found a lodging in some body of one who had just died a natural death. That body—not mutilated beyond usage as I had mutilated his—he could not bring to life. But he could preserve it indefinitely, bend it to his bidding—*undead!* Through special arts, he could make of himself a vampire and still mingle with the world of the living, though not actually alive

himself. And so he goes, with infinite powers at his command to do his evil will—a corpse unburied, animated with a live man's hate, bound to the frightful existence of the vampire.

"And that, my friend, is the Thing that now confronts us!"

RICK drew a long breath. Then he sprang to his feet and started hastily toward the door.

"Stop!" commanded the professor. "Where are you going?"

"To turn this monster over to the police!" exclaimed Rick. But Tholl slowly shook his head.

"I thought so. But really it won't do. Can't you guess what would happen to you if you went to the police with any such tale as this, in spite of the proof offered by the fang marks on Priscilla's throat?"

Rick stopped in his tracks. He *could* guess. Easily! He would land in a madhouse!

Then he started on again, red glints in his eyes. But again the professor stopped him as he read his thoughts.

"It will do you no good to seek out this Doctor Quoy personally, either. In the first place, you would be as helpless as a child in his hands. In the second place, he won't be here any longer."

"Why won't he?"

Professor Tholl pointed to the window. The first red streaks of dawn were showing.

"As a vampire, he is chained to darkness. From sundown to sunrise he moves and has consciousness. During the daylight hours he must lie in his vampire's trance in whatever dark hiding place he has found for himself."

Rick was unsatisfied with this. Incredulously, he went on out into the corridor. He returned in a moment, biting his lips.

"Well?" said Tholl.

"The night nurse says Doctor

Quoy has gone. She says he is never to be found in the hospital after four in the morning."

**D**URING all the professor's bizarre account, Rick had wavered between credulity and unbelief. Naturally enough, all his training—the training of all normal people—argued against the possibility of such things. Now he burst out with one of his doubts.

"You say this man, Doctor Quoy, worked with you for three years. Yet you didn't recognize him, in Priscilla's bedroom, for several minutes. How was that?"

"Because the body he now inhabits is not the body I was familiar with," Tholl pointed out. "You remember, I said his spirit—soul, intelligence, call it what you please—took possession of the remains of another man, one whom I'd never seen, when I clubbed his own body into such a state that he couldn't use it any more. That was why I could recognize the essential Quoy only by the agitation of Priscilla Rand and by that little drop of fresh blood my old eyes finally distinguished on his lips."

"How did you happen to be here so opportunely in the first place?" demanded Rick bluntly.

"For the last two years," replied Tholl, "ever since my discovery that this evil genius was still abroad, I have haunted every hospital, every hotel and rooming house, every place in the city where people sleep in large numbers, on the chance that some poor unfortunate would turn up with those significant fang marks on his throat. When I heard of such a case here at Grace Hospital, I rushed over at once to see if at last I was on the track of Quoy. The rest you know."

A long, uneven sigh came from Rick's lips. "Yes, the rest I know.

And I believe now . . . there's nothing else for it but to believe. But, Professor, now that you have succeeded in locating this menace, what's to be done about it?"

**A** GRIM look came over Tholl's venerable old face.

"As I said, in Doctor Quoy's vampirism lies his vulnerability, and our chief weapon. We cannot attack him with much hope of success when he is fully conscious, or when he is clothed in man's form. But if we could locate the hiding place where he lies in a coma every day, or if we could trap him in his helpless bat-shape as we nearly succeeded in doing just a few hours ago. . . ."

The gleam that came into his fanatic old eyes completed the meaning of his sentence.

"Why," said Rick gloomily, "did this horrible thing have to smash into the lives of Priscilla and myself? Why was Priscilla picked out as one of the victims?"

"That was pure fate," said Tholl. "Out of the hundreds of thousands of women in the city, Priscilla was happened on by Quoy. It might have been any other. But as long as it was Priscilla, and as long as you are so directly involved, you will help me exterminate this fiend?"

"With my life," said Rick. "Give me whatever orders you please, and I'll see that they're carried out!"

The broad firm hand of the young man met the slightly unsteady hand of the old one in a tight clasp. And there in the chill hospital room, only a few feet away from the beautiful, unconscious victim of the monster armed so terribly with Cagliostro's dark knowledge, they formed their allegiance. Then they went to Professor Tholl's huge old house to get what rest they could during the balance of the forenoon.

## CHAPTER IV

*The Enemy Retreats*

IT was early afternoon. The two had slept fitfully, all morning; and now, with little appetite, they were having an uneasy breakfast.

"Shouldn't we have got Quoy's address from the hospital last night, and forced our way in there at once?" said Rick.

"For what reason?" inquired the professor.

"To try to catch him there un-awares."

Tholl's heavy eyebrows went up. "I'm afraid you don't understand the nature of our struggle with this man—this animated corpse, to be exact—even yet. Do you really think he would stay openly at a known address during the daylight hours when he is powerless?"

"He might."

"There's little chance of that."

"Anyway," said Rick doggedly, "I think we ought to phone the hospital, find out where he lives, and pay the place a visit just on the chance."

The professor shrugged. "Well, it won't hurt, I suppose," he decided. "I know in advance we won't find Quoy there. But we may find some possession of his, some weapon to be turned against him."

Rick telephoned the hospital and found that Doctor Quoy was listed as residing in a large, well known apartment building about half a mile from Tholl's house. Also, Rick found out something which astonished him, but which the professor had rather expected.

Doctor Quoy had resigned precipitately from the hospital. He had sent his resignation by messenger immediately after leaving, just before dawn, that morning.

"Hopeful, in a way," muttered Tholl. "It shows he fears us at least a little. Only too little, prob-

ably. He knows, and rightly, that he is my superior in occult power. Well, shall we go?"

A FEW minutes later they stood before the hall door of the apartment given as Doctor Quoy's. Boldly, Rick rang the bell. But there was no answer.

"How will we get in?" he asked. Simple as the point was, he hadn't thought of it till now. "I suppose we could break the door down, but that would raise a lot of nuisance for us."

The professor motioned him to stand aside. "Bolts and keys are not the only things that open doors," he said.

Whereupon, he did a curious thing. Rick couldn't quite see what it was, and was never afterward able exactly to describe it. He only knew that the professor's hand barely touched the door knob. The extreme tips of his fingers passed lightly over the polished brass just once. Then his hand seemed to tense, and Rick saw his thumb curve inward till the nail was on his palm.

"Now, open it," said Tholl calmly, stepping back.

Rick turned the knob. The door opened.

"For the good of society," he exclaimed, "I hope you never turn criminal, Professor!"

"And how about the creature who already *has* turned criminal—whose powers make mine look like child's play?" rejoined Tholl.

Rick was silent at that, while a new conception of precisely what they were up against, was born in his mind.

THE two men entered the apartment. As Tholl had been sure it would be, the place was empty. Furthermore, it was stripped of most of its belongings. All Quoy's personal effects were gone; only a

few unimportant possessions were left. He had fled.

The professor disregarded this evidence of flight, which to Rick was crushing discovery. With his silvery beard almost touching the floor, he crouched here and there, like a great animal on a scent, searching for something.

"What are you hunting for?" said Rick.

"For anything that might give us a clue as to Quoy's real quarters," said the professor abstractedly. "The secret, hidden place where he sleeps the daily sleep of the vampire—and where we can ferret him out and drive an aspen stake through his heart! That's what we must discover now. For never again, I'm afraid, will we have the opportunity to crush him while he's busy at his vampire feast."

For nearly an hour they searched the place; but there was uncovered only one thing out of the ordinary, one clue: a sort of miniature stage set up on an escritoire. Over the top of this boxlike little contrivance were draped strings, as though puppets were moved over the stage for some reason or other. A mysterious, seemingly useless device it seemed to Rick. To the professor its fiendish meaning was plain enough; but it added nothing to his inadequate store of information. He knew only that Doctor Quoy, while mocking him at the hospital the night before, had yet deemed him a worthy enough opponent to hide securely from him.

"And with a whole city to hide in, we'll never find him!" despaired Rick. "Meanwhile—what about Priscilla?"

"Perhaps he won't attack her again," said the professor, though his eyes evaded Rick's as he said it. "But he'll certainly attack us! You and I are the only two who know his secret. He can never rest

till he's destroyed us. It's through attacks he'll probably make on us in the near future that we may be able to trace him. We'll hope so, anyhow."

**T**HEY left the doctor's deserted rooms, then, and went to the hospital. There they were greeted with good news. Priscilla had finally regained consciousness, to tell them, with horror-filled eyes, of vague and terrible dreams that had pursued her during the black hours of her trance.

Until nearly midnight Tholl and Rick stayed with her. Then Rick, upon her falling into a normal sleep, decided to go home and get some of his things.

"No, no!" said Tholl. "You're safer here. You can't go out at this time of night—alone!"

"I just want to go to my diggings long enough to get a change of linen and my razor and a few other things," Rick said. But the professor would not hear of this.

"Send a messenger for them, or wait until to-morrow. What may threaten you away from my poor protection, I can't say. But *something* might."

Seeing the old man's perturbation, Rick promised to send for his clothes. But as soon as he had left to go to the desk to phone, he changed his mind. It had suddenly struck him that there was a principle at stake here; a point of honor that was not to be disregarded.

"Let that poisonous rat drive me away from my own home?" snapped Rick at last. "I'm damned if I will!"

He left word at the desk for the professor that he had gone to his apartment, but would be right back, and then went out onto the street.

In Priscilla's room, Tholl shifted his chair nearer the bed while his eyes were almost unblinking in

their alertness. Should those tiny, ominous marks appear once more on the girl's throat, should the vampire visit her once again, it was probable she would sink into an unconsciousness from which she would never wake!

## CHAPTER V

### *Minions of Death*

**A**FTERWARD, in the light of the sinister things he came to learn, Rick could hardly conceive of the foolhardiness that had led him to go alone, in the dead of night, to his apartment.

At the time, however, he thought little of the risk because of his ignorance of the sort of thing that might happen. At most he imagined Doctor Quoy might force his way in and attack him personally; an attack he welcomed rather than feared. At the least—and this was his inward conviction—he would not be molested at all.

In his ignorance, then, and in his weariness and desire for a change into clean things, he had almost dismissed Doctor Quoy and all his possible machinations from his mind by the time he got to his own door.

Mechanically, his thoughts mainly occupied by Priscilla, he fumbled for his key, opened the outer vestibule door, and started up the stairs to his rooms.

Almost stumbling in his fatigue, he let himself in and switched on the lights. Retaining only enough sense of caution to lock and double-lock the door behind him, he went to the bedroom and began packing his suitcase.

When it was that he first noticed the odor, he could not afterward determine. It was very faint at first, so faint that it probably had begun to seep into the room almost with the moment of his entrance. But he had packed his

things and had half undressed for a shower-bath before he threw back his head and sniffed in a startled, puzzled way.

Even then, for a second or two, he wasn't quite sure.

"Funny," he mumbled aloud—that first unconscious recognition of danger when a person talks aloud to bolster up his courage—"funny, I thought I smelled something odd."

His voice died away as suddenly; he *knew* he had smelled something odd! Something he had smelled before!

A strange and ghastly odor of the grave! Of things long dead and clad in mildewed, clotted shrouds, of putrefaction and corruption, of inanimate lumps that rotted in secret places, buried from the light of the sun and the vision of mortal eyes!

**R**ICK froze into immobility. Every nerve in his body seemed to jump and twitch. An icy chill started at the tips of his feet and crept slowly up to his set jaw, till the jaw muscles quivered and strained in ridges that distorted his face.

The stench of death! The visiting card of the vampire—more particularly, of the deadly Doctor Quoy! It was filling the place now till he gasped for breath, till he felt as if he must surely suffocate in the foul atmosphere.

For a long moment Rick stood there, in a room seemingly deserted save for himself, but which he knew was slowly being occupied by another—a dreadful—tenant. Each beat of his heart exaggerated the sensations of suffocation. His tongue seemed glued to the roof of his mouth. The veins in his neck seemed to swell and harden till the odd thought assailed him that if they were touched they would snap like dry twigs.

Then Rick moved. He started to leave the room, running toward the hall door. This stench . . . this loathsome signature of Quoy . . . never had he known such panic fear as it induced. Escape was all that was in his mind now!

He had almost got out of the room when the events presaged by the terrible odor began.

The first manifestation was a sudden paralysis, binding him from head to foot until it was only with difficulty that he could roll his eyeballs. Lot's wife, turned to a pillar of salt, could have been no more helpless and rigid.

He had got near enough the bedroom doorway to be able to look through it and see the hall door and the possible escape it represented. Yet he could no more complete that short journey than he could fly.

And now a smothered gasp came from Rick's stiff lips—a gasp that was intended for a shout.

Something soft and slimy, something boneless and smooth and loathsome, had crawled over his stockinged foot!

**H**E fought against the rigidity that held him, willed his head to tilt downward that he might see what dread thing it was that had crawled across his flesh, to leave its viscous cold trail behind it. His head remained set on his neck, locked immovably on his shoulders. Not even the inch that would have allowed him to see the floor at his feet, could he move it.

Then, while his straining eyes tried to roll down enough to vision whatever repulsive mass it was that had touched him, another slimy body trailed its cold length over his instep. And another! And then a fourth! And now his eyeballs, straining downward, caught just a flash of some moving, tapered, yel-

lowish-white thing that might have been the tail of some unbelievably huge, white earthworm.

The stench of the grave grew even more appalling. Rick gagged in the poison of it. Gagged—then gasped for breath again. . . .

Something crawling and hairy had started a slow, tortuous, many-legged path down his bare arm!

In the thin air of the doorway before him, a tiny commotion began to be visible to him. The air wavered and shimmered in ragged small columns, much as heat rays shimmer and vibrate above a hot plate in the sun.

The small columns shaped into more definite lines and grew less shifting in movement. They grew clearer, bolder. White patches etched themselves in behind them. Two narrow, dark slits split the white patches. A blood-red, writhing gash appeared suddenly over a triangle that was now revealed as a long, narrow chin.

Stunned, reeling with horror, Rick found himself gazing at the pallid face of Doctor Quoy.

**B**ODILESS, motionless, it hung there in the doorway, revealed in every detail by the bright electric lights. And Rick stared at it with glazing eyes, his hypnotized gaze going from the blood-red, repulsive lips to the drab, somehow dead-looking hair that sprouted from grayish skin, drawn parchment-tight over a veritable death's-head.

The crimson lips—so terribly suggestive of fresh blood—moved slightly. Words came to Rick's consciousness: “. . . for daring to interfere . . . my existence . . . you shall die. . . .”

“Damn you! Damn you! Get back to whatever Hell it is you come from!”

In a gasping whisper these words came to Rick's ears. He tottered

a little. The whisper had seemed to be his. But he had willed the words to be screamed aloud defiantly.

“. . . shall die. . . .”

The reply tolled out like two notes of a discordant bell. At their conclusion, Rick saw the ghastly head fade slowly into nothingness. Slowly, it reduced itself to the shimmering small columns, like heat waves—so slowly that his eyes continued for seconds to see what was no longer really there, the face disappeared and the doorway was an empty space.

Swaying on his feet, his outraged nervous system almost ready to break down and plunge him into oblivion, he suddenly heard a noise in the other room. Around the corner of the door frame, it sounded; it came from something as yet hidden from his sight by the partition.

**I**T was a dry, whispering, rustling *rattle*, that sound. With his mind tottering on the borderline of insanity, Rick tried to define it. . . .

The whispering rattle of scales? Of giant, reptilian scales, moving scratchily with the progress of a mighty, serpentine body? No, not exactly. The rustle of stiff silks? That was more like it, but not the precise sound. . . .

And then the horrible simile came to his mind. And so exactly did it fit that, in the next instant, Rick knew it was no simile—but the hideous truth!

That dry, loathsome sound was the noise of *bones!* Bones loosely articulated, insecurely held together by withered tendons and shreds of muscle! Bones rubbing dryly against each other, muted only partially by some clinging, muffling fabric!

Hardly had the stunning realization come to him when he saw something grope slowly around the

door frame and reach out in his direction.

That something was a hand. But it was not a hand; it was a thing composed of five, jointed bones of different lengths, like a loose-spread bundle of sticks only vaguely resembling fingers, held together by cords which were frayed and dabbled with brownish-red clots. And on the middle stick, the longest stick, was something that looked like a fingernail, long and jagged, seeming ready to fall off at a touch.

**T**HE hand crept farther. And now Rick saw that it was attached to a wrist that was, in patches, only bare bones, and in places was padded with bits of spongy, gruesome substance that might once have been flesh. Over this, as the ghastly arm came more into view, he saw draped a fold of grayish-white fabric to which bits of earth still clung.

“Let me die,” prayed Rick, “or faint . . . or go mad. . . .”

And then the thing itself stepped slowly into the doorway till it was fully revealed, framed by the door-sills like a grisly picture. A picture of death in its final form!

Eyeless sockets glared emptily at Rick. Jaws that were on the verge of falling apart, moved slightly. With a dry, whispering rattle, the thing, clad in fold on fold of rotted shroud, advanced toward him.

And then part of his prayer came true. He fainted.

But just before, with a last gasp of terror, he let go—just before his knees sagged under his weight—one final impression his darkening eyes conveyed to his mind: the awful, shrouded thing was still moving, machine-like, toward him . . . that it was almost near enough to touch him with its clawing talons. . . .

## CHAPTER VI

*Puppets of Doom*

**B**ACK at the hospital, Professor Tholl remained in ignorance of Rick's departure for some little time. When the younger man did not come back, he assumed Rick was waiting till the messenger came for orders and the keys to the apartment. Knowing so much better than Rick did the peril that stalked them, he didn't dream that Rick might have been so reckless as to go alone into the night.

Absently, the professor stared at the sleeping girl. Poor, harassed little thing! Only one bright ray pierced the fog of disaster that hung over her: she would not, if she won through her awful experience, be condemned to the usual fate of the vampire's victim—that of becoming a vampire herself after her death. Doctor Quoy's vampirism was not a natural one to be transmitted like a foul disease from one person to the next; it was an artificially acquired thing that would die when he died.

Tholl sighed, looked at his watch, and saw that Rick had been gone over half an hour. His heavy eyebrows drew together. He glanced at Priscilla, decided he did not dare leave her even for a few moments to go and see if Rick was downstairs in the lobby, and picked up the telephone.

In a low voice he talked to the girl at the desk, and was told that Rick had gone to his flat himself!

Tholl sprang to his feet. He was in a quandary. Rick, rashly alone in his apartment, might be in deadly danger. But if he went to Rick's side, he must leave the girl alone here. Which needed him most? Over which was the black wing of Quoy's power hovering nearest?

At this instant the breathing of the slumbering girl lost some of its regularity. Her lips parted.

"Rick. . . ." she moaned. Her arms moved as though she were struggling to wake. "Rick, dear. . . ."

**T**HAT was all. But it was enough to decide Tholl. All his studies had tended to confirm him in the belief that every dream, of every person, had a meaning. In Priscilla's dream she had called out in accents of fear to Rick. Did that mean that she herself was afraid, or that the young man was in some sort of peril? He believed the latter was true.

He pressed the button for the night nurse. He looked at her thoughtfully. A tall, quiet girl with intelligent dark eyes, she appeared to be the sort of person one could tell things to. Almost, the professor decided to confide in her. Then he changed his mind. Better to test the credulity of no one by naming the actual, bizarre danger that hung over Priscilla Rand!

"I must leave here for an hour or so," he told her at last. "As you know, it is thought necessary to have someone with Miss Rand every moment of the night. You have been told why?"

The nurse shook her head.

"It is because she has a queer horror of bats," said Tholl smoothly; "a delusion, if you want to call it that. Therefore, someone must be with her constantly to reassure her if she wakes in terror. Could you arrange to take my place for, say, an hour and a half?"

The nurse glanced at the watch on her wrist.

"Yes," she said. "I go off duty in five minutes. Then my time will be my own. I'll sit in here till you return."

"Good," said Tholl. "And, by the way,"—his tone grew casual—"if an actual bat *should* blunder in at the window, or the transom, for heaven's sake drive it out before

Miss Rand can wake and see it."

"A bat?" echoed the nurse, staring. "In the heart of the city? Impossible!"

"Impossible, at least," the professor agreed. "I just thought I'd mention it. . . ."

**T**HE nurse went out to report, while Tholl fretted at each second of delay. In less than the stated five minutes she was back, and Tholl raced down to the lobby and into the street.

His mind outraced his feet. Speed was essential now. His house was nearer than Rick's apartment. And in his house was his laboratory and a miniature stage, a puppet-show arrangement, much similar to the one they had seen on the escritoire in Quoy's deserted rooms. With that he could set a guard of projected, multiple Professor Tholls about Rick that would be as effective a protection as his own presence, and a quicker one.

He turned toward his home, then changed his mind in mid-stride and hastened toward Quoy's old rooms. They were nearer yet. And he knew how to use the puppet-stage Quoy had left behind him as well as the doctor himself.

To the deserted apartment of Doctor Quoy he hastened with all possible speed. And ever as he went, he prayed that Quoy had not already struck, that he might not be too late in his projected rescue.

In the professor's specially trained mind, as he let himself in through the outer doors of the building where Quoy had lived, a sort of occult bell of warning sounded a muffled peal. But he paid scant attention to it, engrossed as he was in getting to that small stage at once.

That Quoy might have returned, might be at this moment in the room behind the final locked door

where Tholl paused an instant, never occurred to the venerable professor. Although, he confessed honestly later, it certainly should have! Else why should that odd note of warning have sounded dimly in his mind, and a queer, uncanny prickling sensation have momentarily burned all over his body as he opened the door and walked in?

**B**UT if he was too preoccupied to know that Doctor Quoy was there before he opened the door, he became aware of it the second after he stepped inside! He was made aware of it by the fact that all the lights in the ostensibly vacant place were turned on, and an instant later by finding himself gazing directly at the tense, bent back of Quoy himself!

Doctor Quoy was seated in front of the escritoire. Over his shoulder, Tholl could see enough to know that the thing which was claiming his attention was the tiny stage. Also the professor could see Quoy's hand move above the contraption, and knew that the man's fingers were manipulating the puppet-strings, now duly attached to whatever tiny figures they had been designed to animate.

What dark purpose was being served by that lonely puppet-show? Tholl silently edged nearer to find out.

Had Doctor Quoy not been so lost in sinister concentration, so certain that his two enemies would never think of looking for him in this place from which surely he might be supposed to have fled forever, it is certain that Tholl could not have got so close to him without his having known of it. As it was, the professor found himself stealing nearer, inch by inch, with his hated antagonist still unaware that anyone was in the room with him. At last he was close enough

to see that tiny stage and the tiny figures that were moved jerkily upon it. . . .

**H**E saw that the stage was partitioned into two spaces, designating rooms. He saw that one of these little rooms, which occupied the major portion of the stage, was supposed to be a bedroom. Then he stared at the puppets.

One of these, even in miniature, was a blood-curdling thing: a sort of skeleton, done in wax the professor judged, and draped in some rotted white fabric. The other figure—

At the sight of the other figure, Tholl gasped aloud—a horrified exclamation at the sound of which Doctor Quoy instantly dropped his puppets and whirled about with a snarl. But for a second or two, deadly as his danger now was, the professor could not move from the spot, or tear his eyes away from that ominous small figure.

For the puppet, with a skill that was diabolical in its perfection, had been shaped to resemble Rick Ballard! And at the moment Tholl's gasp had warned Quoy, the ghastly little wax skeleton had just touched the throat of Rick's image with its tiny claws of hands!

With another strangled exclamation, the old professor wrenched his eyes from the deadly stage, and glared into the hate-filled eyes of Quoy.

"You thing of the grave!" he grated. "Move away from that death-trap while I smash it!"

**T**HE fires in the dark, oblique eyes died down and were replaced by glints of cold mockery.

"The excellent professor forgets," murmured Doctor Quoy, "that I am no longer his underling. I am the master now. There will be no orders given, save those I choose to give myself."

"Will you leave that thing before I kill you?" blazed the professor. Forgotten were his years. His old shoulders had straightened under their weight; and his keen gray eyes shone with a fire almost of youth.

"How can you kill that which you yourself admit is already without life?" mocked Doctor Quoy.

"If I can't kill it—that walking corpse that clothes your spirit—I can at least hold it till dawn. And with the dawn I can drive a stake through that unclean heart!"

Doctor Quoy's eyes burned like bits of jet in a strong light. Like lightning his narrow long hands began a weird sign.

With a cry of rage, Professor Tholl flung himself at him. Quoy eluded the clutching old hands with a snake-like writhe; but the professor, in his charge, knocked over the puppet-stage on the es-critoire. An instant later he had smashed it to matchwood. With the destruction of the eery tool there was an ear-shattering report, like the roar of a gun.

Doctor Quoy's face was maniacal as he confronted the professor. But before he could begin whatever infernal incantation he was about to hurl at him, there came a peremptory knocking at the door.

The knocking grew louder, changed to heavy blows as someone tried to burst the door in. A voice sounded: "Hello—is somebody in trouble there? I heard a shot."

A second later the door was wrenched from its frame almost enough to spring the lock. And then, just as it gave completely, Quoy flung one swift look of rage at Tholl and disappeared.

**E**VEN in that crowded moment, with death only just averted and his aged body trem-

bling leaflike under the terrific strain that had been put upon it, the professor had time for one terrible flash of realization.

Quoy had mastered that last and most terrible of all the black arts, dematerialization. Tholl groaned. With that fearful knowledge what chaos might not Quoy be able to bring down at will upon an ignorant and helpless world!

A man stepped over the smashed ruin of the door—a man who hastened to the professor and put a supporting hand under his arm.

"What's wrong?" he asked. "Burglary? Attempted murder? What?"

"Burglary," said Professor Tholl weakly. "I was in here, and someone attacked me from behind. I didn't even have a chance to see the man."

His rescuer, a powerfully built, red-haired fellow, stared suspiciously.

"Yes? And what were you doing in here. I live in the apartment next door, and now I come to think of it, this place is supposed to be vacant. I think maybe the police. . . ."

He stopped. His mouth opened foolishly; his eyes half closed as though overpowering slumber were descending on him. Which, as a matter of fact, was the case. . . .

The professor completed with a few passes of his hands the simple hypnotic process he had started. He eased the man gently down on the floor.

"In five minutes you will awake," he commanded, touching the closed eyelids gently.

Whereupon, he left the room and raced to Rick Ballard's apartment. Behind him a sleeping man breathed heavily—to wake up precisely five minutes later and for the rest of his life to tell a tale that was sometimes heard with interest and sometimes laughed at but never by any chance believed.

## CHAPTER VII

### *Of Another World*

**RICK BALLARD** slowly came back to consciousness. For an instant he lay in a daze, his eyes still closed, unable to recall anything. He had been unconscious for an unguessable length of time. . . .

His eyes flew open as memory came to him, and he threw up his arms with a hoarse cry to defend himself from the grisly horror that had been advancing on him.

But the horror was there no longer. In its place was Professor Tholl, bending over him, bathing his forehead with cold water, talking to him in soothing, reassuring tones.

Rick relaxed with a long sigh, content in the realization that he was in some unexplained way safe from further attack. In a short time his fit, muscular body had sprung back to almost a state of normalcy, and he was listening, almost sheepishly, to the professor's account of his trip to Doctor Quoy's rooms and of what he had found there. Then he told his story.

"All I saw was a succession of hypnotic images," marveled Rick. "Yet they certainly seemed real. I felt the cold, slimy things—like snakes they seemed—crawling around my feet. I felt something hairy and spidery crawl down my arm. I thought I saw Doctor Quoy's face—and I was sure I saw that specter from the grave! And now I find they were only mind pictures, instead of the real thing!"

"Don't be so sure they weren't the real thing," said Tholl quietly.

"Real bulk and substance materializing from thin air?" said Rick, with a little smile. "No, I can't believe that. And it isn't necessary to believe it. The other fits in too logically—the hypnotic images induced in my mind from a distance by Doctor Quoy."

**T**HOLL echoed Rick's first statement. "Thin air? There is no such thing! The apparently empty air about us is as teeming with life as the tropic seas!"

He stretched out his arm and swept it in front of him. "When I do that, I have no doubt whatever that I have passed my hand through the substance of some living thing, moving and breathing and solid, but in some other dimension, that is as unconscious of us as we are of it. Doctor Quoy has the power of drawing things from other dimensions into this, or of shifting objects from this to others and back again. Believe me, the things you saw were actually here—not existing only as figments of your imagination."

Rick shook his head. "It makes me out an awful coward, to keel over at the sight of brain-phantoms," he said, "but I'm perfectly certain, now, that I was attacked by nothing more dangerous nor solid!"

Tholl sighed. Then he reached behind him, and brought into view a newspaper, rolled lengthways, as though bundled around some long cylindrical thing.

"Perhaps, then, you'll believe this. One of your visitors, due possibly to sudden death, possibly to the fact that Quoy's invocations were incomplete, didn't return to its own dimension!"

He unwrapped the paper.

Rick gasped as his eyes gazed at the thing the professor had rolled up and hidden from sight on his entrance there. The walls seemed about to fall in on him, while the floor swayed dizzily under his feet. And still his eyes would not close, would not turn away from the one visitor that had not returned to its own world.

A wormlike thing, that was yet longer and bigger than any worm we know. A legless, cylindrical,

viscous mass, colored a dirty yellowish-gray, with its soft, pulpy head smashed in as though it had been inadvertently stepped on....

As though from a long distance, Rick heard the professor saying apologetically, "I shouldn't have showed it to you. You're not recovered yet from your shock. I am very sorry. . . ."

**D**USK was falling. The sun's flaming disk was half hidden under the ragged skyline of the city to the west. Rick and the professor were in Priscilla Rand's room at the hospital.

Priscilla, now judged almost well by the hospital staff, although they were still baffled by her mysterious sickness, was sitting up in bed. Her cheeks, which had almost regained all their normal color, were now pallid again; Professor Tholl had decided she was strong enough to stand the shock of knowing precisely what danger threatened her, and was telling her of Doctor Quoy.

There was a hush as he finished. Priscilla gazed out the window at the tip of the dying sun, and watched it sink slowly behind the skyline. Now her wide eyes went back to the venerable, bearded face.

"What are we going to *do*?" she whispered. Not once had she doubted the truth of Tholl's astounding story. Her woman's instinct told her it was all fact; forbade her a single one of the doubts that had lingered so long in Rick's mind. "This man—this monster—seems all-powerful!"

"Powerful enough," admitted the professor. "But only in the hours of darkness, remember! During the daytime he is in a helpless trance. It is during the daytime we must find him and destroy him. But, during the daytime, my only method of locating him is not effective."

Priscilla gazed quickly, hopefully, at him.

"You *have* a method of finding him, then?"

"Yes. A rather terrible method, and one that involves great risk—to you, even more than to Rick and myself."

"To *me*?"

"Yes. I have said my method is not effective during the daylight hours, when Doctor Quoy is in his vampire's trance, because then he gives off no psychic aura of activity for me to work on. But if we try to search for him at night it means that you must be left unguarded!"

"And that," burst out Rick, catching her hand, "is not to be thought of!"

PRISCILLA stared at the window, which was now a slowly darkening oblong as dusk deepened to night. From the street outside came a shrill shout as a newsboy, disregarding the hospital zone of quiet, cried an extra. The words drifted up to them, only half registering on their preoccupied minds: "Extra! Extra! Girl kidnaped! Police combing the city! Girl kidnaped. . . ."

Priscilla shuddered as the words finally penetrated her full consciousness. Girl kidnaped! And what might be *her* fate if she were left alone during the period of Doctor Quoy's greatest activity!

But none of this misgiving showed in her tone as she said: "There's nothing for it but to leave me unguarded. This creature must be trapped, and if he can only be hunted down at night, then you two dare not waste time by staying inactive in this hospital room!"

"I won't have it—" began Rick.

"Ssh," said Priscilla, squeezing his hand.

"There is an alternative," said Professor Tholl, avoiding her gaze.

"I can go out alone, leaving Rick here with you."

Priscilla smiled. There was in that smile the sort of determination that sent women, without a backward glance, rolling in covered wagons into fearsome Indian country with their men a hundred years ago. Her eyes compelled Tholl's to meet them.

"You aren't very young," she said gently. "Yours is the brain and the knowledge, but not the body. You need the muscles of this young husky to back you up. You must both go."

And so it was finally decided. There was, really, nothing else to do. It was foolish to wait passively for Quoy to come and attack them, illogical to do anything but try to search him out as speedily as possible, taking whatever risks might come up on the way!

They went out, with admiration in their eyes for the quiet courage of Priscilla, and with fear in their hearts for what might happen to her during the long night. And as they went, the final cries of the unseen newsboy came faintly from the distance: "Extra! Big Kidnaping mystery! Girl disappeared. . . ."

## CHAPTER VIII

### *Unholy Divination*

THE two men turned toward the professor's gloomy big house. As they went, Tholl's face was grave and troubled, and for a long time he said nothing. Equally silent, Rick walked beside him, uneasily glancing about him now and then into the darkness, thankful for every street-light. The evil powers of Doctor Quoy might at that very instant be hanging over them like a sword of Damocles, ready to drop and snuff out their lives.

"What is this method of yours

of finding out where Quoy is operating?" he said at last.

"You'll soon see," was Tholl's somber reply.

"We're on our way to your house now for your equipment, or tools, or whatever you call them?"

"Yes," muttered the old professor, "for my tools. . . ."

Rick glanced at his face. In the uncertain light it had almost a greenish tinge.

"You spoke of risks," he persisted. "What are they—physical, or psychical?"

"That, too, you will soon discover for yourself," said the professor. He sighed. "It is a terrible thing to interfere with natural laws. Unexpected, unguessable things may happen. . . ."

No more was said during the balance of the walk. They turned into the drive leading to the huge old house.

It was in pitch darkness. No light showed at any window. The professor had no servants, preferring to live hermitlike in a few of the rooms and let the rest of the house cover itself with dust, rather than have a housekeeper to interfere with his private observations and experiments.

Tholl turned the key and pushed open the door. Rick almost exclaimed aloud with relief when the professor switched on the lights in the old-fashioned, ill-kept hall.

**W**ITHOUT pausing, Tholl went down the hallway to the door in the rear that led to the steep basement steps. He turned on another switch, illuminating the cavernous cellar. Rick followed him into its depths. As he went, he felt the now familiar icy shiver of something weird and terrible about to happen, an intuitive warning, having nothing to do with reason.

"I'm becoming positively psychic!" he said aloud, with a twist-

ed grin. He said it more to break the oppressive silence than because he expected an answer. But the professor replied quite seriously:

"Probably you are temporarily endowed with a reflection of my own psychic sensitivity. But please do not talk any more. A hard mental struggle lies before me. I must compose my mind for it."

They traversed the big cellar to the rear wall. Here the professor halted.

Rick, gazing at it, could see no more than that it resembled any other wall, constructed of blank cement blocks which were cracked here and there with the weight of the old house. But the professor's eyes gleamed a little as he bent nearer one of the blocks and touched a ragged crack that split it diagonally from end to end.

Rick stared. The cracked block, and four more above and below it, swung aside to form a narrow doorway. Tholl motioned, and Rick followed him through it and into a low tunnel, the roof of which was crudely shored up with timbers.

At Tholl's touch, the secret door slid into place, leaving them in the darkness of the tomb. Rick felt the professor tug at his arm; he walked ahead, paused a moment while, he surmised, Tholl opened another portal; then followed forward a few steps.

They stopped; and, thrusting out his arms on either side, Rick could touch nothing. They were in a fairly large chamber, or cave. He heard the professor mutter something under his breath. Then there was a click, and light flashed up.

**T**HE prosaic electric-light bulb, hanging from a cord in the roof, intensified rather than diminished the horror of that underground place. The harsh, glaring light shone only too clearly on the festooned spider webs, and the

slow oozing drops of moisture that appeared from the raw earth of the walls to drip monotonously between the rough supporting timbers. The air of the place was damp, stifling. It was like a crypt.

And then Rick started, while his face went chalk-white. He stared with pounding heart at something stretched out in one corner, something that sprawled in ghastly rigidity on the earth floor.

Like a crypt? The place was a crypt in actual fact! There was its corpse!

It was the body of a man of average height. To judge by the condition of the flesh, and the look of the splotched, discolored clothes that covered it, the body had been there a long time. Another thing that hinted that it had lain there for long was the hair on face and head, curled and rank and unkempt, like foul weeds growing on a grave mound.

The face was covered with dried, reddish-brown splotches. And these were seen to have come from the head, the back and top of which were horribly crushed in.

"My God!" whispered Rick. "Who was this?"

"That is the mortal part of the man I hired in an evil moment to be my assistant, Doctor Herbert Quoy. And that"—the professor's face became set and grim—"is the 'tool' I am about to use in trying to locate Quoy's whereabouts. To that lump of clay is chained the spirit of the man whose body Quoy now wears—a spirit that shall be my helper!"

Rick was speechless. The overpowering closeness of the air in that hidden cave, the subtle warning of dread things about to happen, above all the presence there of that ghastly, pallid figure, filled him with a longing to be through at once and rush back out into the clean, open air.

THE professor knelt beside the sprawled body. His hands went slowly out toward the red splotched face. But before they touched it, he gazed up at Rick.

"This is a moment of great danger," he said. "I have never dared try such an experiment as this before, so I do not know exactly what may happen. Whatever it is, be on the alert for it!"

Wordlessly, Rick nodded. The professor began the procedure that was to haunt Rick from then on in nightmare-ridden sleep.

A sentence came sonorously from the professor's lips. Rather, it was a succession of sounds, no one of which was familiar to Rick, but which in combination sounded like a phrase in some forgotten tongue.

Tholl's long, sensitive fingers lightly touched the lid of the right eye that was sunk deep in the grisly ruin of the face. Then he was silent.

For what seemed to Rick hours, the tableau held: Tholl kneeling motionless beside the corpse, his eyes half closed and his face tense as if he were concentrating all his mental powers on some gigantic task; Rick standing beside him and a bit to the rear, staring at the pallid thing which had once housed a spirit that was now walking abroad, clothed in another's flesh. Then an astounding, an awful thing happened.

The right eyelid, which Tholl had touched lightly, quivered perceptibly. Jerkily, a fraction of an inch at a time, it opened to reveal the sunken, shriveled eyeball beneath. And at sight of that shrunken eye, Rick felt his throat contract till his lungs labored for breath.

*The eye was alive!*

THE body was patently lifeless; the face was a clotted mass obviously verging on actual

decomposition. But in that deathly face the eye lived and moved! It rolled in its socket and glared first at Rick and then at Tholl.

An instant later a second miracle took place. The withered lips moved, disclosing jaws from which several teeth had already dropped out. A voice sounded—a voice that was harsh and hoarse, that was dull and hollow, as a voice might be that is heard in a tunnel a long way off.

"I am here. What do you wish?"

Rick was battered by a very insanity of terror at the sound of that sepulchral voice. But with an enormous effort of will he kept from shrieking aloud, and remained motionless by the professor's side.

"I command you," said Tholl in a low, shaken voice, to direct us to the presence of—you *know who!*"

With the last three words a fearful change took place in the rigid body. The eye fairly flamed. The lips writhed and hissed. The whole figure twitched as if galvanized by an electric charge.

"Where is he?" said Tholl. "I command you to tell."

The loosened, yellowed teeth clashed together. A last spasmodic quiver touched the stark limbs. Then the corpse was still. There was silence—a silence so deep that Rick could hear, like a drumbeat, the thudding of his heart.

"My God," groaned Tholl, "have I failed?"

He stopped. From the dead lips was coming the hoarse, sepulchral voice.

"The one you seek . . . stone house with red roof . . . beside the cemetery men call Tyn—Tyn—"

"Yes," said the professor. Beads of sweat stood out on his face as he leaned over the corpse and willed it to go on. "Yes, Tyn—what?"

"Be quick . . . or too late. . . ."

the voice went on, haltingly. "Tyn—Tyn—"

Like the mechanical failure of a clockwork thing that has run down the hollow voice faltered and stopped.

"Go on!" cried Tholl, his face livid with excitement.

But the lips moved no more. The voice was stilled.

**T**HE professor clenched his fists in helpless anguish. But Rick thought he had understood. "Maybe the thing means Tynsdale Hollow Cemetery," he suggested shakily. "Maybe—"

He stopped, appalled; and at the look in his eyes, the professor whirled to gaze at the corpse.

That fearsome object, with a soft snapping of stiffened joints and withered tendons, was getting to its feet. The single opened eye glared with the fires of hell as the body lurched toward the two who had dared to use it, in defiance of the laws of death, for their own mortal purpose.

"The door—" gasped Tholl. "Quick!"

But already the corpse had launched itself stiffly toward them, its gaunt arms flailing like jointed tree branches as it reached the professor.

Fighting down a wave of repulsion that was nauseating in its intensity, Rick sprang to help the old man. He lashed out with his fists, battering at the dead thing.

His fists found nothing solid to injure. His clawing hands sloughed through clammy substance too insecure to grasp. But he managed to send the awkward figure tottering back for a second.

It was enough. He dragged the professor to the entrance, and slammed the wooden barrier just as the awful thing in the cave thudded against it.

Staggering a little, like creatures

moving endlessly in a nightmare, they returned the way they had come, leaving behind them a huddled figure bathed only too clearly in the raw glare of the electric bulb. . . .

## CHAPTER IX

### *Under the Red Roof*

"**T**YNSDALE HOLLOW CEMETERY," said Professor Tholl, looking up from a list of cemeteries in and near the city. "That must be the one. There are no others with a first syllable remotely like that. Come, we'll hurry there at once, and see if there's a house with a red roof."

Out along the river's edge they sped, in a hired motor that broke all speed laws under the guidance of a well-paid driver. They came to Tynsdale Hollow Cemetery, and, as they drove by, Tholl exclaimed aloud with grim triumph.

"There!" he said, pointing.

Rick's eyes followed his leveled finger, and by the light of one of the sparsely-scattered electric lamps, saw an old stone house with a red-tile roof and boarded windows, on a weedy lot just across the fence from the cemetery. Indeed, less than twenty yards away from it was a newly-dug grave, looking like a bloody gash in the earth by reason of the dull reddish color of the dirt prevailing in that section.

They got out, paid the driver, and dismissed the car. Then, sure that no one was around at that late hour to see them, they walked cautiously up to the house, and around it to the rear.

No light showed anywhere in the house. The boarded windows were as blank as blind eyes. An atmosphere of desertion and decay hung over the place; plainly it had not been occupied for years.

"Can this be right?" whispered

Rick dubiously, staring about him.

"Next to a graveyard—a deserted house, yes, I think it's the right place," the professor whispered back. "And, God willing, our enemy will be inside alone."

"And if he is?"

"It is near dawn. Between us, we will try to hold him till his trance overcomes him. Then he will be at our mercy."

A doubt that had persisted in Rick's mind since the first mention of tracking Doctor Quoy, came from his lips.

"With all his uncanny powers, won't he know automatically when we are near him? Won't he be aware of all our movements and be ready for us?"

The professor shrugged. "Probably he will. Almost certainly he will! Our only chance is that he may be so engrossed in some of his black work that his very concentration will let us creep up on him."

**H**E turned to the locked rear door. It soon opened under his manipulations. He pushed it aside, gently, noiselessly, and the two men tiptoed into a dark room that had once evidently been used as a kitchen.

At once the gruesome stench of death assailed their nostrils. The grave was very close, that odor silently insisted. Death was all around them in that dark old house. But they stole onward, through a doorway, down a hall, and into a middle room that might once have been a drawing room or parlor.

At the threshold of this room they stopped, utterly paralyzed by the sight that met them.

The room was dimly lit by a solitary stub of candle that flickered and guttered on the floor. It had so nearly burned itself out that, just as they stared with terrified eyes at the scene of horror

there, the tiny flame leaped higher in its expiring burst, and gilded every detail with pallid flame.

A veritable lake of red widened sluggishly, slowly, in the center of the floor. The walls were daubed with red; red was smeared on the door-frame beside them. Sodden with it, a little heap of torn blue fabric—what was left of a woman's street-suit, lay near the dying candle.

And in the center of the horrible red lake was a white, distorted figure. A girl's figure that seemed at first entirely nude—and at second glance to have a filmy red mantle thrown over it.

The demon, Quoy, was gone. They had come too late to catch him. Only this, his handiwork, was here to greet them.

Silently, almost felled by this crowning horror in a fearful night, they turned and ran.

**"ANTHROPOMANCY!"** said Professor Tholl, as they wearily entered his house. "Anthropomancy! The most hellish of all the black practises. So that is the answer to the 'kidnaping mystery' we heard cried in the papers!"

"May God strike him dead," said Rick hoarsely.

"May God let us extinguish the black soul of him," amended the professor. "Death, alone, has no meaning for Doctor Quoy."

They flung themselves down in the professor's room, Rick on a low couch, Tholl on the bed.

"We'll sleep if we can," said Tholl.

"Sleep?" Rick shook his head. "I feel as though I'll never be able to sleep again!"

"Fatigue does marvelous things," said the professor. "Close your eyes; give exhausted nature a chance."

Presently Rick's eyes drooped;

now they were closed in slumber.

It may have been exhausted nature that brought him sleep; it may, perhaps, have been a few obscure, odd gestures the old professor made with his slender hands, as though he were weaving strange patterns in the air. . . .

**I**T was afternoon when Rick woke, to find Professor Tholl engaged in the prosaic task of setting a meal on the table in the center of the room. He took a hurried cold shower, dashing the icy water into his still tired eyes, and sat down to eat a tasteless meal and talk the situation over with the professor.

"After all, we know one thing that is faintly heartening," said Tholl. "Doctor Quoy is at least disturbed enough to want to divine the future in his own fiendish way. That would seem to indicate that he fears that future. If we could only know what he read in the results of his unspeakable surgery!"

"Probably death for you and me," said Rick gloomily, "and, a little later, for Priscilla. Unless," he added hopefully, "he will decide to pick out some other victim, now that Priscilla has been warned against him."

Professor Tholl shook his head. "A vampire never relinquishes a victim," he said heavily. "As long as Doctor Quoy remains at large, Priscilla is doomed."

They went to the hospital, then, to find a somewhat rebellious patient on their hands.

"I'm perfectly all right, now," protested Priscilla. "I'm feeling fine. I think I ought to go home."

**T**HOLL gazed thoughtfully at her. It didn't need a specialist to tell that she was speaking the truth. The flush of delicate health lay bright on her skin. Her long,

honey-colored hair seemed to crackle with vitality. Her eyes had lost their sunken look, and were clear as spring-water. Nevertheless, Tholl shook his head.

"Who lives at home with you?"

"My aunt," said Priscilla, "and our old servant, Kemp. Kemp is devoted to me. I really think she'd die for me."

"But she is old, and a woman," Tholl broke in. "Certainly not a very stalwart protector! No, you'd better stay on here, where there is a night and day staff, and where Doctor Quoy's attempts against you would be offered at least a little resistance."

"Then you failed in your move against him last night?"

"Yes," said Tholl, "we failed."

He told her a little of what had happened. A very little! Mercifully, he spared her the real story of Quoy's dark activities in the deserted house; and mercifully he said nothing of the true nature of his own work in the secret cellar of his home.

"Then the situation remains unchanged?" faltered Priscilla.

"Yes. There is only one ray of hope. We have found one spot, at least, where Doctor Quoy has been. He may return to it. We will watch that spot. . . ."

**T**HE watching was to prove fruitless.

For two nights Rick and the professor stood alternate guard over the deserted house with the red roof. During neither of these nights did Quoy visit it—at least not in a form visible to mortal eyes. Then the two had to abandon their watch. The police had found the body; and Rick and Tholl dared not stay near the house for fear they would be implicated in a murder charge.

For a week the sensational story was played up in the newspapers as the undoubted work of a luna-

tic. And for a week Rick and the professor, the only ones beside the perpetrator who knew the truth of the crime, kept close guard over Priscilla to ward off the attack of the deadly enemy—who failed to attack!

"I can't stand much more of this inactive waiting!" snapped Rick at the end of the seventh long night. "Hanging around, doing nothing, knowing that at any moment Doctor Quoy may attack for the last time—"

"What else can we do?" replied Professor Tholl. "As you know, I am spending every possible moment in my laboratory, trying to locate the real, daytime hiding place of Doctor Quoy. Until I can do that, we can't move against him."

"Are you any nearer success now than when you started your laboratory experiments?" demanded Rick.

"No," admitted the professor, "I'm not. As yet I don't know what is to be our next move."

But their next move, or rather Rick's, was to be made at once—and in a strange and eery fashion.

## CHAPTER X

### *The Aspen Stake*

**I**T was the custom of the two to rise from their fitful daytime sleep in the early afternoon, force themselves to eat a kind of breakfast-luncheon, and go to the hospital before dusk fell. But next afternoon this procedure was varied.

When Rick woke and glanced automatically at the clock, he saw that it was five minutes past four. Even then he woke up, not because his jangled nerves warned him it was so late, but because someone was shaking him violently. He blinked dazedly, still half-asleep, to find the keen face of Professor Tholl gazing excitedly down at him.

"Rick!" came his voice again, now penetrating Rick's dulled consciousness like a knife blade. "Rick! Wake up! I've got it! At last I've found where Doctor Quoy hides from the daylight! Dress and come with me at once."

Rick was instantly on his feet. "You know where he is?"

"Yes, I know! There is nothing for us to do now, but go to him in his helpless coma and snuff out that dark intelligence forever!"

Rick proceeded to dress hastily. There was no thought of eating now. The thing to do was go at once and reach the terrible Quoy before darkness fell!

"Where is he?" he demanded grimly, as the two started precipitately down the stairs.

"Follow me," was all Tholl said, as he hurried down to the street.

A motor was waiting at the curb. It was not a regulation cab. Unusually small windows were set in sides and rear; and the rear one was covered by a roll-curtain. It seemed to be waiting on order of the professor, however, so Rick stepped in at once.

**T**HOLL gave orders in a low voice, and the car started rapidly down the street. The professor, as they rolled along, told how he had located Quoy at last.

There was a certain herb, it seemed, that emitted a dense smoke if burned properly in a special crucible. In that smoke, if one were initiated, one could see distant images as on a cinema screen. For days Tholl had been trying to wrench the secret of Quoy's hiding-place from the smoke. This afternoon he had succeeded!

"And we are now on our way, at last, to end the career of this infernal being!" marveled Rick, who had listened, absorbed, to the account.

"Not quite yet," replied the old

professor; "but in a very short while! Now we are going to pick up the actual instrument that will destroy him—a tool specially prepared in special surroundings. When we have got that, we shall go to Quoy!"

At that moment the car stopped.

Tholl ordered the driver to wait, then turned and hastened away.

Rick, stumbling after him, had only an instant of time to realize that they were crossing a weedy, open field. Then they were in an impossibly narrow underground passage of some sort, which extended for a long distance to widen into a subterranean room.

In this room was apparatus of a kind for which Rick had no adequate words of description. There were oddly curved rods, and earthen retorts. A pile of dried weeds took up one corner. In another corner was a long narrow box that must certainly be a coffin. In the center of the room was a low workbench, and on this bench was a curious thing.

It was a sharpened piece of wood about three feet long and several inches thick. The sharpened end tapered to a fine, almost needle-like, point, and its blackened surface indicated that it had been hardened in fire.

"The stake!" breathed the old professor. "The aspen stake that shall be plunged into his breast!"

**H**E clutched it, and they hurried back through the passage to the weedy, open space and to the waiting motor.

"And now," said Tholl, his voice vibrant, "for Doctor Quoy!"

Faster the cab flew. It was like a dream ride. Then Rick, glancing out the small windows began to see familiar street sights. Here he recognized a building, there an electric sign.

"Why!" he ejaculated at last,

"we're going directly back toward your house! Quoy is hidden near there?"

"Yes." Professor Tholl fingered the sharp point of the aspen stake. His eyes were glittering. "You see the ingenuity of his choice? We would never dream of searching near at home. But we've got him now!"

Rick closed his eyes while a wave of exultation passed through him. With wide, unseeing gaze, he followed the professor as the cab stopped, up a walk and into an old doorway.

The professor held up his finger for silence, and began to tiptoe up a curving staircase. Cautiously Rick followed, taking infinite pains to make no noise. They entered a room, an ordinary room outfitted as a bed chamber. And there on the bed Rick saw lying a straight, still figure.

Even at that tense moment Rick found time to be surprised and a little taken back. He had visioned the sinister Doctor Quoy as passing his vampire's sleep in some hideous, buried place—not in an ordinary bedroom in an ordinary residence. But the thought passed immediately from his mind. The important thing was that Quoy was here. Actually in the same room with him, lying helpless in slumber!

**A**LMOST holding his breath lest he wake the sleeper, though the professor had told him that the coma of vampirism is almost that of death, Rick moved toward that still figure on the bed. Beside him tiptoed the professor.

Nearer they came. Nearer . . . till they were bending over the sleeping figure, and gazing directly down at that face which was an incarnation of evil. Fascinated, Rick stared at it. The red, red lips; the pallid skin, like a pale, un-

healthy mushroom growth; the long, slit eyes, hidden now under eyelids that looked like unwholesome bruises in the waxy countenance!

"Victory!" whispered the professor. His right arm, with the stake held in his hand like a short spear, was raised high. "Victory!"

Like a splendid statue of an old warrior, he stood there, the stake poised for its deadly down-stroke. Then, slowly, with trembling arm, he lowered it. His eyes closed. A hissing moan came from his lips.

"I dare not," he muttered. "I dare not. I am old. My arm is no longer strong. I doubt if I have the power to thrust so deep."

He turned suddenly to Rick, and thrust the stake toward him.

"You!" he said. "*You do it!*"

**R**ICK took the stake, staring at the old professor in a dreamy sort of surprise. With that fearfully sharpened point, it seemed even a child could find the monster's heart! But he thought he could divine the true reason for the professor's hesitancy.

This unnatural creature stretched before them was in a sense Tholl's own creation. He had given him unwittingly the opportunity to steal and use for his own purposes the awful secrets in Cagliostro's lost document. This chance to undo, with a single stroke, the evil he had done, was too much for him; it had unstrung him.

"Well," thought Rick, "*I have no such self-doubt! I'll send this stake through chest and heart and back, and into the bed beneath!*"

Grasping the lancelike thing, he raised it even as Tholl had done, and poised it over the immobile figure. But there he, too, halted for an instant.

The training of everyday, prosaic life is hard to break. Tholl had told him—and heaven knew he

believed sincerely—that the body before him was not alive, was simply undead, an animated corpse kept up only by its vampire diet. Nevertheless, to his eyes and instinct, the thing *looked* like the living body of any other man. And the plunging of that aspen stake into the heart was no less than murder!

**H**E had never dreamed it would be so hard a thing to do. He had fancied that, given the opportunity, he would drive the stake into Quoy's breast with no more compunction than he would have smashed the head of a snake.

But now, standing beside the hated figure, with the aspen stake held high, he hesitated. . . .

Murder! his instinct shrieked to him against all the dictates of reason. Cold-blooded murder, that's what it was! To stab an unconscious, helpless man. . . .

"Strike!" hissed the professor. "Be quick—before it is too late!"

Rick's fingers tightened on the smooth wood. He glared down at the evil, red-lipped face, gaining strength for his act from the loathsomeness of the pallid features. His arm tensed for the downward stroke. . . .

A crash like the report of a pistol shot split the air. Rick's arm faltered. The descent of the stake was stayed. He glanced down to see if Doctor Quoy had stirred in his trance.

He was looking, not at the repulsive face of Quoy, but at the bearded, venerable countenance of Professor Tholl! And the body on the bed was the body of Tholl, just moving now with returning consciousness as sleep passed from it!

**P**HYSICALLY, Doctor Quoy cannot touch me," the professor said. "That much power at least

I have to combat him with. So he plotted to have *you* kill me, in the nightmare he sent you. He had to have you get the stake with your own hand, because he could not bring it to you: I have reason to think he can pass through walls of brick and stone, but I am very sure he could not drag so inanimate a lump of substance as a stick of wood with him."

Rick's face was buried in his shaking hands. "My God!" he groaned. "What a frightfully close call! One more second—"

Tholl stared at him in blended pity and horror. Then he glanced toward the window. Beside that lay a heavy screen he was in the habit of setting before the opened window to keep the direct draft from him while he slept. A gust of wind had swept through the window, tipping over the heavy screen with a sharp crash. On that his life had hung!

Then, as Tholl gazed at the window, the color left his face and his eyes widened with realization of a vital, an ominous fact that their preoccupation had thus far kept the two men from noting.

"Good heavens!" he cried. "Look!"

Rick whirled to face the window too. Then his own face went white.

The window was an oblong of pure black. Night had fallen—deep night—how long ago he could not guess.

**H**E glanced at the clock. The hands pointed to ten minutes past eleven. They had slept for fourteen hours, for over three hours of which Priscilla Rand had been left unguarded and alone. Rick had merely, in his dream, *thought* it was still afternoon; actually he had gone out into pitch darkness, returned in darkness, and turned on the lights in the room under the hypnotic power of Quoy.

The ringing of the telephone burst in on the men's dazed thoughts. Rick and Tholl gazed at each other; then the professor moved to answer it.

"Professor Tholl?" came a woman's voice. "This is the Grace Hospital. Do you, or Mr. Ballard, know where Miss Priscilla Rand has gone?"

With difficulty, Professor Tholl forced himself to answer. And then he had to repeat it before the operator at Grace Hospital understood his words.

"We haven't heard from Miss Rand. She is not at the hospital?"

"No. She has left. Her clothes are not here, and she said nothing about leaving, and no one has seen her go. Shall we notify the police?"

"Not—just yet," said Tholl. "Wait. We will be down at once!"

"Gone . . .?" whispered Rick as the professor hung up.

"Yes. God help her! Quoy has surpassed himself to-night. He meant to kill me, have you dragged to a murderer's cell, and make away with Priscilla, all in one diabolical night! You and I, by the grace of heaven, escaped. But Priscilla—"

He stopped. In Rick's eyes was a picture of the thing they had seen under the red roof. The white, distorted figure in the crimson lake . . . anthropomancy. . . .

## CHAPTER XI

### *Into the Night*

**I**N her room at Grace Hospital, Priscilla had marked with impatience the slow flight of the afternoon hours. It was irksome, this continued stay, when she felt perfectly well. She was tired of reading; tired of roaming from her room to the terrace, and being stared at curiously by really sick people; tired of having monotonous hospital meals served her, and be-

ing hemmed in by an invalid's routine.

The place had become a jail to her. Nevertheless, she realized the wisdom of staying here in obedience to the professor's wishes. Involuntarily her hand went to her throat, where two sets of small red marks had barely healed. . . .

Restlessly she walked to the window, which faced west, and watched the lowering sun. Six-thirty. Rick and the professor were usually here by now. She wished they would come.

As the sun sank lower and lower, she began to have a growing unease. Again her hand strayed to her throat. If they were forced to leave her alone another night, she would face it with all the courage she could muster. But the thought of that eventuality, of staying awake hour after hour through the long night, waiting, waiting to fight off a possible attack of the malignant Quoy, as she had done a week ago, turned her pale.

She called the nurse. "Has Mr. Ballard, or Professor Tholl telephoned the hospital?" she asked anxiously.

"No, Miss Rand."

"Oh. . . . I thought one of them might have called you with instructions for the night."

The nurse left. Priscilla tried to interest herself in a book. It was a dismal failure. Her eyes kept straying toward the window, where the last dim red of sunset barely showed.

Night fell. An odd drowsiness stole over her. She was a little surprised at it. Having no outlet for her energies, she had been finding it hard to sleep nights. And now, at only a little after eight, and worried as she was by the failure of Rick and Tholl to appear, she was sleepy and found it more and more difficult to keep her eyes open!

**D**ETERMINEDLY she fought against her drowsiness; then she began to yield to it. Rick and the professor would surely be along soon. Why not take a nap till they arrived?

Almost with the thought, sleep dropped on her. Deep, thick sleep, that yet left her dimly conscious of her surroundings. A queer sleep, which, despite her will, she could not shake off—but a sleep which left her five senses open to vague and far-off impressions.

She knew, for instance, when the hands of the clock beside her pointed to a quarter of ten. She heard the nurse tiptoe in, and out again, after glancing at her and turning on the dim night-light. And she was fully conscious of a curious odor that began to permeate the air.

It was a revolting odor, a stench that nauseated her. She moved uneasily, but was still unable to break the chains of the strange, numbing sleep that bound her.

And now she became aware of two eyes staring at her. Her own eyes were closed; but still she could see those staring orbs, as though they were etched flamingly on the insides of her eyelids.

Long, narrow, and black as jet, they glared unblinkingly at her. And soon she was rising slowly from the bed, and was mechanically dressing. A small part of her was aware that she didn't want to do this—that above all things she must resist the unspoken command to be read in those narrow black eyes. But she couldn't resist. Plastic as wax to the will behind the glittering eyes, she walked to the door of her room.

Down the corridor she went, seeming to float more than to walk. There was no one in the corridor; no one was near the window leading to the fire-escape ladder. Afterward the nurse on duty in that

wing was to recall that she had been summoned to a far room, only to find the patient there asleep....

Still only mistily conscious of what was happening, as though groping blindly at the bottom of a sea of horror, Priscilla descended the steep iron steps of the escape, to find herself on the ground.

Helplessly obedient to the inexorable will flaming in the evil black eyes, she started off through the starless night, seeing only as wavering phantoms the few passersby on the back streets along which lay her path. . . .

**T**HE hospital was seething with activity when Rick and Tholl got there. Nurses and internes hurried quietly through the corridors, and in and out of rooms. Rick and the professor were met by the head physician of the staff who had chanced to be awake and dressed when called at his home.

"This is most mysterious, most distressing," he said. "The only thing we can believe is that Miss Rand walked down the corridor and out the fire-escape window in her sleep—or something—" He glanced intently at them. "There has been some mention of mental unbalance in connection with her case, I believe?"

Rick started hotly to reply; but the professor spoke first. "Yes, she had occasional mild delusions."

"Ah!" said the doctor quickly. This was the first time such a thing had happened at Grace Hospital. He grasped at a chance to absolve the institution from accusations of carelessness. "I hardly credited the sleep-walking theory, yet for an adult person to crawl so secretively down a fire-escape at this time of night. . . ." He ended the sentence with a shrug, and did not mention something that had been persistently puzzling him: a lingering remnant of some curious

odor that had greeted his nostrils when he stepped into the room of the missing girl.

"What have you done to locate her?" asked Tholl.

"Nothing. We understood you to say over the phone that nothing definite was to be done till you got here."

"But you have searched the building?"

"Thoroughly. She is not in it."

"Don't be too alarmed by this," said Tholl. "I have little doubt we'll find her at home when we go there to look for her." His voice and face expressed only mild concern. He turned and walked toward the door.

Rick clutched frantically at his arm.

"For God's sake, Professor—" he began.

"Ssh!" hissed Tholl. "You don't want the police in this, do you?"

Rick stopped. Vampires! Dead bodies that talked! Aspen stakes and the black arts! No, he did not want the police in this.

"The affair must be reported to the proper authorities if Miss Rand is not found at once," the doctor called after them.

"Of course," said Tholl. "We will phone you if we don't find her at home. Come, Rick."

**F**OR a moment the two stood in front of the hospital entrance in frozen indecision. In what festering dark spot in the great city was Priscilla hidden? And how could they move to find and help her?

Tholl's eyes were nearly closed with the concentration of his keen old mind.

"I think," he said at last, "there may be a chance—just a chance—through this dream of yours that came so close to tragedy for us both. From your description of the spot where you got that aspen

stake, it sounds as though it might be Quoy's secret hiding place. Could you possibly find your way there again?"

"I doubt it," despaired Rick. "I visited it only in a hypnotic trance. Hardly once did I glance out the window of the car I went in. The only clue I have is"—he pointed to his knees—"this brownish-red dirt I picked up while there."

Tholl glanced down. Adhering to the dark fabric of Rick's suit were two damp, discolored areas that could only have been caused by his kneeling somewhere in a muddy spot.

"That is all?" said Tholl. "Think! Think hard! Is there *nothing* you remember that might help us guess where this dream place is?"

Rick gnawed at his upper lip. Then a gleam came to his eyes.

"Yes! I remember now! There was something! At the very end of our trip we turned in through high, iron gates. And on the gates, worked in iron, were the letters T. H. C."

"T. H. C.," repeated the professor. "T. H. C. It carries a memory of some sort. . . . Seems as though we should know those letters . . . what they stand for. . . ." He stared at the drying patches of damp earth on Rick's knees. "And the curious color of that dirt! Brownish-red. . . . That strikes a chord, too. . . ."

**H**E stopped. Then, with a strangled cry, he turned and began running toward a cab that was parked down the street. "Where are you going?" Rick called. "What's up?"

"I'm going for Doctor Quoy!" cried the professor. "T. H. C.—and the color of that dirt! Don't you know? Can't you guess?"

Rick's head snapped back as he, too, caught the significance of the two clues.

"Tynsdale Hollow Cemetery!"

"Yes. We should have guessed it immediately," panted the professor. "The place for death—and Quoy is but death walking abroad—is in a graveyard. And what more likely one than that beside the house with the red roof where we saw. . . ."

"But the chamber I entered was underground!" said Rick, interrupting before the professor could finish. "And I reached it through a subterranean passage! There is no such arrangement at Tynsdale Hollow Cemetery!"

"How do you know?" snapped Tholl. "The ground there is low. There might be an extra large drain to carry off occasional surface water."

Once again they fled through the night in a speeding hired car to the vicinity of Tynsdale Hollow Cemetery, the memory of what they had found on their first trip there weighing down the thoughts of each. Once more they passed the graveyard, to conceal their true destination from the driver.

**Q**UICKLY they went to the big iron gate after the car had passed out of sight. It was closed now, that gate. It was past twelve; nearly one o'clock; and no one was supposed to have business there at such an hour.

The stone fence that flanked the road was easily scaled, however; and the two climbed it and returned to the gate, inside the grounds, as their starting point.

"You remember nothing but this gate?" the professor asked. "Nothing at all? Try to recall every move you made."

Furrows appeared in Rick's forehead as he tried desperately to remember the exact course of his nightmare.

"We came in through here . . . we turned right and then left. . . ."

"That must have been following this lane!" snapped Tholl, point-

ing to a side road that curved right along the fence from the gate, and then straightened out to parallel the center road. "We'll go down it!"

They did, slowly, while Rick strove to remember.

"I seem to recall hearing a heavy ring of metal on masonry . . . might have been the sound of a manhole lid lifted from a concrete inset. . . ."

"Enough," breathed Tholl. "It was—that!"

He walked through the grass and weeds toward a small circular spot that was bare of vegetation. And this spot, as they got nearer to it, proved to be a rusted iron manhole cover.

Tholl knelt, and put his ear to it. "Listen," he said.

Rick did; and he heard a trickle of water down beneath the lid.

"A drain, even as I thought it might be. It probably runs under this entire section," said the professor. His voice grew hushed, as he added: "This is the entrance! I feel it; I *know* it! This leads to the real hiding place of Quoy—probably the place where Priscilla is now being held. That is, if she is not already—"

"Don't say it!" implored Rick. With a frantic heave, he lifted the heavy iron lid from the clammy cement well it covered. "Come on, let's hurry."

## CHAPTER XII

### *The Vampire's Den*

**S**ULTRY black clouds pressed down overhead. A moaning, rising wind tossed the branches of the gnarled trees that dotted the old cemetery. The night was as black as a night can be, and heavy with an approaching storm. Indeed, the first large drops of rain just spattered against their faces as Rick and the professor lowered

themselves into the shallow well beneath the manhole lid.

Down the cement walls they climbed, on iron rungs set in the stonework, to the bottom. There they found two drains, about three feet in diameter, leading away from it. One went out of the cemetery toward the great city main that lined the street. The other led toward the heart of the graveyard.

"This way," said Tholl unhesitatingly, indicating the latter passage.

They started laboriously down. It was more like a tunnel than a drain; a continuous, tiny arched vault of rotting brick, laid before the advent of the more modern hollow tile, resembling in miniature some of the elaborate sewers that underlie many of Europe's cities.

On hands and knees they made their way. The darkness was so thick that they seemed to breathe it, to absorb it in clogged and clammy pores. It weighed on them like a heavy physical load. Rick reflected that he knew now what it was like to be blind, as he crawled on hands and knees down the damp, chill drain.

The path was slightly winding; and here and there the two bumped helplessly against a turning. Also here and there their questing hands sank into mounds of loose earth, where the vaulted brickwork above had given way and allowed the soft dirt to filter through. And once, eternities from the time they had left the well, Rick's fingers encountered something smooth and irregularly round and large, with three jagged holes in it, two of which had once held eye-balls and the third of which had been covered with the flesh and substance of a nose. . . .

**O**N and on they went, silently, like damned souls doomed to spend the rest of time worming

along a tunnel bored in solid blackness. Only once was the silence broken.

"Do you suppose this may be a trap?" whispered Rick, wiping the perspiration from his forehead and leaving there a smear of dank and musty earth.

"It may well be," came Professor Tholl's voice in the darkness. "But we must go on. . . ."

And on they went, until at last they saw, still far ahead of them, a ghostly greenish light which seemed to exude phosphorescently from the damp brickwork of the drain.

The light grew clearer as they advanced; and then, faintly at first, but growing rapidly stronger, came the loathsome odor with which they were now only too familiar!

Rick stopped, and turned to look at Tholl. He could dimly make out his face now, spectral and distorted in the ghostly greenish light. And he saw in Tholl's eyes the same thought he himself harbored.

Crawling down that horrible passage, they would emerge head first, and utterly helpless, into whatever subterranean chamber lay before them! A child could beat them down before they could rise to their feet and lift cramped arms to defend themselves!

And then, as they hesitated there in fearsome realization of their helplessness, a scream came keening down the passage. A girl's scream; high and imploring and broken with terror.

"Priscilla!" said Rick hoarsely; and he rushed forward on the slippery drain-floor, all thought of risk forgotten, at a speed that left Tholl far behind.

Again the scream burst out—to stop as though sliced through with a knife blade just as Rick got finally to the source of the ghastly greenish light; a cavern-like chamber which looked vaguely, horribly

familiar—the room of his dream!

They had accomplished their first object. They had searched out the final haunt of the evil genius, Quoy, at last. But where was he? And where was Priscilla?

In the phosphorescent light Rick could see no moving thing. Yet that fearful shriek had told of the girl's presence here; and the grisly stench of rotting corruption told with equal certainty of the near presence of the vampire-thing they sought.

Professor Tholl emerged panting from the tunnel and joined him. Warily, the two stood in the center of the cavern, and gazed about them.

**T**HE gruesome vault, deep-buried in the heart of the old cemetery, which Doctor Quoy had hollowed out for his secret hiding-place, was in effect only a widened spot in the drain-tunnel.

It was perhaps eight feet in height, and ten square; the walls, were the raw earth itself, unsupported in any way. Down from the roof, like clutching, gnarled talons, protruded the roots of trees. Through a shallow channel in the floor ran a tiny brook, passing from the drain-mouth opposite the one through which they had just emerged, across the vault and into the exit drain leading down to the circular well. Even as they gazed, this small brook ran faster and became more swollen, hinting that the storm outside had broken in its full fury.

Strange, curved rods of metal, and earthen retorts lay scattered here and there; along one wall was ranged a heavy, wooden work-bench. In one corner was a heap of shriveled herbs. In another corner—

"It may be he's lurking in *there!*" came the professor's tense voice. "Although it is not yet daylight,

and I can't conceive of his being inactive."

Rick caught up one of the curved metal rods and grasped it club-wise. Then he sprang for the thing in the corner—a plain wood coffin with the lid set in place but not screwed down.

His fingers clutched the edge of the lid. He started to raise it. . . .

With every nerve in his body tingling, he threw the lid back and leaped aside with his club raised for a crashing blow. And then he almost dropped it as a shock of surprise, terror and grief flooded through him.

Lying there in the coffin, her cheeks as white as fresh snow and her hands folded over her breast in the pose of death, was Priscilla.

**R**ICK groaned aloud. Priscilla . . . dead! But even as his eyes closed and the world seemed to topple, Professor Tholl brushed past him and started hurriedly to lift her from the casket.

"She's alive!" he said. "Unconscious—but alive! We were not too late."

A mocking voice suddenly sounded, seeming to come from every corner of the vault at once.

"Yes, she lives. You have rescued her, and found me out at last. You have triumphed."

Rick spun about, to glance in all directions for the source of the voice. He saw no trace of its dread owner. Meanwhile, the odor of death had suddenly grown stronger in the place.

The mocking, sinister voice went on: "You have triumphed—if one can call it triumph for the prey to stumble blindly into the trap and find the bait still alive!"

As the words were concluded, there was a dull crash. Rick and Tholl whirled around to see that a heavy iron plate had thudded down to form a tight barrier over the

mouth of the drain into which the surface rain water had been pouring at an ever increasing rate, and from which they had just entered.

The entrance to the trap, now that they were securely inside it, had been duly closed!

"The omniscient Professor Tholl and his lovelorn assistant!" the voice gibed on. "What chance has the humble Doctor Quoy against two such foes?"

The voice had gradually centralized, until now Rick thought it came from the drain entrance out of which the water was flowing—opposite the entrance that had been blocked by the iron plate.

**G**RIMLY, swinging the curved metal rod in his hand, he started toward the spot. But before his third step had been completed, he found himself rooted to the floor as though the air had hardened into transparent stone around him.

Near the open drain-mouth a shadow suddenly fell. And before Rick could decide whether it was shadow or substance, whether it had come from the drain-mouth or had just materialized out of the air, he found himself staring into Doctor Quoy's jet black eyes and shuddering at the twisted smile on his blood-red lips.

"And so the struggle ends between us, Professor Tholl," Quoy went on. "And in at the death—a purely literal phrase on this occasion—are your stalwart young assistant and the doll-faced girl he sprang so gallantly to rescue. I congratulate you on your victory."

The lips of Tholl moved desperately in incantations designed to paralyze his antagonist as that antagonist had paralyzed Rick. The incantations failed before Quoy's power.

"It will yet be victory!" he panted at last. "Thief and murderer!"

"Thief?" Doctor Quoy broke in suavely. "You are still bitter about my acquisition of the lost Cagliostro, I see. But I am utilizing it properly, whereas you would have played with it as a mere dilettante. Murderer? What would you? You know as well as I how I must derive my sustenance. And you know as well as I that the most effective way of divining the future is by reading the signs to be obtained—only with human sacrifice."

"You fiend from hell!" grated Tholl.

Doctor Quoy bowed ironically, giving never a glance in the direction of Rick, who was straining to break loose from whatever power it was that held him motionless.

"The compliment is treasured for the sincerity with which it is delivered. And now, if you will pardon me, I will leave the three of you to the pleasant finis which lies before you."

**Y**OU cannot touch me!" declared Tholl, drawing himself up. "Small as my power is, compared to the power of the possessor of Cagliostro's knowledge, it is yet sufficient to keep you from laying a finger on me."

"Granted," was the cold reply. "But while I may not have the pleasure of killing you directly, I can see to it that the forces of nature do it for me. Look at the floor!"

Rick's eyes swept downward with the professor's. And at what he saw, and at the significance he read in it, he exclaimed aloud.

The floor was covered with half an inch of water, that had overflowed its shallow trough. Unable to take its usual course through the lower drain entrance, dammed by the iron plate, the water was forming a pool which at every instant grew higher.

"Outside," said Quoy, "a storm

is raging. You may have noticed that it was starting to rain as you entered here? Well, that rain is now a downpour. As you know, all the surface water from this entire low section about here, drains through this vault. If it cannot get out of the vault—but you can guess the rest.”

“May God strike you dead,” shouted Professor Tholl. He sprang toward the mocking figure, splashing furiously in the deepening water. But as he reached Doctor Quoy, the man was no longer a thing of substance. Tholl’s hands grasped futilely at empty air.

A last few words were conveyed to them by the mocking, devilish voice: “I will leave you now. When I return at dawn, to unbar the lower drain and let the water out, I shall welcome with pleasure three new bodies on which to perform certain experiments I have in mind.”

The voice sounded no more. Every instinct told them Doctor Quoy had truly gone.

A moment the two men looked at each other; then, on common impulse, they leaped to the sliding iron plate that dammed the lower drain.

## CHAPTER XIII

### *Trapped*

**R**ICK and the professor wrestled with the iron plate, but they could no more move it than shift the solid earth about it. It did not even quiver under their desperate heaving. Only a moment was required to show them that *that* way out of their dreadful predicament was hopelessly barred.

“The other drain!” cried Rick. “Perhaps we can find a way out there.”

They stooped to enter the drain from which the flood was pouring, and splashed a few paces on the

long slant up. But scarcely five yards from the vault, the drain separated into multifarious branches, each far too small to accommodate a human body.

And now a cry sent them hurrying back. They found Priscilla sitting up and staring about her with wondering, fear-filled eyes. The chill water in which she had lain, now covering the floor for three or four inches, had ended her unconsciousness.

“Where are we?” she faltered. “What is this place? Rick—Professor—”

In a few words, Professor Tholl outlined their position. Priscilla went white as death; but she did not faint or grow hysterical. Her courage, proven before, was even equal to this emergency.

“The only two outlets from this vault are the two drains,” Tholl summed up. “The one is barred by the iron drop-door; the other, a few feet away, is too small for even a cat to crawl through. Meanwhile, the water—”

All glanced downward. The water had risen till it was halfway between their ankles and their knees. It seemed to increase in rapidity of rising, too, which was only natural: the furious downpour outside would drain more and more rapidly as the surface earth became saturated and absorbed the falling water less and less easily.

Above them was, probably, twenty feet of solid earth. Around them was Mother Earth itself. About them the flood rose with increasing swiftness. Now it had reached their knees—now almost to their waists.

Priscilla drew close to Rick. Wordlessly, he put his arm around her shoulders. Tholl’s head lowered till his beard swept his chest.

Silently the three waited, while the swirling, muddy water rose high and higher.

**S**UDDENLY Rick pushed himself away from Priscilla and faced the professor with a wild gleam in his eyes.

"My God!" he shouted, "why didn't we think of it before! We can save ourselves."

Tholl and Priscilla stared at him with the same thought in the mind of each. The strain. . . .

"Easy, Rick," said the professor soothingly. "Don't go to pieces." He laid his hand on the younger man's arm.

Impatiently, Rick shook it off and waded toward the heavy wooden bench, which was just beginning to float free of the floor.

"The other drain!" he cried, his voice so uneven and cracked that Tholl's muscles tensed to protect himself from a possible insane attack. "This bench! The other drain!" said Rick excitedly. "Good heavens! The simplest thing—yet we might well have died for not having thought of it!"

Desperately he tugged the heavy bench toward the drain from which the water poured. "If Quoy can block the one passage, to keep the water in this vault," he explained, "we can block the other—to *keep the water out!* Now do you see?"

The professor did see! With an exclamation, he hurried to help move the bench. They propped it endways against the drain-mouth, and felt with their fingers beneath the surface of the water to see if it fitted flush with the brickwork. It did. Save in a few small places, the wooden planks pressed snugly against the mortared bricks of the drain entrance. But those few places, too, were plugged efficiently: Rick reached out and grasped an armful of the floating herbs and wadded them into compact masses to stop the gaps.

The rush of water was cut off. Very, very slowly, the flood seeped in at minute apertures around their

crude dam; but the three were saved for an indefinite time—as long, probably, as Rick and the professor would have the strength to stand with their backs leaning against the bench to hold it in place. To this small extent, at least, the machinations of Doctor Quoy had been thwarted.

But how were they ever to get out of their ghastly tomb?

**P**RISCILLA voiced the thought of all: "It seems to me we have only put off dying a little longer. We'll never be able to leave this place, unless a miracle happens."

She looked with faint hope at the professor. But he shook his head. "No my child. I am not able to work miracles. A few things, elementary in themselves but terrifying and inexplicable to those unacquainted with the black arts, I can perform. But to get our solid bodies through these solid walls and to the outer air—that I cannot!"

"Then," said Priscilla simply, "our miracle must come from another source."

And her head bowed humbly, while her lips moved with the words of a childish, almost forgotten supplication her mother had taught her long ago to repeat each night beside her bed. . . .

Hour dragged slowly after hour, while Tholl and Rick leaned grimly back against the bench that kept them from being submerged. With the chill of the water and the monotony of their position, their muscles grew ever more cramped, till even breathing was an agony to them. But they dared not relax. The flood in the ramified drainage system behind them would fill the vault with a rush now, accumulated as it was, if the bench ever slipped.

"A quarter after four," muttered Rick, cautiously freeing one hand and looking at his watch, which he

had put in an upper pocket to keep it clear of the water. "Dawn comes about five o'clock, at this time of year. And with the dawn will come Doctor Quoy!"

**P**RISCILLA and the professor said nothing. It had not needed Rick's remark to remind them of that. The vampire's parting sentence—that he would return at dawn and find three new bodies for his experiments—continually burned in the brain of each. It happened that he would return to find bodies still alive, but this was a condition he could easily change.

"Unless," said Rick, "we could catch him for one minute off guard."

"We couldn't leave this bench long enough to avail ourselves of the one minute!" Tholl pointed out.

Rick was silent for a moment. "But surely there may be some way . . . something we can do . . ." he insisted.

Priscilla was the next to speak.

"Professor," she said suddenly, "just how much like a normal human being is a vampire?"

"Why, not at all like one," said Tholl, his brows knitting. "A vampire is not alive; it is an undead thing actuated by a living intelligence."

"But its body—it is forced to take nourishment, of a sort, like any other body—"

"Oh, I see what you mean," said the professor. "Well, in its ordinary functions, a vampire's body is much like that of a living, normal person. It feeds in its own ghastly way, and breathes."

"Breathes!" repeated Priscilla, her white face showing sudden eagerness. "Breathes! That's what I was wondering about. Then the vampire, Quoy, can't enter this prison of ours till it's emptied of water!"

The two men gazed at her, wondering what she had in mind.

"I think there's a ray of hope," she said softly. "Doctor Quoy must be sure this crypt is flooded. Before he enters here, he will go through all the motions of emptying it. One of those motions will be—the opening of that iron gate!"

"That's sound logic," commented Tholl.

"What of it?" said Rick dully.

Priscilla outlined more completely the thought that had come to her.

"He will have to open the flood-gate from a distance: that drain leading to the outer world will be a rushing torrent impassable even to him till the flow is over. That means there will be a lapse of several minutes between the time the flood-gate is lifted and the time he enters here!"

"Well?" said Rick, still perplexed.

**W**ELL—suppose we let loose the flood accumulated behind the bench the instant the iron plate is raised. The water will all be drained out, even as Doctor Quoy anticipates. He will come in here expecting to find us drowned. Isn't it possible that he will be careless—off guard as Rick said—and that we can strike some blow against him before he has realized exactly what has happened?"

"Wonderful!" said Rick. "Priscilla, you're a marvel! There's just one thing. . . ." He looked speculatively at the roof of the crypt, judging its height from the floor. "There'll be a lively few minutes in here while the water we're holding behind this bench pours out! It may fill the vault completely for a long enough time to drown us after all!"

"There's no other alternative," snapped Tholl. "If only Priscilla's reasoning is correct, and he *will*

have to open the water-way. . . ."

Tensely, the three stared at the iron cover that shut off the mouth of the lower passage. They could just see the top of it in the dim greenish light, over the flood that washed around them, and they watched it till their eyes ached. It remained immovable.

"Twenty minutes till dawn," said Rick, moistening his lips.

"He *must* come soon—if he's coming here at all," said the professor.

Wide-eyed, with life hanging in the balance, they stared at the iron barrier.

"Eighteen minutes. . . ." muttered Rick; and then, "fifteen. . . ."

"I think it's moving," whispered Priscilla.

Holding their breaths, they all watched. And it seemed as though a slight ripple showed in the murky water next to the iron plate.

The next instant it was confirmed. All felt a tugging at their ankles and legs as the flood in the vault began to sweep down the lower drain. And the next moment after that they saw the blackness of the passage mouth as the iron plate swung soundlessly up to leave the entrance clear.

**I**N a few moments the water in the vault had swirled noisily down the tunnel, leaving only shallow pools on the floor under their feet.

Rick glanced at the professor, who nodded.

"Now!" said Tholl. "Find something to hang on to. Anyone who is sucked down into the passage with the flood. . . ."

Simultaneously the two men leaped away from the propped-up bench. It went down with a crash as the surging water behind it jammed forward. In an instant the crypt was a boiling whirlpool, with the three being tossed this way

and that as if they were straws.

"The roots!" shouted Rick.

He had one arm around Priscilla, holding her desperately against the deadly pull of the current. With his free hand he was clutching at one of the largest of the gnarled tree roots that protruded down through the earth of the ceiling. The professor, who had been swept half-way to the tunnel mouth in the first rush of the water, reached up at Rick's call and caught a root. There the three clung, dangling and swaying in the rapid current like three streamers of paper suspended before the gale of an electric fan.

The flood reached up to within a foot of the roof in its first wild rush. Then gradually it lowered its level till the three could drop from the holds of the roots into only a foot or so of water. Finally the crypt was emptied, as was the system of mains behind it. The roaring in the big drain that led to the outside world, diminished to a sullen muttering, and then was stilled altogether. Once more the water splashed in a decorous small brook through the groove cut for it in the floor of the vault.

The crypt was ready for the occupation of the monster who had so painstakingly hollowed it out for a secret retreat from a more normal world.

## CHAPTER XIV

### *Doctor Quoy Returns*

"**W**E'LL lie on the floor," said the professor, "as though Quoy's plan had succeeded. Simulate death."

The three stretched themselves out in sprawled, limp attitudes on the moist floor, to wait the arrival of the evil genius that had imprisoned them there. And as they lay there, with eyes closed and the greenish glow shining on faces

pinched and pallid with the chill of the place, they looked indeed like the lifeless corpses it was so imperative that they resemble.

The ordeal of lying helplessly on the floor, waiting for the coming of the dread Quoy, was almost unbearable.

Rick felt that each succeeding second of time must see the end of his endurance—that any instant he must spring to his feet and yell like a maniac to end the suspense. Lying there, just lying there, painfully repressing the shudders of terror and exhaustion and pure chill, with the entire weight of the weedy old cemetery above seeming to press down on him, and with Doctor Quoy somewhere near and creeping closer every moment, was torture far more refined than that of red-hot pincers and rack. And then a positive note crept into the unendurable passivity of their suspense, as, from the mouth of the passageway, came a faint, horrible stench.

For some seconds before Rick could hear anything, his nostrils caught that odor of death, ever growing stronger and more loathsome. Then from down the dripping passage came a faint, dragging sound.

Rick reached out and pressed the arm of Priscilla, who lay like a limp flower beside him. Then he let his arm fall in a lax, dead way to the floor while he watched, through the fringe of his eyelashes, the entrance of the passage.

**T**HE dragging sound grew louder. It puzzled Rick. It sounded as though some sick or wounded thing were dragging itself painfully down the small tunnel. Then Quoy appeared; and at the look and actions of him, Rick could hardly repress a start.

Doctor Quoy was moving slowly, but in a way that showed he was

hastening as rapidly as he could. He moved as though partially paralyzed, hitching arms and legs along as if they weighed him down like lead. On his pale, evil face was a dull, perplexed look; and his eyes had a glazed expression.

With a wild thrill of hope, Rick divined the meaning of Quoy's lethargic movements and his anxious, though tortuous, haste. His one point of vulnerability—the inevitable limitation of the vampire—was clamping down on him. Doctor Quoy had almost been overtaken by dawn, and the near-death of his day, before returning to his underground haunt!

Breathlessly, Rick watched the movements of the crippled enemy. And as he watched, the thrill of hope grew wilder.

Doctor Quoy sighed heavily as he dragged himself to his feet. With an immense effort he stood almost upright. Then, scarcely glancing at the three sprawled bodies on the drenched floor, he stumbled toward the spot where the subsiding flood had stranded the wooden coffin.

What occurred then was simple in itself, but ghastly beyond description in the foul and hideous things it connoted.

Doctor Quoy lifted the coffin lid, sighed heavily again, and lay down in the coffin as if it had been a bed. Slowly the lid sank over him, till with a soft thud it had closed him in.

Quoy the malignant, Quoy the fiendishly powerful, was in his deathly trance and delivered into their hands!

**W**ITH a cry of triumph that rang shrill and cracked in the vault, Rick sprang to his feet and jumped toward the horrible couch of the vampire. The professor reached it with him, and together they pried at the coffin lid.

It was immovable under their fingers!

Rick glanced at Tholl.

A second time they put their backs into the task of lifting the coffin lid. It didn't stir.

They had seen for themselves how it had settled loosely down into place. They had seen before that there were no inside fastenings to hold it down. Formed of a solid, inch-and-a-half plank, it couldn't have weighed more than twenty pounds. Yet it resisted their combined efforts to lift it as though it had been of solid lead and sealed to the box beneath it with steel clamps!

"Beaten . . . again. . . ." said the professor brokenly. He seemed to grow older in that bitter short moment. "Again! And I was so sure. . . ."

"We'll break the damned thing in!" snapped Rick.

He picked up a metal rod and brought it crashing down on the wood. A slight dent appeared in the lid. That was all.

**H**E raised the rod for another blow. But at this instant something happened that ended completely the faint hope that Quoy could be reached in that oddly impregnable casket of his.

Priscilla leaped away from them, staring with horrified eyes at the mouth of the smaller drain, while scream after scream burst from her bloodless lips.

The two men spun around to look, then shrank back in their turn.

Whether driven out of the rain-soaked earth by the surplus of fallen water, or called in regimental formation by some ghastly, horrible power, a wriggling mass of life filled the smaller tunnel. A writhing mass of earthworms! The drain was choked with them!

Blind, helpless, slow-moving things, they flowed sluggishly into

the crypt in a billowing flood. In a moment they had surrounded the coffin and were rolling and crawling about the feet of the girl and the two men.

"Good Heavens!" Rick gasped. "Look at the things pour out!"

The same vision assailed the brain of each. A second flood, more horrible by far than any tide of water, slowly rising to trap and submerge them in the crypt. . . .

Silently, with their eyes almost starting from their heads, the three plunged into the lower tunnel entrance and began clawing a way toward the outer world. And as they slipped and fought their way along the dripping passage, it seemed to them that the soft helpless things dropped down upon them from the rotting archway above, and started up between the very bricks under their recoiling fingers. . . .

## CHAPTER XV

### *The Golden Noose*

**D**OWNSTAIRS, in the professor's library, the two men sat gazing unseeingly at the wall, each lost in his thoughts.

They had brought Priscilla here to the professor's house, feeling she would be safer here than anywhere else. She was lying upstairs now, sunk in the sleep of utter exhaustion and nervous shock, with a nurse in attendance. Tholl had phoned the hospital immediately on their arrival in the early morning to stop any police investigations they might have started. Then he had got the nurse for her, and he and Rick had fallen loglike into bed to get some rest.

With the first relief of their great fatigue, they had waked again, too tense for normal slumber. That had been at two in the afternoon. It was now nine in the evening, with full night blanketing

the city. In those seven endless hours they had stood guard over Priscilla, and had tried to compose themselves to face whatever might next be their lot to endure from the infamous Quoy.

**A**T the moment they were in the library for a few minutes of relaxation and talk; they couldn't converse in Priscilla's room for fear of waking her. The nurse—a grim-faced woman who was almost too efficient at her duties—could see that the girl was undisturbed for a little while.

"Quoy will strike to-night," the professor insisted. "When dawn comes to-morrow, either he will be destroyed, or all three of us will be dead. To-night decides all."

"How do you know?" demanded Rick, puffing nervously at a cigarette. "I don't see how you can be so certain."

"It can't be otherwise," interrupted Tholl impatiently. "Consider: we three of all the world know Doctor Quoy's true character and identity. And now—we three of all the world know where he hides in daylight, his last secret den. Don't you see—he's got to strike, and at once, if he would continue to exist himself."

"What do you think will be Quoy's method of attack to-night? Have you any idea?"

"Yes, I have a pretty definite idea, versed as I am along similar lines. I think he will try to get something from this house. Some intimate, personal thing belonging to one of the three of us. Using that as a focal point, he can destroy us from a distance. We might, perhaps, be able to trap him if he tries to steal into this house for some such thing."

Rick got abruptly to his feet. "I think we'd better get back to Priscilla's room," he said with a shiver.

**T**HE two left the library and walked up the stairs. At the head of them they met the nurse, just leaving the girl's room.

"Is she still sleeping?" asked Rick in a low tone.

At this question, the nurse seemed oddly surprised. "Why, yes, sir," she said. "She's as sound asleep as she was a moment ago when you were in her room."

"I? A moment ago?" repeated Rick in amazement. "It's been a half hour since I was in there!"

"I don't understand. . . ." faltered the nurse, looking at him as though she doubted his sanity.

But here the professor spoke, clutching Rick's arm convulsively.

"You saw Mr. Ballard come into this room only a moment ago?" he rapped out.

"Yes, sir. It was less than three minutes—"

"What did he do in there?" demanded Tholl.

"He tiptoed to Miss Rand's side, and snipped off a lock of her hair. I thought it was such a sweet little touch of sentiment."

In utter dismay, Rick and Tholl faced each other.

"He's come—and gone!" said Tholl. "And he has accomplished his purpose while I sat stupidly inactive within forty feet of him! May heaven protect us now!"

Heavily, he instructed the astonished nurse to go to her own home for the night; and, still gazing doubtfully at Rick as though convinced he was not quite sane, she donned her mannish blue coat and left.

"There's nothing more she can do here," said the professor dully to Rick. "Why endanger her life needlessly?"

"You think some general catastrophe may come now—something that would destroy the house and everybody in it?"

Professor Tholl shrugged. "Who

can tell? With that fatal lock of hair in his possession, Doctor Quoy can do many things. Which he will attempt, I have no way of divining."

But they were soon to know.

**S**LOWLY the minutes passed while the two men sat in Priscilla's room and waited for the final thrust of the evil genius, Quoy. Rigid they sat, as condemned men sit in their hopeless cells, keyed up to the breaking point; while the girl breathed deeply and regularly, still locked in heavy sleep.

The room was dimly lit by a single light bulb. Rick had moved to snap on the overhead lights, but the professor had stopped him with a gesture.

"Why wake her, with a glare of light, to go through these last few moments of suspense?" he had whispered. "Let her sleep as long as she can, poor girl."

So they sat and watched her, listening to her deep, regular breathing.

Rick's quick ears were the first to catch a slight difference in that rhythmic breathing; his eyes were the first to see the alarming change that came over her face, and to discover the dreadful reason for it.

Priscilla's lips parted, and she moved a little in her sleep; her breathing had changed tempo! It became quicker, uneven, with a harsh, stertorous sound. And her face, pale and worn, was suddenly suffused with crimson. After that the delicate skin became oddly mottled. And her throat—

"Professor!" cried Rick, leaping from his chair and plucking frenziedly at something on Priscilla's white throat. "Look!"

Around the girl's neck, biting more deeply every second into her soft flesh, was a single strand of her long golden hair. It was loose, not in any way connected with the

tresses that swept her pillow—one of that lock which Quoy had cut when he entered the room in the appearance of Rick Ballard!

"Help!" Rick implored the professor. "She'll choke to death!"

**B**UT the professor was already beside him, tearing at that single throttling strand of hair with fingers that shook as badly as Rick's did.

Under their hands, Priscilla did not move. She had passed from sleep to unconsciousness with scarcely a quiver.

With an immense effort—it was like trying to snap tempered steel piano-wire—they broke the fatal golden thread. But instantly, another appeared, to bite even deeper into the soft white flesh.

And then Rick gave a strangled shout, and his hands flew to his own throat. There, too, an almost invisible strand of gold had appeared, to sink into flesh and muscle in a deep thin groove!

For perhaps five seconds Professor Tholl struggled to break the golden noose. Then, realizing that such efforts were fatally useless, he turned and ran from the room, down the hall, and up the steep stairs to the laboratory in his attic.

Two steps at a time, he ascended the stairs, driving his old body to haste till the veins stood out like cords on his forehead. Across the floor of the eery laboratory he leaped, to a shelf where was a small, carefully sealed earthen pot. With this in his hands, he ran back to the bedroom.

Rick and Priscilla were both motionless by now, with their faces dreadfully black and their breaths rattling in their throats. Not stopping to try to unseal the earthen pot, the professor dashed it to the floor. It broke, revealing a thick, gummy substance, like a

heavy salve, that was purplish blue. The result of one of the experiments with obscure, alchemic formulae which Tholl had mentioned to Rick but had not attempted to explain to him—or to any living soul.

Quickly he applied some of the purplish salve to the constricted throat of Priscilla and Rick.

The deadly hairs snapped.

ONCE again Doctor Quoy had been beaten—by a pitifully small margin, it is true, but still beaten—at his own game. But Professor Tholl knew that it was not enough, that such desperate and last moment remedies could not be applied forever. Each blow of Doctor Quoy's—and there would be a relentless and never-ending succession of them—might be the last. They must strike at him first, definitely and decisively, if they could think of a way to do it.

So it was that Tholl left Rick and Priscilla when the girl had drawn the first deep breath of returning consciousness. For he *had* thought of a way in which Quoy might be attacked!

It had come to him like an inspiration while he was in his laboratory; and at once it had presented itself as so logical and possible that he was amazed he hadn't thought of trying it before.

True, it might fail; everything else had failed against Quoy so far. And it meant his, the professor's, almost certain death. . . .

Tholl drew himself erect, and his pace, as he descended the stairs, became almost a martial tread. He was old. His life was nearly done anyway. What if he did sacrifice the few years remaining to him? Faced with a chance, no matter how remote, of destroying at last the dread power for which he was indirectly responsible, he did not hesitate.

His fingers tightened on the most powerful weapon against Quoy that had yet been presented to him—something that had within the hour been in direct contact with the vampire.

Professor Tholl gazed down at the two golden hairs he had taken up when they had fallen from the throats of Rick and Priscilla.

He entered his library and opened a secret drawer. In there was the aspen stake which Doctor Quoy, himself had shaped and sharpened. The vampire, probably never dreaming his plot to trap and kill them in the crypt might fail, had not troubled himself to try to retrieve that stake. Now, by some poetic justice, that fire-hardened point might be plunged into his own chest.

Tholl grasped the stake, and marched unfalteringly to that place he had thought never again to enter—the crude underground chamber in which was hidden the fleshly mantle that had once housed Quoy's intelligence: that body he, Tholl, had done to death in his laboratory two years ago.

## CHAPTER XVI

### *Through the Heart!*

THOLL'S mind was icily clear as he marched to his almost certain doom. In the cellar, he debated calmly whether or not he would leave the secret door in the concrete-block wall open for Rick to follow him later. He decided he would. It was taking a desperate chance that in so doing he might let loose an unspeakable horror in the house; but they were taking desperate chances, anyway.

Clutching the aspen stake and the two long golden hairs, the professor went down the dark passage to the chamber in which Rick had first seen an actual example of the practise of the black arts. With

a last deep breath, he flung open the portal and stepped in.

The electric light was still on, as they had left it in their panic-stricken flight days ago, shining with horrible brilliancy on the corpse huddled in a stark heap at the base of the door it had battered against in its insensate attempt to follow the mortals that had disturbed its rest. At this reminder of that last near-catastrophe, the professor shivered. But his mind was still calm and cold.

In the glaring light of the bulb, he took out a pencil and notebook and wrote a few hurried lines. He tore out the page and thrust it carefully into an inside pocket. Rick would find it there, in case there came to pass that which he unshrinkingly anticipated. Then he returned to the task in hand—a brave man about to perform an act of courage no less great for the fact that no one would ever know the supreme fortitude required for it.

**A**S he had done before, he bent over the stark body in an intensity of mental concentration. After a few minutes of this, he touched the lids of the shrunken right eye with his long, tapering fingers. The lids jerked convulsively; finally opened. The withered eyeball turned in its socket to glare at him.

"I am here," grated the hollow, sepulchral voice. "What do you wish?"

Fine moisture broke out on Tholl's forehead, but he did not falter.

"Spirit of a homeless land," he droned, "fettered to this rotting shell, that is not your own, by the dark will of the one who has wronged you, I wish to set you free at last, and to avenge you by condemning *his* black soul as he condemned your innocent one!"

The dead jaws locked shut with such force that the loose teeth splintered together. The shrunken features worked in a frenzy of rage. The glare in the opened right eye was such that Tholl could hardly endure it.

"What am I to do?" boomed the hollow, dull voice. "Command me."

The professor unclenched his left hand, disclosing the two golden hairs. These he laid over the heart of the corpse in a cross-shape.

"These golden strands," he said, "have but an hour ago been charged with evil by the one we both wish to annihilate. They are thus two-edged swords, deadly to him as to us. Take them, and, armed with the power their recent hellish contact and association gives you—*force that black intelligence back to this frame in which it was born!*"

The hollow voice did not reply. The stiff eyelids jerked shut over the glaring eye. Anxiously, Professor Tholl watched those two golden hairs, laid over the unbeating heart. . .

Suddenly, they were gone.

**T**HE end was swift in coming. Miles away, in a secret crypt twenty feet under the debris of death men call Tynsdale Hollow Cemetery, the sinister figure of Doctor Quoy was bent intently over a lock of long golden hair.

At one moment he was muttering strange words, repeating them from a rune inscribed in faded symbols on an ancient piece of parchment. At the next moment he had fallen, with a wild shriek, to the clammy earthen floor.

The body of Quoy jerked and twitched for a long time in queer and awful spasms . . . then was stark and still.

And shortly after that, the corpse beside Professor Tholl suddenly moved, as though galvanized with an electric current, and sat up.

Tholl backed away from it, the aspen stake raised before him. The corpse got creakily, unsteadily to its feet. And now *both* eyes were open; and from them came a ray light so luridly evil that the impact of their glance was almost a physical thing. No further demonstration was necessary to proclaim that the eery transfer had been made—that the savage intelligence of Doctor Quoy was once more in the body in which it had started its mortal journey.

"Thus far you have won," grated the dull, hollow voice, a voice now subtly, terribly different from that which had first sounded in the shrunken chest. "But if you try what I read in your mind, it will be the last act of your life, Professor Tholl!"

"Nevertheless," said Tholl, and his voice, though shaken, was indomitable, "I shall try—and I will succeed. I will impale your rotten heart with this stake!"

"Fool!" boomed the voice. "Should you do that, you would die as I died. When that point enters my heart in that same instant a psychic point less solid, but no less deadly, shall pierce your own heart. That at least I can accomplish, even in the moment of my own death. And no one knows it more surely than you!"

**I**N answer, swift and sure, the professor drove for the swaying corpse, even as the bony fingers clamped around his throat.

"No longer am I unable to touch your flesh with mine," rasped the dead voice. "Now will I have the pleasure of killing you with these two hands."

The words ended in a bubbling groan; a groan that rose and swelled terribly to a piercing shriek, and then was stilled.

Tholl had not attempted to tear the throttling, almost fleshless fin-

gers loose. Shaken in the clutch of the gaunt arms, he had yet contrived to arch his body away from the shrunken thing that held him. Then he had placed the fire-hardened point of the aspen stake over the left side of the rotting chest, braced the butt of it against his own breast, and clasped the hideous form to him in an embrace of death.

In and in the stake had gone, till the charred sharp point had thrust with a dreadful soft sound out through the shredding back. And then the creature fell, with the hellish soul of it snuffed out forever.

But with it fell the professor. Quoy had made good his threat, as Tholl had known he would. With the entrance of that point into the long-stilled heart a terrible pain had clamped the professor's own heart. It had pounded once, then stopped. Still locked in the terrible embrace, the two bodies lay motionless on the floor.

**I**T was so, some hours afterward, with the clean gold of sunrise flooding the world, that Rick found them. And it was there in that underground room that he found and read the last few words Professor Tholl had written and thrust into his inside pocket.

"To Priscilla Rand and Rick Ballard, with a last assurance of peace, I leave all my earthly possessions. I make this last will and testament under the premonition that my life will soon be spent, taken from me by my old enemy, heart failure."

"Heart failure!" repeated Rick to Priscilla, as the two stood looking down at the still figure Rick had brought upstairs and arranged gently on the bed. "Heart failure!"

The sublime irony of it! The cold courage and intelligence that even in that last awful moment could think of attributing approach-

ing death to a natural cause and so spare a world ever hostile to beliefs and creeds beyond its limited comprehension, the bitter truth!

"With a last assurance of peace," murmured Priscilla. "He conquered, then, and that dreadful Thing no longer exists."

"Yes, he conquered," breathed Rick. "Just the look on his face would be enough to tell us that."

And, a little awed, they gazed at the expression of supreme triumph and content that had erased the lines of agony in the last instant before Professor Tholl had fallen.

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## The Wizard Merlin

**PROBABLY** no wizard has so captured the imagination of the English speaking peoples as has the great Merlin. This almost completely legendary figure appears to have been contemporary with the Saxon invasion of Britain in the latter part of the Fifth Century; but the earliest mention of his name by any writer that has come down to us was in the Eleventh Century. Since six hundred years elapsed between the time he lived and the earliest known record of his achievements, it is impossible to know what he really did during his lifetime, or to guess what were those actions of his that successive writers have embroidered into their fantastic stories.

Merlin is said to have been the confidant of several English kings, among them Uther Pendragon. Uther had become desperately enamored of Igera, the wife of the Duke of Cornwall, and had tried every means to seduce her in vain. Merlin, upon being consulted, contrived by an extraordinary unguent to metamorphose Uther into the form of the duke. The duke had shut up his wife for safety in a very strong tower; but Uther in his new form gained entrance without being suspected, with the result that the unsuspecting Igera begot him Arthur, afterwards the most renowned of all England's sovereigns. Uther then contrived that the duke, her husband, be slain in battle, and married Igera, and made her his queen.

Merlin's next exploit had for its purpose the erection of an everlasting monument to the memory of three hundred British nobles who were massacred by the Saxons. He wanted the mighty structure now called Stonehenge, which was said to have originally been set up in Africa and then transferred to Ireland, no one knows how, removed to Salisbury Plain. The workmen whom he commanded to transport the stones exerted all their power and skill, but could move not one of them. Merlin, having for some time watched their fruitless exertions, applied his magic; and, to the amazement of every one, the stones spontaneously rose to a great height in the air and then pursued the course which he had prescribed,

finally settling themselves in Wiltshire, where they are now and will remain forever.

The last of Merlin's recorded adventures proceeded from a project he conceived for surrounding his native town of Caermarthen with a brass wall. Against the completion of this project he enlisted the services of a multitude of fiends, who labored with their preparations in a neighboring cavern, well underground. Now at that time Merlin was enamored of a supernatural being called the Lady of the Lake, a lady who had long resisted his importunities and showed no inclination to yield. One day, however, she sent for him in great haste, and Merlin went to her after giving his fiends strict orders to continue their labors until they saw him again.

It turned out that the lady intended nothing but to make sport of him, while eluding his advances. Hoping to melt her, Merlin showed her some of the wonders of his magic art, among them a tomb which could be forever sealed by means of a charm which he revealed to her. The lady pretended to disbelieve that the tomb was large enough for its purpose, and inveigled Merlin to enter it; and, no sooner had she succeeded in getting the unsuspecting wizard inside than she pronounced the magic words, rendering it impossible that it ever be opened until the Day of Judgment. Thus, according to the story, Merlin was shut in, a corrupted and putrifying body with a living soul which retained the faculty of returning in audible sounds prophetic answers to questions put to it as an oracle.

Meanwhile the fiends at work in the cavern near Caermarthen, bound by his injunction not to discontinue work until he returned, continued forever at their labors; and it is said that to this day the traveler who passes that way can, by laying his ear against the mouth of the cavern, hear the ghastly noise of iron chains, of brazen cauldrons, of loud strokes of the hammer and the ringing sound of the anvil, all intermixed with the pants and groans of the fiends forever laboring in its depths.

*She glided down  
the long hall.*



# By the Hands of the Dead

By Francis Flagg

**I** BELIEVE," said Porter Norton to me, "that you should tell the story as a warning to those dreamers and madmen who would dare to knock at the very portals of death and question the grim guardian of the beyond."

Perhaps Norton is right. Perhaps the terrible fate of Peter Strong was incurred because he came near to rending the veil betwixt life

and death, and no man can do that and live. But I do not quite believe this. I believe. . . .

But let me tell the story; let me put the weird, incredible facts on paper and in the end you shall know what I believe.

From beyond the very grave a spirit reaches back with hands of vengeance.

Norton and I met Peter Strong at one of Mrs. Tibbet's Sunday night gatherings. Mrs. Tibbet was a charming old lady who believed in spiritualism.

A spiritualist society held weekly meetings at her parlors and one saw some inexplicable things there. One night a medium—a big, fleshy woman who resembled pictures of Madame Blavatzky—gave a rather disturbing performance. The room was darkened as usual, but a veiled globe threw a faint light upon an area of floor in our midst.

We sat in a half circle, facing the cabinet, and holding hands. Suddenly the curtains of the cabinet parted and something came into the room, something abnormally broad and squat. All this time the sound of heavy breathing and occasional cries as if of pain, came from the cabinet. The thing which now undulated across the floor could not possibly be the medium, and I watched with a prickling sensation of the scalp until it reached the illuminated area. In the blacker portions of the room it had been distinguishable only as a luminous mass; but now it showed like white smoke, wreathing and churning. I felt Norton, who sat next to me, stiffen in his chair, and at that moment a woman screamed and someone snapped on the lights. The smoke vanished:

"Fake, of course," I said with a nervous laugh.

**N**ORTON nodded his head doubtfully; but the gentleman who had sat on my right, a man I had seen at the meetings for the first time, shook his head. "No," he said quietly, "that wasn't a fake, that was one of the odd times when Mrs. Powers had enough psychic units of electricity focused in herself to allow the materialization of matter plain enough to be seen."

I looked at the man with interest. He was of average height, slim and precise looking. His face was clean shaven, that of an ascetic, a scholar; he had a high forehead and wide gray eyes—the eyes of a mystic.

His age I judged to be fifty-five or sixty.

At that moment Mrs. Tibbet bustled up. "This," she said, putting her arm around the shoulders of the man, "is a very dear friend of mine, and I want you to meet him. His name is Strong—Peter Strong."

We shook hands. "You mustn't judge spiritualism," he said with a smile, "by its religious or fortune-telling aspects. As a matter of fact, the science of spiritualism has nothing to do with religion."

"The science?" said Norton.

"Yes, the science. Nothing is more exact than astronomy to-day, yet it had its roots in astrology. What you see in the spiritualist societies throughout the world, the mediums and their like, is but the primitive foundations of scientific spiritualism. It is full of quackery and fraud, just as astrology was and still is full of quackery and fraud." He gave us his card. "If you should ever care to call on me," he said, "I would be delighted to discuss the subject further."

**S**EVERAL months passed, however, before we took advantage of that invitation. Mrs. Tibbet went to White Horse Canyon for the summer, and the meetings at her parlors discontinued; but except for week-end trips to Oracle, Norton and I were confined to the city. Norton as city editor of the *Gazette*, and I as its circulation manager, had enough to keep us busy.

One hot August afternoon when the mercury registered a hundred-four in the shade and the office was a sizzling furnace, Norton poked his head into my sanctum and waved a sticky proof. "Read this," he commanded.

I took the strip listlessly. "Tucson inventor makes strip machine for raising spirits," I read. "Peter Strong, local scholar and psychic research worker, announces. . . ."

I looked up at Norton with quickened interest. "Why, this must be the fellow we met at Mrs. Tibbet's."

"I am sure it is. What do you say if we run around and see him after dinner? Might be a story in it for the paper."

I assented; and that was how we came to meet Peter Strong again and to undergo the harrowing experiences set down here.

The house was an old one, set in the southwest part of town, a two-story rambling pile built of adobe and surrounded by overgrown gardens and a stone fence. The immediate neighborhood was given over to other large houses and substantial estates; yet we approached it through the squalid Mexican quarter where dark-skinned, exotic-looking men and women gossiped or smoked in doorways, and dirty ragged children with vivid eyes and shrill cries rolled on the sidewalks and in the gutters.

As he carefully piloted the Ford, Norton told me something of Peter Strong. "I looked him up in our private morgue," he said, "and questioned the managing editor. Strong belongs to one of the oldest families in these parts. His grandfather was United States marshal hereabouts in the old days when Tucson was nothing but a cow town; and his father used to be mayor about twenty years back, before his death. Quite wealthy, I understand, but most of the family fortune was lost in the 1913-14 business slump. At that, the present Strong, the one we're going to see, isn't poverty-stricken. Lives very quietly, though, and seldom goes into society. Lived abroad for years. Wife dead. Is considered an authority on psychical phenomena and generally held to be a bit queer."

**A**S everyone who has lived in Tucson knows, the street lights are sparsely scattered. With

some difficulty we located the desired estate and drove up a wide drive through a thick row of pepper and palm trees. The wide veranda was deserted, but the heavy front door was open, and even the screen door was flung back to admit more readily the faintly stirring evening breeze.

As Norton raised his hand to sound the brass knocker, a woman came down the stairs from the upper part of the house. She came from obscurity into the rather faint light cast by an overhead bulb in a colored shade, and I could not see her distinctly save to note the fact that she was tall and slender and clad in a skirt that reached to the floor. The woman paused at seeing us.

We both doffed our hats. "Is Mr. Strong in?" asked Norton. She did not reply, but instead beckoned us forward, and glided down the long hall, glancing over her shoulder to see if we followed. We started to do so, but at that moment a door at the end of the corridor opened, flooding it with light, and an elderly man in the quiet garb of a gentleman's servant faced us. The woman, we were both surprised to observe, had disappeared. "I beg your pardon," said Norton, in answer to the servant's suspicious looks, "but we are here to see Mr. Strong. We would have sounded the knocker, of course, but the lady—"

"The lady!" said the man, his expression subtly altering.

"Why, yes," replied Norton. "She invited us in. We would scarcely have entered otherwise. I don't know where," he said, looking about perplexedly, "she could have gone to."

The man made no reply but went to announce our presence to his master, and in a few minutes Peter Strong greeted us warmly. "This basement room," he said, leading

the way to it, "is my study and workroom."

IT was a large place, and despite its cement floor, was comfortably enough furnished with rugs, easy-chairs and pictures, the one incongruous note being a work-bench set against the rear wall on which a variety of tools, odds and ends of wire, and other articles lay scattered.

"Yes," said Peter Strong, "I recollect meeting you at Mrs. Tibbet's very well. Michael," he called to the servant, "bring us something cooling to drink, will you? It's only an iced fruit beverage," he apologized, "but I never drink wine."

We sipped our glasses appreciatively. The kitchen door opened off the room in which we sat, and through the open door I could see the servant moving silently about. Twice I surprised him casting furtive glances over his shoulder. What could be agitating the man, I wondered.

"Yes," Peter Strong was saying, "I am at work on a psychic machine. There it is near the bench." He pointed to a contrivance I had mistaken for a radio. "But your reporter wrongly quoted what I said at the luncheon today. I did not say the machine was yet completed. As a matter of fact, I am waiting for a specially made transformer to arrive from the east before testing it out."

"But you believe it will work?"

His fine gray eyes, eyes that stirred me in spite of myself, lit up with enthusiasm. "I have every reason to believe that it will. This isn't my first machine; it is the culmination of a dozen machines. For fifteen years I have been building, experimenting. And there have been results. Yes," he said softly, almost to himself, "there have been results."

HIS eyes stared fixedly beyond me, and, following the direction of their gaze, I saw the door through which we had entered quietly open, and the woman of the hallway stand glancing in. Then she withdrew, the door quietly closed, and Peter Strong glanced back at us, a flush on his usually pale face. "Let me show you something." He took from a chest of drawers a number of cabinet size pictures. "With photographic devices in the machine preceding this one, I snapped these."

Norton and I regarded the pictures curiously. They showed vague, spiral-like bodies rising out of masses of vapor. The outlines resembled heads and shoulders as much as anything else, and in one or two profiles were clearly defined. Of course we had read about faked spiritualist pictures, but to suspect Peter Strong of knowingly perpetrating a fraud was impossible.

"With my earlier machines I received messages," Strong continued. "But I wanted more than messages. I wanted to materialize a spirit. And I wanted to materialize it under perfectly scientific conditions." He paused and regarded us tensely. The servant came in and removed the glasses and empty pitcher. "Yes," he said, "spiritualism is a scientific proposition. Not the spiritualism of the churches. Scientific spiritualism has no need of religion; no need of God. I don't," he said gently, "believe in God."

"Don't believe in God?"

"No."

"But," protested Norton, mopping his face, "something must be responsible for the world and the universe."

The servant returned with a full pitcher and clean glasses. It was very warm in the room despite the electric fan and the faint breeze blowing through the windows set high in the walls. I was conscious

of the servant like a dark shadow going to and fro across the doorway. "Damn the man," I thought; "what is he so nervous about?"

**P**ETER STRONG filled his glass. "Something is responsible. Of course, and that something is pulsations of magnetism from indivisible prime units of matter."

"And the prime units," queried Norton, "what created them?"

"They were never created."

"Being the 'causeless cause' of some of the metaphysicians," I murmured.

"But," argued Norton, ignoring my interjection, "why can't the uncreated be God?"

"The very idea of God is unscientific."

"And yet you believe in a future life?"

"Not in a future life," corrected Peter Strong, "but in the continuity of life. And I don't believe; I know."

"But," I exclaimed, "that is the stock statement of all mystics and religionists: they all claim to know."

"Yes," he admitted with a smile. "But they claim to know through faith, while I know through knowledge. Not through the knowledge of ancient mystical lore, but through knowledge of more recent discoveries in science. And," he added softly, "through a channel more intimate . . . more dear."

We sipped our beverage in silence. A shadow loomed in the kitchen doorway, the silent figure of the servant. "Consider this," said Peter Strong after awhile. "I have already told you that all life and mass owes its existence to pulsations of magnetism. Science calls this pulsation chemical affinity. But here is a copy of my theory; I typed it to read at the luncheon to-day." He passed Norton a piece of paper. We read it with care.

"So you see," said Peter Strong, "that earth life is of one electronic density and spirit life of another. When a man dies, he is just as alive as he ever was, only his ego has a body invisible to us. But if a number of people physically *en rapport* form a circle, or if a vital medium goes into a trance, sufficient prime units of electricity may be generated for the spirits to build bodies dense enough to be seen. Those bodies will be no denser than the amount of prime units allows them to be. That explains why most spirit bodies and photographs of them are vaporous, unformed. However, the circle or human medium as methods of materializing the dead are primitive, uncertain, and open to all kinds of fraud and quackery. It is my aim, through the machine, to put spiritualism on a scientific basis."

**O**N our way home that evening, Norton and I discussed our visit.

"An interesting old chap, all right," said Norton; "and he certainly can make it sound plausible; but for all that I don't believe the dead can come back."

"Neither do I. They say Edison once tried to invent a psychic machine but gave it up."

Just before Norton dropped me at my door I mentioned what had been milling around in my mind all the time. "Damn funny about that woman," I said.

"Oh, I don't know. A maid, perhaps."

"But where did she go to?"

"Popped through some door, I expect; there was one across from us, you know."

"But it was closed, and we never heard it open or shut."

Norton grinned. "I guess our hearts were thumping too hard for us to hear anything."

"But the servant's face! You must

have seen the way he looked when you mentioned seeing a lady."

"Scared," said Norton. "Yes, I noticed. But maybe he had a woman in the house unbeknown to his boss."

"No," I said. "Strong knew the woman." And I told him about his looking at her in the basement doorway. Norton had been glancing elsewhere at the time and hadn't noticed.

"Well," he said reflectively, "it's none of our business what women the old fellow has hanging around. But then again, she wasn't dressed as a maid, if that's anything."

"And that servant was stiff with fright," I said. "I was sitting where I could watch him, and the way he'd look over his shoulder. . . ."

**I**T was about five weeks after the above conversation that Peter Strong invited us to be present at a demonstration of his machine. Besides ourselves and several people whom we did not know, there were present two gentlemen, both members of the society for psychic research. One was Doctor Bryson, a middle-aged man of commanding height and presence, head of a local sanitarium; the other was a professor of science at the University, Woodbridge by name, rather short and taciturn. Neither of them, it was plain to be seen, placed much stock in Peter Strong's invention. The doctor, though an interested investigator of psychic phenomena, did not believe in spiritualism. He professed to be a rank materialist.

"No one denies there are some things we cannot understand," he said, "but some day science will prove them to be but extensions of our physical powers haphazardly used."

The professor said nothing. "Conan Doyle—" began Norton.

"Doyle!" snorted the doctor. "Doyle was the most gullible man

on God's earth. Why, he writes of a personal experience in London being told him through a certain medium miles away before the occurrence had time to be broadcasted. He naively asks how the medium could possibly have heard of it save through spirits. Evidently he forgot about telephones and telegrams, and the fact that most professional mediums belong to secret information bureaus with agents everywhere!"

We were sitting in what evidently had once been the main parlor, a large room almost devoid of furniture. Michael, I noticed, was the only servant visible. Indeed, discreet inquiries had elicited the information that the only other servant was a cook who came in by the day: a personable enough woman neither tall nor slim.

**T**HE night was unbearably hot, though it had rained throughout the afternoon and was threatening to do so again. The windows were all ajar. Attracted by the glare of the lights, I could see gnats and moths fluttering against the screen. Michael brought us iced drinks. "Mr. Strong will be here in a few minutes," he announced. We sat and chatted, and everything seemed very ordinary and unimpressive. Then Peter Strong entered the room and the atmosphere subtly altered.

"Gentlemen," he said, "all of you here to-night are disbelievers in spiritualism; that is why I invited you. I do not wish believers to witness this experiment, but skeptics." He flung off a large covering from what I had supposed to be a table in the center of the room and exposed his machine to view. It resembled, as I have said before, a radio. On the face of it was set a clock-like dial. Inside the box was a heavy, finely wrapped coil of wire. I am no electrician. I can only say

that the box was intricately wired in accord with some principle evolved by its inventor; that there were two odd transformers. The whole affair rather disappointed me.

"What you are looking at," said Peter Strong, "is a mechanical medium. Connected with an electric-light socket by means of this cord extension, it is supposed to generate sufficient prime units to make materializations possible." He made the connection as he talked, but did not turn on the current. "As you all know, certain vibrations are sensitive to light, therefore the room shall be darkened. Michael, will you turn off all but the colored cluster of globes?"

"But, Mr. Strong—"

"Please, Michael!"

THE servant, whose white, agitated face I had observed hovering in the background, did so with obvious unwillingness. The room was now in a red haze. Objects blurred into almost indistinguishable masses. I heard the snap of the switch as Peter Strong turned on the current. The room became very still. The droning of the machine and the loud beating of my own heart were all I could hear.

There is a curious thing about silence and gloom. They have a ghostly effect on the nerves. Or perhaps I am more sensitive to them than are others. I felt an almost irresistible impulse to speak, to move; and in fact I did fidget. Someone coughed; I coughed. There was an epidemic of clearing throats. A chair scraped the floor. Then again everything was preternaturally still and the buzzing of the machine filled the room with a steady monotonous noise that was itself a form of silence. So we sat, for perhaps five minutes, without a thing happening. Then:

"Look!" someone whispered.

Over the machine broke a fanfare of sparks. A murmur ran through the room. "Silence!" commanded the voice of Peter Strong. The sparks grew in intensity and from them swirled a luminous smoke. I felt the hair rise on my scalp, a chill tremor sweep up my back. It was not the sight of what I saw, no; but the sense of something evil, something inimical that brought me to my feet, tense, staring.

The sliding of chairs, the stamping of feet, apprised me that others, too, had risen. Someone's fingers bit convulsively into my arm, someone's hoarse breathing was next my ear. The luminous smoke eddied and whirled, and then suddenly it was pouring not up but down, and in the midst of it a dark shape etched itself against the luminous glow, a shape that seemed to take on form and substance even as we watched, a shape that seemed to suck into itself the pouring smoke and flashing sparks—a *human shape!* For a pregnant moment I saw a half-visible face leer out of the mist. "God!" screamed someone hysterically, and then it happened.

OUT of the luminous mist lunged the human shape, menacing, deadly. Chairs crashed as terrified men surged backward, stumbling, falling. "Miranda!" cried the voice of Peter Strong, something of horror and yet of entreaty in its note. Then, through the red gloom of that room, rang a noise that chilled the blood in our veins. Up, up, went a ghastly peal of eldritch laughter, the laughter of something insane, uncanny.

"Miran—" The voice of Peter Strong wavered, broke, into a horrible gurgle. There were sounds of a terrible struggle, of the mad threshing of forms. "For God's sake," cried someone, "turn on the lights!"

"The lights! the lights!" babbled another.

After a moment of bedlam, the lights flashed up. The room was a wreck, the machine overturned. All this we perceived in a glance. And then we saw the body of Peter Strong stretched inertly on the floor, his face horribly congested, his tongue protruding. But not that alone. For crouching over him like something vampirish and predatory, was the slender figure of a woman, her fingers fastened on his throat, throttling him to death; and ever as she throttled him, pouring forth a blood-chilling stream of uncanny laughter.

Like men in a dream, a nightmare, we stood; like figures caught on a mimic stage by the glare of a spotlight. For perhaps a dozen seconds we stood, unmoving. Then we were roused into action by the voice of the servant, Michael. "O, my God," he cried, "she's killing him! Killing him!" And whirling up a chair he sprang forward with an oath and brought it down with a thud upon the woman's head.

It was Norton who, with some difficulty, tore the stiffening fingers from Peter Strong's throat. Together we turned over the lifeless body of the woman, and then, at sight of the staring, implacable countenance, started back with a cry of amazement; for the features upon which we gazed were those of the lady we had seen coming down the stairs on our first visit to Peter Strong!

**T**HE servant knelt by the body of his master, tears streaming down his face. "Oh, I warned him to be careful," he cried brokenly, "but he wouldn't listen to me; he wouldn't listen."

The doctor made a hurried examination. "Both of them are dead," he announced. There was a moment's silence.

"Who is this woman?" questioned Norton.

"His wife," replied Michael.

"His wife!" exclaimed the professor. "But I thought his wife died years ago?"

"So she did," answered Michael.

"Then he remarried again?"

"No, no," mumbled the servant. "You don't understand. This is his wife . . . the one who died."

We stared at him. The same thought was in all our minds. Evidently horror and grief had deprived him of his wits. But he read our thoughts.

"No," he said sadly, calming himself with an effort, "I am not mad. This is the only wife my master ever had; she who was Miranda Smythe, and who died in Paris . . . twenty years ago."

"But, good God, man!" exclaimed the professor. "Do you realize what you are saying? How can this woman here—"

"Sir," said Michael, standing up, "there is no rational explanation to give. My master married this woman when she was young and fair to look upon, but if ever there was a devil in human shape she was one. For ten years she made his life a hell. I know. I was with him through it all . . . more friend than servant . . . and many a time. . . . But enough! She was unfaithful; she blackened his name; she tortured him in ways too vile and unspeakable to mention. And yet his love persisted. . . . And one day in a jealous rage he struck her here"—the servant laid his hand on his breast—"and from the effects of that blow she died. But not before she cursed him, and threatened to reach back . . . from beyond the grave . . . and kill. . . ."

**H**E paused. The silence in the room was like a deep noise.

"The affair was hushed up; but the grief of my master was terrible.

It was then he took to spiritualism and was soon in communication with a spirit claiming to be his wife. Sir, there is more to this spiritualism than quackery. With my own eyes and ears I have heard and seen. . . . But enough! She claimed that in passing over she had won virtue and understanding, that she forgave. 'Oh, how I love you now and wish I could be with you again!' was her constant refrain. But I never believed her; one doesn't change so readily; besides there was something mocking in her tones, and several times I saw. . . . 'Be careful,' I warned my master. Oh, I constantly warned him. But he was adamant, sir, blinded with love and remorse, and when he discovered I was mediumistic. . . ."

Again Michael paused. "I couldn't refuse him, of course, and it was through me—me who dreaded and hated her so—that she gave him the idea of this infernal machine." He pointed at the overturned mechanism. "You know the theory of its working. To generate enough prime units of electricity so that a spirit can build up a fleshy body with which to function on earth again. Oh, it's incredible, I know!" he cried, "but that is just what my master did. But his early machines were weak and she would wander through the house like a wraith—those gentlemen can tell you; they saw her one night in the hallway! She would wander sometimes for a week, until her electrical body dissipated, unable to harm any one, though she tried. . . . Oh, sir, I'm telling you that she tried hard enough! But my poor deluded master never saw. She smiled at him and melted in his arms, and he only dreamed and worked for the time when. . . ."

"And that time came," said Michael tensely. "To-night she had sufficient prime units for a com-

plete materialization. Yes, she built herself a body of actual flesh and blood and with it reached back from beyond the grave to wreak vengeance on the man whose life she ruined, reached back with the hands of hate to strangle, to slay, to. . . ." He pointed blindly at the body of Peter Strong and collapsed into a chair, burying his head in both hands.

**W**E stared at one another with pallid faces, at the bodies on the floor, at the bowed figure of the old servant. The doctor was the first to recover, though he, too, was still dazed.

"Nonsense," he muttered uncertainly. "Nonsense. Spirits be damned. This is a case for the police. Perhaps. . . ." he glared suspiciously at the servant.

Norton and I quickly glanced at each other. The suggestion that Michael had had anything to do with the tragedy struck us both as preposterous.

"There is a phone in the hall out there," said the professor. "One of you had better call the police station. I'm sure the authorities will clear up the mystery."

But they never did!

This much only is known: That the body of the dead woman was never properly identified; that her face certainly bore a strong resemblance to early photographs of Peter Strong's wife. But of course it was impossible for a matter-of-fact police department to admit that the dead return, and that a woman twenty years a moldering corpse could commit murder. So, after a few weeks of investigation and grilling, they closed the case by entering in their files that one Peter Strong had come to his death, through strangulation, at the hands of a crazy woman, name and antecedents unknown. The machine was broken up.

And there the matter rests.



*He felt a strange,  
almost painful suc-  
tion.*

# The Trap

By Henry S. Whitehead

**I**T was on a certain Thursday morning in December that the whole thing began with that unaccountable motion I thought I saw in my antique Copenhagen mirror. Something, it seemed to me, stirred — something reflected in the glass, though I was alone in my quarters. I paused and

looked intently, then, deciding that the effect must be a pure illusion, resumed the interrupted brushing of my hair.

I had discovered the old mirror, covered with dust and cobwebs, in an outbuilding of an abandoned estate-house in Santa Cruz's sparsely settled Northside

A subtle evil lurks in Canevin's antique Copenhagen mirror.

territory, and had brought it to the United States from the Virgin Islands. The venerable glass was dim from more than two hundred years' exposure to a tropical climate, and the graceful ornamentation along the top of the gilt frame had been badly smashed. I had had the detached pieces set back into the frame before placing it in storage with my other belongings.

Now, several years later, I was staying half as a guest and half as a tutor at the private school of my old friend Browne on a windy Connecticut hillside—occupying an unused wing in one of the dormitories, where I had two rooms and a hallway to myself. The old mirror, stowed securely in mattresses, was the first of my possessions to be unpacked on my arrival; and I had set it up majestically in the living-room, on top of an old rosewood console which had belonged to my great-grandmother.

The door of my bedroom was just opposite that of the living-room, with a hallway between; and I had noticed that by looking into my chiffonier glass I could see the larger mirror through the two doorways—which was exactly like glancing down an endless, though diminishing, corridor. On this Thursday morning I thought I saw a curious suggestion of motion down that normally empty corridor—but, as I have said, soon dismissed the notion.

**W**HEN I reached the dining-room I found everyone complaining of the cold, and learned that the school's heating-plant was temporarily out of order. Being especially sensitive to low temperatures, I was myself an acute sufferer; and at once decided not to brave any freezing schoolroom that day. Accordingly I invited my class to come over to my living-room for an informal session around my

grate-fire—a suggestion which the boys received enthusiastically.

After the session one of the boys, Robert Grandison, asked if he might remain; since he had no appointment for the second morning period. I told him to stay, and welcome. He sat down to study in front of the fireplace in a comfortable chair.

It was not long, however, before Robert moved to another chair somewhat farther away from the freshly replenished blaze, this change bringing him directly opposite the old mirror. From my own chair in another part of the room I noticed how fixedly he began to look at the dim, cloudy glass, and, wondering what so greatly interested him, was reminded of my own experience earlier that morning. As time passed he continued to gaze, a slight frown knitting his brows.

At last I quietly asked him what had attracted his attention. Slowly, and still wearing the puzzled frown, he looked over and replied rather cautiously:

"It's the corrugations in the glass—or whatever they are, Mr. Canevin. I was noticing how they all seem to run from a certain point. Look—I'll show you what I mean."

The boy jumped up, went over to the mirror, and placed his finger on a point near its lower left-hand corner.

"It's right here, sir," he explained, turning to look toward me and keeping his finger on the chosen spot.

His muscular action in turning may have pressed his finger against the glass. Suddenly he withdrew his hand as though with some slight effort, and with a faintly muttered "Ouch." Then he looked back at the glass in obvious mystification.

"What happened?" I asked, rising and approaching.

"Why—it—" He seemed embar-

rassed. "It—I—felt—well, as though it were pulling my finger into it. Seems—er—perfectly foolish, sir, but—well—it was a most peculiar sensation." Robert had an unusual vocabulary for his fifteen years.

I came over and had him show me the exact spot he meant.

"You'll think I'm rather a fool, sir," he said shamefacedly, "but—well, from right here I can't be absolutely sure. From the chair it seemed to be clear enough."

**N**OW thoroughly interested, I sat down in the chair Robert had occupied and looked at the spot he selected on the mirror. Instantly the thing "jumped out at me." Unmistakably, from that particular angle, all the many whorls in the ancient glass appeared to converge like a large number of spread strings held in one hand and radiating out in streams.

Getting up and crossing to the mirror, I could no longer see the curious spot. Only from certain angles, apparently, was it visible. Directly viewed, that portion of the mirror did not even give back a normal reflection—for I could not see my face in it. Manifestly I had a minor puzzle on my hands.

Presently the school gong sounded, and the fascinated Robert Grandison departed hurriedly, leaving me alone with my odd little problem in optics. I raised several window-shades, crossed the hallway, and sought for the spot in the chiffonier mirror's reflection. Finding it readily, I looked very intently and thought I again detected something of the "motion." I craned my neck, and at last, at a certain angle of vision, the thing again "jumped out at me."

The vague "motion" was now positive and definite—an appearance of torsional movement, or of whirling; much like a minute yet intense whirlwind or waterspout, or a

huddle of autumn leaves dancing circularly in an eddy of wind along a level lawn. It was, like the earth's, a double motion — around and around, and at the same time *inward*, as if the whorls poured themselves endlessly toward some point inside the glass. Fascinated, yet realizing that the thing must be an illusion, I grasped an impression of quite distinct *suction*, and thought of Robert's embarrassed explanation: "*I felt as though it were pulling my finger into it.*"

A kind of slight chill ran suddenly up and down my backbone. There was something here distinctly worth looking into. And as the idea of investigation came to me, I recalled the rather wistful expression of Robert Grandison when the gong called him to class. I remembered how he had looked back over his shoulder as he walked obediently out into the hallway, and resolved that he should be included in whatever analysis I might make of this little mystery.

**E**XCITING events connected with that same Robert, however, were soon to chase all thoughts of the mirror from my consciousness for a time. I was away all that afternoon, and did not return to the school until the five-fifteen "Call-over"—a general assembly at which the boys' attendance was compulsory. Dropping in at this function with the idea of picking Robert up for a session with the mirror, I was astonished and pained to find him absent—a very unusual and unaccountable thing in his case. That evening Browne told me that the boy had actually disappeared, a search in his room, in the gymnasium, and in all other accustomed places being unavailing, though all his belongings—including his outdoor clothing—were in their proper places.

He had not been encountered on

the ice or with any of the hiking groups that afternoon, and telephone calls to all the school-catering merchants of the neighborhood were in vain. There was, in short, no record of his having been seen since the end of the lesson periods at two-fifteen; when he had turned up the stairs toward his room in Dormitory Number Three.

When the disappearance was fully realized, the resulting sensation was tremendous throughout the school. Browne, as headmaster, had to bear the brunt of it; and such an unprecedented occurrence in his well-regulated, highly-organized institution left him quite bewildered. It was learned that Robert had not run away to his home in western Pennsylvania, nor did any of the searching-parties of boys and masters find any trace of him in the snowy countryside around the school. So far as could be seen, he had simply vanished.

Robert's parents arrived on the afternoon of the second day after his disappearance. They took their trouble quietly, though, of course, they were staggered by this unexpected disaster. Browne looked ten years older for it, but there was absolutely nothing that could be done. By the fourth day the case had settled down in the opinion of the school as an insoluble mystery. Mr. and Mrs. Grandison went reluctantly back to their home, and on the following morning the ten days' Christmas vacation began.

Boys and masters departed in anything but the usual holiday spirit; and Browne and his wife were left, along with the servants, as my only fellow-occupants of the big place. Without the masters and boys it seemed a very hollow shell indeed.

\* \* \*

**T**HAT afternoon I sat in front of my grate-fire thinking about Robert's disappearance and evolving

all sorts of fantastic theories to account for it. By evening I had acquired a bad headache, and ate a light supper accordingly. Then, after a brisk walk around the massed buildings, I returned to my living-room and took up the burden of thought once more.

A little after ten o'clock I awakened in my armchair, stiff and chilled, from a doze during which I had let the fire go out. I was physically uncomfortable, yet mentally aroused by a peculiar sensation of expectancy and possible hope. Of course it had to do with the problem that was harassing me. For I had started from that inadvertent nap with a curious, persistent idea—the odd idea that a tenuous, hardly recognizable Robert Grandison had been trying desperately to communicate with me. I finally went to bed with one conviction unreasonably strong in my mind. Somehow I was sure that young Robert Grandison was still alive.

That I should be receptive of such a notion will not seem strange to those who know of my long residence in the West Indies and my close contact with unexplained happenings there. It will not seem strange, either, that I fell asleep with an urgent desire to establish some sort of mental communication with the missing boy. Even the most prosaic scientists affirm, with Freud, Jung, and Adler, that the subconscious mind is most open to external impression in sleep; though such impressions are seldom carried over intact into the waking state.

Going a step further and granting the existence of telepathic forces, it follows that such forces must act most strongly on a sleeper; so that if I were ever to get a definite message from Robert, it would be during a period of profoundest slumber. Of course, I might lose the message in waking; but my apti-

tude for retaining such things has been sharpened by types of mental discipline picked up in various obscure corners of the globe.

I MUST have dropped asleep instantaneously, and from the vividness of my dreams and the absence of wakeful intervals I judge that my sleep was a very deep one. It was six forty-five when I awakened, and there still lingered with me certain impressions which I knew were carried over from the world of somnolent cerebration. Filling my mind was the vision of Robert Grandison strangely transformed to a boy of a dull greenish dark-blue color; Robert desperately endeavoring to communicate with me by means of speech, yet finding some almost insuperable difficulty in so doing. A wall of curious spatial separation seemed to stand between him and me—a mysterious, invisible wall which completely baffled us both.

I had seen Robert as though at some distance, yet queerly enough he seemed at the same time to be just beside me. He was both larger and smaller than in real life, his apparent size varying *directly*, instead of *inversely*, with the distance as he advanced and retreated in the course of conversation. That is, he grew larger instead of smaller to my eye when he stepped away or backwards, and vice versa; as if the laws of perspective in his case had been wholly reversed. His aspect was misty and uncertain—as if he lacked sharp or permanent outlines; and the anomalies of his coloring and clothing baffled me utterly at first.

At some point in my dream Robert's vocal efforts had finally crystallized into audible speech—albeit speech of an abnormal thickness and dullness. I could not for a time understand anything he said, and even in the dream racked

my brain for a clue to where he was, what he wanted to tell, and why his utterance was so clumsy and unintelligible. Then little by little I began to distinguish words and phrases, the very first of which sufficed to throw my dreaming self into the wildest excitement and to establish a certain mental connection which had previously refused to take conscious form because of the utter incredibility of what it implied.

I DO not know how long I listened to those halting words amidst my deep slumber, but hours must have passed while the strangely remote speaker struggled on with his tale. There was revealed to me such a circumstance as I cannot hope to make others believe without the strongest corroborative evidence, yet which I was quite ready to accept as truth—both in the dream and after waking—because of my formed contacts with uncanny things. The boy was obviously watching my face—mobile in receptive sleep—as he choked along; for about the time I began to comprehend him, his own expression brightened and gave signs of gratitude and hope.

Any attempt to hint at Robert's message, as it lingered in my ears after a sudden awakening in the cold, brings this narrative to a point where I must choose my words with the greatest care. Everything involved is so difficult to record that one tends to flounder helplessly. I have said that the revelation established in my mind a certain connection which reason had not allowed me to formulate consciously before. This connection, I need no longer hesitate to hint, had to do with the old Copenhagen mirror whose suggestions of motion had so impressed me on the morning of the disappearance, and whose whorl-like contours and apparent il-

lusions of suction had later exerted such a disquieting fascination on both Robert and me.

Resolutely, though my outer consciousness had previously rejected what my intuition would have liked to imply, it could reject that stupendous conception no longer. What was fantasy in the tale of "Alice" now came to me as a grave and immediate reality. That looking-glass had indeed possessed a malign, abnormal suction; and the struggling speaker in my dream made clear the extent to which it violated all the known precedents of human experience and all the age-old laws of our three sane dimensions. It was more than a mirror—it was a gate; a trap; a link with spatial recesses not meant for the denizens of our visible universe, and realizable only in terms of the most intricate non-Euclidean mathematics. *And in some outrageous fashion Robert Grandison had passed out of our ken into the glass and was there immured, waiting for release.*

IT is significant that upon awakening I harbored no genuine doubt of the reality of the revelation. That I had actually held conversation with a trans-dimensional Robert, rather than evoked the whole episode from my broodings about his disappearance and about the old illusions of the mirror, was as certain to my inmost instincts as any of the instinctive certainties commonly recognized as valid.

The tale thus unfolded to me was of the most incredibly bizarre character. As had been clear on the morning of his disappearance, Robert was intensely fascinated by the ancient mirror. All through the hours of school, he had it in mind to come back to my living-room and examine it further. When he did arrive, after the close of the

school day, it was somewhat later than two-twenty, and I was absent in town. Finding me out and knowing that I would not mind, he had come into my living-room and gone straight to the mirror; standing before it and studying the place where, as we had noted, the whorls appeared to converge.

Then, quite suddenly, there had come to him an overpowering urge to place his hand upon this whorl-center. Almost reluctantly, against his better judgment, he had done so; and upon making the contact had felt at once the strange, almost painful suction which had perplexed him that morning. Immediately thereafter—quite without warning, but with a wrench which seemed to twist and tear every bone and muscle in his body and to bulge and press and cut at every nerve—he had been abruptly *drawn through* and found himself *inside*.

Once through, the excruciatingly painful stress upon his entire system was suddenly released. He felt, he said, as though he had just been born—a feeling that made itself evident every time he tried to do anything; walk, stoop, turn his head, or utter speech. Everything about his body seemed a misfit.

These sensations wore off after a long while, Robert's body becoming an organized whole rather than a number of protesting parts. Of all the forms of expression, speech remained the most difficult; doubtless because it is complicated, bringing into play a number of different organs, muscles, and tendons. Robert's feet, on the other hand, were the first members to adjust themselves to the new conditions within the glass.

DURING the morning hours I rehearsed the whole reasoning problem; correlating everything I had seen and heard, dismissing the natural scepticism of a

man of sense, and scheming to devise possible plans for Robert's release from his incredible prison. As I did so a number of originally perplexing points became clear—or at least, clearer—to me.

There was, for example, the matter of Robert's coloring. His face and hands, as I have indicated, were a kind of dull greenish dark-blue; and I may add that his familiar blue Norfolk jacket had turned to a pale lemon-yellow while his trousers remained a neutral gray as before. Reflecting on this after waking, I found the circumstance closely allied to the reversal of perspective which made Robert seem to grow larger when receding and smaller when approaching. Here, too, was a physical *reversal*—for every detail of his coloring in the unknown dimension was the exact reverse or complement of the corresponding color detail in normal life. In physics the typical complementary colors are blue and yellow, and red and green. These pairs are opposites, and when mixed yield gray. Robert's natural color was a pinkish-buff, the opposite of which is the greenish-blue I saw. His blue coat had become yellow, while the gray trousers remained gray. This latter point baffled me until I remembered that gray is itself a mixture of opposites. There is no opposite for gray—or rather, it is its own opposite.

Another clarified point was that pertaining to Robert's curiously dulled and thickened speech—as well as to the general awkwardness and sense of misfit bodily parts of which he had complained. This, at the outset, was a puzzle indeed; though after long thought the clue occurred to me. Here again was the same *reversal* which affected perspective and coloration. Anyone in the fourth dimension must necessarily be reversed in just this way—hands and feet, as well as colors

and perspectives, being changed about. It would be the same with all the other dual organs, such as nostrils, ears, and eyes. Thus Robert had been talking with a reversed tongue, teeth, vocal cords, and kindred speech-apparatus; so that his difficulties in utterance were little to be wondered at.

AS the morning wore on, my sense of the stark reality and maddening urgency of the dream-disclosed situation increased rather than decreased. More and more I felt that something must be done, yet realized that I could not seek advice or aid. Such a story as mine—a conviction based upon mere dreaming—could not conceivably bring me anything but ridicule or suspicions as to my mental state. And what, indeed, could I do, aided or unaided, with as little working data as my nocturnal impressions had provided? I must, I finally recognized, have more information before I could even think of a possible plan for releasing Robert. This could come only through the receptive conditions of sleep, and it heartened me to reflect that according to every probability my telepathic contact would be resumed the moment I fell into deep slumber again.

I accomplished sleeping that afternoon, after a midday dinner at which, through rigid self-control, I succeeded in concealing from Browne and his wife the tumultuous thoughts that crashed through my mind. Hardly had my eyes closed when a dim telepathic image began to appear; and I soon realized to my infinite excitement that it was identical with what I had seen before. If anything, it was more distinct; and when it began to speak I seemed able to grasp a greater proportion of the words.

During this sleep I found most of the morning's deductions con-

firmed, though the interview was mysteriously cut off long prior to my awakening. Robert had seemed apprehensive just before communication ceased, but had already told me that in his strange fourth-dimensional prison colors and spatial relationships were indeed reversed—black being white, distance increasing apparent size, and so on.

He had also intimated that, notwithstanding his possession of full physical form and sensations, most human vital properties seemed curiously suspended. Nutriment, for example, was quite unnecessary—a phenomenon really more singular than the omnipresent reversal of objects and attributes, since the latter was a reasonable and mathematically indicated state of things. Another significant piece of information was that the only exit from the glass to the world was the entrance-way, and that this was permanently barred and impenetrably sealed, so far as egress was concerned.

That night I had another visitation from Robert; nor did such impressions, received at odd intervals while I slept receptively-minded, cease during the entire period of his incarceration. His efforts to communicate were desperate and often pitiful; for at times the telepathic bond would weaken, while at other times fatigue, excitement, or fear of interruption would hamper and thicken his speech.

**I** MAY as well narrate as a continuous whole all that Robert told me throughout the whole series of transient mental contacts—perhaps supplementing it at certain points with facts directly related after his release. The telepathic information was fragmentary and often nearly inarticulate, but I studied it over and over during the waking intervals of three intense days; classifying and cogitating

with feverish diligence, since it was all that I had to go upon if the boy were to be brought back into our world.

The fourth-dimensional region in which Robert found himself was not, as in scientific romance, an unknown and infinite realm of strange sights and fantastic denizens; but was rather a projection of certain limited parts of our own terrestrial sphere within an alien and normally inaccessible aspect or direction of space. It was a curiously fragmentary, intangible, and heterogeneous world—a series of apparently dissociated scenes merging indistinctly one into the other; their constituent details having an obviously different status from that of an object drawn into the ancient mirror as Robert had been drawn. These scenes were like dream-vistas or magic-lantern images—elusive visual impressions of which the boy was not really a part, but which formed a sort of panoramic background or ethereal environment against which or amidst which he moved.

He could not touch any of the parts of these scenes—walls, trees, furniture, and the like—but whether this was because they were truly non-material, or because they always receded at his approach, he was singularly unable to determine. Everything seemed fluid, mutable, and unreal. When he walked, it appeared to be on whatever lower surface the visible scene might have—floor, path, greensward, or such; but upon analysis he always found that the contact was an illusion. There was never any difference in the resisting force met by his feet—and by his hands when he would stoop experimentally—no matter what changes of apparent surface might be involved. He could not describe this foundation or limiting plane on which he walked as anything more definite than a

virtually abstract pressure balancing his gravity. Of definite tactile distinctiveness it had none, and supplementing it there seemed to be a kind of restricted levitational force which accomplished transfers of altitude. He could never actually climb stairs, yet would gradually walk up from a lower level to a higher.

**P**ASSAGE from one definite scene to another involved a sort of gliding through a region of shadow or blurred focus where the details of each scene mingled curiously. All the vistas were distinguished by the absence of transient objects, and the indefinite or ambiguous appearance of such semi-transient objects as furniture or details of vegetation. The lighting of every scene was diffuse and perplexing, and of course the scheme of reversed colors—bright red grass, yellow sky with confused black and gray cloud-forms, white tree-trunks, and green brick walls—gave to everything an air of unbelievable grotesquerie. There was an alteration of day and night, which turned out to be a reversal of the normal hours of light and darkness at whatever point on the earth the mirror might be hanging.

This seemingly irrelevant diversity of the scenes puzzled Robert until he realized that they comprised merely such places as had been reflected for long continuous periods in the ancient glass. This also explained the odd absence of transient objects, the generally arbitrary boundaries of vision, and the fact that all exteriors were framed by the outlines of doorways or windows. The glass, it appeared, had power to store up these intangible scenes through long exposure; though it could never absorb anything corporeally, as Robert had been absorbed, except by a very different and particular process.

But—to me at least—the most incredible aspect of the mad phenomenon was the monstrous subversion of our known laws of space involved in the relation of the various illusory scenes to the actual terrestrial regions represented. I have spoken of the glass as storing up the images of these regions, but this is really an inexact definition. In truth, each of the mirror scenes formed a true and quasi-permanent fourth-dimensional projection of the corresponding mundane region; so that whenever Robert moved to a certain part of a certain scene, as he moved into the image of my room when sending his telepathic messages, *he was actually in that place itself, on earth*—though under spatial conditions which cut off all sensory communication, in either direction, between him and the present tri-dimensional aspect of the place.

**T**HEORETICALLY speaking, a prisoner in the glass could in a few moments go anywhere on our planet—into any place, that is, which had ever been reflected in the mirror's surface. This probably applied even to places where the mirror had not hung long enough to produce a clear illusory scene; the terrestrial region being then represented by a zone of more or less formless shadow. Outside the definite scenes was a seemingly limitless waste of neutral gray shadow about which Robert could never be certain, and into which he never dared stray far lest he become hopelessly lost to the real and mirror worlds alike.

Among the earliest particulars which Robert gave, was the fact that he was not alone in his confinement. Various others, all in antique garb, were in there with him—a corpulent middle-aged gentleman with tied queue and velvet knee-breeches who spoke English

fluently though with a marked Scandinavian accent; a rather beautiful small girl with very blonde hair which appeared as glossy dark blue; two apparently mute Negroes whose features contrasted grotesquely with the pallor of their reversed-colored skins; three young men; one young woman; a very small child, almost an infant; and a lean, elderly Dane of extremely distinctive aspect and a kind of half-malign intellectuality of countenance.

This last named individual—Axel Holm, who wore the satin small-clothes, flared-skirted coat, and voluminous full-bottomed periwig of an age more than two centuries in the past—was notable among the little band as being the one responsible for the presence of them all. He it was who, skilled equally in the arts of magic and glass working, had long ago fashioned this strange dimensional prison in which himself, his slaves, and those whom he chose to invite or allure thither were immured unchangingly for as long as the mirror might endure.

**H**OLM was born early in the seventeenth century, and had followed with tremendous competence and success the trade of a glass-blower and molder in Copenhagen. His glass, especially in the form of large drawing-room mirrors, was always at a premium. But the same bold mind which had made him the first glazier of Europe also served to carry his interests and ambitions far beyond the sphere of mere material craftsmanship. He had studied the world around him, and chafed at the limitations of human knowledge and capability. Eventually he sought for dark ways to overcome those limitations, and gained more success than is good for any mortal.

He had aspired to enjoy something like eternity, the mirror be-

ing his provision to secure this end. Serious study of the fourth dimension was far from beginning with Einstein in our own era; and Holm, more than erudite in all the methods of his day, knew that a bodily entrance into that hidden phase of space would prevent him from dying in the ordinary physical sense. Research showed him that the principle of reflection undoubtedly forms the chief gate to all dimensions beyond our familiar three; and chance placed in his hands a small and very ancient glass whose cryptic properties he believed he could turn to advantage. Once "inside" this mirror according to the method he had envisaged, he felt that "life" in the sense of form and consciousness would go on virtually forever, provided the mirror could be preserved indefinitely from breakage or deterioration.

Holm made a magnificent mirror, such as would be prized and carefully preserved; and in it deftly fused the strange whorl-configured relic he had acquired. Having thus prepared his refuge and his trap, he began to plan his mode of entrance and conditions of tenancy. He would have with him both servitors and companions; and as an experimental beginning he sent before him into the glass two dependable Negro slaves brought from the West Indies. What his sensations must have been upon beholding this first concrete demonstration of his theories, only imagination can conceive.

Undoubtedly a man of his knowledge realized that absence from the outside world if deferred beyond the natural span of life of those within, must mean instant dissolution at the first attempt to return to that world. But, barring that misfortune or accidental breakage, those within would remain forever as they were at the time of en-

trance. They would never grow old, and would need neither food nor drink.

TO make his prison tolerable he sent ahead of him certain books and writing materials, a chair and table of stoutest workmanship, and a few other accessories. He knew that the images which the glass would reflect or absorb would not be tangible, but would merely extend around him like a background of dream. His own transition in 1687 was a momentous experience; and must have been attended by mixed sensations of triumph and terror. Had anything gone wrong, there were frightful possibilities of being lost in dark and inconceivable multiple dimensions.

For over fifty years he had been unable to secure any additions to the little company of himself and slaves, but later on he had perfected his telepathic method of visualizing small sections of the outside world close to the glass, and attracting certain individuals in those areas through the mirror's strange entrance. Thus Robert, influenced into a desire to press upon the "door," had been lured within. Such visualizations depended wholly on telepathy, since no one inside the mirror could see out into the world of men.

It was, in truth, a strange life that Holm and his company had lived inside the glass. Since the mirror had stood for fully a century with its face to the dusty stone wall of the shed where I found it, Robert was the first being to enter this limbo after all that interval. His arrival was a gala event, for he brought news of the outside world which must have been of the most startling impressiveness to the more thoughtful of those within. He, in his turn— young though he was—felt overwhelmingly the weirdness of meet-

ing and talking with persons who had been alive in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

THE deadly monotony of life for the prisoners can only be vaguely conjectured. As mentioned, its extensive spatial variety was limited to localities which had been reflected in the mirror for long periods; and many of these had become dim and strange as tropical climates had made inroads on the surface. Certain localities were bright and beautiful, and in these the company usually gathered. But no scene could be fully satisfying; since the visible objects were all unreal and intangible, and often of perplexingly indefinite outline. When the tedious periods of darkness came, the general custom was to indulge in memories, reflections, or conversations. Each one of that strange, pathetic group had retained his or her personality unchanged and unchangeable, since becoming immune to the time effects of outside space.

The number of inanimate objects within the glass, aside from the clothing of the prisoners, was very small; being largely limited to the accessories Holm had provided for himself. The rest did without even furniture, since sleep and fatigue had vanished along with most other vital attributes. Such inorganic things as were present, seemed as exempt from decay as the living beings. The lower forms of animal life were wholly absent.

Robert derived most of his information from Herr Thiele, the gentleman who spoke English with a Scandinavian accent. This portly Dane had taken a fancy to him, and talked at considerable length. The others, too, had received him with courtesy and good-will; Holm himself, seeming well-disposed, had told him about various matters including the door of the trap.

The boy, as he told me later, was sensible enough never to attempt communication with me when Holm was nearby. Twice, while thus engaged, he had seen Holm appear; and had accordingly ceased at once. At no time could I see the world behind the mirror's surface. Robert's visual image, which included his bodily form and the clothing connected with it, was—like the aural image of his halting voice and like his own visualization of myself—a case of purely telepathic transmission; and did not involve true inter-dimensional sight. However, had Robert been as trained a telepathist as Holm, he might have transmitted a few strong images apart from his immediate person.

**T**HROUGHOUT this period of revelation I had, of course, been desperately trying to devise a method for Robert's release. On the fourth day—the ninth after the disappearance—I hit on a solution. Everything considered, my laboriously formulated process was not a very complicated one; though I could not tell beforehand how it would work, while the possibility of ruinous consequences in case of a slip was appalling. This process depended, basically, on the fact that there was no possible exit from inside the glass. If Holm and his prisoners were permanently sealed in, then release must come wholly from outside. Other considerations included the disposal of the other prisoners, if any survived, and especially of Axel Holm. What Robert had told me of him was anything but reassuring; and I certainly did not wish him loose in my apartment, free once more to work his evil will upon the world. The telepathic messages had not made fully clear the effect of liberation on those who had entered the glass so long ago.

There was, too, a final though minor problem in case of success—that of getting Robert back into the routine of school life without having to explain the incredible. In case of failure, it was highly inadvisable to have witnesses present at the release operations—and lacking these, I simply could not attempt to relate the actual facts if I should succeed. Even to me the reality seemed a mad one whenever I let my mind turn from the data so compellingly presented in that tense series of dreams.

When I had thought these problems through as far as possible, I procured a large magnifying-glass from the school laboratory and studied minutely every square millimeter of that whorl-center which presumably marked the extent of the original ancient mirror used by Holm. Even with this aid I could not quite trace the exact boundary between the old area and the surface added by the Danish wizard; but after a long study decided on a conjectural oval boundary which I outlined very precisely with a soft blue pencil, I then made a trip to Stamford, where I procured a heavy glass-cutting tool; for my primary idea was to remove the ancient and magically potent mirror from its later setting.

**M**Y next step was to figure out the best time of day to make the crucial experiment. I finally settled on two-thirty A.M.—both because it was a good season for uninterrupted work, and because it was the "opposite" of two-thirty P.M., the probable moment at which Robert had entered the mirror. This form of "oppositeness" may or may not have been relevant, but I knew at least that the chosen hour was as good as any—and perhaps better than most.

I finally set to work in the early morning of the eleventh day after

the disappearance, having drawn all the shades of my living-room and closed and locked the door into the hallway. Following with breathless care the elliptical line I had traced, I worked around the whorl-section with my steel-wheeled cutting tool. The ancient glass, half an inch thick, crackled crisply under the firm, uniform pressure; and upon completing the circuit I cut around it a second time, crunching the roller more deeply into the glass.

Then, very carefully indeed, I lifted the heavy mirror down from its console and leaned it face-inward against the wall; prying off two of the thin, narrow boards nailed to the back. With equal caution I smartly tapped the cut-around space with the heavy wooden handle of the glass-cutter.

At the very first tap the whorl-containing section of glass dropped out on the Bokhara rug beneath. I did not know what might happen, but was keyed up for anything, and took a deep involuntary breath. I was on my knees for convenience at the moment, with my face quite near the newly made aperture; and as I breathed there poured into my nostrils a powerful *dusty* odor—a smell not comparable to any other I have ever encountered. Then everything within my range of vision suddenly turned to a dull gray before my failing eyesight as I felt myself overpowered by an invisible force which robbed my muscles of their power to function.

I remember grasping weakly and futilely at the edge of the nearest window drapery and feeling it rip loose from its fastening. Then I sank slowly to the floor as the darkness of oblivion passed over me.

**W**HEN I regained consciousness I was lying on the Bokhara rug with my legs held un-

accountably up in the air. The room was full of that hideous and inexplicable dusty smell—and as my eyes began to take in definite images I saw that Robert Grandison stood in front of me. It was he—fully in the flesh and with his coloring normal—who was holding my legs aloft to bring the blood back to my head as the school's first-aid course had taught him to do with persons who had fainted. For a moment I was struck mute by the stifling odor and by a bewilderment which quickly merged into a sense of triumph. Then I found myself able to move and speak collectedly.

I raised a tentative hand and waved feebly at Robert.

"All right, old man," I murmured, "you can let my legs down now. Many thanks. I'm all right again, I think. It was the smell—I imagine—that got me. Open that farthest window, please—wide—from the bottom. That's it—thanks. No—leave the shade down the way it was."

I struggled to my feet, my disturbed circulation adjusting itself in waves, and stood upright hanging to the back of a big chair. I was still "groggy," but a blast of fresh, bitterly cold air from the window revived me rapidly. I sat down in the big chair and looked at Robert, now walking toward me.

"First," I said hurriedly, "tell me, Robert—those others—Holm? What happened to *them*, when I—opened the exit?"

Robert paused half-way across the room and looked at me very gravely.

"I saw them fade away—into nothingness—Mr. Canevin," he said with solemnity; "and with them—everything. There isn't any more 'inside,' sir—thank God, and you, sir!"

And young Robert, at last yielding to the sustained strain which

he had borne through all those terrible eleven days, suddenly broke down like a little child and began to weep hysterically in great, stifling, dry sobs.

**I** PICKED him up and placed him gently on my davenport, threw a rug over him, sat down by his side, and put a calming hand on his forehead.

"Take it easy, old fellow," I said soothingly.

The boy's sudden and very natural hysteria passed as quickly as it had come on as I talked to him reassuringly about my plans for his quiet restoration to the school. The interest of the situation and the need of concealing the incredible truth beneath a rational explanation took hold of his imagination as I had expected; and at last he sat up eagerly, telling the details of his release and listening to the instructions I had thought out. He had, it seems, been in the "projected area" of my bedroom when I opened the way back, and had emerged in that actual room—hardly realizing that he was "out." Upon hearing a fall in the living-room he had hastened thither, finding me on the rug in my fainting spell.

I need mention only briefly my method of restoring Robert in a seemingly normal way—how I smuggled him out of the window in an old hat and sweater of mine, took him down the road in my quietly started car, coached him carefully in a tale I had devised, and returned to arouse Browne with the news of his discovery. He had, I explained, been walking alone on the afternoon of his disappearance; and had been offered a motor ride by two young men who, as a joke and over his protests that he could go no farther than Stamford and back, had begun to carry him past that town.

Jumping from the car during a traffic stop with the intention of hitch-hiking back before Call-Over, he had been hit by another car just as the traffic was released—awakening ten days later in the Greenwich home of the people who had hit him. On learning the date, I added, he had immediately telephoned the school; and I, being the only one awake, had answered the call and hurried after him in my car without stopping to notify anyone.

**B**ROWNE, who at once telephoned to Robert's parents, accepted my story without question; and forbore to interrogate the boy because of the latter's manifest exhaustion. It was arranged that he should remain at the school for a rest, under the expert care of Mrs. Browne, a former trained nurse. I naturally saw a good deal of him during the remainder of the Christmas vacation, and was thus enabled to fill in certain gaps in his fragmentary dream-story.

Now and then we would almost doubt the actuality of what had occurred; wondering whether we had not both shared some monstrous delusion born of the mirror's glittering hypnotism, and whether the tale of the ride and accident were not after all the real truth. But whenever we did so we would be brought back to belief by some monstrous and haunting memory; with me, of Robert's dream-figure and its thick voice and inverted colors; with him, of the whole fantastic pageantry of ancient people and dead scenes that he had witnessed. And then there was the joint recollection of that damnable dusty odor. . . . We knew what it meant: the instant dissolution of those who had entered an alien dimension a century and more ago.

There are, in addition, at least

two lines of rather more positive evidence; one of which comes through my researches in Danish annals concerning the sorcerer, Axel Holm. Such a person, indeed, left many traces in folklore and written records; and diligent library sessions, plus conferences with various learned Danes, have shed much light on his evil fame. At present I need say only that the Copenhagen glass-blower—born in 1612—was a notorious Luciferian whose pursuits and final vanishing formed a matter of awed debate over two centuries ago. He had burned with a desire to know all things and to conquer every limitation of mankind—to which end he had delved deeply into occult and forbidden fields ever since he was a child.

He was commonly held to have joined a coven of the dreaded witchcult, and the vast lore of ancient Scandinavian myth—with its Loki the Sly One and the accursed Fenris-Wolf—was soon an open book to him. He had strange interests and objectives, few of which were definitely known, but some of which were recognized as intolerably evil. It is recorded that his two Negro helpers, originally slaves from the Danish West Indies, had become mute soon after their acquisition by him; and that they had disappeared not long before his own disappearance from the ken of mankind.

**N**EAR the close of an already long life the idea of a glass of immortality appears to have entered his mind. That he had acquired an enchanted mirror of inconceivable antiquity was a matter of common whispering; it being alleged that he had purloined it from a fellow-sorcerer who had entrusted it to him for polishing.

This mirror—according to popular tales a trophy as potent in its

way as the better-known Aegis of Minerva or Hammer of Thor—was a small oval object called “Loki’s Glass,” made of some polished fusible mineral and having magical properties which included the divination of the immediate future and the power to show the possessor his enemies. That it had deeper potential properties, realizable in the hands of an erudite magician, none of the common people doubted; and even educated persons attached much fearful importance to Holm’s rumored attempts to incorporate it in a larger glass of immortality. Then had come the wizard’s disappearance in 1687, and the final sale and dispersal of his goods amidst a growing cloud of fantastic legendry. It was, altogether, just such a story as one would laugh at if possessed of no particular key; yet to me, remembering those dream messages and having Robert Grandison’s corroboration before me, it formed a positive confirmation of all the bewildering marvels that had been unfolded.

But as I have said, there is still another line of rather positive evidence—of a very different character—at my disposal. Two days after his release, as Robert, greatly improved in strength and appearance, was placing a log on my living-room fire, I noticed a certain awkwardness in his motions and was struck by a persistent idea. Summoning him to my desk I suddenly asked him to pick up an inkstand—and was scarcely surprised to note that, despite lifelong righthandedness, he obeyed unconsciously with his left hand. Without alarming him, I then asked that he unbutton his coat and let me listen to his cardiac action. What I found upon placing my ear to his chest—and what I did not tell him for some time afterward—was that *his heart was beating on his right side.*

**H**E had gone into the glass right-handed and with all organs in their normal positions. Now he was left-handed and with organs reversed, and would doubtless continue so for the rest of his life. Clearly, the dimensional transition had been no illusion—for this physical change was tangible and unmistakable. Had there been a natural exit from the glass, Robert would probably have undergone a thorough re-reversal and emerged in perfect normality—as indeed the color-scheme of his body and clothing did emerge. The forcible nature of his release, however, undoubtedly set something awry; so that dimensions no longer had a chance to right themselves as chromatic wave-frequencies still did.

I had not merely *opened* Holm's trap; I had *destroyed* it; and at the particular stage of destruction marked by Robert's escape some of the reversing properties had perished. It is significant that in escaping Robert had felt no pain

comparable to that experienced in entering. Had the destruction been still more sudden, I shiver to think of the monstrosities of color the boy would always have been forced to bear. I may add that after discovering Robert's reversal I examined the rumpled and discarded clothing he had worn in the glass, and found, as I had expected, a complete reversal of pockets, buttons, and all other corresponding details.

At this moment Loki's Glass, just as it fell on my Bokhara rug from the now patched and harmless mirror, weighs down a sheaf of papers on my writing-table here in St. Thomas, venerable capital of the Danish West Indies—now the American Virgin Islands. Various collectors of old Sandwich glass have mistaken it for an odd bit of that early American product—but I privately realize that my paper-weight is an antique of far subtler and more paleologean craftsmanship. Still, I do not disillusion such enthusiasts.

## IN THE NEXT ISSUE

### The Great Circle

*An Outstanding Novelette*

By Henry S. Whitehead

### Stragella

*A Thrilling Story*

By Hugh B. Cave

### The Hunters from Beyond

*An Unusual Tale*

By Clark Ashton Smith

—*And Others!*

*The tiger was stepping in  
an uncouth dance.*



# Tiger

By Bassett Morgan

**S**ITTING on the porch of his bungalow, Harden watched the copper-colored moon creep stealthily from the black waters of the Malacca and tried to fight down the feeling that he would have done better to sell his plantation than

pit his courage and wits against the mysterious forces that baffle a white man in the Sumatra highlands. That morning his native workers had deserted the fields of young rubber trees and sugar cane, leaving only a few Chinese coolies and his three house-boys

The story of Senyap and the ghost-tiger—with Harden standing between.

who explained that an alarm of tiger had frightened the natives.

From the river village the beating of drums came to Harden, incessant and annoying as the throb of pain. Djac, his number-one boy, came to the porch and asked for an advance of wages to buy jimats, which are love-charms, or talismans against evil. Harden shook his head, which was a mistake.

"You've got one wife," he said. "Love-charms are a silly superstition. Is your old wife willing for you to marry again?"

Djac's manner was cringing, but his black eyes glittered. He explained that he wanted to buy a dancing girl from the temple and her price would take all his wages. Undoubtedly his old wife was jealous, for she belonged to a head-hunting tribe of Dyaks and she had made gifts and said prayers in the temple to cure Djac of his desire for the girl. But her youth and comeliness were gone, and the girl was beautiful. Of a truth, Djac needed jimats.

Harden was generous with wages, but he was new to Sumatra and had all a white man's scorn of superstition. He left Djac in a sullen mood with his refusal, and went for a stroll down the path to the road between a double wall of flame-trees and hibiscus in heavy bloom. The shadows on the moon's face were not unlike the eyes and muzzle of a tawny tiger-head, and he was glad when the disk sailed high and changed to silver.

**C**OMING back to the porch he neglected to catch the door. Pajama-clad, his toes thrust in grass sandals he lighted a cigar and lay back in his chair conscious of the maddening buzz and drone of insects beating against the copper-wire porch screens. Then something cold and horrible touched his bare foot. At the same moment came

Djac's whisper, soft as the flower-scented wind:

"Don't move, Tuan."

Paralyzed by fear, Harden held his body rigid while a seemingly endless length of cobra slid over his instep toward the door. There came the thud of a weapon, a lashing and grating disturbance on the matting and Djac's yelp of triumph. Sitting on his own feet in the chair Harden saw Djac behead the cobra with a kriss and toss its still writhing body into the jungle grass beyond the flower hedge. A minute later he thrust a glass of brandy into Harden's hand. His whispered warning had saved Harden's life.

"Thanks, Djac," he said. "You get the money for jimats."

"To-morrow, I will kill the cobra's mate," said Djac. "There is a cousin of my old wife who is a priest at the temple, and he has great power," he added, sighing like a man with great odds against him. "But the girl is like the flower of the Tjindanwan-matahara, Tuan."

"But what took you, a Mohammedan, to this native temple to see the girl?" asked Harden.

"I did not go," protested Djac. "She danced out there in the starlight, Tuan, and charmed me so that my liver is fire for her. It was your own good fortune to be sleeping, or who knows. . . ."

Harden snorted his disdain of native women and charms, yet he wondered about the affair, whether it had anything to do with the desertion of his field workers. Cromley who wanted to buy his plantation had warned him to step warily on native mysteries.

**N**EXT morning Djac built a crude stage on stilts above the jungle grass, and under a sheltering palm thatch he sat, piping tunes on a bamboo whistle. Harden, fuming inwardly over his neglected

trees and cane, returned to the bungalow and writhed at the irritating monotony of Djac's weird tunes.

Yet the following morning a seven-foot length of cobra with its head smashed to a pulp lay near the house. Harden was generous in rewarding Djac, and the small brown man departed to visit his old wife and go about the business of bringing his girl bride to the hut near the river. Sonar, the second boy fingered a jimat hanging about his neck as he watched Djac depart.

"Evil will come," he assured Harden earnestly. "The priests can do anything. And My Lord prowled in the night near this house, though he never came before." Harden remembered that he had been warned never to speak of a tiger by its name, but to refer to it as "My Lord," lest the beast hear and take vengeance for the disrespect. He fought a growing sense of evil until Djac returned that night with bad news.

His old wife had disappeared. There was the trail of crushed jungle grass where My Lord had crouched to drink his fill of blood, then dragged its prey to a hidden lair. They also found the blood-stained sarong of his old wife.

In spite of the tropic heat, Harden shivered. The cobras had been bad enough. A man-eating tiger was far more dangerous.

"Then we had better go tiger-hunting," he said emphatically.

**S**HRIEKS of protest came from the three house-boys who gathered to hear Djac's story, and they now chattered excitedly in native lingo and broken English. Harden listened and began to understand that this particular tiger must not be killed. Having devoured Djac's wife it had become a family tomb, subject to veneration, worship and

dedicatory gifts. If Djac failed to observe the reverence due this receptacle of his wife's mortal remains, he would be haunted in this life and damned in the next incarnation. He grovelled in fear as he talked, bumping his head on the matting, moaning that his old wife had laid a terrible curse on him.

But was he to blame that the girl, whose name was Senyap, had danced for him in the starlight until he could not live without her? True, he had given her his old wife's bracelets, at which his wife wept and raged. But only a woman possessed of a devil would deliberately feed herself to a tiger because of jealousy. He would have to kow-tow all his life to this feline tomb to gain forgiveness of the lady in the tiger who took this means of suicide and vengeance.

Everyone knew it is the worst of evils for a relative to commit suicide, for the spirit of the departed haunts the place where his or her body lies. My Lord, the tiger, was not only sacred as a tomb, but he was ghost-haunted until vengeance was accomplished.

"This tiger—" began Harden, bringing howls of anguish from the three natives at the direct mention of the beast. He cursed and gave in to their fears. "My Lord," he began again, disgusted with his own helplessness, "has tasted human flesh and will be dangerous. If he is not killed he must be captured. Djac, gather your relatives and trap the beast. Otherwise I will shoot My Lord."

From that instant Harden felt a queer sense of loss, as if he had capitulated and sold his soul to some demon. The never-ending throb of tom-toms in the village was carried on a gust of wind, rippling in his flesh like the purring of a great cat. Now again he felt that he ought to dispose of his plantation.

**D**JAC departed to gather his people and make a tiger-trap on the river trail where there had been pad-marks in the soft ooze. All signs pointed to an old beast. Young tigers are seldom man-eaters. Also, it was the mating season when tigers in their prime are not flesh-greedy. Harden gave his servants a brief holiday for the hunt and went himself to the river where he saw the long stockade of bamboo lashed together, ending in a corral with a dead-fall gate weighted by a teak log.

In a natural cave in the hillside, Djac was building a cage-front of formidable bars. He beaded it with clean grass, decorated it with flowers and placed bowls of food as votive offerings. The native drums pounded incessantly. Harden went from the cave to where a second stout cage stood on a carabao cart near the corral.

Beyond the trap-gate a carabao calf was tethered as bait, bawling piteously, and adding to Harden's dislike of the whole business. The natives were feasting and working magic, and his fields were still deserted, except for the faithful Chinese.

In his house that night Harden tried to forget the tiger and avoided the sight of the yellow moon peering above the darkly brooding sea, but he could not shut out the purring throb of drums which got under his skin and behind his eyes, rippling in his flesh.

**N**EXT morning when Djac returned to report no luck in tiger-trapping Harden lost patience. It was lonely hill country, with natives unfriendly to white men and under the domination of temple priests and their tricky superstitions. But he had the courage to tell Djac sternly that unless the tiger was trapped that night he would go

gunning for it, and Djac shuddered in fear at the threat.

"My Lord now sees with the eyes of my old wife who was a woman of wisdom, Tuan. She will not be lured by the carabao calf. But there is one thing she desires above all else, and that she must have."

There was a resignation in the man's voice which alarmed Harden. Unable to shake off the feeling of impending trouble he went to the river in the evening and saw a dangerously excited group of natives near the hut where Djac had brought his bride-to-be.

Above the jabbering and clamor rose the high shrill scream of a woman, and Harden stalked to the hut and demanded an explanation of that cry of fear. He learned that, despairing of taking the tiger by other means, Djac had hoisted the girl, who was the cause of all the trouble, high in a nearby tree to attract the tiger.

Harden's gorge rose at the idea of baiting the tiger-trap with a woman. He marched through the crowd of natives, a commanding figure in his fresh white ducks and pith helmet, and talked to Djac as he never before talked to a native. His commands were met with sullen defiance from Djac and the other natives. Excitement exploded into rage and Harden found himself the vortex of an angry mob gesticulating with their wicked-looking waved krisses.

The Dyak relatives of the dead woman were in a nasty rage, and Harden knew his two revolvers could not hold that mob in check even if he wanted to attempt a shot that would be a signal for slaughter.

Controlling his voice and rising alarm, he argued and commanded in vain, then resorted to the only way he could think of to protect the woman in the tree from a possible attack of the tiger. He yelled

that he would share her night vigil, and, after a lengthy argument with Djac as interpreter, the crowd agreed. But they made it very plain that if Harden killed the beast its spirit would have company in death.

Although the death of the old wife was one of many such tragedies in a land infested with tigers, crocodiles, orang-outangs and cobras, the affair struck Harden as being out of all proportion to its significance. Alone in the village of semi-naked brown men, Harden saw blood-lust in their eyes, heard murderous threats in their jabbering, and, like flame in dry grass, the excitement swirled until it required courage of a ruddy order to face them and demand to be bodyguard for the young girl in the tree.

**W**HEN the chattering died to mutterings Harden walked through the village until he came to the tree. Already the bamboo stockade was in shadow, and the carabao calf in the corral wailed with hunger and fear. Once up the tree Harden found the least uncomfortable perch near a small figure swathed in white and lashed to a seat in a limb crotch. She sobbed pitifully and strained at her bonds. His blood boiled with the indignity of making a marriage chattel of the girl and using her as tiger bait. Yet, at sight of the menacing horde below, staring up and chattering, their betel-stained mouths suggestive of cannibal feasts, Harden could only control his rage and wait.

They vanished, and night fell with tropic swiftness. The insect noise grew louder and the calf bawled monotonously. Harden wondered if a tiger that ignored carabao calf was now hungry enough to be tempted by the scent of a human being. The woman near him

had ceased sobbing. He caught the gleam of starlight on her metal anklets and bracelets and heard the tinkle of bangles. Then she spoke:

"Tuan, you will kill the ghost-tiger," she said, pleadingly.

In his halting Malay, Harden explained that he had given his word not to shoot the tiger, but once it was trapped she need not fear it again.

"Kill it, Tuan," she begged, "or it will live to haunt you."

It would not haunt him, he protested, because he did not believe in ghost-tigers. He talked for some time, quietly persuading her that the worst to be feared was an attack by the beast. Yet his reasoning did not shake off his own uncanny chill, or the tensivity that puckered his flesh as he awaited what the night might bring.

**I**N the tree the darkness was profound, but just as the moon-rim rose above the far-away black sea, the calf ceased bawling and the insect clamor died away. There was a quiet rustling as little monkeys scampered off. Then came deep, thick silence in which Harden felt something like the purring of muted drums that came nearer, set time to his rapid pulse, tingled on his skin. He stared below with his scalp prickling as if some indefinable presence were approaching.

The revolver in his hand came to full cock! Then, as if the tiger had heard the metallic click, it streaked into the open and turned its green, shining eyes towards the tree. He saw the black muzzle and white fangs, the venerable look of a white beard and magnificent stripes on the amber hide. Its tail lashed the grass with a silky hiss, and there came the frightened whimper of the calf.

The girl's hands clutched at him, and, sharing her terror, Harden slipped an arm about her as the

beast prowled below, gliding about the tree and trap, evidently confused by two different scents of prey. Harden felt cold sweat trickling inside his shirt until the tiger moved away, sniffed about the trap-mouth, then shot, like a streak of gold, in a splendid leap on the whimpering calf. There was a shrill bleat, the crash of a teak log, the vicious snarling of the tiger. The bamboo creaked at its angry lunges against the walls, but the natives came running from cover and howled their joy around the trap.

Cutting the girl's lashings, Harden lowered her to the ground and, as he followed, she was running toward the river hut.

**D**RUNK with triumph and native liquor Djac lorded it among his fellows, but Harden did not wait to see them prod the tiger into the cage on the carabao cart backed to the trap-gate. Returning to his house he slept through the noisy celebration at the river which continued through the next day. By evening he felt that enough time had been wasted on Djac's affairs, and seeing the torches of the river town flaring through night darkness he strapped on his guns and strolled down to interview Djac.

The early night was dark and the light of a solitary torch against the hill took him to the cave. On the clean straw, behind the cage bars of its den, he saw a splendid tiger. Its golden eyes followed every moment of Djac who squatted on his heels, chattering prayers and incantations, touching his head to earth at intervals, worshipping his family tomb. Fresh flowers draped the cage bars. Inside were fresh offerings of meat and rice. And after watching at a distance Djac's fervent petitions, Harden told the man it was time to get back to his work.

But Djac came to him with a rambling tale of more trouble. The dancing girl he had bought refused to worship at the tiger shrine and they could not begin the wedding until she showed proper veneration for his old wife's tomb, especially since her spirit dwelt in such a terrible home as this body of My Lord. He could not mate with a woman who refused to placate the "berhauntu." Instead of showing proper grief, the girl danced for joy. She outraged Djac beyond all reason. He could not beat into submission a woman not yet his wife. Perhaps the Tuan would talk to her, for she was loud in her praise of his master who had been with her in the tree.

"Bring her to the house," said Harden. "I'll try to talk sense to her. And you get back to work. Anything, for peace!"

**H**ARDEN returned to his house with Djac and the girl. He finished dinner, after which Djac went to say more prayers to the tiger and left him alone with the woman. She had been sitting motionless in her white wrappings, with bowed head, until Harden spoke. Then she rose, dropped her white garment and stood like a bird of gorgeous plumage in the glow of lamp-light. Her jacket and trousers were kingfisher green. There were scarlet pompons on her red slippers. The teeth shone white between lips like a bitten pomegranate. Jeweled butterflies quivered in hair of dusky silk, slightly curly, and, by the rose-tinted amber of her skin Harden knew she was hybrid. Coquetry and allure shone in her eyes. She swayed on her feet like a flower in the wind.

"Why do you refuse to obey Djac?" he began, sternly.

Dimples stirred the warm gold of her cheeks.

"I am not yet a wife," she said.

"But a woman should obey her man," he protested.

"How should you know who have no woman in your house?" she asked with pretty impertinence. Harden laughed. Instantly her feet twinkled nearer. She knelt with her pretty head on one side like a pert bird, the butterfly ornaments twittering, her young breasts straining the silk of her jacket. Harden tried to scowl, but he was thinking how wasted this child was on Djac.

As if she knew his thoughts she swayed forward touching her forehead to his foot. Harden caught and lifted her to her feet, but she suddenly slipped to his knee and curled like a gorgeous doll in his arm, red lips parted expectantly, her eyes like pools of dark fire, her whole body an invitation.

For a moment he allowed the girl to clutch at the woman-hunger of loneliness in the Sumatra hills, then his face grew stern. She read his face like print and slipped from his arms. Then, crooning a wordless, tuneless song, she danced.

**I**T was as if humming birds were released to quiver like living jewels, as if fountains played brightly and butterflies flashed as bits of wind-blown silk. Her feet slipped from the sandals and with her arms she wove a story of passionate appeal. Never had he seen such fire veiled in sensuous gestures. His stern scowl melted, and through lowered eyelids he watched until she sank on the matting at his feet.

"My dancing pleases the Tuan?" she entreated.

"It is very pretty, Senyap," he admitted cautiously, then reached for a cigarette. Like a flash she caught the match from his fingers, struck a light and held the flame in her cupped hands. He caught the

fragrance of her perfumed body, saw the opal moons on her fingernails.

When he lay back inhaling smoke, she again danced, circling about the white garment which lay in a heap of silk gauze on the floor.

Suddenly she snatched it up, and, from a small basket he had not noticed before, two cobras glided, coiling their lengths on the matting. They lifted their swaying heads as she danced between them, twinkling, glittering as she sang, in so perilous a dance that Harden sat gripped by admiration and fear, a clutch that held him rigid as Senyap spun faster in the maddening whirl of the terrible death dance of the temple. Harden had heard of it. He heard of dread rites in which the dancing girls file out slowly leaving one alone as the bride of the awful hama-dryad god that lay hidden in a golden urn above the altars.

**W**ATCHING the dance, fascinated by the swaying, hypnotic glitter of the cobras, Harden felt as if the walls of his house receded and left him motionless, trapped in a vast gloom of which the lamp was the altar fire, and this girl a priestess of evil rites that chained his will and lured his senses. With hair rising on his scalp and sweat starting on his palms, he found himself powerless to move or speak as she bent slowly backwards until the flat of her hands and feet rested on the floor and made of her body a living arch of flesh.

The silk jacket fell open. Her breasts were smoothly molded and gold-tipped with coral. And, as if trained to that lure, the cobras swung aloft and glided over her motionless, rigid body that shone like pale metal, then disappeared into the basket.

Still Harden stared, leaning forward in his chair, waiting, waiting, hearing the slow thud of his own heart, seeing the girl sway upright and begin a deliberate padding dance with her feet, keeping time to the pulse of his veins. Her pale arms writhed like white snakes, she moved with the grace of a cat, holding his gaze until he could have screeched at her. Yet no sound came from his parted lips, nor could he move foot or finger. He knew he was caught in a hypnosis, yet he was conscious of some dread thing to come and his inability to avert it. He knew he should have crashed a fist at this glittering creature trained by temple priests.

He was conscious, then, of the menace that had by devious ways sought contact with his life. Serpent lure and tiger ferocity breathed about her, and there came from her parted lips the strange purring sound of a tiger.

The sudden stab of memory cracked a little of that spell she cast. She leaped, but his hands met her as her white teeth grazed the skin of his throat. He caught her wrists as she screamed an inhuman, feline cry that started a rustling in the basket on the floor. Free of the trance gripping his will, Harden snatched at his revolver as he held the girl in one arm. Two shots rang out, and two cobras, with smashed heads, twisted in death frenzy on the matting. Then, as if a spell had been broken for her also, Senyap lay limp on his arm. He swung her to his shoulder and turned to the door, only to face Djac who had returned in time to see Harden catch her in his arms and start toward his bedroom.

**F**OR a moment Djac stared, then turned on his heel and ran. Harden touched his fingers to his

throat where her teeth had struck and felt them sticky with a few drops of blood. He dropped the girl and ran for permanganate, daubing the tiny wounds thickly.

Sonar heaved the reptiles from the porch and began to scrub the blood from the matting as Harden returned. The girl crouched in a corner of the couch, sobbing.

"Tuan, Tuan. You saved us both from the curse of My Lord," she said, and Harden stared. She seemed so pretty, so soft and helpless now, that he could not believe her teeth had drawn blood in that savage lunge at his throat. His mind was chaos as he went near the couch and she clung to him, quivering in perfumed warmth, her arms about his neck. Then he felt her body stiffen, and at the window he saw the face of Djac and his flattened brown nose against the wire gauze. The face vanished as Harden called him.

"Tuan, keep me here in your house. If you send me away, I die. Djac will think I am your woman."

"You had better be taken to the temple where you belong," said Harden.

"Tuan, Tuan, they will make me the bride of the serpent god! I have disobeyed."

"Disobeyed what?" he demanded, catching her wrists, forcing her arms from his neck, pressing her back on the couch cushions.

"Tuan, Tuan," she sobbed in hysterical fear. "It was commanded, and I was forced to obey. I have failed, and I shall be given to the hamadryad god of the temple."

Sonar had darted away with his task only half done, as if he feared to breathe air of this small temptress. Harden had not the heart to turn her into the night alone with Djac nursing the belief that she had given her charms to his master, so he carried her to the guest room and closed the door.

All that night he expected trouble, nor could he sleep for thinking of the strange hypnosis of that dance of death and the tiger-like leap of the self-hypnotized dancing girl who had been sent from the temple, trained in some wickedness that concerned himself. The dark and devious ways of priestcraft were inscrutable to a white man. Some mystery pressed close, but he assured himself he need only keep his wits and will working to shake off the clutch of evil that undermined a white man's morale.

**M**ORNING dawned. The silver and pink mists of the valley disappeared, and the hot sun shot out of the distant sea. There was an ominous peace over the house, and Sonar's disapproval was tangible when he reported that Djac had not returned. In high dudgeon Harden started for the village to tell Djac to take his bride away from the bungalow and get down to work, or he would get another boy. But he did not find Djac, and the natives whom he tried to question ran from him, muttering incantations.

Thinking Djac was feeding the tiger, Harden went to its rock den and peered inside. For a moment he saw nothing. Then, as his eyes became accustomed to tree-shadowed gloom after the sun-glare, his breath caught. The grass was stained with evidences of a gory meal. The cage door was open and the tiger was gone!

Striking a match Harden held it until the flame nipped his fingers. He was not mistaken. The horrid remains of a man lying on the grass was Djac!

An exceedingly frightened white man ran through the hot sun to his own house and dropped in a porch chair, spent with heat and fear. Senyap was among the cush-

ions of his day-couch, eating fruit, and the sight of her made him furious. She was the cause of this tragedy, the death of Djac's wife and Djac. She had dared bring her cobras and temple tricks to his house for some fell purpose. Yet he dared not send her away now to the cruel vengeance of Djac's relatives, and it was worse than folly to keep her there. She had half confessed that she was sent from the temple for no good. She enticed Djac by dancing for him in the starlight and encompassed his death. When Harden told her about it, she preserved a callous calm, then said childishly and simply:

"He was only a servant, Tuan. I had to come to you."

"Why did you have to come to me?" he demanded. "Who sent you?"

"The god, Tuan. But I have failed his command. I will be an outcast, except to become the bride of the god."

**H**ARDEN grew cold inside. Dimly he saw the wickedness of priestcraft dispatching this pretty messenger of death to charm him with her dance until he should have been helpless in her hands. Then the cobras! Well, he had robbed her of the cobras, and now he dared not send her away. He himself felt insecure and was afraid to leave the house. He could not eat, and at night he sat on the porch until the moon rose.

Then the girl who had sat all afternoon on the couch with her slender hands in her lap, motionless as a small Buddha, glided to the porch and curled at his feet on the mat regarding him with unwinking dark eyes. Harden dozed. He was wakened by the faint tinkling of her bangles and whisper of her voice. Small brown fingers touched his wrist. One hand point-

ed to the dark jungle grass, and, as Harden turned his head, he saw two twin green flames—the eyes of a beast staring at him. Tiger!

Those eyes moved up and down, across and back. The girl threw herself between his knees, clutching at his arms. Breaking her grasp, he went into the house for his gun. He was firmly resolved to kill the tiger menace once and for all time. But when he came to the porch the tiger was gone.

He slept badly, troubled by fearful dreams. As he shaved in the morning a gray-faced Sonar came with news that the ghost-tiger had killed a woman and her two children in a hut along the river, and terror stalked the land. Harden screwed his courage to visit the village to gather natives for a tiger hunt, but they not only refused to listen, they threatened him with death if he harmed the ghost-tiger which was now the tomb of both Djac and his wife. His life was in double jeopardy. Djac had seen the girl in his arms, and laid on his house the curse of suicide: his ghost would take vengeance on Harden.

With a naked rabble at his heels he went to the river hut where the sleeping victims had been struck down with merciful swiftness. Preparations for a funeral were in progress, always a precarious time, because of the consumption of liquor which inflamed the natives to murderous mood and the honor of winning a reward after death by slaying an unbeliever like Harden.

**T**HAT night drums made the darkness hideous. Senyap sat at his feet on the porch, her eyes turned to the jungle. Her sudden cry whipped him to his feet and again he saw the twin green flames of tiger eyes!

Snatching the gun beside his

chair he fired twice, aiming between those glowing orbs. But they only moved nearer! Both shots had gone wild. Harden stared at the round clean bullet holes in the wire gauze where mosquitoes streamed inside. A second cry from Senyap turned his head. The tiger was on its hind legs, swaying to and fro, taller than a man, swaying and stepping in a cumbersome and uncouth dance. Harden was horrified as he stared at the grotesque spectacle.

“Tuan, Tuan, the Death Dance!” moaned Senyap, hiding her face.

His skin prickled as he took a second aim and fired, then cursed the gun. The tiger dance went on until it grew into a slow, undulating cat walk. Harden was breathless as he watched the tiger’s grinning muzzle, his gleaming fangs, his lolling tongue. Senyap writhed in a frenzy of fear on the floor.

“Djac and his old wife have come for me, Tuan,” moaned Senyap.

He carried her into the house, shut and locked the door, lighted lamps and turned on the gramophone, then called for whiskey. All night the spectral beast haunted him. At dawn he told Sonar to re-enforce the windows with wooden bars. The house was now a cage with the humans trapped within it, while the beast stalked at large outside. Harden laughed, but his laughter sounded queer. He drank heavily, and the third boy wound the gramophone all day. He commanded Senyap to dance—anything to drive out the memory of the golden beast.

To satisfy his reckless mood the girl became, in turns, bird and butterfly, and the room glittered and twinkled with her radiance. Drinking many pegs of brandy, Harden forgot the racial barrier between them. He caught her from her dance to his arms and lowered his head until their lips met.

**A** WILD screech of beast rage jerked him from that kiss. With the girl clinging to him, he turned to the window and saw the swishing tail and green eyes of the tiger. He tore the small fingers from his arms, feeling as merciless and brutal as the tiger and told Sonar to lock the girl in the bedroom. Her screams maddened him, and the night was one of terror.

In the darkness he heard the tiger snarling and purring at his windows. At times he heard it scraping the wire grating with its paws, and he smelled the fetid breath of the big cat. Gun in hand, he prowled all night shooting at beast eyes from every window. Drink and fear shook his hands, yet he felt cold sober except for those hot spurts of terror at the base of his brain. The shots sped harmlessly into the darkness. Finally he dropped into a chair with the gun across his knees and fell into a drunken sleep from which he awakened, unrefreshed, to the hot day.

He assured himself the affair was the result of loneliness and inaction, a touch of tropic fever, a disordered liver. But Sonar reported that even the Chinese had gone from his fields, and that there had been another tragedy in the night, an old man and an unbeliever who refused to make obeisance to the ghost-tiger.

"Tuan," added Sonar, his face a greenish hue with fright. "The number-three boy has gone to visit a sick mother. I also crave permission to visit my grandmother who lies at death's door. I have shown respect to the 'berhauntu,' My Lord, Tuan. Nevertheless it will not leave your house until this dancing woman is gone, nor will your gun kill it!"

Harden snarled a curse. Then, as Sonar left the house on winged feet, the laughter of the white man held

a note of incipient madness. The servants were gone and he had to get his own meals or go hungry. When he went to the larder it was to find only the spoiled remains of yesterday's food, and he knew that Sonar had been refused when he went to buy food from the village and for that reason had deserted.

He had to have food, and there was his car, seldom used because of the almost impassable hill roads made only for carabao carts. He might go deeper into the highlands and buy food from natives not affected by this mysterious curse laid upon him. But, as he left the bungalow, there came the tinkling of a bell, and he saw the patch of blazing yellow of a priest's robe, under an umbrella shielding him from the sun. The sight of it halted Harden. The girl crept to his side crooning songs, but his face was averted and he cursed her in words she could not fail to understand.

**U**P the path between the flame trees came the poongie, black eyes gleaming wickedly below his shaven head, holding out his begging bowl for alms. Harden laughed and spat in the dust.

The girl crouched at his feet whispering hoarsely:

"The priest who laid the curse, Tuan. The tiger-lord."

Harden remembered that Djac's old wife had a relative who was a temple priest. The robe of the poongie was tiger-yellow. His shaven head, the long narrow eyes and lips stained with betel looked bloody, carnivorous and cruel. He paid no attention to Harden's commands and curses as he stared through the screen, glaring at the girl who threw an arm up to shield her eyes. Harden caught the tiger-stench, heard the whirring prayer-wheel like the purring of a great cat as the girl's fingers curved like claws. Her eyes were glassy and flecks of

foam gathered on her lips from which came a snarling, mewing sound, horrible to hear, answering in some beast way the uncouth sounds from the poongie's mouth.

The screen door was fastened. Harden caught up the girl who fought at him and he carried her, struggling and hissing like a wild cat to the kitchen, where he sloshed water over her. At the touch of water her body stiffened as in a convulsion, then went limp, and she slipped to the floor. But a noise on the porch took Harden to the living room with his flesh crawling and cold with fear. He knew now that the crisis of the mystery was at hand and dreaded the swift-falling tropic darkness which swooped over the hills as the sun set. In the gloom of vines and trees about the bungalow he felt a presence that stilled the insect clamor and his own heart-beats. The little monkeys that played in the trees fled whimpering far away. Somehow he must keep this poongie from the girl whom his glance hypnotized into an unspeakable creature.

**H**E stared into the porch and the breath caught in his throat. From a hole torn in the heavy wire netting advanced a tigerish yellow shape with eyes like dark coals, yellow fangs showing from lips drawn back in a snarl. It glided toward him in a grotesque and growing form that was no longer human. Fascinated by terror, Harden watched the eyes change from black fire to glowing green that came nearer, holding him spellbound and helpless. Taller grew the shape of the creature until above him towered a tiger head with quivering red tongue drooling, purring so loudly that the sound shut out the moaning of the girl in the next room.

Slowly the beast thing was stalk-

ing him and Harden backed towards the wall with one hand groping. His fingers touched the barrel of his gun standing against the door frame and the touch of metal seemed to release a catch in his numbed brain. He caught up and swung the gun, firing against that advancing terror. The shot crashed and brought a screech of animal fury, a lunging shape tearing through the screens, vanishing in the darkness. Through the tiger stench, Harden was grateful for the honest smell of gun powder.

**T**HEN in the silence he heard the girl sobbing, splashing water, and saw her bathing her amber body. She wrapped herself in white and knelt touching her head to the floor. He was staring into the night from windows and doors when she came on dragging feet. Then he remembered the significance of bathing to these Orientals and that white is their mourning color. He wheeled and caught her in one arm.

"Twice have I disobeyed when I should have killed you, Tuan. It is the curse of Djac's old wife whom you took into your house where he lived like a fighting cock and made her jealous. Because I loved instead of killing you, I die out there in the grass, not honored as is the bride of the hama-dryad god, but tiger-meat!"

He held her close to his breast with one arm, his other hand clutching the gun.

"Why is this curse laid on my house?" he cried.

"I have said Djac's old wife wanted him to live in her river hut. She asked her relative, the tiger-lord, to lay a curse, and I was sent to dance for you, and the cobras would have killed you. But you slept and Djac saw me dance, and desired me. Thus it was the old wife entered the tiger to haunt you and me. And a curse is laid

on me because I could not kill you, Tuan."

His mouth touched her lips lightly. She was merely the trained tool of a demoniac temple priest, and her heart had betrayed her master's training. Then looking toward the window he saw in the starlight the twin green eyes of the tiger. It stood on its hind legs, dancing. At it glided nearer his flesh again rippled with the evil purring of that beast. His scalp crawled and his legs were limp.

**T**HE girl slipped from his arm. He tried to catch her, tried to call her name, but he was powerless to move or speak. She glided to the door, down the steps, and Harden saw the great beast pad-padding nearer, lifting its head in a roar of triumph. Then, like a blow came a memory of Senyap dancing for him, all glitter and color, parted red lips near his own, her body curled on his chair.

The gun falling from his nerveless fingers was caught up. He braced it against the window frame as the girl halted and dropped on her knees before the terrible ghost-tiger in the jungle grass. Harden's fingers jerked again and again. In that room the shots were deafening. From the darkness came a scream of rage, a threshing of the grass, a pitiful cry from the girl: "Tuan, Tuan!"

Clubbing the gun, he rushed to where she crouched and snatched her to his shoulder. Then, as the old moon with its broken edge

peered above the sea, the girl laughed softly and slipped her arm about his neck, spreading her fingers between which blood trickled from the tiger's claw marks that would scar her flesh for all time.

"They will not have me at the temple now, Tuan," she said, "for the brides of the god must be unblemished by birthmark, scar, or the caress of a man!"

But Harden was staring down at something dead in the grass. There was the shaven head of the tiger-lord. There were his cruel features and lips stained as if they sucked blood, and on the yellow robe lay bars of black that were shadows of jungle grass and light of the old moon. But now he was conscious of Senyap, speaking softly to him.

"You could not kill the tiger, Tuan. But when he changes his shape for the body of a priest he may be killed," said the girl, clinging happily to his neck. "But you did not kill the tiger so the workers will return to your fields, and the young trees and cane will thrive."

Harden made a generous gift to the temple for the accident to the poongie. Sonar and the number-three boy returned next morning and his fields were busy with workers. Senyap danced and filled the room with jeweled butterflies and birds, but Harden's eyes lingered on the claw marks of a tiger striped down her arm, the visible brand of a mystery still incomprehensible to a white man, even one who survives the tiger curse.

## STRANGE TALES

*Is Issued Every Other Month*



*A wolf stood howling  
on the top of the hill.*

# Back Before the Moon

By S. Omar Barker

**O**N a little meadow slope of the Hidden Valley (*El Valle Escondido*) that lies like a sun-smile back of the black woods of the Upper Vallecitos, stands a great cross built of red stone at the edge of the weird timber. This is in the *Rio Arriba* country of New Mexico, where all the world is still outside, and where there are said to be strange, strange sights every night of a moon for those with eyes to see them. Here, then is how the red stone cross came to be. If you had seen it

you would want to know. And old Oliborio Baldonado, the gray-beard, squatting in the sun beside his adobe in Canoñcito, would tell you, as he told me:

Eligio Jaramillo came riding down out of the black woods from the Valle Escondido, and all the little cañons were running belly-deep in snow water to stop him. There were black bogs where the firs had hoarded great piles of winter ice only to soak up the spring trails into

sucking vats that swigged and pulled at his horse's legs. The Rito itself, mod-

Eligio learns the queer way of a  
Cross in the black woods.

est and clear-eyed in summer, boomed now through its red stone box like the wrath of *Mi Tara Díos*, and then came swinging out in a twist of muddy-watered death into the three-cornered cove where Eligio must cross it.

Ah, the reckless doom of spring in the backland wilderness of the Hidden Valley country! One day there was the silence of deep-folded snow, and the next the growl of baby torrents loping down the hills to join the roar of wild, new water out to sweep destruction down the slanting cañon and strew it in the fields below.

A great pine, tricked by a suddenly faithless earth at its spring-stirred roots, renounced the sky and came swooshing down without warning across the path of the dark horseman and his black horse struggling down out of the black woods from Valle Escondido; and in flare-eyed terror at this weird treachery of his own mountains, the pony reared and swung his mud-covered body in futile struggle back up the hill.

**B**UT Eligio's eyes widened only a second in sudden alarm. Then into their blackness came again the deeper fear that drove him wallowing in mud, like some haunted soul in despair, down the sweeping slopes of the mountains toward Vallecitos. He jerked his *caballito* back down the hill, spurred him to flounder around the fallen tree and on again down the slipping trail to the river, snaking down the steep cañon in coils ten feet deep and fifty feet from edge to edge—the river he could not hope to cross.

Yet Eligio would cross it, for it was a fear worse than a death-fear in his heart that urged him on.

Back in a squat cabin with a flat dirt roof, on a long grass slope

tipped up to the sun—the lone homestead of the Hidden Valley—Erslinda lay in a fever. Erslinda, little brown-eyed sister of the angels, with the rude heart of her father so soul-bound to her own that two little tears from her eyes—*ay! que preciosos!*—would half break it, and bring his rough brown face quivering against hers. Erslinda, at eight years already the image of *la madrecita querida*, the dear little lost mother who had left them and gone to be with her *Tata Díos*. Thus the simple love of the rude sheepman for his daughter!

Eligio had left her, dying perhaps, with her two brothers, good brown mountain lads who knew what the sheep were saying when they cried out at night, and who did not mind talking to mountains alone in the moonlight, but who must run and hide when a stranger would drop into the *Valle* from somewhere in the world.

The two good brown boys were with her; and one, Toribio, perhaps would be down on his knees asking with *Tata Díos* to leave her with them; and the other, Juanito, holding fast to her hand. And Eligio battling down through the black woods to Vallecitos, the whip of fear lashing him behind and one tiny gleam of hope to lead him: one little *cruc de Jesus*—one wooden crucifix on the altar in the *capilla* at the village. If only Padre Onésimo would give him that and he could fight back to Erslinda before the red moon would turn white over the tops of the firs and the little coyotes come out talking their queer way on the hill-tops!

**A** DOCTOR? Oh, yes, there was a doctor in the village, too: old Pantureaux with his black bag and half-white whiskers. Eligio would see him for medicine,

but, after all, what could one hope from a mere *médico* in such a case?

Three days ago, Toribio had come crying to the cabin, and sure enough when Eligio went out with him, there was old Chango, the biggest goat, standing on a stump inside the *fuerte-corral*, upright like a man and preaching to the flock.

They could hear strange words past understanding and when Chango saw them coming there was a sudden red-fire circle around him, and as it died away the old goat leaped down among the herd, saying "ba-a" in his own language again. A puff of heat came blowing past their ears that could have only been the breath of the very devil.

That night Juanito saw a great wolf go flying out of the trees the way a lost soul would fly, for when he came against the white moon there was blue fire in his mouth and he dropped down suddenly and stood howling on a rock at the top of the hill.

Thus the weird doom of a haunted springtime up in the Valle! When that night was half-way into dawn, two coyotes, slim wolf brothers of *el Demonio*, sat on a hill and set up a mad fandango to drive back the sun, and over across the valley one answered like a call from another world. Eligio knew the Voice, and it said: "Er-slinda, Er-rs-li-i-in-da!" over and over. As he lay like a dead man listening he heard the little brown daughter moan softly in her sleep, but when he muttered a swift *Ave María* she was silent again; and outside the two coyotes went *yip-yirr-uping* back into the woods.

**T**HAT morning Erslinda arose a little quieter, yet well and clear-faced as ever; but one mother goat was dead on her knees in the

*fuerte*, and when the brown boys had milked the others and Erslinda drank some of it, moon whiteness came over her face and the fever began to take her. Juanito looked in her cup and sure enough, there, for a second, was the outline of a face marked in blue pinpoint bubbles of milk.

It was a devil's spring and a devil's fever that had come to the Valle Escondido, and Eligio Jaramillo came riding down out of the black hills for that little token of *Nuestro Salvador* that would save his daughter—if not from death, at least from the *Diablo* who would take her soul away. Three weeks before, he had gone up with Erslinda and the two brown boys and a few goats over the frozen snow and winter-dead river, making ready for summer until the mad water should all have run out of the hills and he could bring his sheep up for the new grass. But now he must leave the Valle and battle down to Vallecitos for the cross that had cured Macario Romero of the fever and saved Jose Adán that time of a doomed spring in the Valle Alamoso.

The Rito was a monster across his path. It swished down the cañon in a current so swift that every wave arched its back and leaped to keep up with its fellows like *un lobo* anxious to be in at the killing. The muddy rider knew it would be death, and yet, with the talking sounds of the hills behind him and the great fear in his heart, he urged the black horse to its edge. Black Choto groaned, but stepped into the torrent, for he knew his master. Two steps brought his head into the waves. The horse knew death when he saw it, and he saw it then. Yet not so close but that a lunge and a mad pawing of water brought him streaming and quaking back to the bank. Eligio's heart was a

second without beating, for he knew poor Choto could not carry him across.

**Y**ET he would cross. Twenty steps above, where the mad water came tearing out of the box cañon, it was narrower, and at the edge of the bank, the curled fingers of the flood clutched at the roots of a tall blue *pinoreal*. If he had an ax he could chop it, and it might swish down and catch on the other bank, for it was long enough. But Eligio had left the Valle half in stupor from the dread in his soul and had not been fore-minded. He tried pushing the tree. It swayed a little, for the water had loosened its roots, but it did not fall. A dozen little *piédritas* and a single block of black earth where he had disturbed the anchor of the tree tumbled into the stream, *y no más*.

The black horse stood like a slim statue back a bit from the bank, and Eligio looked at him without hope. Then suddenly he was at the saddle, unbuckling the lasso that always hung there. It was a long rope, light and tough and made of *magüey Mejicano*, the way the cowboys like. Eligio could throw it, too, with a swish that would fetch up whatever he caught in a quick surprise.

Now it was no running horse he must rope, but the snag root of a big log lying like clusters of dead snakes across the Rito. He threw with all his might and the slim string of *magüey* kirtled clear across the water, though it did not catch. But it was long enough. It dropped down into the water and dragged off down the stream, but Eligio pulled it to him with swift hands and a spark of *esperanza* came into his heart. For now he would cross the river. It remained for him but to throw the rope swiftly and surely.

**A**ND he did. The third time the questing loop caught on a stout snag and held when the middle bellied to a strong tug of the mad water. He tied Black Choto to a bush back from the bank to await his return with *la cruz salvadora* ere the moon would be rising. Then into the water he crept, knotting his hands in the rope and fighting that giant a thousand times his strength with the muscles of a strong little man and the heart of a *león*.

Eligio had come down out of the black woods where a *Lobo-Diablo* had flown across the moon, and he was going down to Vallecitos for a Cross of Jesus to save the child that was his other heart, and he had crossed the Rito because he must!

One step on the bank in safety and he heard the soft sound of a *woo-oooh!* behind him like the blue fire-wolf that had come down from the moon to sit and howl on the hillside, but when he looked back, half in terror, it was the tall blue fir that was swaying down over the river. It came down slowly to rest its stiff upper branches on a gray boulder across the Rito so that its trunk was a stout-bristled bridge over the reaching water that any man might cross. If the tired wet man had only waited—

But now he was over, nevertheless. With the coiled rope around his dripping shoulder he was on his way down the wild-curved road to the *placita*. Now he would run in the swigging mud the few miles distance to the *capilla*, and he would be back across the fir-tree bridge before the moon! *Jesús adorado!*

**E**LIGIO ran like the cursing old river itself, for here there had been more sun on the road. But even as he went, dodging the black bog holes and talking a

heart prayer to the good Jesus, there was a voice that muttered in the little cañons and a soft sound of doom in the warm-lipped wind; and the black hills talked behind him.

It was where the slanting road comes down by the river and a helpless old trail from the Rito del Espíritu Santo crawls to the west edge of the water, that his tired legs pulled him down to rest for a double breath lest he fall dead in the black mud. And it was when he dropped his head in his leath-ered hands for a dead still moment that he heard the voice that called from over the Rito.

"Amigo! Amigo!"

It was a strange sound. Eligio looked in wonder, for who would be calling from the old trail? Ah, what would the poor sheepman see? Leaning against the white stump of a *troncón*, holding himself up with his arms out on two branches as though he might be a Christ on the Cross was a long-haired man with a curly brown beard on his face, and the black woods behind him. Eligio had not yet closed his mouth from surprise when the man stepped down to the brink of that rabid water and called again.

"Amigo! Friend! Help me to cross this water! I cannot pass it alone!"

Eligio saw that there was the stain of red, like blood, on his blue rag jacket and remembered how he had heard of the old hermit digger of mines back in the red stone hills of the Espíritu Santo, who was like to be standing on his head half of the day because of the crazy way it was.

So Eligio called to him that he could not cross that torrent, worse here than above. For it was only the crazy miner, and Eligio must be running on down the road to the village.

"Your rope! Throw me your rope!" the old man called out now, more insistently.

**B**UT Eligio was going again and would leave him there, for who would stop to help an old fool drown? He looked back over his shoulder and his heart stopped for a second with his legs. The old man was wading in, arms over his head. He would be lost!

Let him drown! Eligio had battled the clutching hills to come down this far for the *cruz de Jesús*, and he must go on. But it was in his heart now as if there were only one world and one man in it, and he the crazy old man wading out to go down dead in the flood.

The hawk does not flick his wing more quickly than Eligio pulled the rope coils from his shoulder, ran back and whistled the strong *magüey* string across the mad water.

The line looped over the old man, and when he went strangling down under the flood the *borreguero* Eligio caught the rope a turn around a stout white aspen and pulled him up again! It was one *hombrecito* against the whole weight of another and the long-muscled water besides, and there was death in it for one or both if he should slip, for he had the rope wound about his hand and arm like a snake.

Here was another struggle with the roaring Rito, and the sun crawling around west to make long, black shadows of the firs! Eligio pulled and hauled and cursed like *un loco enojado*, and the old *mi-nero* gurgled and fought the water and then went dead on the rope until a whirl caught and swung him past the middle. Eligio pulled him out on the bank like a great dead *trucha*. But the old man was not dead.

THERE were two long, lost hours the sheepman was working with him until he stood up again, and now he would be too late getting back to Erslinda! He tried to run on now, but the *minero* plucked him by the sleeve and said, like one who would know already:

"Where do you go, my friend, and why do I see shadows like the black woods in your eyes?"

Ah, Eligio would hurry away, but now he must stay and tell him what he asked, for there was no end to the look in his eyes. So he did tell him, even how Chango had preached to the flock up in the Valle and how he had come fighting across the river.

The *minero* gave him a look like the look of a clear blue sky and said: "Who shall say that the little roots are only for the growing of wild grass? Or that uphill is not down to the one who understands?"

Even before he had finished, Eligio was off again down the rough *camino* to the village . . . late . . . late, but with half the fear shadow gone from his black eyes, and he not knowing why.

At the beginning of evening Eligio came over the last hill with the gray sage clumps about him, to look upon the village down by the river where he should find the chapel and the Holy Crucifix.

The black doom came rushing back into his heart when he looked, for the long digging arms of the crowding water had crept out and clutched the old chapel, and the baked mud that was its walls was crumbling like dead faith into the flood. As he ran crying down the hill the last front wall with the great cross upon it tumbled to the *embrazada del agua*, and all the God-fearing people of Vallecitos stood groaning and watching it. . . . All but the good Padre Onési-

mo, for his body was bumping somewhere down the river and his soul flying up to his *Tata Díos*.

Eligio Jaramillo had come down out of the black woods of talking wolves for the *cruz de Jesús* to save his daughter, but the black water he had fought was there before him. Even the good Padre who might have known the holy words to say for making another cross was gone.

ELIGIO was taking back a useless medicine from old Pan-tureaux, now, yet without hope, for how would a little red bottle or white pellets save the girl when there was blue fire in the mouth of a wolf flying across the moon? Now he must go back through the black woods to bury his dead, and his heart under the black earth with her, for he had lost two hours fighting the river for a crazy digger of mines, and the avenging water had been that long before him at the *capilla*.

There was only one word in the woods as he climbed back again toward the Valle, and that was the shouting word of the river in the cañon. Eligio crossed the fir-tree bridge that had fallen for him. The water was singing a wild song beneath him. Now he would step down to die in it, but he must not, for the dead must be buried.

Black Choto was there by the foot of the hill with a strange, joyful voice welcoming his master. His master had no ears for the sound of a poor horse's gladness.

It was slow up the mountain. The moon was white and going west over the black firs when Eligio topped the hill where the little coyotes should be out talking their queer weird way in the night time. But they were not. There was no voice in the woods. Ah, the poor sheepman understood this silence of death in the Valle! For,

why should a devil-wolf be howling now that Eligio was coming back with empty hands—too late?

When he rode into the Valle with the flat black cabin up on the *solana* of it, there was a cry from the marsh by the road and when Eligio looked, it was the old *minero* again, deep in a bank of the melting snow of spring and calling:

"*Amigo!* Friend! Your rope! Throw me your rope!"

**E**LIGIO would kill him now, for his heart was black with grief. Yet he did not. Again it was in his heart as if there was but one world and one man in it, and he the old man dying there in the moonlit snow; and he looped him again with the *magüey* string he could throw that sure way, and pulled him out flat where the snow was hard.

But he did not raise him up, for now he must ride on up the hill to kiss the dead lips of his Erslinda. *Ay! Jesús!*

It was the boy Toribio who ran out in a swift patter when Eligio came to the cabin, but it was Erslinda, brown little sister of the angels, that stood in the light of the open door and called to him,

her voice singing into his poor heart like the joy of a day that never was.

How could the man listen to his good brown boy telling him something until Erslinda was in his arms and her brown face against his? For they must tell him how a strange miner man with a beard, and with the look of the blue joy in his eyes and red stone stains like blood on his jacket, had come wordless into the cabin, with queer grasses on his brow.

And when Erslinda drank the red drink he brought for her from beneath his jacket the fever left her, and they, falling on their knees at her bed did not see the stranger leave.

**I**T was in a quiet moonlight that Eligio Jaramillo went quickly searching down the valley for the *minero* he had left lying on the snow. But there was only the print where his clothes had stained the snow like a blood-red cross, to be found.

Ah, the holy calm that follows springtime where Eligio Jaramillo has built a red stone cross in the *Valle Escondido* and the little coyotes go walking their queer quiet way in the night!

## ASTOUNDING STORIES

*For Science Fiction*

## STRANGE TALES

*For Weird Fiction*



*The shadow towered up before them.*

# The Case of the Sinister Shape

By Gordon MacCreagh

**D**R. MUNCING stepped out of an early morning train in the chill, salty dawn of Ocean City and shivered with an ill premonition. He did not know why he had come. He had been planning to take a vacation somewhere else; but something had impelled him to change his plans

and come to Ocean City instead. It was an uncomfortable urge of something pressing. Dr. Muncing shook himself and looked around him.

Dr. Muncing encounters an old foe,  
an unleashed thing of hate.

Sollicitous hotel runners in gold-lettered caps recited the scenic and culinary merits of their respective hostleries. The doctor looked at them with-

out the least interest, undecided.

A name caught his eye. Hotel Bathurst. The broad gold letters were just the slightest bit tarnished and the man the vaguest trifle less spruce than his rivals. But something made Dr. Muncing feel that Bathurst was the hotel he wanted.

Some *thing* again. The letters were all wrong. That "BA" combination, and the fourth letter "H," the eighth in the alphabet. He didn't like it. He didn't particularly like the strong impulse that attracted him to it.

It was not a comfortable impulse; not just a vague hunch. It was a distinct urge that impelled him, an insistent influence against his will that drew him on. A feeling wholly unpleasant. He might have resisted it of course. But much of Dr. Muncing's success in his work of battle against the more evil things of the borderland was of necessity a result of acting upon impulses. With quick decision he gave his bag to the man and followed him to the car.

Short questions during the drive elicited the information that the Bathurst was a hotel patronized mostly by the theatrical profession. None of that offered any clue to the impulse. Dr. Muncing wondered darkly.

**T**HE premonition of unpleasantness received quick impetus upon his arrival at the hotel. In spite of the early hour a scurrying and a confusion was in the lobby. Bellhops hurried aimlessly, doing nothing. A few wide-eyed guests, showing evidences of having dressed hastily, whispered in groups.

Words such as "horrible . . . fearsome . . . the most frightful sound I ever heard in my life . . ." passed in shuddering agreement.

A large, very blond lady behind the desk wrung her plump white hands distractedly and moaned:

"That it should happen in my house! My God, why must it happen to me?"

A car roared up to the door and a burly man with a brusque and officious manner entered.

"Where is it?" he asked importantly.

A dozen voices told him eagerly: "Fourth floor. Room forty-eight."

Four and eight again. Dr. Muncing was always quick in decision. He stepped up to the man and handed him his card on which was inscribed, "Dr. Muncing, Exorcist."

The man glanced at it. The title, doctor, caught his eye. The last word was unfamiliar in his business of extracting the solid facts out of material mysteries; but this was no time to bother. He grunted satisfaction.

"Good. Better come along, Doc. I couldn't connect with our own man this early; had to leave a call for him. All right, boy; shoot her up."

**O**N the fourth floor frightened faces peered from doorways. A woman huddled in a chair at the floor desk, rocking with her head buried in her arms while her body shook in great hysterical sobs. The elevator boy pointed dumbly in the direction of room forty-eight.

The plainclothes man strode briskly down the corridor. Over his shoulder he said:

"Phone call said the whole floor was awakened by a frightful scream and the floor clerk rushed to the room and found a guy laid out all twisted on the bed. Something about a tall thin feller and the window too. Sounded foolish; but we'll get the woman in as soon as we've had a look around."

While scared faces stared at him in horrid fascination he pushed open the door with professional callousness and entered, Dr. Muncing on his heels.

The window shade kept the room unpleasantly gloomy; but there was plenty enough light to see an emaciated figure in pajamas on the bed, twisted, as the floor clerk said, in a hideous contortion.

The detective grunted.

"Huh. Don't need a physician to tell me that this one is out. But look at him anyhow, Doc."

While Dr. Muncing made quick tests for any possible lingering life, the other with trained eyes took in all details of the room. He shot the window shade up with a whirl and let in the early daylight. The window sash was open. The man leaned out and made critical note of the outside distances. He came back to the bed and looked at the body.

"What's the verdict, Doc?"

Dr. Muncing's face was darkly serious.

"Quite dead of course. There's not an external mark on him, but every bone in his body seems to be broken; smashed small from the inside."

**T**HE detective scowled and his eyes swept the room rapidly once more.

"Huh—that's a funny one. Not a mark on him; nothing upset; no furniture broken; no signs of a fight; nothing. A body tied in a knot like it had been done with a derrick, and an open window. But, what the heck, there's nothing human could get out there. Let's call that woman in."

Dr. Muncing nodded; but mechanically. He stood with head high, his strong black brows drawn together in a frown, nostrils wide and twitching, as though sniffing. He was feeling, sensing, trying desperately to catch some vague aura or impression that remained in the room. The impression was uncomfortable; more than that, evil and menacing.

He went to the window, as the detective had done, and looked out. The wall was sheer. No projections, no ledges or roofs. He measured with his eye the distances to adjoining windows. He drew his head in again, nodding darkly with thin lips sucked in a tight line.

Outside the door was the detective's voice, not unkind but determined.

"Come along, my girl. Nothing's going to hurt you. I don't want to make it hard; but, we've got to have your description. Hey, Doc; cover it up, will you? This dame's got the horrors."

He pushed the floor clerk before him.

"Now about this man you say you saw. Tell me exactly where and how he stood."

**T**HE woman came in, twining convulsed fingers round a moist handkerchief and biting her lip to control hysteria. She cast a shuddering glance towards the bed; and, finding to her relief that the twisted form upon it was decently covered, she controlled herself sufficiently to stammer her tale.

"I—I was reading at the desk there—I wasn't asleep. Suddenly I heard the scream. It was—God have mercy, it was the most horrible noise I've ever dreamed in a nightmare. I ran to the door and knocked. There was no answer. I—the knob turned to my hand and I looked in, and—"

Shudders choked her words and she covered her face with her hands. Dr. Muncing quickly put his arm about her shoulders and spoke soothingly.

"Don't tell us about the man on the bed. Don't think of that. Just tell us about the other one."

The woman sensed protection in the muscular arm, and understanding in the voice. She got a grip on her nerves.

"He was—it wasn't quite daylight yet; the room was dim. All I could see was a very tall man—not his face. Only his shape—my God, his frightful shape. It was that that frightened me more than—than that other. I don't know why; but it was somehow horrible. Just the shape. Dark and thin and frightfully tall. He—it seemed to reach the window in one stride and it pulled aside the shade and stepped out. Just like that. All elbows and knees and then it was gone. Then I—I screamed and other people came from their rooms."

"Let's get this straight," snapped the detective. "Other people came. Did they come at once? They'd be witnesses that nobody came out of this room. That's important, because no human person could go out of that window. It would take an eight-foot man with a ten-foot reach to touch the next window sill. I tell you nothing human could get out of that window."

Dr. Muncing nodded.

"You are right, Officer. Nothing human. Still—" He pointed with his eyes at the shrouded huddle on the bed.

**T**HE detective frowned. His voice was dubious.

"I've got to look into rope-ladder possibilities; though I'd say that's out from the start. A rope against three floors of lower windows would make quite a racket. Still, that tied-up knot isn't normal. Something must have killed him."

Dr. Muncing nodded agreement again. Very softly and full of dark meaning, he said:

"You are very right again, Officer. Some *thing* quite surely killed him."

The detective looked at him, his eyes dilating.

"What d'you mean? What weird stuff are you driving at, Doc?"

Dr. Muncing shook his head.

"I don't know, Officer. I don't know—yet. There are more horrible things in heaven and earth than are dreamed of in your police records. You go ahead on your own methods. I'd like to verify from your coroner's autopsy my opinion that there was nothing organically wrong with this man. Still, I'll bet that he has been sick for some days and I'll bet that his doctor has never found the trouble in all his medical books. I must go and see that man if I can possibly get his address from the office."

The detective scowled reflectively and lit a cigarette to conceal an uneasiness that came over him.

"You're a cheerful one, Doc, to have on a murder case. You give me the willies with your unholy talk. If this guy has had a doctor, like you say, I guess I'll come along with you and talk to him. I want to know what kind of sickness ties a man up into that kind of a knot."

**T**HE physician who had been attending the sick man, a Dr. Perkins, turned out to be an alert-eyed little man with the inquiring manner and quick movements of a bird. He was momentarily shocked to hear of his patient's horrible and sudden death. Then he shrugged.

"I suppose one should call it a tragedy; but it was, after all, only a hastening of what seemed to be inevitable. Whatever was the matter with him was more than my poor skill could fathom."

"So I thought," said Dr. Muncing. "You found nothing organically wrong?"

"Nothing. Nothing at all. It was the most perplexing case of all my experience as a general practitioner. There was nothing wrong with the man; I'll stake my reputation on that. He was just wasting away and he responded to no treatment. Something was sapping his vitality."

Dr. Muncing assented soberly.

"Quite right, Doctor. Without any manner of doubt, some *thing*."

The detective exploded.

"There you go again, hinting at deviltries of some kind. Come across, Doc. What have you got up your sleeve? I'm not one of those know-it-all sleuths of the story magazines; I'm not above taking a hint from anybody. Let me in on your dope."

Doctor Muncing held up his hand. His compelling eyes held the detective.

"One minute, Sergeant. The doctor here has verified just what I guessed. Take the phone and verify one more guess, will you, while I ask the doctor a few more questions; and then I'll tell you all I know. Call up the hotel and ask if there aren't some more sick people."

**T**HE detective stepped into the hall where the telephone was and the mumbling of his voice into the mouthpiece came to the two men while Dr. Muncing asked questions. Suddenly the voice came loud in a startled exclamation.

"By Cripes!" and then, "The hell you say!"

The man came back to stare at Dr. Muncing with dilated eyes. Thickly he said:

"You're a wizard, Doc. And there's hellishness afoot somewhere. There's two other sick ones; and neither do their doctors know what they've got. And there's a maid on the top floor out of her mind and moaning about a horrible tall dark thing."

Dr. Muncing sprang to his feet. Flinging a quick thanks to Dr. Perkins, he caught the detective by the arm and hurried him to the street. There he hailed a taxi and pushed the detective in. The latter obeyed without resistance; he was following a knowledge greater than his own. In the taxi Dr. Muncing

rapidly explained to the bewildered detective the outlines of what he guessed and the rudiments of the darker mysteries of life. He found no difficulty in reducing many years of occult study in many countries down to a few lucid details. Muncing's work was so unusual and so few people knew anything about it, that he was constantly called upon to explain his science.

**W**E have no time to go into history or abstruse arguments," said Dr. Muncing. "You accept the findings of expert criminologists as probable truth. You will take the word of another detective on things that you may not be familiar with yourself. Well, I am a ghost detective.

"No, don't interrupt. Let me tell you what I know; and later, perhaps—if we get out of this alive—we can argue.

"I don't have to tell you that what you call ghosts do exist. Most people—though they like to pooh-pooh such things—have an inherent feeling that they might meet a ghost some time in a dark place. You probably have your own superstitions.

"Well, they are not superstitions. They are hereditary memories. Our forefathers knew a great deal about spirit life that we have drowned in modern materialism. Oriental people still know a great deal.

"What most people do not know is that there exist many distinct forms of spirit life and that they function each according to their attributes. Some forms are well disposed to human life; some are harmless; some are malignant.

"We have to deal here with a malignant form. From its action I judge it to be an elemental. Elementals are primal earth forces—formless, eyeless, faceless. You will understand them perhaps by applying the great truth of evolution to

all things. Elementals are spirit forms that have just not evolved at all. They exist, where shall I say? For want of a better word; they exist along with various other spirit forms on the other side of the veil that divides spirit from man.

**S**OMETIMES it becomes possible for a spirit form to break through the veil and to manifest itself on the human plane. Never mind how they break through. They are attracted in various ways. In order to break through they must first be attracted by humans, consciously or unconsciously. The vibration theory may account for some. When they do break through we, in popular language, see a ghost.

"All elementals, possibly on account of their inferiority, hate humans who have progressed further in the scale of evolution. Having broken through into the human plane, an elemental must continue to draw sustenance from humans in order to continue to manifest. It can establish contact with some human who is sick, weak, whose power of resistance is at a low ebb. Thereafter it continues to draw vitality from its victim just as the vampire draws its sustenance in blood—till there is no vitality left.

"That in itself is bad enough. But the human victim, robbed of all vitality, does not quietly die, as do vampire victims. For the elemental, finding its victim useless, vents all its hate upon him by rending the last life from him with a vicious force, and then casts the twisted shell of what once was a man aside and turns to find another victim in a favorable condition of low resistance."

**T**HE detective had listened with wide eyes, knuckles showing white where his hands gripped his

knee. These things sounded fantastically impossible; but Dr. Muncing's cold enunciation of them forced a reluctant belief in their gruesome possibility. And there was the evidence of the broken, twisted body and the telephone addenda from the hotel. All of them, things normally inexplicable.

The detective drew a long, tremulous breath and then fired what he thought was a poser.

"If this thing is a spook—which I don't admit yet—what brought it here? I thought that spooks hung around in old houses; monasteries and such like places where there'd been murders."

Dr. Muncing was able to laugh happily.

"There you are. Your own established superstitions. Why do you believe that? Because your forefathers knew it; because it is history; because people still know it. But make no mistake. While some forms of spirit life are attracted to their associations in old houses, others—elementals—are attracted directly to humans; they can fasten on to them wherever they may live."

The doctor had a desperately logical answer to every doubt. The detective propounded another—not a doubt this time; a question looking for information.

"And this spook thing, can it hurt other people, too; people who aren't sick? Us?"

Dr. Muncing nodded seriously.

"Under the right conditions, yes. Conditions in the Bathurst are right. If it has established contact with three victims its power may be immense."

"What do you figure brought it to the Bathurst?"

**I**DON'T know," replied the doctor. "Maybe the number combinations of its name opened the way. There are deeps in numerology

that no man has fathomed. Maybe its victim did or thought or possessed some luckless thing, to attract it. Maybe just the fact that there were three prospects whose physical vibrations provided the right sort of non-resistance was sufficient.

"These are things that I do not know. I can do no more than guess in the dark. I do not know how this malignant entity was able to exert some queer force that impelled me, personally, to come here. But from that I deduce that I have had contact with this elemental evil before. It has reason to hate me more than all other humans; and it has drawn me to this place because it feels it has contacted with something or other, with some new power, that will enable it to destroy me. I don't know yet what this power may be or just how the thing has been able to exert it from a distance. But I feel positive that the whole plan of campaign is aimed at me."

The doctor stated his case with cold conviction. No exaggeration, no assumption of knowledge that he did not possess, no heroics. Here was something at last that the detective could understand. A force for evil directed deliberately against an individual who stood for law and order. It was a condition that he himself had faced many a time. And the doctor faced the condition calmly, without hint of hesitation just as any officer of the law might.

There was inspiration in that attitude. The detective braced himself. It had been the dark unknown that had seemed so horrible. Now he felt that he knew quite a good deal about the ways of spooks. He shrugged

"Well, it sounds like a lot of hooley to me, Doc. But you got your nerve all right. And I'm assigned to clear up this murder. So I'll

throw in with you. Let me just phone headquarters to send a man to look up marks around the window and fingerprints; and then we'll take a look at this maid that's gone queer on the top floor."

UPON arrival at the hotel they found a physician already in attendance upon the maid. She had been moved to a bed in a vacant room, and there she lay in a state of collapse, moaning incoherent things and rolling staring eyes that saw nothing.

The physician was quite at a loss.

"There's not a thing the matter with the girl," he told them. "No hurt of any kind. But there seems to be some awful fright. All she does is mutter something about a horrible shape."

Dr. Muncing nodded.

"Do what you can. We'll be back."

He drew the detective away.

"There'll be attics above this top floor; trap-door entrances. That's where we must look. And listen—get this very straight because you'll need to know just what you are up against. This is no empty shadow that groans and rattles chains. It has drawn human vitality sufficient to materialize in exaggerated resemblance to the human form from which it has taken that vitality. By the process of multiplication of energy known to all spirit forms it has built up that energy to a force sufficient to tear you and me apart. Few spirit forms can face bright light. Therefore this thing will be lurking through the day in dark places; attics."

The detective heaved up his shoulders in a great shrug.

"If I believed the half of what you told me, Doc, I'd be taking cover faster than from a crook gang with machine guns. But I'm with you; so you know just about what I think."

AT the end of that long hallway, rungs let into the wall led to a square trap above. Dr. Muncing, with a grim little smile, waited. The detective was quick to catch on to his motive. He grinned at him.

"You haven't got me scared yet, buddy," he grunted; and he slowly climbed the ladder. With a thrust of his burly shoulders he flung the trap door back and disappeared into the gloomy hole.

Dr. Muncing deliberately waited below. He heard the man's heavy footsteps move in a small circle above. Still he waited. It was being alone in the dark that tried a man's unbelief in ghosts. Suddenly the detective's voice came.

"Doc. Hey Doc."

Within the second it came again; urgent, anxious.

"Hey Doc. Come on up!"

In a flash Dr. Muncing was up the ladder and beside the man. It was he who was grinning now, though rather thinly and without mirth.

The detective drew a shaky breath. His face was sheepish and had by this time lost all of its gruff assurance.

"By golly I—I guess I'm a fool. For a minute there I was getting rattled. But—there's something up here, Doc."

Dr. Muncing laughed shortly.

"So? You felt it, did you?"

"Felt what?" The detective was boldly positive again. "If I'd felt anything I'd have taken a crack at it. What d'you think I felt?"

Dr. Muncing was grimly uncompromising.

"Fear," he said. "Just the first swift stab of it—and you haven't seen the thing yet. I told you fear was one of its attributes. You'll have to hold your nerve with an iron grip because this thing knows how to wrench out the very roots of fear."

THE detective's voice came very soberly.

"By golly, Doc, you've almost got me believing you. There was something getting my goat. But—I'm with you."

"Good man," said Dr. Muncing. "Let's take a look around."

The attic space in which they stood was a long, wide barrack of a place. Dim light filtered through a cobwebby louver opening. Ghostly gray BX electric cable wandered snakily over the open ceiling beams. The peaked roof shingles were lost in the gloom above. Only a track of three planks made walking space down the middle of the empty area. A false step on either side and one's foot would plunge through the ceiling of the room below.

At the far end another dim ventilation louver showed that the attic extended on both sides. Apparently it was all like that, a dusty, musty, emptiness of king posts and cross beams that covered the whole building, which was constructed with wings and a center, like a letter E.

"Helluva place to go spook hunting," grumbled the detective with an attempt at jocularly to keep up his spirit.

Dr. Muncing said nothing, but advanced slowly, the detective as close to his side as the narrow plank track would allow. In the gloomier central portion barely lit from the dim ends the doctor was very cautious. A faint metallic clink in his pocket told that he had handled something. If overwrought imaginations were not building figments out of nothing, soft echoes and vague scuffling noises indicated that something was moving somewhere.

"We've got to be sure," said the doctor, "that it is up here and that it is It."

They advanced together cautiously. Arrived at the end, the detective

fastened a spasmodic grip on the doctor's arm.

"There! By God, I'll swear I saw something duck round the far corner."

"Come on," said the doctor shortly.

**B**OTH men felt a tingling of their skin as they started forward. The detective pressed on. Having seen something, all his training as a man-hunter came to the fore. He reached that corner ahead of the doctor. With a sudden shout he snatched his pistol and fired into the further darkness.

Nothing happened. Then in a few seconds—almost as though it were a foul odor given off by some beast of the skunk family—a hot wave of hate swept back and eddied round them. It was a sensation almost solid. They could feel the furious malice of the thing. A chill ran along the detective's spine.

"That was foolish," said Dr. Muncing quietly. "You can't shoot a ghost. But I knew you had your gun; otherwise I would never have brought you up here."

"God of Heaven!" breathed the detective. "I take it all back, Doc. I don't know what I saw, but it was a long and a fearful shape of something. And what use is a gun then, if you can't shoot a thing like that?"

Dr. Muncing nodded. He spoke with ominous seriousness.

"The sinister shape that frightened the women to hysteria. You're beginning to believe, yes? But listen now again. You've got to know this. It is a law of the universe that to every natural ill Nature has provided an antidote. We don't know all the antidotes; but science is continually finding more of them.

"There are repellants as well as attractions for all spirit forms. The old timers practised a mumbo-jumbo and called it magic. Rubbish.

There is no such thing as magic. They knew some of the rules, that's all.

"The repellant for an elemental is—cold iron. I don't know why. But it has been known for all the ages. The amulets of all oriental peoples—who know a lot more than we do—are made of cold iron. Your lucky horse shoe is cold iron. The material of which your gun is made is a thousand times better safeguard here than all your bullets. Better still is natural iron; the antidote to the primal earth spirit as Nature primally made it. Best of all, because of its purest natural form, is meteorite iron. An elemental can approach cold iron only in circumstances of extraordinary power. Now come ahead."

**Q**UICKLY they traversed that passage and came to what would correspond to the lower arm of the E. A blind passage. If the thing were here at all they had it cornered.

"It can't go through that ventilation louver," whispered Dr. Muncing. "I mean, it could squeeze through the slats, but it can't face daylight. Come on."

It was a foolish, in fact a quite stupid, advance to make, as Dr. Muncing perfectly well recognized afterwards. That louver was particularly cobwebby and dim. The corner was dark. The elemental malignance had been drawing power from no less than three sick persons. And lastly—a law which the doctor well knew—anything cornered instantly builds up a psychological increase of power.

With perfectly insane recklessness, however, he advanced along the narrow plank track, over the open ceiling beams, the detective, sublime in his ignorance, with him.

Like an offensive odor again heavy hate assailed them. Tangible, almost stifling. The gloom in the

far corner became gloomier. Long, black shadows of beams threw patterns. If the thing were there it was indistinguishable amongst the other shadows.

Under ordinary circumstances Dr. Muncing would have taken warning right there. The sheer overwhelming force of the hate projection was evidence of the power that the thing had been able to gather to itself. But in some amazing manner he seemed to have lost all caution. Not only caution but simple common sense was lacking. The detective, bold in his ignorance, followed the lead of the expert. But he felt the menace of the thing.

"By God," he muttered hoarsely. "I'll swear it's getting darker."

And it was. A blackness in the corner thickened and seemed to bulge out at them. Malignance, almost triumphal, swirled about them. Then fear in a sudden rush clutched at their senses. Like an animate intelligence tearing to break down their resistance.

**A**T that at last Dr. Muncing felt that he had come too far; that he had pitted himself against a condition of power far greater than he had realized. He knew that he had come just where the thing wanted him.

A desperate thought of retreat came to him. But it was a long passage back over the narrow and insecure planks. Then fear in an overwhelming surge tore his grip of himself to shreds of frazzled, screaming nerves. A choked cry of hideous panic came from the detective. And with it the horror broke upon them.

The shadow towered up before them. A palpable, monstrous, deformed thing. An inhuman noise issued from it; a ululation of hell's triumph. The unleashed malignance of all the ages enveloped them.

And the *thing* launched itself at them.

Both men agreed afterwards that at that moment they saw their own spirits apart from themselves, torn from them and whirled in a strong wind.

The detective's shout was a strangled groan. With desperate effort he hurled himself aside—any side, anywhere. His heavy body struck violently against the doctor.

Together the two bodies came down. There was a smashing sound. Wood splintered. Plaster cracked. The bright light of God's good day broke blindingly upon them. A short, swift descent, and a thud. They had smashed through the lath and plaster ceiling into the room below.

Above them, through the jagged hole, sounded a noise like beasts snarling in rage. Angular concentrates of darkness moved furiously in the gloom, as though long arms struggled to reach them; the more furious because they could not face the bright light. Like a stench again, consuming hate settled down upon them. Then slowly the malignance ebbed from the opening.

**B**OTH men were badly shaken. Death had been terrifyingly close to them. They were bruised and the breath had been knocked out of them. But their shock was mental much more than physical. The terror of that primal evil in the thick dark still shook them.

The room through the ceiling of which they had mercifully broken happened to be untenanted. Dr. Muncing pulled himself together with a strong effort. He dragged himself to the plaster-littered bed and sat with his head in his hands.

With the sudden fall and the plunge into bright daylight, common sense had come back to him. The thread of some queer influence had snapped. His mind grappled

with the phenomenon of his so nearly fatal stupidity.

"How could it do it?" he kept asking. "I should have known—I did know, that it had a tremendous store of power. I knew that conditions were just right for it. What lunacy made me walk right into its trap? How did it influence me to come here in the first place? An elemental in itself is of too low an order of intelligence to influence the human mind. That rule is absolute. What new and deadly trick is this?"

The detective was concerned with a more practical aspect of the case. His heavy, ruddy face was white and great drops of perspiration clung to his forehead.

"Blessed saints!" he kept muttering. "Holy Mother! I don't know what I've seen nor what black section of hell has broken out and come to this house. But God help us, what's to do? What can mortal man do against a thing like that? Fifty cops couldn't fight that thing. Save us, is it safe anyway to sit under that hole where it can look at us?"

**D**R. MUNCING shook himself out of his uneasy consideration upon the new menace of mental influence. The detective was right. Practical considerations were paramount. Precautions had to be taken.

"It can't come at us in the light," he assured the detective. "All the police in the world wouldn't be any good. They *might* be able to chase it out of here. But it would be loose somewhere else in the world and would find another victim. We can't destroy it. It is a spirit form and so cannot be killed."

"Holy Mother!" The awfulness of that thought shook the detective. "Is it a piece of everlasting hell itself? What can we do?"

"The only thing we can do is to starve it. By a merciful dispensation of Providence the thing has its limitations. It has made its contacts and has materialized. In order to continue to manifest on this material plane it *must* continue to draw energy from its victims. It must eat.

"We must cut off its supply. We must protect its two remaining victims from further drain upon their vitality—by cold iron on their persons; and their rooms must be kept brilliantly lit throughout the night. We must bar all exits to the attic with cold iron; the louver openings; everything. That won't be difficult. Stove lids, gas piping, anything will do.

"Fortunately the thing cannot easily break through the natural resistance of people who are not sick, whose vitality is strong. In fact it seems that there are only certain people whose vital vibrations are right for it; with whom it can establish contact. Every day—or rather night—that it cannot renew its supply of human vitality it grows weaker. Till shortly it will not have power enough to materialize at all. It will be forced back to spirit form, to the limbo from which it came.

"That is the only way we can deal with it. We *must* so deal with it. Otherwise it will remain a curse at large in the world."

**W**ITH a material job in hand the detective was full of energy. Full, too, of an almost religious obsession as to the need of driving this unholy thing back to the nether pit.

"I'll fix that end of it, Doc," he declared with a crusader's spirit. "Leave it to me. I'll have those trap-doors and things fixed up in no time. No need to tell the hotel folks what it's all about. I'll just say the police are in charge."

"By no means tell anybody," said the doctor. "Fear engenders vibrations favorable to occult forces. I shall go and see these two sick people and try to make them understand what we want to do without scaring them."

At the hotel desk the doctor inquired for particulars about the two sick people who were so mysteriously sick. The large blond lady gave garrulous details.

There was Mr. Beckett in room sixty-two who had the snappiest monologue act in vaudeville. A fine, generous gentleman he was too; and it was a shame and a disgrace that the doctors who took his good money couldn't even tell him what was wrong with him.

And there was Mr. Lubine in nineteen who used to play the two-a-day; but there was not much call for his specialty these days, and he was reduced to a come-on booth at the beach. A hypnotist he was and one of the best in—

"What? What's that?"

Dr. Muncing's sudden shout startled the lady back to her tremulous condition of the early morning. Her nerves were in no condition to bear another shock.

"A hypnotist, you say? God of everlasting wonders! What cunning guile is this?"

**H**E hurried from the desk muttering, leaving the lady to gaze tearfully after him. A hypnotist? So that was how it was done? The malignant thing, absorbing with the man's vitality a portion of his attributes, had been able to project a hypnotic suggestion to its enemy. Dr. Muncing was sure now that this was the same elemental evil that he had combatted before. On that occasion owing to the stupidity of others, the elemental had won; the doctor had failed to starve it out. Now it knew the danger of the doctor's profound

knowledge, just as a criminal knows and fears the danger of a clever detective.

Dr. Muncing smiled a tight and very crooked smile. So that was how the thing had been able to influence his mind and had lured him here where it had no less than three coincidental sources of power. That was how it had fooled him into advancing into its lair in the face of conditions that all his knowledge told him were in its favor.

Dr. Muncing whistled and wiped his brow. What an insidious and deadly danger that was! His lips set in a hard line. He would not be caught with that trick again. And he must immediately warn the detective against that sly menace.

Together they made the rounds of the top-floor halls. The various trap-doors had been guarded with immense quantities of iron. Hardware of all kinds had been nailed, screwed, or attached by cords, as conditions permitted, to every possible outlet. From outside, festoons of gas pipe hung over the ventilation louver.

"And we've shoved nails and stove bolts into the mouse holes," said the detective with an official pride in his thoroughness.

**D**R. MUNCING told him that an elemental was no such attenuated thing that it could ooze through a mouse hole. It was a material body capable of doing material harm. They went to the patients' rooms and immunized those.

Inventing a story about a prowling gang of burglars, Dr. Muncing instructed them about keeping doors and windows closed and lights burning bright. Over the brass hardware of the doors he hung packets of meteoric iron.

"To-morrow," he said to the detective, "we shall know whether

we have missed anything. If the patients look better it will be proof that we are being successful. If they are worse—"

"Don't worry that I've overlooked anything," the detective interrupted. "If that devil spawn is anything bigger than an ant we've got him bottled in the attic."

In spite of which boast, a furious knocking woke the doctor with the first streaks of dawn, and a white-faced boy brought a story that a watchman had seen a long, dark figure skulking up a staircase.

Muncing immediately investigated in company with the detective and discovered that the ironware about one of the trap-doors had been removed and stacked neatly in a corner.

"What the hell!" swore the detective. "I thought you said it couldn't touch iron."

But Dr. Muncing with a very serious expression continued his inquiries. They elicited the information that a hotel employee on one of the upper floors had moved them. He appeared to be hazy in his recollection of just why he had done so. He supposed that probably they must have looked unnecessary, as well as untidy.

The furious detective would have struck the bewildered employee. But Dr. Muncing held his hand.

"Remember," he told him meaningfully. "It hypnotized us to follow it right into its den."

**T**HE detective's hand dropped. Amazement and awe were in his expression.

"Holy Saints! If it can do that against our precautions— Do you think it got at the sick ones again?"

"Come on," snapped the doctor.

A hurried call at number sixty-two disclosed that everything was intact and that Mr. Becket had slept well and looked refreshed.

But the report from number nineteen was not so reassuring.

Mr. Lubine lay in his bed, completely exhausted. And his window that had been so carefully protected was wide open.

Tactful, painstaking inquiry disclosed that he had been unable to sleep, it had been hot. So he had opened the window for fresh air and had turned out the glaring lights.

Dr. Muncing drew the detective out of the room. His manner was very troubled.

"There are times," he murmured, "when I almost believe in a personal devil. What a diabolic jest upon life! Hypnotizing the hypnotist with his own medicine!"

"God of Mercy," groaned the detective. "What can we ever do against that damnable trick?"

"Nothing," said Dr. Muncing with flat conviction. "Nothing at all. I had hoped to starve this thing out. But as long as that man lives it will always be able to influence somebody to leave a loop-hole somewhere. His hypnotic art is his own death sentence. We can only hope that he does not live too long."

The detective stared at him with big eyes as he assimilated the helplessness of that thought.

**T**HREE days of watching and futile precautions passed. Always somebody somewhere was insidiously impelled to remove some carefully built barrier of cold iron. The doomed hypnotist grew horribly weaker. And then, one day just before the dawn that frightful, soul-searing scream rang through the hotel once more.

The detective and Dr. Muncing almost collided with each other at the door of number nineteen. Together they tore it open and dashed in. But only to verify what they already knew.

The body of the wretched hypnotist lay distorted in a gruesome contortion.

The detective, in spite of his anticipation of the tragedy, was stunned by the hideous inevitability of it. But Dr. Muncing was full of grim energy. His strong nostrils quivered with the prospect of encounter and a tight smile pinched his lips.

"S-s-so," he hissed very softly. "The thing has been foolish enough to kill its source of supply. It has perhaps learned enough to circumvent our barriers. "But"—he nodded very purposefully—"perhaps now we can trap it."

The detective stared at him.

"What do you mean, trap it? You're not going to try and catch that thing? And you can't kill it, you told me."

**G**RIMLY Dr. Muncing expounded the law.

"Every spirit form can be exorcised—if you know how. Every ghost, as you would put it, can disappear. A spirit form may disintegrate itself voluntarily. Or—if one has the knowledge and the necessary courage—conditions may be made so unpleasant for it that it disintegrates itself back to the fourth dimension. If we can catch our elemental and force it to dematerialize, it is right back where it came from—beyond the veil once more. A completely new set of conditions must be found in order to let it break through again."

"How?" was all that the detective said through set teeth.

Dr. Muncing was deadly deliberate.

"Have you got plenty of plain guts? I mean, nerve enough to meet this thing in a locked room? But I know you have. You'll see it through with me? Live or die?"

The detective's eyes were held by the doctor's compelling stare.

Slowly he nodded. Dr. Muncing held out his hand.

"Good man. Listen then. This thing has a low grade of intelligence. To-night it will try to get into the other sick man's room. Well, we'll leave the road open—and you, my nervy friend, and I, we shall be waiting for it!"

Like steam slowly escaping the breath came heavily through the detective's nose. But his eyes remained fixed on Dr. Muncing's. His jaw muscles swelled over gritted teeth. He nodded.

"Good man," said Dr. Muncing tersely again. "Go ahead and arrange about having the patient moved into another room, and hang all the iron in the house around it. I've got some preparations to make yet. I've been getting ready for this for the last three days. I've got a long session now with a carpenter and an electrician. Probably a blacksmith, too. See you at ten o'clock to-night."

**F**OR the detective it was an awful day of foreboding and gloomy conjecture. A day that dragged its minutes into interminable hours. Fearsome though the thought was of facing the elemental thing, he welcomed each new hour that led on to the evening as being one hour the less to wait in suspense.

Not a minute before ten P.M. did Dr. Muncing show up. He was tense.

"Come on," he said shortly. "They turn off the main lights here at ten. We want to be in position right away."

The sick man's room was stuffy with recent occupancy and want of air. Dr. Muncing's first act was to throw the window up to its fullest extent. The detective breathed like a nervous horse, but said nothing. Laconically, Dr. Muncing outlined his plans.

"I've been having a surprise built here for the thing. That will give us an advantage—and let me tell you, we'll need it. We must just sit tight in the dark till it comes. Chairs in the corner farthest from window and bed. Not a peep, not a sound to warn it. And then, if it comes, it'll be it or us."

The detective never knew whether minutes or hours or days passed. Time was an interminable ache of apprehension. Comfortable human noises in the hotel ceased. Unfamiliar noises shuffled and whispered down passages. Probably humans too—or mice. But the detective quivered at each one. Faint clicks came from without the window. Insects or summer bats. The detective groped for Dr. Muncing's arm in the dark.

The doctor leaned softly over to whisper reassurance.

"Don't bother about noises. It will be as silent as a ghost when it comes; and then whatever happens will happen fast. Hold your nerve for that minute; and then, whatever happens, don't let the iron amulet out of your hands."

**B**LACK eternity passed again. Suddenly both men drew a sharp breath at the same time. There had been no sound; but a roundish object the size of a grapefruit was dimly outlined above the window-sill. For minutes it stayed as motionless as a lurking animal. A formless, indistinguishable shape; a blur in the outer darkness.

At last it moved. It rose above the sill. An extraordinarily long angle of a raggy elbow heaved up from below. A gaunt shoulder followed; and then another fantastic elbow. There the thing hung in grotesque silhouette. The grapefruit thing was obviously its deformed head. It turned as though listening.

The detective experienced the

same cold fear that he had at his first meeting with the thing in the attic; and again, almost as an animal odor, the sense of hate wafted into the room.

His grip closed hard on Dr. Muncing's arm. Its rocklike steadiness reassured him.

Slowly, with infinite caution the shadow drew itself over the sill; all long raggedy arms and abnormally attenuated legs. Now it stood wholly within the room; a shadow against the outer dimness, deformed, grotesque, immense.

Then things happened fast. Dr. Muncing stretched out a cautious arm and pressed a button. With a rasp and a heavy metallic clang a sliding shutter slammed down into its groove, cutting off even the dim square of outside night. The room was in black darkness.

A snarling squealy noise sounded by the bed. A choked "My God" from the detective. Then a click; a familiar sputter; and a blaze of light from a powerful theater arc lamp.

Crouching in sudden fright the sinister shape loomed enormous in all its exaggerated deformity; menacing in spite of its startled surprise. But it was to the face of the thing that the eyes of both men were attracted. A faceless face. A smudge. A smear of moldy, doughy substance. Shapeless, shrunken, incredibly evil. Yet there were eyes; dead slaty gray with darker diagonal slits of irises; and a frothy gash of a mouth. A formless face of fear and of unbelievable fury.

**A**SOUND of rage issued from the mouth and the Thing hurled itself at the window through which it had come. In the same movement, like an animal arresting its leap in mid-air, it shrank from the iron sheet that had clanged into place. With inhuman speed, snarling as it twisted, it changed

its leap into a plunge across the room and lunged an abnormally attenuated arm at the arc lamp.

There was a crash, a tinkle of smashed carbon rods, and the room was blotted into black darkness once more.

Out of the dark came a roaring noise, an incoherent howl of triumph. The detective felt himself whirled off his feet into the air by an irresistible force. He commended his soul to God.

Then, mercifully, there was a sputtering noise and a spurt of blue flame. Another arc blazed bright. A sputter, once more. Another. Again another. The room was flooded with light that hurt the eyes.

The detective found himself on the floor. Vaguely he was conscious of Dr. Muncing shielding his eyes from the glare and advancing with incredible courage against a shapeless blackness that condensed in a corner, holding in his hands a queer, five-sided emblem of iron.

From it and from the blinding lights the black shadow shrank. Farther into the corner and yet farther. The lights seemed to penetrate it, to eat it up. Its solid blackness paled. It thinned out. The baseboard was visible through it; the pattern of the wall paper.

Presently there was no shadow. Nothing. Only a stifling odor of baffled hate.

Dr. Muncing advanced resolutely into the corner. He pressed his pentagon of iron into the farthest nook. There he left it and he came to lift the detective to his feet. Great beads of perspiration stood on his forehead. His strong hands were trembling. He hid his own agitation under a cover of brusqueness.

"What in thunder did you do with the iron amulet I told you not to let out of your hand? Dropped it to reach for your gun, huh? You poor fool, you've been nearer to horrible death than you'll ever be able to understand."

The detective was not resentful at this.

"Is—is it gone?" was all he wanted to know.

Very slowly and very soberly Dr. Muncing nodded.

"By the grace of God, yes. And by the grace of God again, the conditions that allow a thing like that to break through into the human world come, very fortunately, seldom. This elemental evil is exorcised. Or, as you will tell the tale to your unbelieving fellows, this ghost is laid."

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## Primitive Astronomy

**P**RIMITIVE tribes almost invariably have absurd notions concerning the heavenly bodies. Zulu superstition has it that their two oldest ancestors carry the sun and moon; at the time of their first construction both sun and moon were alike, but the man who carried the moon outstripped his comrade by so great a distance that we can no longer feel the heat from it.

According to the notion of the Pueblo Indians, the sun, moon and stars were not created until some time after their ancestors. A chaotic darkness prevailed, relieved only by fitful glares of volcanic fire which burst from the mountain which had given them birth. Not satisfied with this state of affairs, their ambitious forbears proceeded at once to construct the sun,

moon and stars, and when finished they were given over to the care of Indians who carried them around on their backs.

Eclipses of the sun and moon were always omens of disaster, striking terror and dismay into the hearts of their observers. Among the Seneca nation it was believed that this phenomenon was caused by a manitou, or bad spirit, who intercepted the light intended to be shed over the earth. Upon such occasions all the individuals of a tribe felt it necessary to remove this obstructing demon, so on this purpose they would sally out crying, yelling, drumming and firing guns, in order to frighten him.

Their courage and perseverance were always rewarded, for they never failed to drive him off.



*He fell on his knees  
with his face to  
the floor.*

# The Veil of Tanit

By Eugene de Rezske

**C**ARL MARQUART, traveler and adventurer, was thumbing a catalog case in the reference department of the great library at Forty-second Street and Fifth Avenue when his attention was suddenly drawn to the face of a man at the next table, similarly occupied.

Marquart's prolonged regard was strange, for, to the ordinary observer, there was nothing about the man to attract the slightest notice. Small and pudgy of stature, soft looking, unobtrusively dressed, he was altogether the mousy sort of person one would expect to see bending over a ledger at a

Death is on the Veil-Which-May-Not-Be-Seen, and relentlessly comes the day of its fulfilment.

high desk or in a minor professional chair. It was something on his face that was in utter contradiction to this appearance that so held Marquart. Not his features, for they were in absolute agreement with the rest of him—no, it was the tan on that face that amazed him.

Marquart had just returned from a little adventure in Al Yemen in Arabia to his no small profit, incidentally. And Marquart had just such a tan himself, perhaps slightly lighter if anything. Now Marquart knew tans. There is a world of difference in tans. There is the tan you get in the Canadian woods of a summer. There is the tan you acquire in Florida of a winter if you can afford one. And there is the tan that burns into your skin under the Congo sun in a season's big-game shoot. This stranger's wasn't any of these.

His tan was nothing but a desert tan. A little closer inspection and Marquart narrowed it down either to that of the Sahara or to the Arabian; there was not the slightest doubt of it, he decided. No other sun ever produced that combination of color, that dark brown that in certain lights took on a purplish hue and radiated darkly emanations of stored heat.

Marquart was tremendously interested. What business would such a person have in mid-Sahara or deep Arabia?

**H**E forgot the book he was looking for and became lost in this speculation. The stranger turned and seeing himself observed became nervous. He gave Marquart one startled glance and hurried off to the ticket desk. There he handed in his slips, got his seating ticket and disappeared into the reading room.

Marquart's amused eyes looked after the scurrying figure until it

was out of sight, and then he followed. As he entered the reading room Marquart took the first book that came to hand from the shelves inside, located his quarry and took a seat some distance away, but one which afforded him a plain view of the little fellow.

His curiosity consumed him. A regular bloodhound for the strange, the unusual, the bizarre, the exotic, Marquart's accurate observation told him that here was a riddle and an enigma. Could he solve it? Perhaps, if he caught the man's eye, if he smiled at him casually and had a smile in return so that he could go over to the man and say plainly: "My name is Carl Marquart and I also have just returned from the desert where I had a pretty little adventure. If you've nothing to do in the next hour or so, let's tell our respective stories to each other."

Idle thoughts, these, as he sat slumped back in the chair, his eyes on the man.

The stranger suddenly raised his head from the book. Their eyes met. Marquart essayed a slightly embarrassed smile. It was, he felt at once, rude, uncalled for. He was prepared for a glance of contempt in return. But he certainly wasn't prepared for what followed.

As their eyes met the stranger's face blanched under the tan—went pale. His eyes, even from that distance, Marquart saw, distended with nothing less than terror. It was a look of such haunting fear that it froze Marquart's smile on his face.

The man arose abruptly and almost ran out of the reading room.

**M**ARQUART decided that he had gone far enough. Plainly, his interest had disturbed the little man profoundly. Well, that was that. He tried to read the book before him, to forget the strange

episode. But it was no use. He wasn't in the least interested in "The Economic Aspects of the Industrial Revolution in England." He shut the tome with a bang that brought him some nasty looks from the readers about him and slunk out of the reading room.

In no hurry, and still thinking of the incident he took the steps down to the Fifth Avenue exit. As he neared the bottom, that un-failing perception of men who have known and contended with nature in her primitive moods told him, even in this great marble hall, that he was being watched.

From the corner of his eye Marquart searched the hall. Sure enough, there, behind a marble column was that unaccountable man, his eyes riveted on Marquart. Marquart thereupon turned and smiled. The man left his position and walked over to the water font further down the hall. Marquart smiled to himself as he saw the fellow take out and swallow a powder paper and drink it down with water. Just what you'd expect, Marquart mused.

"One of these after each meal, Mr. Smith," he could almost hear the doctor saying, "and one before going to bed. It will do your liver a world of good and tone up the system. And how's business, by the way?"

And certainly it was an amazing tonic, that powder. For, as Marquart stood there the man came toward him. Gone was the fear in those eyes, the shrink in the body. The man came over with a quite genial smile.

"I see you are interested in me."

"Yes, very much indeed."

**T**HE obvious retort, "Why?" didn't come. Instead the little man regarded Marquart steadily for a moment with a quizzical, puzzling, unfathomable look.

"My name is Carl Marquart."

The man smiled.

"Names. Do they matter? Call me Smith if you wish." And again that puzzling look now spread to the corners of the mouth in a wry little smile as if he and Marquart were both in on some droll story.

"Smith? Smith? . . . Why, that's very suitable. Just the name I had in mind. How do you do, Mr. Smith?"

Mr. Smith looked at his watch.

"I have just half an hour, Mr. Marquart, before an appointment. I have no doubt but that you'd wish to accompany me for a little walk there. It's a beautiful day."

"Why, I'd be delighted, Mr. Smith. I won't deny that I'd like to hear you talk if you would. I'm sure the story—"

"Oh, yes, yes. The story. It is an amazing story, Mr. Marquart, simply astounding. I shall tell it to you." Mr. Smith slapped his thigh and went into a burst of laughter. "Yes. That would be effective. That would be the thing. I shall tell you what happened to me in detail and you will be the only man to know it from beginning to end. Yes. From the very beginning to the very end. Otherwise, it would remain forever untold. First of all, because I don't know a soul I could tell it to; and secondly—well, secondly, it happened to *me*. To *me*, you understand. That in itself is astounding!"

They walked through the great doors and were soon on Fifth Avenue. Mr. Smith turned downtown with the silent Marquart at his side. In the sweet spring sun the little man expanded and became animated. He began his story and Marquart forgot the sun and the sky, the time, the place, the circumstances. For he was listening to one of the strangest stories in all the annals of adventure.

“UNTIL two years ago,” Mr. Smith began, “there was, in all the world, but one individual with whom I was intimate enough to call him friend. And he has gone.

“When I was a boy, I was a puny little fellow and soon learned to turn inward that normal energy which only brought me insult and ridicule from my school fellows. I had a strong sense of life, of adventure, of daring. I built castles and dreamed dreams. My physique chained my energy but not my fancy. I took to reading omnivorously and soon came to prefer history above all other types of literature. It was the only food that came near to appeasing that hunger for adventure in me. Excluded from the world of mundane things I slew dinosaurs, drew plans for pyramids, commanded a legion in the Punic wars and was Alexander’s closest adviser.

“I am trying to convey to you how intense was my longing for living actively, physically, intensely. What do you think I became? A professor of ancient history in a small mid-western college where I lived and taught obscurely until two years ago, until my forty-ninth year. In all my life, until that time, nothing had happened to me. Nothing had even come near to happening to me. Absolutely nothing.

“I TOLD you I had one friend. His name was Peter Armand, a resident of our little college town. We were drawn together because of a similarity of interests. I was a professor of ancient history. He was a collector in a limited way of Egyptian and Persian antiques—vases, trinkets, coins, bits of statuary, and so forth. He was, like myself, a bachelor and a recluse of simple tastes. His only pleasure was his occasional trips

abroad from which he’d come back loaded with all sorts of pieces. Most of them were devoid of interest. Many were fakes. But now and then he’d come back with a real find, and we’d discuss it for days and weeks before it went into that part of his collection which he valued most.

“There you have the background of my life. Can you imagine anything more placid, anything more rooted and riveted? But listen.

“It all started because of a newspaper write-up. Armand had allowed a Sunday paper of a nearby city to photograph and reproduce some of his pieces. Among these was a photograph of a certain very ancient and crudely, but profusely, carved block of scarred metal that might have been a box except that there was no apparent means of ingress into it. It had no joints, no hinges, no seams, no lid of any kind. I had hardly even glanced at it, and Armand never mentioned it that I can remember.

“EARLY one evening about three months after these pieces had been brought out in the paper he telephoned me to come over.

“‘Smith,’ he said as soon as I had arrived, ‘I have just had an interesting visit from an extremely interesting stranger. What do you make of the name?’ He handed me a card which bore upon it one word: Eochim.

“‘The word strikes an echo somewhere in the depths of my brain,’ I told him. ‘But don’t expect me to unearth it. My mind is a regular junkshop of obscure jetsam of every description.’

“‘Well, what do you think this Eochim was here for? He wanted that box affair.’

“‘I suppose you told him that you never sell anything out of your rummage bag.’

"I would have if he'd asked to buy it. He didn't. He said that the thing belonged to him—no, to his people. That's what he said. To his people. That it had been unlawfully abstracted three centuries ago by Shah Lelaad of Irak, since when it had been lost track of until it appeared that I had it."

"Interesting if true," I said.

"Oh, I believe it's true enough, Smith. Up to that point friend Eochim sounded logical enough. But then he demanded the box, and I refused him pointblank, naturally. Do you know what his counterthrust was? A good old-fashioned magic threat. He said that he was in no hurry. He'd get it all right after my doom had overtaken me—just like that."

"Let's see the box or whatever it is," I said. "There must be something to it."

"**A**BOUT an hour later there came a telephone call by long distance from the next state where a brother of Armand and his old mother lived on a farm. His brother was on the wire. I know he recognized his voice immediately. His mother had suddenly been taken sick and the brother wanted to know if he would come the next morning. He said he would, of course. And then he spoke to the old family physician who was attending her. After he hung up he decided he would not wait until morning after all. He telephoned an automobile-renting firm in the city and engaged a powerful car with a chauffeur to make the trip then and there.

"I remained in his house intending to give this antique a real inspection. I was all alone, Armand's housekeeper having left for the night. I lifted the metal block from its pedestal and brought it onto the large library table and under a strong reading light. I

wondered then how I had ever missed noticing the thing. For, from the first close glance it captured my interest completely. I knew I was in for a work of hours so I decided I'd stay over, and, to make myself comfortable, I went upstairs and brought down a suit of pajamas, a dressing gown and slippers. There was a couch in the library, and, intending to sleep here if sleep could tear me loose from that box, I donned the pajamas and robe and went to work.

"The antique was about two feet square and about one foot deep. It appeared to be made of bronze, roughly hammered. The carvings I mentioned covered its every surface. These appeared to have been done simply by working a sharp instrument into the surface of the metal, and so, outlining the figures. I soon discovered that all those figures were simply different attitudes and postures of the same person and that person was none other than Tanit, the great goddess of Carthage, the deity of plenty and fertility, second in power only to Moloch, and a divinity of the most popular cult of the Punic republic.

"**I** CAN tell you I was impressed.

If the thing was genuine it was a rarity of rarities. For the Romans did such a thorough job in the destruction of Carthage that, although its civilization was contemporary with that of Rome, research had discovered little that would permit us to reconstruct its life directly. All we know of Carthage is still in the writings of Romans, their inveterate enemies. Nevertheless even the prejudiced Romans attest to the perfection of its crafts and the splendor of its arts. That was why these crude carvings puzzled me so. The thing had so patently been intended for permanence that the indif-

ferent workmanship of the figures was puzzling, paradoxical.

"I studied the figures and noted that the attitudes of Tanit were distinctly threatening, warlike. She was represented with a sword, with a brand of fire, with a bowl of pitch and sulphur. In other postures she seemed to be hurling anathemas, uttering fearful curses, and so on. Not once did she appear in her natural character as the placid and voluptuous Tanit whose business was the very opposite of war and destruction.

"The problem presented by these two paradoxes—the crudeness of the art and the strange attitudes of Tanit—threw me into a fever of excitement. To a professor of ancient history that in itself would be in the nature of an adventure. Suddenly I remembered that Armand owned a very powerful magnifying glass.

"So faint, that even by the aid of the glass it took me hours to decipher it, was an inscription in Roman characters, sandwiched in between the figures. Here was another surprise: Roman characters on a Carthaginian antique? But when I deciphered that writing it all came to me at last. What drama!

"Herein by the Eochim, the Dead; the Zaimph of Tanit. The dread vengeance of Tanit pursue the generations forever of him who touches. . . ."

"IN the small house approaching dawn I reconstructed in my mind a scene. Scipio Africanus II was battering at the walls of a doomed Carthage. In the marvelous temple of Tanit, the ancient Eochim—the family of Tanit priests, heirs to all the secret knowledge of Ur and Babylon and Egypt before them—gathered outside the innermost sanctuary that

enshrined the Veil of Tanit, known as the Zaimph, the very essence of the deity.

"To touch the Zaimph was death; to even look upon it was the most horrible of sacrilege. 'Herein by the Eochim, the Dead. . . .' What else could it mean but that the Eochim had put the Zaimph into this metal block that was indeed a box, a box upon which the threatening postures of the goddess had been hastily chiseled and the line written for the special benefit of the Romans whose entry into the city was now but a matter of days. And then, having touched and locked upon the Zaimph they themselves were 'The Dead.' They all immediately committed suicide!

"And in surged the conquering Romans, ploughing Carthage and its civilization into fine dust to the hysterical scream of Cato that reached them from across the Mediterranean: 'Delenda est Cartago!' Carthage must be destroyed!

"But this box? None had touched it!

"I was mad with an excitement that had me trembling from head to foot. Was it possible that in this bronze casket reposed the most famous, the most dreaded sacred object antiquity, the Zaimph itself!

"I LIFTED the box and shook it. Not a sound. Where was the lid? How had those cunning priests sealed it so there was no trace left? I dipped a cloth in benzine and rubbed at the surfaces until they were polished clean. Then, with the glass, I began a minute examination, inch by inch. I came across a small particle of a different metal encrusted upon the bronze in one corner. I scratched it bright with my knife, and it looked like lead. Why was it there? It looked for all the world like a deep set plug. I fetched up a box of tools.

"From this I selected a sharp and stout awl and began hammering it gently into the lead spot. It was deep. The awl bit into the metal three inches, and then, of a sudden, there was a sharp hiss of air that jerked the tool handle back into my palm. Simultaneously one side panel of the box flew open striking the table a resounding blow as it fell flat upon it. It was held to the inside of the box by an ingenious, inner hinge.

"Do you understand how that box had been sealed? Think of it! *They had created a vacuum that had lasted for over two thousand years!* And that was part of the knowledge that Rome destroyed.

"Do you remember Flaubert's attempt at a description of the Veil of Tanit? He spent half a lifetime on research of Carthaginian life and here is what he says of it: 'It was bluish—like night; yellow—like dawn; and crimson—like the sun; harmonious, diaphanous, glittering and light. This was the mantle of the goddess, the sacred Zaimph, which no one might behold!' And here was I, an obscure pedagogue in an obscure mid-western town in the U. S. of America, beholding it. The Veil of Tanit!

**I**T lay folded tight and wrapped about in white cloth, as fresh and bright and glittering and diaphanous as the day it had been put in. Trembling in every limb, my teeth chattering, half believing I would drop dead any minute, I uncoiled it and spread it out to its full length, and, absolutely spellbound, hypnotized, I regarded it for minutes and minutes. I forgot myself completely, forgot my surroundings; forgot where I was, or in what century I lived. I was back in Carthage, a worshipper of Tanit and terrorized by the sacrilege I was committing.

"The mood switched. Now I was

a barbarian chief from across the Pyrenees, and my name was Matho. I had stolen the Zaimph and was wearing it, walking boldly through the despairing populace of Carthage to my army of three hundred thousand men on the plains below. None touched me. They averted their heads at my approach even while desiring with all their souls to tear me to pieces. For they felt I was taking with me the thing that made Carthage great. I knew that Hamilcar, their great general, was destined to wipe me and my armies off the face of the earth for this sacrilege. Yet the feeling of momentary power I had was so tremendous. . . .

**I** THINK it was unconsciously, that, musing thus, I took off my robe and the pajamas and lifting the Veil over me I inserted my head into the hole in the middle and let it fall about my naked shoulders in mantle fashion. The Zaimph enveloped me, rippling softly about my body, billowing down to my ankles. It covered me voluminously from neck to feet. How can I describe what it did to me? It seemed to make me grow a foot taller in stature, to bulge out my flabby muscles into knots of cast iron, to unurge into every corner of my being will and power and daring and strength.

"The sharp ring of the doorbell broke rudely into my little act and threw me almost into a fit.

"Hastily I drew on my clothes over the Zaimph, hardly conscious of my surroundings. I closed the box and put it back on its pedestal. The door-bell kept ringing.

"When I opened it a stranger stood at the threshold. He had on an ordinary business suit of blue and carried a cane. He was rather tall and spare and very dark. On his chin was the strangest beard I had ever seen. It was short, but

it had two points, and was waved horizontally. The hair of it was black and tightly curled. In his lapel was a sprig of some flower that I had never seen before and it smelled strongly with a soft penetrating odor. His eyes were black as night and deep as abysses and they never left my face.

"I knew who he was. I whispered it.

"'Eochim!'

"**H**E bowed slightly and followed me into the library. His voice was deep and vibrant, and he spoke perfect English as only educated foreigners can speak it.

"'I was strolling by and noticed the light,' he said. It did not occur to me that there was anything unusual in a stroll at dawn. 'You are—?' he inquired.

"'Professor Smith,' I answered. 'A friend of Mr. Armand.'

"'Then you will be interested in this. I imagine you don't yet know—'

"He extended a newspaper to me. It was the morning paper. I read the headlines hurriedly: Peter Armand dead. Auto accident. Terribly burned and lacerated. Tortures. Hospital. Death. Struck a tree off the road. Chauffeur miraculously untouched. Car demolished.

"'I have come for that box,' Eochim said after a minute. 'It is mine. It has been stolen. That is why your friend is now dead. Three centuries ago it was stolen from us by one of Shah Jelaad's men who had come with a caravan to buy frankincense from us.' Eochim glanced down at the sprig of flower on his lapel. 'That man died in the Ruba-el-Khali, in the "Place of Loneliness" upon the desert in horrible torture. To Shah Jelaad and to his household the box brought death and misfortune of every kind; to him and to his

heirs. Peter Armand bought it from a Persian knowing it had been stolen from the subterranean treasure coffers of a palace in Iraq. That eunuch is now a leper in Shiraz and Peter Armand is dead. The time has come. It shall repose once more within our temple.'

"'You are an Eochim,' I whispered, 'a priest of Tanit? Where? Where upon this earth is Tanit worshipped?'

"**T**HE stranger gave me a startled look. 'How do you know?'

"'Ah, I know more, Eochim. Much more. That box contains...'

"A repressed cry escaped his lips. But I went on, suddenly enjoying his amazement.

"'The Veil of Tanit! The Zaimph!'

"Eochim ran to the box and snatched it under his arm. I laughed exultingly, possessed of an inexplicable frenzy. For the first time in my life something was happening that involved me, something that I felt was smeared with the brush of danger, stamped with the leering signature of death itself. Now was my chance to plunge into the thick of it. I laughed hoarsely.

"'No, Eochim. It is not there. The Zaimph is gone. The box is open. I have the Veil, Eochim! I am wearing it! It is mine! Shall I show it to you. . . .?' I made a movement of my hand toward my shirt front. Eochim believed. He fell on his knees with his face to the floor.

"'No! No!' he cried. 'It is death. It is sacrilege! You are doomed!'

"'I am not afraid, Eochim! It is not death to me. It is life and power! See how you cringe before me?'

"He had gotten up slowly with face averted from me and as soon as he was on his feet he ran from the house.

**I** KNEW I was going to hear from my friend, Eochim. I longed for the adventure to develop. I couldn't eat or sleep; I couldn't work. I was another man. And since I couldn't attend my classroom duties, I resigned and left town, a few days later, taking the box with me and wearing, for precaution, the mantle of Tanit.

"A good thing it was, too, for Eochim had me kidnaped one night. Bundled, tied hand and foot and gagged, I was thrown into an automobile and taken to a coast city. If I had not been wearing the Zaimph I would have been done for along the way. But he was beside me in the car during the journey and I warned him. The next thing I knew I was a prisoner in a dark hole of a freight hatch. The lurching motion told me I was already on the high seas, and the violence of the movement impressed me with the fact that the vessel was some battered hulk of a tramp that knew the tropic seas and their frowsy ports better than it knew the Atlantic.

"The sea journey must have taken months; actually months. During that time I was more dead than alive. When I was taken out at last it was in the deep of night. Within an hour of our arrival there was a cavalcade of camels ready, and, perched under awning in a takht-rawan of two camels, like a prince or some great potentate, except that I was securely bound, we were on our way into the desert, into the 'Place of Loneliness,' the Ruba-el-Khali itself.

**T**HE desert journey must have taken more months. Half the time I was unconscious from the torture of my bonds. It was only in the cool nights that some spirit came back to me. During the day that terrible sun beat into my little shelter atop the camels as if the

canvas was made of gauze. The tilt of the animals bruised my soft body into blotches of insensible flesh.

"At last we reached a great salt lake, skirted its shores for a day and came to a range of quite lofty hills. We reached these hills at night. They were covered with verdure which gave off a perfume that drenched the night. We pressed on over them through a pass and came one morning to a great oasis nestling in a valley. Tall palms rose into the air, and houses of white sandstone trimmed with red brick and profusely balconaded shone through the trees.

"As we neared I heard the murmur of running water and the tumult of a town. We entered a great gate into a wide street and I saw in a square at the end of this street a great and beautiful temple of curious design. I knew it was no mosque and I knew these people were not Moslems. During the journey, instead of the five daily prayers, there was only one stop for prayer and that was at high noon. And it was not a prayer. It was an act of adoration, to the sun. And at night there would be another such to the moon when it was high. These were fire-worshippers, Shamanaim, devotees of Moloch-baal, the sun god, and of Tanit, the moon goddess.

**T**HROUGH surging crowds of people we proceeded until we reached the temple. There I was taken down, unbound, and ordered to wash my hands and face. Frankincense was given me to put on my hair and rub upon my hands. When I was ready I was ushered in through magnificent corridors of flagstone and alabaster to a high ceiled apartment. I was taken through many rooms.

"But at last I stood before a great dais supported by unspeak-

able figures and shaped in the form of a great belly. Upon this dais, in a milk white robe with crimson facings, sat Eochim. At his feet upon the platform was the box of the Veil of Tanit. He bade me sit.

"My friend,' he said, 'consider your situation carefully. You are in Al Khartoug, the city of the Beni-Khartougs, descendants of the refugees from the destruction of Carthage. We trace our lineage directly to the great families of Carthage, to the Barcas, the Hannonos, the Schanhabarim, children of the Baal-gods of antiquity. I am the supreme power here with one associate, the high priest of the Moloch. You are completely in my power.

"Know then that you are destined for a terrible death. That is inescapable, inevitable, and in the hands of Tanit herself. I am willing to leave it in her hands. I will leave here for half an hour. If you will take off the Zaimph and put it back within the box and remain undressed so that I may see that you do not have it I shall give you a royal escort and see that you get back safely to America as far as it is in the power of a human being to do so. For I believe that you will die, anyway.

"If you do not do that, if you refuse to return what does not belong to you, but to us, we shall have to devise ways of taking it from you. In that case I promise you that no human being ever endured the torture you will be put through.'

**M**Y veins were pounding with excitement and with exultation. For months I had turned the situation over in my mind. What could they do? If it was death to see or touch the Veil, if they indeed believed that, how could they molest me? Killing me would mean

tearing the Zaimph by dagger or bullet and tainting it with my blood. They could poison me, true. But then who would strip the corpse, who would disrobe me of the sacred mantle? The priest's offer itself confirmed me. I myself was to put the Zaimph back into the box. And the only way he would verify that would be to see that I did not have it on me! What belief in the Veil, in its sacred character and in its powerful tabu, that signified!

"Was I going to cheat myself of playing such a role as I could see unfolding before me? Did I get so far in my adventure only to lie down and cry quits. Unthinkable! I was going to go through with it, death or no death, torture or no torture. The feel of the Zaimph next to my skin sent a wave of power and exultation through my whole being.

"You can have my answer right now, Eochim,' I cried. 'It is no! And what are you going to do about it?'

"At this juncture another man entered. He was an impressive looking individual, extraordinarily tall. He wore a toga of shimmering yellow and on his breast a shining plate set with blazing jewels. His beard covered his chest and almost hid a face cast in evil lines. Eochim stepped down from the dais, and they engaged in a whispered conversation. Eochim's face was troubled, but the other one's shone with an ironic malignancy. I knew of course that the tall one was a priest of Moloch by his robe and the equality with which the two conversed; he was the high priest, and, also, co-ruler with Eochim. If Eochim asked his counsel in the dilemma he got no help from the Molochite for the latter soon left, laughing as if at a joke and casting what I took to be a glance of admiration in my direction.

“‘**W**HATEVER your motive may be,’ Eochim said to me after an interval, ‘you are certainly a man of great courage. Who would have suspected it!’ He had a charming smile as he spoke. In fact the fellow was, by every standard, a gentleman. ‘I must take time to think this out clearly and if you will give me your word, Professor, that you will guard the mantle from exposal I shall turn you loose until we decide what shall be done. Don’t think of escaping. It would be folly, and you would perish on the desert before a day is gone. Besides, you would be tracked down with ease.’

“That suited me. I gave him my word and went out upon the street. There, in front of the temple, a great crowd was assembled, and, as I emerged into the sunlight, the assemblage gave up a murmur and all knelt on hands and knees before me as if I were a god. So they knew I was wearing the Zaimph! You can imagine my feelings. Not even in the wildest dreams of my boyhood days had my soaring imagination placed me in such a position. I enjoyed it immensely. For the first time in my life I was supremely happy with the realization of the extent of my power.

“I descended among the people. Saving the men who once a year guided a caravan of frankincense to the coast none had ever seen a blond-haired man before. This distinguishing mark, added to the fact that I wore the mantle without dropping dead on the spot, endowed me with the attributes of divinity. As I came down they parted before me, dreading to touch me.

“**F**OR months I was free in Al-Khartoug. I refused a house offered me and chose to live in a tent in an open space so that I

could see and hear all about me. They spoke Arabic, a tongue whose roots I am familiar with, so that it was not difficult for me to piece their talk together. And I circulated freely among them and was treated everywhere as if I were a valuable piece of delicate china. Continually I marveled at the inaction of Eochim whom I seldom saw, but at length I understood the reason from snatches of conversation I overheard and the character of political undercurrents that I caught.

“It seems that the town was split in two great factions: The supporters of Tanit, and those of Moloch. The Moloch cult had enjoyed the greater power since the disappearance of the Veil these three hundred years. They were loath to see the other party come back into power which the recovery of this sacred object would certainly bring about. For Tanit was a cult devoid of the cruelty and the bloodthirsty character of Moloch, and the Veil was by far the most sacred symbol in their entire religion. Ahrim, the high priest of Moloch, therefore, had been putting every possible obstacle in the way of Eochim, to recover the Veil.

“I learned that it had been proposed to cast chances so that he upon whom the symbol fell was to either strangle or poison me: that is, kill me in a neat and bloodless manner, then strip me of the Veil, return it to its box, and commit suicide. It was this plan of Eochim’s that Ahrim opposed, and he was strongly upheld in his opposition, of course. No one wanted to take the chance.

“**E**OCHIM was in despair. Not only was Ahrim’s opposition gallingly effective, but another factor had now entered into the situation. I had personally be-

come quite popular. There was no doubt but that the Beni-Khartougs took to me from the first. While they were careful not to come in contact with me they continually dogged my footsteps, and I had only to wish for something and it would be brought and put down within my reach.

"Incredible as it seemed, I knew, that, little by little, a third party was taking shape in Al-Khartoug—my party. I suddenly began seeing visions and dreaming dreams of superseding both Tanit and Moloch, banishing their priests and founding in the Ruba-el-Khali a little kingdom of my own, reigning as a god-king, taking a queen and passing the title on to my heirs.

"There was only one flaw to this dream, and that was Tanit. Yes, despite myself I had a sneaking respect for her power. Not all my learning, my own religion nor any power within myself had been able to do for me what the Veil of Tanit was doing. It, and it alone, kept me, preserved me, raised me to the heights where my secret desires had ever been enthroned. How could I help believing, there, where the civilization of the Occident is as unreal as Shamanism is here on Fifth Avenue!

"Fool that I was, I couldn't wait for events to ripen. I precipitated matters by proposing a truce to Eochim. Again I was before him in his apartment telling him of my plan, clothing it in wily words.

"I have you cornered, Eochim," I said; 'and you know it. If any harm came to me now you would have to reckon with a factor you never thought of—my popularity. Listen then to my proposition. I like Al-Khartoug. I will renounce the West completely, and, I assure you, without a twinge.

"Let us make an alliance, working to one end—the elimination of

the worship of Moloch. Let us enshrine Tanit, and Tanit alone. With the Veil it will be possible. I shall wear it on me all my life. Only when I come to die will I restore it to its casket so that it may be placed in the sanctuary of the temple. There is your solution. In return for that, make me a ruler with you in Al-Khartoug. With your party and my popularity we can do it, despite Ahrim. And then, in our lifetime, you will see, we will raze Moloch to the dust.'

"HIS eyes glowed. I had struck home, I knew. I admired my own Machiavellian finesse. It did not occur to him that in the back of my mind, despite my apparent respect for Tanit was a plan for the eventual elimination of that pagan goddess also. It was such a dream, I thought in my ecstasy, as marks the beginning of empires and the birth of dynasties.

"He sprang from the dais and walked about the room. 'There are more private chambers in my apartment than this,' he said. 'You should have warned me of what you had in mind first. If the priests of the Moloch-baal heard you they would throw you to him to burn, Veil and all. I cannot afford that. Leave me now until I talk it over with my people.'

"I left, sobered somewhat. At the door of the temple sat a beggar cutting a piece of bread with a dagger. An impulse came over me, and I stopped to snatch the dagger from him. He let it fall from his hands and cringed away from me. I picked it up, stuck it in an inside pocket and walked on.

"That night I awoke in my tent to the sound of footsteps without. I sat up with a lurch as the flap parted and the tall figure of Ahrim stopped to enter. He came to where I lay and regarded me with a venomous smile.

“‘You are an ungrateful dog,’ he said evenly. ‘But for me you would have been food for the vultures these three months. Do you think I am Ahrim, Right Hand to Moloch-baal himself, for nothing! Walls speak to me and the innermost secret of the crawling ant is written in plain characters for my eyes. Now even the Veil of Tanit cannot save you. For the Moloch is greater than she, and his vengeance comes first.’ He spat on me and then bent down and picked me up with one powerful hand.

“**I** SNATCHED at the dagger in my pocket and with a frenzied sweep of my arm I let him have it in the ribs. It sank in with a soft crunch. Surprise and agony spread upon that evil face, and he dropped to the ground. I raced out of the tent, sped through the deserted streets to the temple of Tanit and reached the door of Eochim’s apartment. My wild knocking was answered by a sleepy priest who was armed with a scimitar. He fell away before me, and in a few moments I came upon Eochim who had risen at the noise.

“‘I have killed Ahrim!’ I gasped. ‘What shall I do?’

“He gave a groan. ‘They will feed you to Moloch!’

“‘It mustn’t be. Come.’

“In half an hour I was perched on a camel with one companion to lead me through the desert, and I can still hear Eochim’s words ringing in my ears:

“‘He is taking you by the long way to Makalla. If you get through, take ship from there to Aden and seek the protection of the British. Wait for me there. It is very likely that now Ahrim is dead I may accept your proposition in good faith. It will do you no good to try and hide from me, for I shall find you wherever you are. Till then, farewell.’

“‘I shall wait,’ I said quietly.

“**T**HE first journey through the Ruba-el-Khali was simply a passage in the royal suite of a Cunarder compared to this second one. It is indescribable. It was after twenty solid weeks in the desert, and after it was all over, that I really came to believe with heart and soul in the Veil of Tanit. Certainly I couldn’t ascribe my lasting through as much as three weeks of it to the body God gave me. I believe that without the Veil of Tanit I would now be a patch of white bones under that sun.

“My driver, used to the desert, kept cursing the day he was born that he should have to endure such hardship, such torture of sun and thirst and madness. Well, what was it in *me* that made me the stronger of the two? Look at me! Look at my body. Listen, we have been talking only a little while—do you hear how my breath whistles for shortness? It was this same body, enfeebled by a long sedentary life, that went without water when there was only just enough for one, so that a hardy Arab of the desert might drink it instead. How do you account for it?

“But I shan’t linger on that journey. Accept it as a miracle that we reached Makalla after twenty weeks in the Ruba-el-Khali. There I boarded a filthy native fishing-boat and reached Aden at last. And, miracle of miracles, when I got there Eochim was waiting for me.

“**I**T was in the library of the Government House that I had my last interview with him.

“Ahrim, he informed me, was recovering from the wound. It was now impossible for me ever to return to Al-Khartoug. Eochim had brought the box with him. He pleaded with me to return the Veil.

"No," I answered. "This thing must be played out to the end, Eochim. When I am wearing it I feel like a god. Without it life would become empty, dull, meaningless. I would be what I was, a particle of nothing. And I refuse to be nothing if I can help it. I have been that for close to fifty years. Others have climbed the ladder; others have fulfilled their lives. I have the same right despite the form in which I was cast. I will do only this for you. I will make a will in which I shall bequeath the Veil to you and your successors when I die."

"For a long time he didn't speak. When he did at last his words were charged with fate, with prophecy.

"My friend," he said, "you are living in a fool's paradise. Tanit is playing with you, for she has her playful moods. And you are responding like the puppet you are. But I tell you this: *Some day soon you will forget or neglect to wear the Veil of Tanit. That day will be your day of doom. You will die.* Whether by the caprice of Tanit or by the hand of one of my men, wherever you are, you will die. And you know very well that Tanit's vengeance is not mild. Remember Peter Armand. Remember the leper eunuch."

"With these words he left me abruptly and forever."

PROFESSOR SMITH had stopped in front of a building some minutes before he came to the end of his tale. Marquart did not even look up, so absorbed was he in the story. Smith paused for a long while. His next words tore into Marquart's consciousness.

"Those last words of Eochim have burned into my brain. 'Some day you will forget to wear the Veil,' he had said. I resolved to make a test of that, in short, to

see my adventure through to the very end, to squeeze every last drop of juice out of it.

*"To-day I took off the veil, put it in its box, and went out without it!"*

"On the box I left instructions for its disposition to Eochim should I fail to return within forty-eight hours. I then divested myself of every possible mark of identification so that if I was to die I would do so anonymously and without trouble. This I owed to Eochim. I went to the library. There I saw you, and I noticed you watching me, marking me. I saw you follow me into the reading room and smile at me. You knew! I saw you follow me downstairs. I was sure then.

"You are one of Eochim's men! By your hand I was to die! I was caught. There was no Zaimph to save me!"

PROFESSOR Smith swayed suddenly, and Marquart attributed it to his inordinate excitement. He decided that Smith must be demented, of course. But he lay on Marquart's arm like a dead weight, and Marquart eased him to the steps of a building. Smith's eyes opened and a smile came to his lips. He looked at his wrist watch and Marquart had to bend close to hear:

"This was a half-hour powder. It's fast—by two minutes. . . . I foresaw everything. . . . I owe it to my friend, Eochim, to save you from a possible—death penalty. . . . My regards to Eochim. I even came here. . . . Here! Save trouble . . . no regrets. . . . I have lived. . . ."

And then Smith was no more. Marquart shivered in the spring sunlight. He looked up at the building over the heads of the crowd that had quickly gathered. With a gasp he saw that Smith had led him to the threshold of the morgue.

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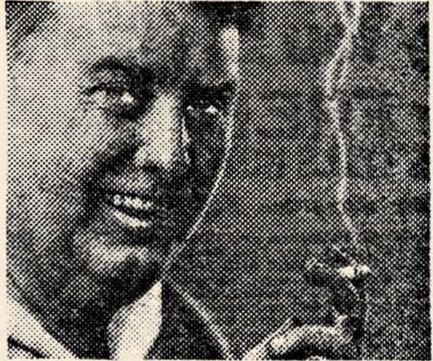
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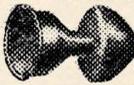
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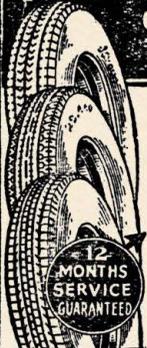
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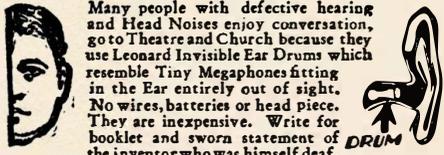
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"I'll see it through  
if you will!"



**T**HEY tell me there's five or six million of us—out of jobs.

"I know that's not your fault, any more than it is mine.

"But that doesn't change the fact that some of us right now are in a pretty tough spot—with families to worry about—and a workless winter ahead.

"Understand, we're not begging. We'd rather have a job than anything else you can give us.

"We're not scared, either. If you think the good old U. S. A. is in a bad way more than temporarily, just try to figure out some other place you'd rather be.

"But, until times do loosen up, we've got to have a little help.

"So I'm asking *you* to give us a lift, just as I would give one to you if I stood in your shoes and you in mine.

"Now don't send me any money—that isn't the idea. Don't even send any to the Committee which signs this appeal.

"The best way to help us is to give as generously as you can to your local welfare and charity organizations, your community chest or your emergency relief committee if you have one.

"That's my story, the rest is up to you.

"I'll see it through—if *you* will!"

—Unemployed, 1931

#### THE PRESIDENT'S ORGANIZATION ON UNEMPLOYMENT RELIEF

*Walter S. Gifford*

*Director*

#### COMMITTEE ON MOBILIZATION OF RELIEF RESOURCES

*Owen D. Young*

*Chairman*

*The President's Organization on Unemployment Relief is non-political and non-sectarian. Its purpose is to aid local welfare and relief agencies everywhere to provide for local needs. All facilities for the nation-wide program, including this advertisement, have been furnished to the Committee without cost.*

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# USE ONLY LISTERINE TO RELIEVE SORE THROAT

*It is SAFE*

Heals tissue while it kills germs.  
Reduces mouth bacteria 98%.

When you want relief from sore throat, do not expect it from ordinary mouth washes. Weak ones accomplish nothing. Harsh ones may irritate the very delicate throat tissues, and thus allow germs easier entrance to the body.

Physicians and nurses, and at least 10,000,000 people, have found that full strength Listerine promptly relieves ordinary sore throat. One trial will convince you also. When you use Listerine, you know you are safe—that this great antiseptic actually heals tissue; no irritation whatsoever. You know also that it kills germs in the fastest time. That it reduces bacteria on the surface of the mouth 98%.

Listerine's success in arresting infection and its acceptance by the medical profession and public are based on these properties. They are the subject of comment by *The Lancet* of London, the physician's bible.

Use Listerine not only as a treatment for colds and sore throat, but as an aid in preventing them. Note below the remarkable results achieved by Listerine, in this direction.

## *Only half as many colds*

Several hundred people were divided into three groups and kept under medical supervision for periods ranging from 4 weeks to 4½ months, during the winter of 1930-31. One-third of them gargled with full strength Listerine twice a day. One-third gargled with it five times a day. One-third did not gargle with it at all.

Those who gargled with Listerine twice a day contracted only one-half to one-third as many colds as those who did not gargle at all. When Listerine users did develop colds, they were approximately one-fourth as severe and lasted only one-third as long. In a number of tests, even greater resistance was registered.

Those who gargled with Listerine five times a day showed still greater resistance but not in the direct ratio to the number of times used.

These results, amazing as they are, do not mean that Listerine should be used as a substitute for the family physician, who is always your best friend in time of illness. They *do* mean that the average person can reduce the risk of ill-health considerably by the systematic twice-a-day use of full strength Listerine. Begin now. See how your health improves.

Ask for Listerine at your druggist's—and see that you get it.  
Lambert Pharmacal Company, St. Louis, Mo.



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so we say, "Thanks, Jean Harlow."

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Jean Harlow

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Your Throat Protection against irritation-against cough  
And Moisture-Proof Cellophane Keeps that "Toasted" Flavor Ever Fresh