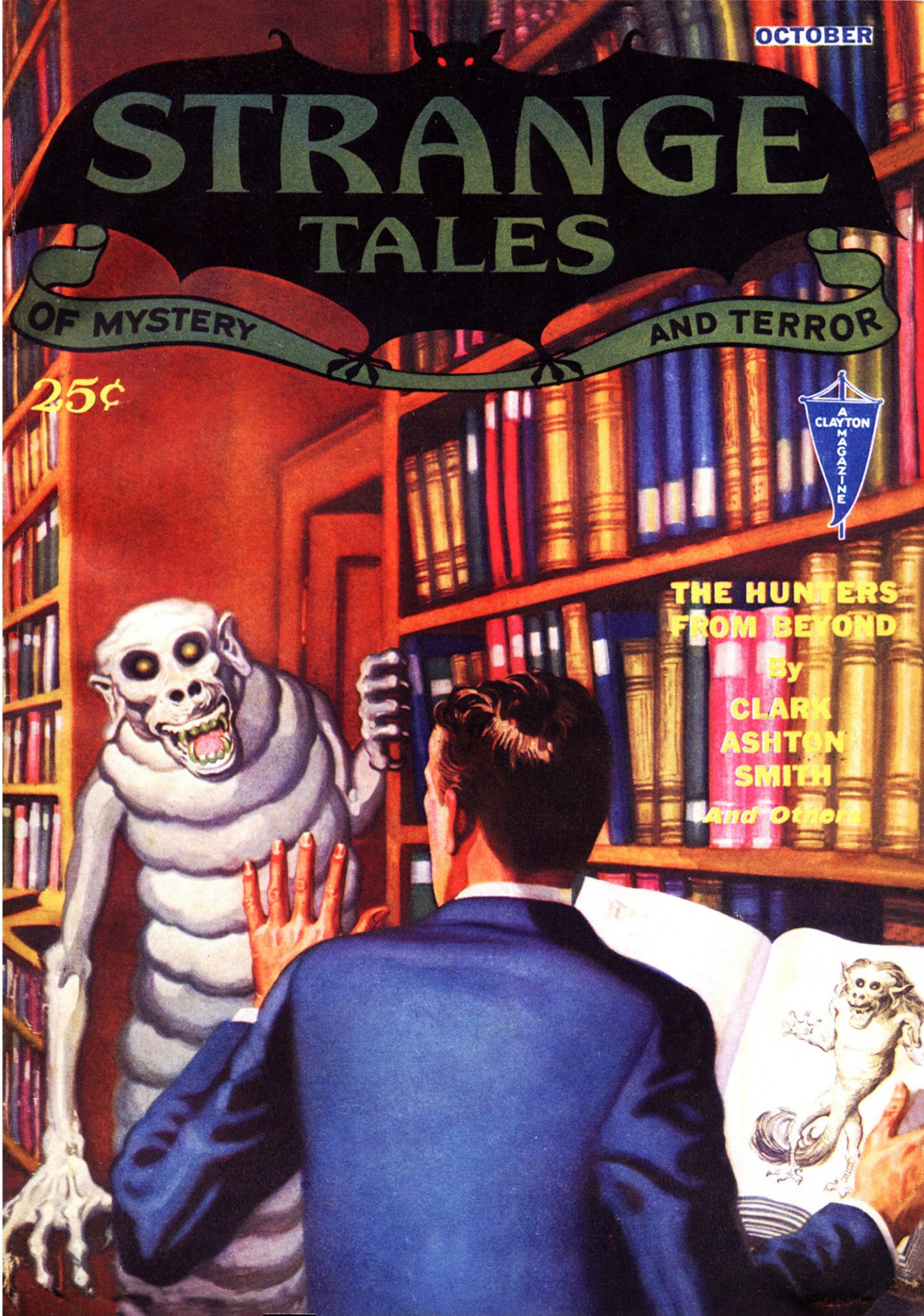

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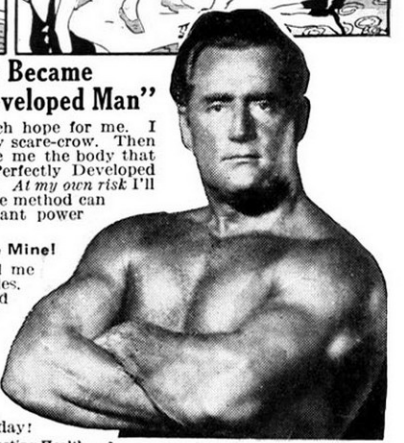

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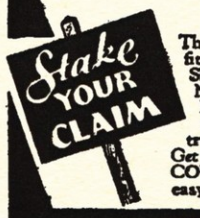

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Marta was sinking into that ooze, and the Things were all about her.

The Hunters from Beyond

By Clark Ashton Smith

I HAVE seldom been able to resist the allurement of a bookstore, particularly one that is well supplied with rare and exotic items. Therefore I turned in at Toleman's to browse around for a few minutes. I had come to San Francisco for one of my brief, biannual visits, and had started early that idle forenoon to an appointment with Cyprian Sincaul, the sculptor, a second or third cousin of mine, whom I had not seen for several years.

His studio was only a block from Toleman's, and there seemed to be no especial object in reaching it ahead of time. Cyprian had offered to show me his collection of recent sculptures; but, remembering the smooth mediocrity of his former work, amid which were a few banal efforts to achieve horror and grotesquerie, I did not

Living gargoyles, most hideous, come to the sculptor Sincaul from outland realms of evil.

anticipate anything more than an hour or two of dismal boredom.

The little shop was empty of customers. Knowing my proclivities, the owner and his one assistant became tacitly non-attentive after a word of recognition, and left me to rummage at will among the curiously laden shelves. Wedged in between other but less alluring titles, I found a de-luxe edition of Goya's "Proverbes." I began to turn the heavy pages, and was soon engrossed in the diabolic art of these nightmare-nurtured drawings.

It has always been incomprehensible to me that I did not shriek aloud with mindless, overmastering terror, when I happened to look up from the volume, and saw the thing that was crouching in a corner of the book-shelves before me. I could not have been more hideously startled if some hellish conception of Goya had suddenly come to life and emerged from one of the pictures in the folio.

What I saw was a forward-slouching, vermin-gray figure, wholly devoid of hair or down or bristles, but marked with faint, etiolated rings like those of a serpent that has lived in darkness. It possessed the head and brow of an anthropoid ape, a semi-canine mouth and jaw, and arms ending in twisted hands whose black hyena talons nearly scraped the floor. The thing was infinitely bestial, and, at the same time, macabre; for its parchment skin was shriveled, corpselike, mummified, in a manner impossible to convey; and from eye sockets well-nigh deep as those of a skull, there glimmered evil slits of yellowish phosphorescence, like burning sulphur. Fangs that were stained as if with poison or gangrene, issued from the slavering, half-open mouth; and the whole attitude of the creature was that of some maleficent monster in readiness to spring.

THOUGH I had been for years a professional writer of stories that often dealt with occult phenomena, with the weird and the spectral, I was not at this time possessed of any clear and settled belief regarding such phenomena. I had never before seen anything that I could identify as a phantom, nor even an hallucination; and I should hardly have said offhand that a bookstore on a busy street, in full summer daylight, was the likeliest of places in which to see one. But the thing before me was assuredly nothing that could ever exist among the permissible forms of a sane world. It was too horrific, too atrocious, to be anything but a creation of unreality.

Even as I stared across the Goya, sick with a half-incredulous fear, the apparition moved toward me. I say that it moved, but its change of position was so instantaneous, so utterly without effort or visible transition, that the verb is hopelessly inadequate. The foul specter had seemed five or six feet away. But now it was stooping directly above the volume that I still held in my hands, with its loathesomely lambent eyes peering upward at my face, and a gray-green slime drooling from its mouth on the broad pages. At the same time I breathed an insupportable fetor, like a mingling of rancid serpent-stench with the moldiness of antique charnels and the fearsome reek of newly decaying carrion.

In a frozen timelessness that was perhaps no more than a second or two, my heart appeared to suspend its beating, while I beheld the ghastly face. Gasping, I let the Goya drop with a resonant bang on the floor, and even as it fell, I saw that the vision had vanished.

TOLEMAN, a tonsured gnome with shell-rimmed goggles, rushed forward to retrieve the fal-

len volume, exclaiming: "What is wrong, Mr. Hastane? Are you ill?" From the meticulousness with which he examined the binding in search of possible damage, I knew that his chief solicitude was concerning the Goya. It was plain that neither he nor his clerk had seen the phantom; nor could I detect aught in their demeanor to indicate that they had noticed the mephitic odor that still lingered in the air like an exhalation from broken graves. And, as far as I could tell, they did not even perceive the grayish slime that still polluted the open folio.

I do not remember how I managed to make my exit from the shop. My mind had become a seething blur of muddled horror, of crawling, sick revulsion from the supernatural vileness I had beheld, together with the direst apprehension for my own sanity and safety. I recall only that I found myself on the street above Toleman's, walking with feverish rapidity toward my cousin's studio, with a neat parcel containing the Goya volume under my arm. Evidently, in an effort to atone for my clumsiness, I must have bought and paid for the book by a sort of automatic impulse, without any real awareness of what I was doing.

I CAME to the building in which was my destination, but went on around the block several times before entering. All the while I fought desperately to regain my self-control and equipoise. I remember how difficult it was even to moderate the pace at which I was walking, or refrain from breaking into a run; for it seemed to me that I was fleeing all the time from an invisible pursuer. I tried to argue with myself, to convince the rational part of my mind that the apparition had been the product of some evanescent trick of light and shade, or a temporary dimming of eyesight. But such sophistries were useless; for I had seen the gargoylish terror all too distinctly, in an unforgettable fullness of grisly detail.

What could the thing mean? I had never used narcotic drugs or abused alcohol. My nerves, as far as I knew, were in sound condition. But either I had suffered a visual hallucination that might mark the beginning of some obscure cerebral disorder, or had been visited by a spectral phenomenon, by something from realms and dimensions that are past the normal scope of human perception. It was a problem either for the alienist or the occultist.

Though I was still damnably upset, I contrived to regain a nominal composure of my faculties. Also, it occurred to me that the unimaginative portrait busts and tamely symbolic figure-groups of Cyprian Sincaul might serve admirably to soothe my shaken nerves. Even his grotesques would seem sane and ordinary by comparison with the blasphemous gargoyle that had drooled before me in the bookshop.

I entered the studio building, and climbed a worn stairway to the second floor, where Cyprian had established himself in a somewhat capacious suite of rooms. As I went up the stairs, I had the peculiar feeling that somebody was climbing them just ahead of me; but I could neither see nor hear anyone, and the hall above was no less silent and empty than the stairs.

CYPRIAN was in his atelier when I knocked. After an interval which seemed unduly long, I heard him call out, telling me to enter. I found him wiping his hands on an old cloth, and surmised that he had been modeling. A sheet of light burlap had been thrown over what was plainly an

ambitious but unfinished group of figures, which occupied the center of the long room. All around were other sculptures, in clay, bronze, marble, and even the terra-cotta and steatite which he sometimes employed for his less conventional conceptions. At one end of the room there stood a heavy Chinese screen.

At a single glance I realized that a great change had occurred, both in Cyprian Sincaul and his work. I remembered him as an amiable, somewhat flabby-looking youth, always dapperly dressed, with no trace of the dreamer or visionary. It was hard to recognize him now, for he had become lean, harsh, vehement, with an air of pride and penetration that was almost Luciferian. His unkempt mane of hair was already shot with white, and his eyes were electrically brilliant with a strange knowledge, and yet somehow were vaguely furtive, as if there dwelt behind them a morbid and macabre fear.

The change in his sculpture was no less striking. The respectable tameness and polished mediocrity were gone, and in their place, incredibly, was something little short of genius. More unbelievable still, in view of the laboriously ordinary grotesques of his earlier phase, was the trend that his art had now taken. All around me were frenetic, murderous demons, satyrs mad with nympholepsy, ghouls that seemed to sniff the odors of the charnel, lamias voluptuously coiled about their victims, and less namable things that belonged to the outland realms of evil myth and malign superstition.

Sin, horror, blasphemy, diablerie—the lust and malice of pandemonium—all had been caught with impeccable art. The potent nightmarishness of these creations was not calculated to reassure my trembling nerves; and all at once I felt an imperative desire to escape from the studio, to flee from the baleful throng of frozen cacodemons and chiseled chimeras.

MY expression must have betrayed my feelings to some extent.

"Pretty strong work, aren't they?" said Cyprian, in a loud, vibrant voice, with a note of harsh pride and triumph. "I can see that you are surprised—you didn't look for anything of the sort, I dare say."

"No, candidly, I didn't," I admitted. "Good Lord, man, you will become the Michelangelo of diabolism if you go on at this rate. Where on earth do you get such stuff?"

"Yes, I've gone pretty far," said Cyprian, seeming to disregard my question. "Further even than you think, probably. If you could know what I know, could see what I have seen, you might make something really worth-while out of your weird fiction, Philip. You are very clever and imaginative, of course. But you've never had any experience."

I was startled and puzzled. "Experience? What do you mean?"

"Precisely that. You try to depict the occult and the supernatural without even the most rudimentary first-hand knowledge of them. I tried to do something of the same sort in sculpture, years ago, without knowledge; and doubtless you recall the mediocre mess that I made of it. But I've learned a thing or two since then."

"Sounds as if you had made the traditional bond with the devil, or something of that sort," I observed, with a feeble and perfunctory levity.

Cyprian's eyes narrowed slightly, with a strange, secret look.

"I know what I know. Never mind how or why. The world in which we live isn't the only world; and some of the others lie closer at

hand than you think. The boundaries of the seen and the unseen are sometimes interchangeable."

RECALLING the malevolent phantom, I felt a peculiar disquietude as I listened to his words. An hour before, his statement would have impressed me as mere theorizing, but now it assumed an ominous and terrifying significance.

"What makes you think I have had no experience of the occult?" I asked.

"Your stories hardly show anything of the kind—anything factual or personal. They are all palpably made up. When you've argued with a ghost, or watched the ghouls at mealtime, or fought with an incubus, or suckled a vampire, you may achieve some genius characterization and color along such lines."

For reasons that should be fairly obvious, I had not intended to tell anyone of the unbelievable thing at Toleman's. Now, with a singular mixture of emotions, of compulsive, eery terrors and desire to refute the animal versions of Cyprian, I found myself describing the phantom.

He listened with an inexpressive look, as if his thoughts were occupied with other matters than my story. Then, when I had finished:

"You are becoming more psychic than I imagined. Was your apparition anything like one of these?"

With the last words, he lifted the sheet of burlap from the muffled group of figures beside which he had been standing.

I CRIED out involuntarily with the shock of that appalling revelation, and almost tottered as I stepped back.

Before me, in a monstrous semicircle, were seven creatures who might all have been modeled from the gargoyle that had confronted me across the folio of Goya drawings. Even in several that were still amorphous or incomplete, Cyprian had conveyed with a damnable art the peculiar mingling of primal bestiality and mortuary putrescence that had signalized the phantom. The seven monsters had closed in on a cowering, naked girl, and were all clutching foully toward her with their hyena claws. The stark, frantic, insane terror on the face of the girl, and the slavering hunger of her assailants, were alike unbearable. The group was a masterpiece, in its consummate power of technique—but a masterpiece that inspired loathing rather than admiration. And following my recent experience, the sight of it affected me with indescribable alarm. It seemed to me that I had gone astray from the normal, familiar world into a land of detestable mystery, of prodigious and unnatural menace.

Held by an abhorrent fascination, it was hard for me to wrench my eyes away from the figure-piece. At last I turned from it to Cyprian himself. He was regarding me with a cryptic air, beneath which I suspected a covert gloating.

"How do you like my little pets?" he inquired. "I am going to call the composition 'The Hunters from Beyond.'"

Before I could answer, a woman suddenly appeared from behind the Chinese screen. I saw that she was the model for the girl in the unfinished group. Evidently she had been dressing, and she was now ready to leave, for she wore a tailored suit and a smart toque. She was beautiful, in a dark, semi-Latin fashion; but her mouth was sullen and reluctant, and her wide, liquid eyes were wells of strange terror as she gazed at Cyprian, myself and the uncovered statue-piece.

CYPRIAN did not introduce me. He and the girl talked together in low tones for a minute or

two, and I was unable to overhear more than half of what they said. I gathered, however, that an appointment was being made for the next sitting. There was a pleading, frightened note in the girl's voice, together with an almost maternal concern; and Cyprian seemed to be arguing with her or trying to reassure her about something. At last she went out, with a queer, supplicative glance at me—a glance whose meaning I could only surmise and could not wholly fathom.

"That was Marta," said Cyprian. "She is half Irish, half Italian. A good model; but my new sculptures seem to be making her a little nervous." He laughed abruptly, with a mirthless, jarring note that was like the cachinnation of a sorcerer.

"In God's name, what are you trying to do here?" I burst out. "What does it all mean? Do such abominations really exist, on earth or in any hell?"

He laughed again, with an evil subtlety, and became evasive all at once. "Anything may exist, in a boundless universe with multiple dimensions. Anything may be real—or unreal. Who knows? It is not for me to say. Figure it out for yourself, if you can—there's a vast field for speculation—and perhaps for more than speculation."

With this, he began immediately to talk of other topics. Baffled, mystified, with a sorely troubled mind and nerves that were more unstrung than ever by the black enigma of it all, I ceased to question him. Simultaneously, my desire to leave the studio became almost overwhelming—a mindless, whirlwind panic that prompted me to run pell-mell from the room and down the stairs into the wholesome normality of the common, Twentieth Century streets. It seemed to me that the rays which fell through the skylight were not those of the sun, but of some darker orb; that the room was touched with unclean webs of shadows where shadow should not have been; that the stone Satans, the bronze lamias, the terra-cotta satyrs and the clay gargoyles had somehow increased in number and might spring to malignant life at any instant.

Hardly knowing what I said, I continued to converse for a while with Cyprian. Then, excusing myself on the score of a nonexistent luncheon appointment, and promising vaguely to return for another visit before my departure from the city, I took my leave.

I WAS surprised to find my cousin's model in the lower hall, at the foot of the stairway. From her manner, and her first words, it was plain that she had been waiting.

"You are Mr. Philip Hastane, aren't you?" she said, in an eager, agitated voice. "I am Marta Fitzgerald. Cyprian has often mentioned you, and I believe that he admires you a lot.

"Maybe you'll think me crazy," she went on, "but I had to speak to you. I can't stand the way that things are going here, and I'd refuse to come to the place any more, if it wasn't that I—like Cyprian so well.

"I don't know what he has done—or what has been done to him—but he is altogether different from what he used to be. His new work is so horrible—you can't imagine how it frightens me. The sculptures he does are more hideous, more hellish all the time. Ugh! those drooling, dead-gray monsters in that new group of his—I can hardly bear to be in the studio with them. It isn't right for anyone to depict such things. Don't you think they are awful, Mr. Hastane? They look as if they had broken loose from hell—and make you think that hell can't be very far away. It is wrong and wicked for anyone to—even

imagine them; and I wish that Cyprian would stop. I am afraid that something will happen to him—to his mind—if he goes on. And I'll go mad, too, if I have to see those monsters many more times. My God! No one could keep sane in that studio."

SHE paused, and appeared to hesitate. Then:

"Can't you do something, Mr. Hastane? Can't you talk to him, and tell him how wrong it is, and how dangerous to his mental health? You must have a lot of influence with Cyprian—you are his cousin, aren't you? And he thinks you are very clever, too. I wouldn't ask you, if I hadn't been forced to notice so many things that aren't as they should be.

"I wouldn't bother you, either, if I knew anyone else to ask. He has shut himself up in that awful studio for the past year, and he hardly ever sees anybody. You are the first person that he has invited to see his new sculptures. He wants them to be a complete surprise for the critics and the public, when he holds his next exhibition.

"But you'll speak to Cyprian, won't you, Mr. Hastane? I can't do anything to stop him—he seems to exult in the mad horrors he creates. And he merely laughs at me when I try to tell him the danger. However, I think that those things are making him a little nervous sometimes—that he is growing afraid of his own morbid imagination. Perhaps he will listen to you."

If I had needed anything more to unnerve me, the desperate pleading of the girl and her dark, obscurely baleful hintings would have been enough. I could see that she loved Cyprian, that she was frantically anxious concerning him, and hysterically afraid; otherwise, she would not have approached an utter stranger in this fashion.

"But I haven't any influence with Cyprian," I protested, feeling a queer embarrassment. "And what am I to say to him, anyway? Whatever he is doing is his own affair, not mine. His new sculptures are magnificent—I have never seen anything more powerful of the kind. And how could I advise him to stop doing them? There would be no legitimate reason; he would simply laugh me out of the studio. An artist has the right to choose his own subject-matter, even if he takes it from the nether pits of Limbo and Erebus."

THE girl must have pleaded and argued with me for many minutes in that deserted hall. Listening to her, and trying to convince her of my inability to fulfil her request, was like a dialog in some futile and tedious nightmare. During the course of it, she told me a few details that I am unwilling to record in this narrative; details that were too morbid and too shocking for belief, regarding the mental alteration of Cyprian, and his new subject-matter and method of work. There were direct and oblique hints of a growing perversion; but somehow it seemed that much more was being held back; that even in her most horrifying disclosures she was not wholly frank with me. At last, with some sort of hazy promise that I would speak to Cyprian, would remonstrate with him, I succeeded in getting away from her, and returned to my hotel.

The afternoon and evening that followed were tinged as by the tyrannous adumbration of an ill dream. I felt that I had stepped from the solid earth into a gulf of seething, menacing, madness-haunted shadow, and was lost henceforward to all rightful sense of location or direction. It was all too hideous—and too doubtful and unreal. The change in Cyprian him-

self was no less bewildering, and hardly less horrifying, than the vile phantom of the bookshop, and the demon sculptures that displayed a magisterial art. It was as if the man had become possessed by some satanic energy or entity.

EVERYWHERE that I went, I was powerless to shake off the feeling of an intangible pursuit, of a frightful, unseen vigilance. It seemed to me that the worm-gray face and sulphurous eyes would reappear at any moment; that the semi-canine mouth with its gangrene-dripping fangs might come to slaver above the restaurant table at which I ate, or upon the pillow of my bed. I did not dare to reopen the purchased Goya volume, for fear of finding that certain pages were still defiled with a spectral slime.

I went out and spent the evening in cafés, in theaters, wherever people thronged and lights were bright. It was after midnight when I finally ventured to brave the solitude of my hotel bedroom. Then there were endless hours of nerve-wrung insomnia, of shivering, sweating apprehension beneath the electric bulb that I had left burning. Finally, a little before dawn, by no conscious transition and with no premonitory drowsiness, I fell asleep.

I remember no dreams—only the vast, incubus-like oppression that persisted even in the depth of slumber, as if to drag me down with its formless, ever-clinging weight into gulfs beyond the reach of created light or the fathoming of organized entity.

IT was almost noon when I awoke, and found myself staring into the verminous, apish, mummy-dead face and hell-illumined eyes of the gargoyle that had crouched before me in the corner at Toleman's. The thing was standing at the foot of my bed; and behind it as I stared, the wall of the room, which was covered with a floral paper, dissolved in an infinite vista of grayness, teeming with ghoulish forms that emerged like monstrous, misshapen bubbles from plains of undulant ooze and skies of serpentine vapor. It was another world, and my very sense of equilibrium was disturbed by an evil vertigo as I gazed. It seemed to me that my bed was heaving dizzily, was turning slowly, deliriously toward the gulf; that the feculent vista and the vile apparition were swimming beneath me; that I would fall toward them in another moment and be precipitated forever into that world of abysmal monstrosity and obscenity.

In a start of profound alarm, I fought my vertigo, fought the sense that another will t han mine was drawing me, that the unclean gargoyle was luring me by some unspeakable mesmeric spell, as a serpent is said to lure its prey. I seemed to read a nameless purpose in its yellow-slitted eyes, in the soundless moving of its oozy lips; and my very soul recoiled with nausea and revulsion as I breathed its pestilential fetor.

Apparently, the mere effort of mental resistance was enough. The vista and the face receded; they went out in a swirl of daylight. I saw the design of tea roses on the wallpaper beyond; and the bed beneath me was sanely horizontal once more. I lay sweating with my terror, all adrift on a sea of nightmare surmise, of unearthly threat and whirlpool madness, till the ringing of the telephone bell recalled me automatically to the known world.

I sprang to answer the call. It was Cyprian, though I should hardly have recognized the dead, hopeless tones of his voice, from which the mad pride and self-assurance of

the previous day had wholly vanished.

"I must see you at once," he said. "Can you come to the studio?"

I was about to refuse, to tell him that I had been called home suddenly, that there was no time, that I must catch the noon train—anything to avert the ordeal of another visit to that place of mephitic evil—when I heard his voice again.

"You simply must come, Philip. I can't tell you about it over the phone, but a dreadful thing has happened: Marta has disappeared."

I CONSENTED, telling him that I would start for the studio as soon as I had dressed. The whole nightmare had closed in, had deepened immeasurably with his last words; but, remembering the haunted face of the girl, her hysteric fears, her frantic plea and my vague promise, I could not very well decline to go.

I dressed and went out with my mind in a turmoil of abominable conjecture, of ghastly doubt, and apprehension all the more hideous because I was unsure of its object. I tried to imagine what had happened, tried to piece together the frightful, evasive, half-admitted hints of unknown terror into a tangible coherent fabric, but found myself involved in a chaos of shadowy menace.

I could not have eaten any breakfast, even if I had taken the necessary time. I went at once to the studio, and found Cyprian standing aimlessly amid his baleful statuary. His look was that of a man who has been stunned by the blow of some crushing weapon, or has gazed on the very face of Medusa. He greeted me in a vacant manner, with dull, toneless words. Then, like a charged machine, as if his body rather than his mind were speaking, he began at once to pour forth the atrocious narrative.

"THEY took her," he said, simply. "Maybe you didn't know it, or weren't sure of it; but I've been doing all my new sculptures from life—even that last group. Marta was posing for me this forenoon—only an hour ago—or less. I had hoped to finish her part of the modeling to-day; and she wouldn't have had to come again for this particular piece. I hadn't called the Things this time, since I knew she was beginning to fear them more and more. I think she feared them on my account more than her own—and they were making me a little uneasy too, by the boldness with which they sometimes lingered when I had ordered them to leave, and the way they would sometimes appear when I didn't want them.

"I was busy with some of the final touches on the girl-figure, and wasn't even looking at Marta, when suddenly I knew that the Things were there. The smell told me, if nothing else—I guess you know what the smell is like. I looked up, and found that the studio was full of them—they had never before appeared in such numbers. They were surrounding Marta, were crowding and jostling each other, were all reaching toward her with their filthy talons; but even then, I didn't think that they could harm her. They aren't material beings, in the sense that we are, and they really have no physical power outside their own plane. All that they do have is a sort of snaky mesmerism, and they'll always try to drag you down to their own dimension by means of it. God help anyone who yields to them; but you don't have to go, unless you are weak, or willing. I've never had any doubt of my power to resist them, and I didn't really dream they could do anything to Marta.

"It startled me, though, when I saw the whole crowding hell-pack,

and I ordered them to go pretty sharply. I was angry—and somewhat alarmed, too. But they merely grimaced and slavered, with that slow, twisting movement of their lips that is like a voiceless gibbering, and then they closed in on Marta, just as I represented them doing in that accursed group of sculpture. Only there were scores of them now, instead of merely seven.

"I CAN'T describe how it happened, but all at once their foul talons had reached the girl; they were pawing her, were pulling at her hands, her arms, her body. She screamed—and I hope I'll never hear another scream so full of black agony and soul-unhinging fright. Then I knew that she had yielded to them—either from choice, or from excess of terror—and knew that they were taking her away.

"For a moment, the studio wasn't there at all—only a long, gray, oozing plain, beneath skies where the fumes of hell were writhing like a million ghostly and distorted dragons. Marta was sinking into that ooze, and the Things were all about her, gathering in fresh hundreds from every side, fighting each other for place, sinking with her like bloated, misshaped fen-creatures into their native slime. Then everything vanished—and I was standing here in the studio, all alone with these damned sculptures."

He paused for a little, and stared with dreary, desolate eyes at the floor. Then:

"It was awful, Philip, and I'll never forgive myself for having anything to do with those monsters. I must have been a little mad, but I've always had a strong ambition to create some real stuff in the field of the grotesque and visionary and macabre. I don't suppose you ever suspected, back in my studgy phase, that I had a veritable appetence for such things. I wanted to do in sculpture what Poe and Lovecraft and Baudelaire have done in literature, what Rops and Goya did in pictorial art.

"That was what led me into the occult, when I realized my limitations. I knew that I had to *see* the dwellers of the invisible worlds before I could depict them. I wanted to do it. I longed for this power of vision and representation more than anything else. And then, all at once, I found that I had the power of summoning the unseen. . . .

"THERE was no magic involved, in the usual sense of the world—no spells and circles, no pentacles and burning gums from old sorcery books. At bottom, it was just will-power, I guess—a will to divine the satanic, to summon the innumerable malignities and grotesqueries that people other planes than ours, or mingle unperceived with humanity.

"You've no idea what I have beheld, Philip. These statues of mine—these devils, vampires, lamias, satyrs—were all done from life, or, at least from recent memory. The originals are what the occultists would call elementals, I suppose. There are endless worlds, contiguous to our own, or coexisting with it, that such beings inhabit. All the creations of myth and fantasy, all the familiar spirits that sorcerers have evoked, are resident in these worlds.

"I made myself their master, I levied upon them at will. Then, from a dimension that must be a little lower than all others, a little nearer the ultimate nadir of hell, I called the innominate beings who posed for this new figure-piece.

"I don't know what they are, but I have surmised a good deal. They are hateful as the worms of the Pit, they are malevolent as harpies, they drool with a poisonous hunger

not to be named or imagined. But I believed that they were powerless to do anything outside their own sphere, and I've always laughed at them when they tried to entice me —even though that snakish mental pull of theirs was rather creepy at times. It was as if soft, invisible, gelatinous arms were trying to drag you down from the firm shore into a bottomless bog.

"THEY are hunters—I am sure of that—the hunters from Beyond. God knows what they will do to Marta now that they have her at their mercy. That vast, viscid, miasma-haunted place to which they took her is awful beyond the imagining of a Satan. Perhaps—even there—they couldn't harm her body. But bodies aren't what they want—it isn't for human flesh that they grope with those ghoulish claws, and gape and slaver with those gangrenous mouths. The brain itself—and the soul, too—is their food: they are the creatures who prey on the minds of madmen and madwomen, who devour the disembodied spirits that have fallen from the cycles of incarnation, have gone down beyond the possibility of rebirth.

"To think of Marta in their power—it is worse than hell or madness. Marta loved me, and I loved her, too, though I didn't have the sense to realize it, wrapped as I was in my dark, baleful ambition and impious egotism. She was afraid for me, and I believe she surrendered voluntarily to the Things. She must have thought that they would leave me alone if they secured another victim in my place."

He ceased, and began to pace idly and feverishly about. I saw that his hollow eyes were alight with torment, as if the mechanical telling of his horrible story had in some manner served to requicken his crushed mind. Utterly and starkly appalled by his hideous revelations, I could say nothing, but could only stand and watch his torture-twisted face.

INCREDIBLY, his expression changed, with a wild, startled look that was instantly transfigured into joy. Turning to follow his gaze, I saw that Marta was standing in the center of the room. She was nude, except for a Spanish shawl that she must have worn while posing. Her face was bloodless as the marble of a tomb, and her eyes were wide and blank, as if she had been drained of all life, of all thought or emotion or memory, as if even the knowledge of horror had been taken away from her. It was the face of the living dead, the soulless mask of ultimate idiocy; and the joy faded from Cyprian's eyes as he stepped toward her.

He took her in his arms, he spoke to her with a desperate, loving tenderness, with cajoling and caressing words. She made no answer, however, no movement of recognition or awareness, but stared beyond him with her blank eyes, to which the daylight and the darkness, the void air and her lover's face, would henceforward be the same. He and I both knew, in that instant, that she would never again respond to any human voice, or to human love or terror; that she was like an empty cerement, retaining the outward form of that which the worms have eaten in their mausolean darkness. Of the noisome pits wherein she had been, of that bournless realm and its pullulating phantoms, she could tell us nothing: her agony had ended with the terrible mercy of complete forgetfulness.

LIKE one who confronts the Gorgon, I was frozen by her wide and sightless gaze. Then, behind her, where stood an array of carven Satans and lamias, the room

seemed to recede, the walls and floor dissolved in a seething, unfathomable gulf, amid whose pestilential vapors the statues were mingled in momentary and loathsome ambiguity with the ravening faces, the hunger-contorted forms that swirled toward us from their ultra-dimensional limbo like a devil-laden hurricane from Malebolge. Outlined against that boiling, measureless cauldron of malignant storm, Marta stood like an image of glacial death and silence in the arms of Cyprian. Then, once more, after a little, the abhorrent vision faded, leaving only the diabolic statuary.

I think that I alone had beheld it; that Cyprian had seen nothing but the dead face of Marta. He drew her close, he repeated his hopeless words of tenderness and cajolery. Then, suddenly, he released her with a vehement sob of despair. Turning away, while she stood and still looked on with unseeing eyes, he snatched a heavy sculptor's mallet from the table on which it was lying, and proceeded to smash with furious blows the newly-modeled group of gargoyles, till nothing was left but the figure of the terror-maddened girl, crouching above a mass of cloddish fragments and formless, half-dried clay.

Speaking Heads

MAGICIANS of old were very successful in turning to their purposes the then infant science of Acoustics. In the Labyrinth of Egypt, which contained twelve palaces and 1500 subterranean apartments, the gods were made to speak in a voice of thunder; and Pliny, in whose time this singular structure existed, informs us that some of the palaces were so constructed that their doors could not be opened without starting peals of thunder in the interior.

When Darius Hystaspes ascended the throne, and allowed his subjects to prostrate themselves before him as a god, the divinity of his character was impressed upon his worshippers by the burst of thunder and flashes of lightning which accompanied their devotion. It is not known for a fact how this thunder was achieved, but it is not improbable that they used the same sort of instrument that is now often used in our theaters for the same purpose—a thin sheet of iron, three or four feet long. Held by one corner between the finger and thumb, and shaken horizontally in a direction at right angles to the surface of the sheet, a great variety of sounds can be produced, sounds varying from the deep growl of distant thunder to the loud and explosive bursts which rattle in quick succession from clouds that are hanging low and directly overhead.

Among the most spectacular of the ancient priests' acoustic devices were the speaking heads, which were constructed for the purpose of representing the gods and uttering oracular responses. Of these, probably the speaking head of Orpheus, which uttered its responses at Lesbos, was the most famous. It was celebrated not only throughout Greece but even in Persia, and it had the credit of predicting, in the equivocal language of the heathen oracles, the bloody death which terminated the expedition of Cyrus the Great into Cythia.

Odin, the mighty magician of the North, who imported into Scandinavia the magical arts of the East, possessed a speaking head said to have been that of the sage Minos, which he had encased in gold, and which uttered responses that had all the authority of a divine revelation. The celebrated mechanic Gerbert, who filled the papal chair A.D. 1000, under the name of Sylvester II, constructed a speaking head of brass. Albertus Magnus is said to have executed a head in the Thirteenth Century which not only spoke but moved. It was made of earthenware; and Thomas Aqninas is said to have been so terrified when he saw it that he broke it in pieces, upon which the mechanist exclaimed, "There goes the labor of thirty years!"

It is known that usually in these speaking heads the sound was conveyed into the mouth by concealed pipes within the head and leading back to someone secreted in another room. Lucian expressly states that the imposter Alexander made his figure of Aesculapius speak by transmitting his voice through the gullet of a crane to the mouth of the statue.

The Curse of Amen-Ra

A Complete Novelette

By Victor Rousseau

CHAPTER I

Pequod Island

THE scene all around me was about as repulsive a one as I had ever set eyes upon. On every side the flat, dun marshes, with their heavy growth of sedge, stretched away. In front of me—yes, that must be Pequod Island, for a strip of foul and sluggish water separated it from the mainland.

Pequod Island, in the lower reaches of Chesapeake Bay, was barely a hundred feet distant. I could have waded waist-high to it, but for the sucking quick-mud which, I knew, would engulf me if I attempted any such thing.

Mummy eyelids stir in Farrant's laboratory.

And there was no need to attempt it, for an ancient ferryman

At the touch of Neil's shears, the princess rose.

was already poling his antediluvian bark across the narrow channel in my direction. I stopped at the edge of the trail and waited for him.

He hailed me, using indistinguishable words in a local dialect that was unintelligible to me. Then, just out of reach, he held the punt with his pole and peered at me out of his deep-set eyes under their white, thick eyebrows, while he chewed and worked his chin with its stained, shaggy gray beard.

"Well, what are you waiting there for?" I asked impatiently. "Don't you see I want to cross?"

"Aye, ye want to cross, do ye? But what do ye want to cross for? Who d'ye want to see?" I managed to make out.

"I want to see Mr. Neil Farrant, if you've got to know," I answered. "I didn't know this island was private, though."

"Neil Farrant? What, him that's got the mummies down to Tap's Point?" There was a look of fear in the old ferryman's eyes. "He won't see ye. Won't see nobody. There was scores turned away when

he first brung them here. Pestered the life out of him, they did. University perfessors and all—but he wouldn't see none of them."

"Well, this is different," I answered. "My name's Jim Dewey, and Mr. Farrant has especially requested me to call and help him with his work."

"Jim Dewey?" The ferryman turned the quid of tobacco in his mouth. "Yeah, I seem ter remember Mr. Farrant saying you could come."

But he still stood there, leaning upon his pole, eyeing me with ruminating, brooding suspicion.

"Well, why don't you bring the boat near enough for me to step down?" I asked.

"See here, mister, how'd I know you ain't come to try to help one of Doctor Coyne's loonies to escape?" he asked.

"What the devil do you mean? Who's he?" I answered. But before the old man could speak again it flashed across my mind that Neil had told me the island was occupied principally by the house and extensive grounds of Doctor Rolf Coyne's private sanitarium, where some of the wealthiest and most hopelessly insane of Virginia and other States were housed.

THAT was why Neil, who had been associated with Doctor Coyne for three or four years before his departure for Egypt, as assistant to the University of North Virginia Excavation Fund, had chosen this lonely spot in which to work out certain experiments with the mummies that he had brought back. And I, because we had been friends through our four years at the University together, was to be permitted to assist in his task.

He had written me in guarded terms that had aroused my curiosity, had asked me to wire him whether I could come, and I had wired back my acceptance.

The old ferryman winked at me. "There's fellers wouldn't stop at helping the most desp'rit of them loonies to git away, if they was well paid for it," he said. "And they got away more than once. That's why we don't have no bridge between the island and the mainland. I'm Old Incorruptible, I am. That's what the doctor calls me. If you're a friend of Mr. Farrant's, I reckon you got the right to cross, but if you're thinking of gittin' some of them poor devils away, lemme tell you Doctor Coyne's bloodhounds will run ye down and tear ye to pieces."

"Well, I'm not going to wait here all day while you're making up your mind whether I'm a fit person to cross," I retorted. "So bring your boat up to the bank, or get back where you came from, and I'll phone Mr. Farrant you refused to take me over."

The ancient chewed a minute or two on that, then reluctantly poled up to the bank. Clutching my suitcase, I stepped aboard, and the old man pushed back through the muddy water toward the opposite shore.

"HOW much to pay?" I asked, as we finally landed.

"Ye can make it what ye like, mister," he answered. "Money don't mean nothing to me. Old Incorruptible, the doctor called me, and that's what I am. Ye can make it a quarter, or ye can make it fifty cents."

Having no change, I handed him a dollar, and told him to keep it. His eyes bulged avariciously as he pocketed the bill. "Now which way to Mr. Farrant's house?" I asked.

"Down to Tap's Point," replied the ancient. "Foller that road through the village, and you'll come to the house a quarter mile or so

beyond. But listen, mister." He seized me by the arm as I was about to stride down the weed-grown road. "Ye won't never come back. None of them done, who opened the graves in which them mummies lay. Only Mr. Farrant, and that was because he was a healer. Mr. Burke and Mr. Watrous, and that English lord whose name I fergit—all of them died, because of the curse that was put upon anyone opening them dead princes' and princesses' graves.

"Folks think we don't know down to Tap's Point, but we seen it all in the Sunday newspapers, and we ain't minded to have them dead mummies prowling round our homes and killing our children. I'm warning you, mister, the first person who's killed on Pequod Island, there's going to be a reckoning. Excepting you. If you want to commit suicide, you're welcome to it. But keep them mummies out of our homes."

He leaned forward and tapped me on the shoulder. "When you see them hawks, look out for trouble," he whispered. "The hounds knows, and we knows. You'd better not have come."

"You talk like a madman," I retorted. It irked me to think that the silly legend of a curse, fostered by the admittedly strange deaths of so many members of the expedition, had become known among these clowns. But the old man only went on chewing tobacco and grinning at me derisively; and I turned from him and, with my suit-case in my hand, went striding down the track of a road that ran toward Tap's Point.

PEQUOD ISLAND was more picturesque than I had supposed from the sight I had obtained of it from the flat shore opposite. In a few minutes I was passing between stretches of juniper and stunted cypress. Then I saw, far back through the trees, a great building, a cluster of buildings, which I knew must be Doctor Coyne's private sanitarium. There was an open space with tennis nets, and men were playing. Others were strolling in the grounds. Everything was open and unfenced—why shouldn't it be, with the Bay on one side, and that stretch of muddy water on the other, and the blood-hounds?

I passed the grounds of the sanitarium and came to a straggling village beside the water, where a few fishing boats, drawn up, proclaimed the nature of the livelihood of the occupants. Two or three men, slouching about, stared at me sullenly, and a woman glared defiantly from an open doorway, and muttered something as I went by. Another clutched a small child to her, as if I were some kidnaper.

I passed the clowns, head erect, carrying my suit-case, I was still filled with indignation at the monstrous stories in circulation, all due to the fact that Neil Farrant had managed to bring back, in some unauthorized way, three or four of the mummy cases from the tomb of the kings that had recently been opened in Upper Egypt. And from what I remembered of Neil, I didn't for a moment suppose that he placed any stock in the absurd stories of a curse.

I had never known a more hard-headed fellow than my classmate. In fact, I had wondered a good deal at the guarded nature of his letter, and his remarks about certain experiments.

Well, the village was past me, and Tap's Point lay behind. The thread of foul water had broadened into a bay, on which three or four of the fishing boats were engaged in hauling in their booty. The sun was quite low in the west. The scene had suddenly become wild

and beautiful. In front of me was a grove of trees, but there was sea débris right up to their edge, and I guessed that at times storms had submerged this corner of the island.

Then unexpectedly I saw Neil's house. It was an old farmhouse, extending over quite a large stretch of ground, and built solidly of stone. At some early date it had probably been the country home of some Colonial gentleman.

THE edge of the sun had dipped down into the bay. Nothing was stirring in the quiet of the evening. The sails of the boats hung listlessly; I could no longer see the fishermen aboard. But something was hanging overhead. It was a hawk. And another hawk joined it, coming apparently from the direction of the sanitarium. Then a third and fourth came into view.

Fish hawks, I thought. Nothing remarkable about their presence there. But what was it that the old fool had said about hawks? "When you see them hawks, look out for trouble!"

Well, I saw them, and a fifth, and a sixth, and I had no presentiment of trouble. Only a sense of pleasure in the mildness of the evening as I approached the door of Neil's house. I noticed that the windows were all tightly shuttered in front and on both sides of the house, and wondered at that a little, for Neil had been a fresh-air fiend in our early days. I passed up the worn, crazy-stone path and tapped at the door.

I was conscious that the hawks had been following me, but I thought nothing of that. I knew that hawks would follow fishermen —at least, fishing hawks; and the fact that some eight or nine of them were circling above my head aroused no particular emotion in me. I tapped at the door of the shack, anticipating the moment of Neil's delighted recognition of me.

No answer came, and I tapped again, more loudly. Then I heard Neil's voice inside:

"Who is it? What do you want here?"

Strangely harsh and uncouth it sounded. But I guessed that he had been made the victim of the crazy suspicions of the villagers.

"It's Jim Dewey. Didn't you expect me?" I called.

"Jim Dewey? Why didn't you wire me, man, as I asked you to do?"

"I did wire. I guess the telegraphic system is a little slow in this part of the world," I answered. "Aren't you going to let me in?"

"Sure, but—you're alone, are you, Jim? There's nothing with you?"

"Of course not," I answered.

THERE sounded the shuffling of Neil's feet inside the door, then the cautious removal of a chain. Inch by inch the door opened, until Neil stood before me. I was amazed at the transformation in him. The desert heat and sun had browned and wasted him, there was a three days' stubble of a beard upon his face, his clothes hung loose about his wasted frame. He looked years older.

"Well, Neil, you don't seem half glad to see me," I said, putting out my hand.

I saw his hand advance; then he glanced over my shoulder, and a cry burst from his lips. I thought he was going to slam the door in my face.

"The hawks! The hawks! Keep them out!" he shouted.

And as we stood there, the birds, huger than any hawks I had ever seen, suddenly swooped for the door with incredible velocity. I was half inside and half outside, and in an instant the two of us were involved in a tangle of fluttering pinions.

The birds seemed to have gone mad. They swooped down upon us with the utmost fearlessness, yet it was not we who seemed to be the object of their attack. They were apparently imbued with the sole determination of getting inside the house. I saw Neil seize one of them in his hands and almost rend the head from the body. It fluttered out through the doorway, and then, as if magically recovering, soared on high and swooped down at us again.

I did my best against the evil-smelling feathered throng, but my face and hands were quickly a mass of scratches as the talons tore at me.

Then somehow we had won. The last of the winged intruders had been driven from the house, and Neil had dragged me inside and closed the door. For a few moments the foul birds fluttered against it, then soared away.

At the same moment I heard one of the hounds in Doctor Coyne's sanitarium give tongue, then another and another. And I became aware that the sun had set, and darkness was fast settling about us.

I stared at Neil, who was covered with scratches too.

"Well, we kept them out, Jim," he said. "Better come up to the bathroom and let's put some iodine on these scratches."

"Why don't you shoot those birds?" I asked him. "They must be mad."

"They—don't die, Jim," answered Neil. "That's the trouble. I'll—tell you about it."

CHAPTER II

The Curse of Egypt

AFTER we had washed and disinfected our scratches, Neil led the way down to the ground floor of the building. We passed through a poorly furnished living room, filled with the ugly furniture of the seventies, fitted up with bookcases filled with books, which seemed to deal principally with Egyptology and medieval works on astrology and such subjects. Thence through another room, and so into a very long room at the back, which must once have been some kind of storeroom.

It was built entirely of stone, and the numerous windows were heavily shuttered, the shutters being kept in place with iron bars.

Neil switched on a cluster of electric lights in the ceiling, and I perceived that this was his museum. The room was filled with priceless trophies that he had brought back from Egypt. There were two chairs from a tomb, papyrus scrolls, a glass cabinet with various objects resting upon shelves. The room was filled with the pungent odor of spices.

I hardly noticed any of these things, however. My attention was immediately riveted upon five wooden caskets, mummy cases, placed on a dais against the wall and held in position by brackets. On the exterior of each was beautifully painted the representation of the body within.

One of these was the painting of a girl, of such exquisite and noble beauty that I could hardly take my eyes away from it.

You know how closely the ancient Egyptian type approximates to certain of the finest types of to-day. Except that the eyes were conventionally too large, the lineaments were perfect. The little, slightly tilted nose, the small chin, the expression of breeding, of a certain wistfulness, the success of the ideal that the artist had endeavored to portray almost took away my breath.

I saw Neil looking at me and smiling slightly. For the first time he looked more like his old self than the haggard, grim-faced man

whom I had met half an hour before.

"The Princess Amen-Ra," he said, watching me as I stared at the painting, "is of a very old dynasty of Egyptian kings, concerning whose date there is still some dispute. It is certain that she antedated Moses and the Children of Israel by several hundred years. Would you like to hear her story, Jim?

"AFTER her brother's death," he went on, without waiting for my answer, "she ruled the kingdom. She lived and died unmarried. These others"—he pointed to the four other caskets—"are the priests and councilors who were associated with her.

"Her reign is legendary, but it is called the Golden Age of Egypt. During her life the Nile always gave up its proper quota of fertilizing waters, the land remained at peace. Everywhere was prosperity. She was worshiped as divine.

"Only one thing troubled the priesthood. It was considered necessary that she should marry. The question was, who was fit to mate with her? A foreign spouse was unthinkable, for Amen-Ra was believed to descend from the god Osiris.

"There was a young nobleman of Thebes named Menes, who had fallen in love with the princess, and his love was reciprocated. He was too powerful to be condemned or banished, yet the astrologers had predicted that such a marriage would bring down the anger of the gods upon the realm. So the priests conspired to put the young nobleman to death, together with the princess' councilors, for the sake of Egypt.

"On the night of the nuptial ceremony the conspirators broke into the palace and murdered Menes and the chief councilors who had assented to the marriage, yet not until one of the latter, by his magic arts, had caused the Nile to flood the land, and an earthquake that shook down the palace walls. The princess took her own life by poison, in despair. There seems to have been a peasant uprising, too, which completed the disaster. All this is described in that papyrus."

Neil pointed to the glass-covered scroll which stood immediately behind the casket.

"The body of Menes was never discovered," he continued. "But those who survived the disaster dug out those of the princess and her councilors, and these were carefully embalmed, without removing the brain or viscera, which was not done until a later period in Egyptian history. They were buried in the Temple of Set, and unearthed by our expedition.

"ACCORDING to the Egyptian belief, after a period of some three thousand years the Ba would return to reanimate these bodies, when the princess and her advisors would rearise from the tomb to rule the land again and restore it to its ancient glories."

"The Ba was the soul?" I asked.

"The Ba was the soul, as distinct from the Ka, the double, or astral body. There was also the winged Ish, the spirit that dwelled in the abode of the gods. But as for Menes, it is believed that his body was reduced to ashes. You see, the lovers had sworn eternal fealty, by the god Horus, a pledge that neither life nor death should separate them. And the priests were horribly afraid that Menes would return to claim his bride after three thousand years, when Egypt's ancient glories would return.

"Over the sarcophagus was inscribed a curse against anyone who should ever tamper with the

tombs. The widespread legend sufficed to keep them inviolate against both desert robbers and the Moslem invaders of the country. We were the first to open them."

"But, Neil, you don't believe in that stuff about the curse, do you?" I asked him.

"Well, I didn't," answered Neil, "when I went along with the University of Virginia expedition. But what happened? Lord Cardingham, who had largely financed the expedition, fell into an excavation and broke his neck. Burke was taken sick with a mysterious fever and died within a day. Plague, they called it—but there is no plague in Upper Egypt.

"Watrous pricked his finger with a thorn splinter and died of blood poisoning. Three of our natives died mysteriously within a week. Lewis and Holmes were taken ill and sent down to the coast. Lewis died, and Holmes was drowned when his vessel was shipwrecked off Sicily.

"By that time, I was the last one left. I was supposed to be immune against the curse, because I was the physician of the party. I didn't believe—but I had seen too much to disbelieve. I determined to sift the matter to the bottom.

"I succeeded, by bribes, in persuading some of the natives to load the coffins and trophies upon a flat-bottomed boat. I managed to get them down to the coast and so to America. Doctor Coyne, with whom I had worked, and one of the leading neurologists of the world, suggested that I should have the use of this old house, which he owns, in which to carry out my experiment."

"What experiment?" I asked, looking at Neil incredulously, for his face was almost fanatical.

"FIRST," answered Neil, "I must have it from your own lips that you are prepared to associate yourself with me, taking your chance of coming under the curse."

"I've told you I'm in to the limit," I answered. "But so far as the curse is concerned, I think it's a lot of poppycock."

Neil looked at me in a queer way, and walked to the papyrus. He began translating:

> "That Menes, the accursed one, who has been utterly destroyed by fire, may never return to any earthly habitation . . . the curse of Horus, the curse of Anubis, of Osiris, of Hapimou, of the Nile god, of Shu, of the winds, of the god Mesti, the hawk-headed, rest upon him who shall violate these tombs. May he die by water, thorn, and fire. . . ."

"Does it really say 'thorn,' Neil?" I asked, remembering that Watrous had died from a thorn splinter.

> "May he die by pestilence and the winds and shipwreck, and by the beak and claw of Mesti. May his bowels be consumed by inward fire, and he and all his perish. May he. . . .

"But I reckon that's enough," continued Neil, looking back at me from the papyrus. His manner grew almost furtive. "How would you like to take a look at the little princess?" he asked in a low tone.

"I certainly should," I answered. "Do you mean to say. . . ?"

"Yes, I've opened them all. Of course the dampness of Pequod Island would play havoc with them. But, you see, the experiment. . . ."

He broke off, went to the cabinet, and took out a chisel, which he inserted in the edge of the mummy casket. Evidently he had opened the casket a number of times, for the lid, which was perfectly preserved, despite the centuries that

had passed, slid off, disclosing a plainer and unpainted coffin. The lid of this Neil removed in turn, and I saw before me the mummy of the young girl, swathed in the rotting linen fabric, which diffused an almost unbearable odor of natron and spices.

Only the contours were visible. The linen swathed the whole head and body like a winding sheet. Yet I could see that it had been unwound and wound repeatedly, and, I imagined, by Neil.

His hands were shaking. He no longer seemed aware of my presence. Nor of the sudden fluttering of wings without the shuttered windows, and the rending of claws against the bars.

SOMEHOW the proximity of the hawks seemed to me to be connected with what Neil was doing. I shuddered at the sound. But it was not repeated, and I watched Neil begin to unwind the upper layer of linen, so that the contours of the mummy's head gradually grew plainer.

I saw tufts of dark hair appear, and I was amazed at its perfect preservation. It was the eeriest experience I had ever known, to stand there and see this figure of the long-dead Egyptian princess gradually coming to light.

Of a sudden Neil stopped in the midst of his work, looked around and saw me. For an instant he stared at me as if he did not recognize me, as if I was some hostile intruder. And I, in turn, was astonished at the transformation that had come over him.

He looked again as he had looked at the moment of our meeting in the doorway. That lean, cadaverous form of his looked rather like that of a desert sheik than of a twentieth-century American.

"Jim—what the devil!" he began, and then seemed to recollect me. He pulled himself together with a visible effort.

"I'm all worked up over this business, Jim," he said. "Excuse me if I seem queer. I was going to show you the mummy of Amen-Ra, but I guess she'll keep."

"Now that you've gone so far, I'd like to see the rest," I answered. But he was already staring into space as if I had vanished completely from his consciousness. And mechanically his hands went on unwinding the linen shroud.

One more turn, I thought—but there were several, for the material was now as fine as silk, and perfectly preserved. Another turn, and another, and still two more; and then, just as I was beginning to wonder when the process would come to an end, the last layer fell away, and the face and torso of the Amen-Ra were revealed to me.

I STARED at the face and gasped. This a mummy? This the face of a girl who had died countless centuries before? Why, she might only just have died. The skin, with its delicate olive tinge, was perfectly preserved, it even seemed slightly flushed, as if the blood pulsated underneath its peach-smooth surface. The eyes were closed, but there was the hint of a pupil beneath the white eyelid, shaded with long, black lashes.

And it seemed to me as if the ghost of a smile hovered about the mouth, a smile, a loving, mocking smile, as if the dead girl's last thoughts had been of the man to whom she had sworn by the god Horus that neither life nor death should separate them!

I looked at that face, with its beauty and high breeding, and the tragedy of the old story gripped my heart. This girl seemed so alive! It was incredible that all this had happened in the dim dawn of history.

Suddenly Neil flung himself down before the coffin. His hands clasped the sides of the wooden case. He looked into the face of the dead princess, and a sobbing moan came from his lips.

"Amen-Ra! Amen-Ra!" he cried. "I love you still, and ever I have awaited you. I have been true to the oath we swore together, and Horus, whom we trusted, will yet restore us to one another! Do you not know me? Wake from your long sleep and speak to me. Look at me, and tell me that you love me still."

And then strange sounds burst in impassioned utterance from his lips. I supposed it was ancient Egyptian that he was speaking. I moved forward and laid my hand upon his shoulder.

"Neil," I said, "you mustn't give way like this. Pull yourself together, man!"

But his whole form was rigid as a rock, or, rather, like that of a man in catalepsy. And as I hesitated, uncertain what to do, once more there came that horrid rending of claws against the outside of the shuttered windows.

Of course everything was perfectly clear in my mind. Neil Farrant's mind had become unhinged by brooding over his companions' death. He had lived with his mummies hourly, almost, since he had smuggled them out of Egypt—and he had lived alone. Again I sought to bring him back to himself, but with equal unsuccess.

"Do you not remember Menes, Princess Amen-Ra?" he asked, as he stroked the chill cheek. "Will you not wake, only for one little instant, and remember?"

And then something happened that I knew must be imagination, but I went staggering back like a tipsy man. I could have sworn that the eyelids of the dead princess fluttered slightly, and that the faint smile about the corners of her mouth deepened just the least bit in the world. And I stood helpless, while Neil kneeled there and fondled the mummy's cheek, and again I could have sworn that the eyelids fluttered.

From the sanitarium came the deep baying of one of the bloodhounds, and another and another took up the cry. I stood there, helpless, watching the living man make love to the dead woman.

CHAPTER III

Doctor Coyne

IT was the sharp ringing of the telephone in the next room that startled Neil from his spell. He leaped to his feet and stood staring from me to the mummy until his clouded brain seemed to clear.

"Well, Jim, you've seen her," he said; and I could tell from his tones that he was utterly unaware of the scene that had just been enacted. "Pretty little thing, wasn't she, and astonishingly lifelike, even yet. I've been waiting for you to come down and help me with my experiment to-night. Coyne believes in it. It explains all the mystery of the whole process of mummification —all that the explorers and Egyptologists have been trying to discover—"

But he broke off as the telephone began again to ring insistently, and moved toward the door. He was quite his normal self now.

"I guess that's Coyne," he said. "I forgot to tell you that I was to bring you over there to dinner to-night. Excuse me while I answer it."

He hurried out of the room. I was convinced that Neil recalled nothing of that wild outburst of his. He seemed like a man with a dual personality. No doubt in his alternating state of incoherence he had imagined himself to be the half-

mythical Menes, the princess' lover of centuries before.

Again I looked at the face of the dead princess in the light of the electric cluster. What fools one's imagination can make of one! I had been as sure as I could be sure of anything that a sort of semivitality lingered in her, that her mouth and eyelids had moved, though I had refused to believe my senses.

And my senses had tricked me. For now I could see that the face, beautiful though it still was, and looking almost as natural as life, was simply the well-preserved face of a mummy. There was no trace of vitality about those waxen features.

I heard Neil on the telephone: "Yes, Coyne, Dewey's here. Got here about an hour ago. I've told him we're dining with you, and we'll be over right away. The experiment? To-night, maybe, if you're agreeable. Yes, indeed, Jim Dewey's the right man. I trust him more than I'd trust another living soul."

I heard Neil hang the receiver up, and he came back to me.

"Yes, it's Coyne," he said. "He wants me to bring you over. He's a fine fellow, and you'll enjoy meeting him. We'll have to hurry. I must wrap up this mummy first, though. The air's too damp. I oughtn't to have unrolled the bandages, but do you know, Jim," he laughed, "I've taken quite a liking to the little lady. Odd a fellow falling in love with a mummy, eh?"

He kneeled down and with deft, experienced fingers rerolled the linen bandages, until nothing of the princess was visible except the contours. Then he replaced the inner and the outer shells.

"Ready, Jim?" he asked. "Let's start, then. It's only five minutes' walk over there. You go out first, and I'll see that none of those damned hawks gets in."

I STEPPED out of the house. High overhead, against the moon, I saw the soaring covey, but this time the hawks made no attempt to interfere with us, and in another moment Neil had joined me, closing and locking the door behind him.

"I keep this place shut up tight," he said. "Those villagers have an insatiable curiosity, and they learned all about the mummies from one of the Sunday newspapers. There's a fellow named Jones who runs the ferry, who's the worst of the lot. Always prowling around here. Coyne calls him the Old Incorruptible, because he once refused an offer of five thousand dollars from the brother of one of the patients to get his brother out of the sanitarium."

We walked along side by side, striking a track that ran inland in the direction of the asylum. A storm was coming up, and great waves were pounding the beach steadily, yet the air was deathly still, oppressive and suffocating. I was wondering if Neil remembered anything of what had happened.

"We'll have to shoot off those hawks," he said. "I believe the smell of natron from the mummies affects them as catnip affects the feline tribe. I've tried to shoot them, but they're too wary."

But he had told me that the hawks wouldn't die, and I had seen him almost tear the head of one from its body, without destroying its life!

I glanced sidewise at him. He was again the Neil Farrant whom I had known, save that he was leaned and bronzed by the Egyptian suns.

I determined to speak to Doctor Coyne about him, if I found the doctor approachable.

We passed beneath some fine old live-oaks, of massive size, then crossed a wide and well-kept lawn.

There was no fence, and no sign of the bloodhounds. In one place were the tennis nets, in another a bowling green, with no evidence even of night guards.

There were a number of smaller buildings grouped about the main one, all of them lit. The institution presented a fine, well-kept, and up-to-date appearance. Which was, in fact, in keeping with its reputation, for I knew that some of the inmates came from the wealthiest families in the region.

We rang the bell of the front door, and a nurse in uniform opened it. She smiled at Neil.

"I believe the doctor's waiting for you," she said. "Please step inside."

IN another moment we were in the presence of Doctor Coyne in a large reception room, beyond which I could see the medical office, with its cabinet of instruments, chair, and other appliances. Neil presented me, and Doctor Coyne took my hand, giving me a keen, searching look as he did so.

He was an elderly man, between sixty and seventy, as I should judge, with scrutinizing blue eyes and a deeply wrinkled face. Judgment and character were imprinted on it. A man who knew human nature in the raw, as such a man must necessarily know it.

"I'm delighted to make your acquaintance, Mr. Dewey," he said. "Farrant has often spoken to me of you, and how anxious he was to get you to collaborate with him in his work. I think you are both extremely fortunate. And now, since dinner is ready, let's go in, without formalities." He looked at my face. "I hope you didn't get those scratches trying to find the way across our island?" he asked.

"No, we were attacked by some hawks," I said, as he started toward the dining room.

Coyne's brow clouded. "They're pests," he answered. "I'm sorry you had such an experience immediately upon your arrival. They're a sort of fish hawk peculiar to Pequod Island, and for some reason seem to have turned vicious and to attack human beings. We've organized shooting parties, but they're too wary."

At a number of small tables in the dining room, men and women were already at dinner. Some of them rose and bowed at the doctor's entrance, others continued their meal as if unaware of his presence, or unwilling to pay him the courtesy.

I noticed that there were more waiters than could possibly be needed. Some of these were standing against the walls, taking no part in the service, and I guessed that they were probably attendants in waiters' garb.

The doctor led the way to a small table at the farther end of the room, flanked by two enormous bow windows, through which I could see the lights of the village in the distance. The pounding of the surf was very heavy, and there was still that oppressive sense in the air.

Coyne drew me out over a very good meal. I told him about my formed friendship with Neil, and of the post at the Biological Institute that I had relinquished at his request, in order to join him in his experiments on the Island.

"Has our friend here shown you the mummy of the pretty little princess?" asked Coyne. "If not, you've missed a treat." And, as he spoke, he gave me a queer look that I could not quite interpret.

"Yes," I answered. "She must have been a beauty in her day."

"Her story is a most romantic one, according to the papyrus," said Coyne. "Farrant, you haven't told Mr. Dewey about the experiment yet?"

I glanced at Neil, who answered indifferently, "No, I haven't told him. We must try it to-night, though, Doctor. I've only been waiting for Jim's arrival."

"Well, we'll see if it can be done," replied the doctor. I could see that he was somewhat ill at ease, but could not divine the reason. Neil was fidgeting with his knife and fork. Somehow it seemed to me that we were all at cross purposes.

"I SUPPOSE these people here are all convalescents?" I asked, to change the subject.

"Unfortunately no," answered the doctor in a lowered voice. "As a matter of fact, I take in general only the more or less hopeless cases. Occasionally a patient of mine recovers, but usually it is in the face of the text books. Now that man, for instance," he went on, indicating a placid, elderly gentleman in evening clothes, whom I had noticed eating his dinner with a wooden spoon, "is liable to outbursts of homicidal frenzy. I have succeeded in convincing him that the handling of knives and forks sets up injurious galvanic currents in his system. You may notice that he is under pretty close observation by the attendants. After dinner I shall have pleasure in showing you some of my other cases, which are unable to mingle with the rest."

At this moment a women at a table near us dropped her knife and fork with a clatter.

"This meat is electrified, Doctor!" she cried, leaping to her feet. "It's shot through and through with gamma rays! I appeal to you, Doctor, do you permit my enemies to carry on their murderous work under your very nose?"

"Erastus, bring me Mrs. Latham's plate," said the doctor calmly to a colored waiter. "Please sit down and compose yourself, Mrs. Latham. Another plate for Mrs. Latham from the kitchen, please. If any such attempt has been made, madam, we shall spare no efforts to get to the bottom of the trouble."

"But they're too powerful for you!" shrilled the woman. "My enemies can use your laboratory to insert gamma rays in my food, and after all I've gone through, just because of my wretched little bit of money!"

An elderly woman in the uniform of a nurse appeared upon the scene and touched Mrs. Latham on the arm. Still expostulating, she suffered herself to be led away. With her departure, the evident signs of rising excitement on the part of the rest of the diners died down, and the meal was resumed.

"That plate shall be examined in my laboratory as soon as possible," observed Coyne, as if with the purpose of satisfying everybody. I was interested in the way the doctor had handled the incident. Soon the diners were eating and chatting pleasantly, as if there had been no interruption.

BUT there was something queer about the relations between the doctor and Neil. In fact, it almost seemed to me as if Coyne's attitude toward Neil was a medical one—as if Neil, too, was a patient. I was watching it and wondering when the dinner ended. By ones and twos and little groups the patients filed out of the room. As soon as the last of them had gone, Coyne rose suddenly.

"Farrant," he said, "if you really mean to try that experiment this evening, I can be with you in an hour."

"Splendid," answered Neil. "Then I'll hurry back with Jim."

"I think it might be better for you to have everything ready when I bring Mr. Dewey with me," an-

swered Coyne. "You'll remember I promised to show him some of those cases of mine."

Neil looked irresolute, while Coyne's manner had grown almost peremptory. "Well, just as you say," said Neil after a moment's hesitation. "Don't disappoint me, though. You see—well, I outlined the idea to you."

"I'll come, whatever happens," answered Coyne. "You can rely upon me."

Neil left the house. The doctor watched him go. He turned to me. "Poor Farrant!" he said. "He's suffering from mental instability brought on by his experiences in Egypt and by overwork."

"You mean that he's insane?" I asked in amazed horror. Of a sudden everything seemed to be growing clear to me.

"Insanity," replied Coyne slowly, "is a mere medical term. Certainly Farrant was not brought here as a patient." The doctor paused. "But since he has been here. . . . However, I think it might be better to postpone what I was going to tell you until we have visited the cases that I was speaking about. They have an intimate relationship—but there, again. . . ."

CHAPTER IV

Rita Ware

HE broke off oddly, and conducted me out of the main building and into another opposite it, a smaller one separated by a graveled driveway. In the lobby a uniformed nurse was sitting. She rose up as we entered. Nodding to her, Coyne led the way up two flights of stairs to an upper story, which ran the whole length of the building, and had a number of doors on either side of the main corridor.

Two other nurses were seated in wicker chairs in a recess about the middle of this.

"Anything been happening, Miss Crawford?" Coyne inquired of one of them, speaking in his brusque way.

"I'm afraid old Mr. Friend is going to pass out to-night," she answered. "He's very low."

"We'll take a look at him," said Coyne, and turned to me. "Some of my oldest patients seem to be about to leave this earthly scene, and they all seem to have taken it into their heads to make their exit together."

The nurse unlocked one of the doors, and we entered. On the bed, looking as if he was in his last stupor, lay a very old man, withered and dried to almost mummylike proportions. It was odd to see how he seemed shriveling into that condition while life remained in him, as if he had been embalmed by the Egyptians thousands of years ago. It seemed impossible that life could be continuing in that withered frame. He lay perfectly still, breathing very faintly, and apparently in his last coma.

There came a fluttering of wings against the screen of the window, which I noticed was at least twice as thick and strong as an ordinary screen. For a moment one of the obscene fowls clung there with its claws, its vicious eyes staring into mine.

Then, as the doctor made a threatening gesture with his hand, it disappeared silently into the night.

The doctor turned to the nurse. "If you notice any change, have Doctor Sellers administer a strong intravenous injection," he ordered. "We must keep him alive as long as possible. How about the others?"

"They're about the same as they were," the nurse replied.

She unlocked several doors successively. There were three other old men, all pretty near the end of their lives' journeys. Two of them lay stretched out on their beds in

a semiconscious state, the third was seated in a chair, staring in front of him. He paid not the slightest attention to our entrance.

"This one has been with me for twenty-three years," said the doctor in a low voice. "How are you feeling to-night, Mr. Welland?" he asked, touching the old man on the shoulder.

Slowly Welland turned his head around, as if it moved by some smooth mechanism. I shuddered at the look in his eyes. Why, they were the eyes of a mummy, painted on a mummy case! The old man muttered something and then relapsed into his stupor.

"Yes, he's pretty far gone," whispered Coyne to me, and, signing to the nurse to leave the room, he led me into the little embrasure of the window.

"BEFORE I show you my last patient, Dewey," he said, "I think we ought to come to an understanding. Especially in view of the experiment that poor Farrant is planning to perform to-night. You are going to see—whether it succeeds or not—extraordinary things of whose existence I myself was for a long time skeptical. I was forced to believe in them after—after Farrant came to the Island.

"He's spoken to me a lot about you, Dewey, and I don't mind admitting that I've looked up your record. Also, I'm a pretty shrewd judge of men. Our acquaintance has been short, but I believe you are peculiarly the proper person to assist in the experiment. In short, I have faith in you, Dewey, and I perceive in you that very rare thing: an open mind.

"I told you Farrant is not himself. It is a case of what is known as dual personality. Of course such cases are not rare, but they are rarer than they are supposed to be."

I didn't know what he was driving at. I looked over his shoulder, to meet the mummy eyes of old Mr. Welland, seated in his chair. Why was Coyne showing me his patients, and what had these to do with Farrant and his mummies? Somehow I believed there was a close connection. The doctor had hinted at one.

"You are familiar with the literature upon the subject?" asked the doctor.

As it happened, I was, and I told him so. He seemed delighted.

"I run this sanitarium on what might be called unorthodox lines," he said. "It has been suspected for a long time that cases of dual personality, so-called, are really cases of possession."

"By—what?"

"By other entities, Dewey."

"You mean—by the dead?" I blurted out.

"By other entities, living or dead," Coyne answered. "There is undoubtedly another entity that is endeavoring to take possession of Neil Farrant. I think that, on occasion, it has succeeded. And it is possible that you have already noticed it."

"But—but. . . ." I stammered. The suggestion that the long-dead Egyptian, Menes, was attempting to control the body of Neil Farrant violated all the canons of common sense for me. I saw the doctor observing me with his shrewd gaze.

"Let us go and see our last patient, Dewey," was the only comment he vouchsafed, and led the way out into the hall, where the nurse was waiting for us.

"Miss Ware?" he asked.

"She's exactly the same as she's been for the past two weeks," the woman replied.

"I'll see her," said Coyne. "This," he explained to me, "is a case of what is called dementia praecox. For weeks at a time the patient

will remain in the same state, without apparent consciousness. Miss Rita Ware comes of a noted southern family, and was at one time engaged to marry a fine young fellow, the son of a millionaire cotton-mill proprietor. She broke the engagement. Soon after, symptoms of insanity developed. She has been with me for nearly a year."

"IS there no hope for her?" I asked.

"Dementia praecox, a disease of adolescence, is generally considered incurable," replied Coyne. "In some cases, with my methods, I have accomplished a good deal. But, as I said, they are unorthodox, and I have to rely mainly on myself, though Sellers, a young fellow whom I am training—well, he's learning to apply them."

He shrugged his shoulders again. "Well," he said to the nurse, "let's take a look at Miss Ware."

The nurse led the way to a door at the end of the long corridor, and unlocked it. The room within was much larger than the other rooms that I had seen. In the light of the small electric bulb that burned over the bed, I could see that it was tastefully furnished, with pictures, bright hangings, and rugs.

Seated in a large wicker armchair, her face turned away from us, was a young woman. Like the others, she gave no sign of recognizing us as we entered the room. Doctor Coyne moved round in front of her and peered into her face. He raised an arm, which, when he released it, dropped immediately back into its position.

"Come here, Dewey, please," said Coyne in an authoritative tone. "Keep your self-control. Look into her face, and—you may begin to understand."

I moved toward the chair. And at that instant the storm broke with maniacal fury. The light in the room went out, the lights that streamed through the windows of the buildings upon the lawn vanished instantly. There came a vivid lightning flash, and a thunderclap.

And the storm broke. Not within a few seconds, but instantaneously. The howling of the wind seemed to rock the building. A deluge of water poured in through the open window. Simultaneously, from outside, came what sounded like the shriek of a lost soul.

For an instant, in the light of the flash, which split the heavens in twain, I saw the hideous faces and strong beaks of two of the hawks, peering in at me through the strong screen. The next, as if animated by some diabolical fury, the winged devils had torn their way through, and were in the room—not two, but twenty of them.

THE nurse screamed. Coyne ripped out an oath. I put up my hands instinctively to protect my eyes. But the hawks seemed to have no designs on me. One of them settled for an instant upon the head of the unconscious girl, and then the devils were in the corridor.

Coyne was cursing and shouting furiously as he ran in pursuit of them. "You fool, you fool!" he cried at the cowering nurse. "You left those doors open!" He dashed into the nearest room, and I saw the dim shapes of three of the hawks fly out within a foot of his head.

Then all the lights suddenly went on again. I was staring down at old Welland. He had dropped back in his chair, and his mummy eyes were closed. Death was on his waxen features. At the same time screams came from the rooms adjoining:

"They're dead! They're all dead! The lightning must have killed them!"

A panic-stricken nurse with a white face came running toward Coyne. He simply pushed her out of the way with his two hands. "Get those hawks!" he shouted. But they were already fluttering out of all the rooms that the nurse had inadvertently forgotten to lock, winging out into the corridor through the doors, which swung to and fro violently as the gale blew through the house.

They seemed to me no longer vicious, but eager to effect their escape. And at last one of them found the open door of Rita Ware's room, and the whole flock followed it inside, and through the open window into the night.

The fury of the storm was frightful. I could hear the patients in the buildings screaming with terror, and the shouts and running footsteps of the attendants. Flashes of forked lightning alternated with peals of thunder, and all the while the rain came down like a deluge. The nurse had fallen in a faint in the corridor. One of the others was bending over her, attempting to revive her; the third was running out of one room into another. All three of them had evidently lost their heads.

But Coyne had darted into Rita Ware's room in pursuit of the birds. Now, as the last of them winged its way outside, he lifted the girl from the floor, to which she had slipped, and, bending over her, looked into her face. A cry broke from his lips.

"Thank God they couldn't kill her, the devils!" he shouted exultantly. "She's alive, Dewey, she's alive!"

He looked up at me as I came through the doorway into the full blast of the gale. Coyne hadn't even thought of closing the window, and the water was still pouring in. I ran past Coyne, forced away the ripped screen that was hanging inside the room, and got the window down. I turned. The doctor was holding Rita Ware in his arms, as if she had been a statue.

"Look at her, Dewey!" said Coyne in a husky whisper.

I looked. I gasped. The beautiful face of the unconscious girl was, feature for feature, line for line, the same as the face of the mummified princess, Amen-Ra!

CHAPTER V

The Mummies Wake

COYNE placed her back in the chair that she had occupied. "Hold her there, Dewey," he said, as footsteps came running along the corridor. "We've got to get her to Farrant's house as soon as possible. Don't stir! Just hold her so she won't slip down again."

He hurried out to meet the attendants, closing the door behind him. There followed a few quick interchanges. I gathered that some of the patients had become violent with terror.

"No, no!" cried Coyne peremptorily. "Let Sellers attend to them. He knows what to do. Then let him come here and certify some deaths. I've got more pressing business."

While he spoke, I was staring into Rita Ware's white face, trying to convince myself that the resemblance was a chance one, and failing utterly. I knew now—knew for sure that there was some subtle connection between this girl and the princess, and that Coyne had meant to tell me about it. I knew that Neil's projected experiment had some reference to the connection. Dazed, bewildered, I held the unconscious girl, and heard the footsteps of the attendants and nurses die away along the corridor.

Then Coyne was back in the room. "Well, Dewey, you've seen.

You understand now," he said. "Dewey, I trust you. I've got to. And you've got to work with me, for Farrant's sake and the sake of us all. We've got to get rid of those cursed mummies. They are alive, Dewey."

"Alive?" I gasped.

"Do you think the Egyptians were fools? Those mummies have the brains and internal organs intact. It was only at a later period in Egyptian history that the priests lost the clue and eviscerated their dead. Those mummies are alive, dried up, but capable of renewed life, just as many of the lower forms of life can be dried for months and brought back to life by being placed in a suitable medium. If only Farrant has kept those hellish hawks out of his place!"

"But what are the hawks? What is their connection with this business? Surely they're just hawks that have gone mad or something," I protested.

"I've no time to tell you now, Dewey. But you've probably guessed that Rita Ware is the reincarnation of the Princess Amen-Ra.

"Don't misunderstand me or follow a wrong trail of wild hypotheses. I *know* that the soul which forms the body of a human being, after assimilating its life experience, returns to make a bigger, better human being, guided by the lessons of the past. The trouble is that the soul of Amen-Ra has two bodies—two living bodies, Dewey, for its former habitation has not been destroyed.

"ONE of them must die, either Rita Ware, or the mummy. And if it is Rita Ware who dies, we shall be confronted with the mummy of Amen-Ra, living on earth, and capable of God knows what mischief."

"So that explains Miss Ware's mental state?" I asked.

"You've hit it, Dewey. The body was here, the soul was—but that again, I'll explain to you when I have time. I want you to promise to cooperate with me. I don't know precisely what experiment Farrant is projecting, but I fancy he has devised some way of bringing those mummies back to life.

"At the crucial moment, when the chance comes, I am going to try to put a spoke in his wheel, and destroy those devils, and—bring Rita Ware back to sane and normal life."

"You mean—"

"No soul can occupy two bodies simultaneously, Dewey. Now the immediate job before us is to get Miss Ware to Farrant's place. I've ordered my car brought round in front of the building. There it comes," he added, as the chug of the motor became audible beneath us. "Now let's get the poor girl into it.

"And pray, if you have faith, Dewey. The old, bestial Egyptian gods may have had no reality, but they did represent points of consciousness, so to speak, and in that sense they are a dreadful reality, the embodiment of those dark powers that are always waiting to seize upon some human mechanism in order to manifest themselves.

"Come, let us get Miss Ware out to the car," he added. "I have sent the nurses away, and I want to leave before Sellers gets here."

We picked up the unconscious girl. I noticed that a strange change had come over her. Every muscle of her body, which had been limp before, had stiffened, so that she was like a person in a cataleptic trance. The flame of life was burning very low in her, if it was not extinct already. Her face had the waxen hue of death, and I could discern no signs of breathing.

Coyne's finger-tips were on her pulse as we halted, holding her. "She's alive," he said, answering my thoughts. "She is alive because she is the reincarnation of Amen-Ra, and the thread of the new birth cannot be snapped. Those four old men were merely strangers whose souls were taken for the mummies."

"Souls—taken?" I cried.

"She is in no danger of death," he went on, without replying to me, "until the struggle between her body and the mummy body begins. Then we'll need to keep our heads and work together."

I shuddered. All the skepticism in me had been killed somehow, though nothing had happened that could not have been satisfactorily explained. Between us we carried Rita Ware downstairs. A small car was standing at the door, with the engine running, but there was no one in it. The uproar on the buildings had quieted down, though a woman was shrieking at a lighted window, high up in the main structure.

But the storm still lashed the island with merciless severity. It seemed worse than ever. I could hear the breakers tearing frantically at the shingle on the ocean side, and, even as we left the building, a tall tree came crashing down somewhere.

IT was difficult getting Rita into the car. Her body refused to accommodate itself to our efforts in the least. It was necessary to prop her up on her feet in the rear compartment, as if she had been made of marble, and I was afraid of breaking one of her limbs.

"Don't be afraid," said Coyne, as he stepped into the driver's place. "It's the living woman against the mummy, with the odds in our favor, if things turn out as I expect and hope. Only remember, we're fighting primarily to restore Miss Ware to life and sanity, and then to save Neil Farrant."

"You don't know what his experiment consists of?" I shouted above the roaring of the wind.

"I do not, but I have gathered that he has some scheme for restoring the dead princess to life, together with her attendants. And against that we must fight, Dewey.

"We are dealing with a man who is, in certain states, a cunning madman, and it will require all our ingenuity to learn his plans, and thwart him."

Another tree went crashing down. The raging wind seemed as if it would pick the car up bodily and hurl it from the road. The rain was still coming down in a torrential deluge. The sound of the crashing waves was terrific. Mud splashed our sides in torrents as Coyne slowly picked his way toward Farrant's house, through a morass.

We saw the lights in it. Every room was illuminated. Suddenly Coyne jammed on the brakes. "God, look at that!" he exclaimed.

A corner of the roof had been ripped away by the gale, and the slates and some of the bricks of the fallen chimney littered the track. Two big trees had been blown down, and the headlights showed them immediately in our way. Coyne and I stepped out, and instantly the deluge wet us to the skin.

But high overhead I saw the flock of hawks wheeling. They were immediately above the gap where the roof had been.

"So they got in!" muttered Coyne. "That complicates things considerably for us, Dewey."

"Shall we carry Miss Ware in?" I asked.

He grasped my arm. "Don't you understand yet?" he cried. "It's her life against that infernal mummy's, that damned vampire's. The body of the princess must be reduced to

ashes. That's what I've come for. And that's what Farrant must not suspect."

We lifted Rita Ware out of the car and carried her toward the front door. I was afraid of the hellish birds, but they made no attempt to molest us. Round and round they circled, now floating upon the wind, now swooping with apparent aimlessness, till another current caught them and sent them winging upward again. And so, drenched through and through, we reached the front door.

COYNE rapped. No answer came. Somewhere inside the house we could hear Neil shouting incoherently. The doctor beat a thunderous tattoo with the old-fashioned iron knocker, and after an interval we heard Neil's footsteps within. He unbarred the door and stood staring at us in that uncomprehending way that I had noticed before. Then of a sudden he knew us.

"For God's sake hurry! We're drenched!" shouted Coyne.

He stood aside grudgingly, and we went in. He seemed to take no notice of the girl we were carrying.

"They got inside, the devils!" he shouted. "And they visited you first. I know! I'll show you! They got through the rip in the roof, and they've performed their part. The mummies are glad. They're having the time of their lives at the prospect of freedom. They're trying to get out of their caskets —Lord, I've been laughing. But they're mine, my slaves, obedient to my will!"

He uttered an insane laugh, clutched at the doctor's sleeve, and thrust his face into his.

"They'll have to wait a while, even the little princess. I'm not going to let them out until I've got my experiment under way. But it will be one grand little experiment!" he shouted.

We two were standing in the passage, holding the body of Miss Ware, which lay between us, stiff as a log of wood. Neil looked at it.

"What's this you're bringing me?" he asked.

"One of my patients," answered Coyne, assuming that masterful manner of his that quickly seemed to dominate the other. "I'm going to perform a little experiment of my own."

Neil looked into Rita Ware's face. "Hum, pretty girl!" he laughed. "Well, they're always welcome. Maybe the little princess will like her for an attendant when she gets out. She's used to attendants, you know, and we didn't have the luck to dig up any."

I was astounded that Neil seemed to detect no resemblance between Rita Ware and the princess, though the hall was flooded with light.

"Well, let's go in," said Neil. "It won't take long, though I guess it will seem longer than it is."

HE led the way through the two rooms into the museum. The lights were on, not only in the clusters overhead, but in brackets on the walls that had escaped my observation that afternoon. The room was flooded with light. But instantly my attention was riveted upon the five caskets that stood in a row against the rear wall.

From each of four of them there came a creaking, groaning sound, followed by a horrible tapping, as of knuckles against wood!

Neil stepped toward them. "You're lively, old fellows, and I don't blame you after all this time," he said. "But you'll have to wait your turns. Why don't you take a lesson from the princess? See how nicely she's behaving!"

He looked at the fifth casket, which stood in its place at the end of the row, and, in contrast to the rest, was absolutely silent.

A faint and muffled groan broke from within one of the caskets. It chilled my blood. Neil kicked it, and there followed the same rhythmic tap-tapping that I had heard before.

Only the knuckles of a hand could have made that sound. I glanced at Coyne, and saw that he was almost as overcome as myself.

With a great effort I took another step toward the caskets and listened. There was no question but that the sounds came from within them. The outer lids were on them all, and there was no visible movement.

And yet I knew, beyond all possibility of doubt, that the hideous mummies were alive inside them. *And they were trying to get out!*

And all over the caskets I could see the footprints of the hawks, as if the obscene birds had been perching there!

CHAPTER VI

Neil's Experiment

FOR a moment, I confess, I was overcome with horror. I staggered back against the wall. Neil Farrant roared with laughter.

"I tried to convey to you in my wire that you might expect queer experiences, Jim!" he shouted. "You tell him about the hawks, Doctor."

"Dewey, it's this way," said Coyne. "The hawk was a sacred bird in ancient Egyptian mythology. Mesti, the hawk-god, was venerated above all others, except Osiris and Horus. His special function was supposed to be to carry away the soul of the dead person, and bring it back when the cycle of mummification ended, and the dead were restored to life. Do you get me, Dewey?"

"You mean—those birds—carried the souls of those old men—into the bodies of these mummies?"

"Dewey, I'm not committing myself to a statement of my beliefs. I am simply telling you the myth, as Farrant asked me to," answered the doctor.

I think I shook my head. No, it was too incredible that the hawks had transferred the souls of dying persons into those caskets. I was trying to retain my normal faculties. Yet all the while it went on, that horrible rapping, creaking, groaning from within the caskets. Neil turned toward them.

"All right, all right, old fellows!" he cried. "I'll let you out. But don't be in such a hurry. Give a fellow a chance!"

He snatched up the chisel and began rapidly prying off one of the lids. He removed that of the inner case, and the pungent odor of aromatic spices at once began to fill the room again. And I cried out in horror at what I saw. So did Coyne!

For the shapeless form of the mummy inside the case was moving within its linen wrappings. It was wriggling, undulating, like some horrible larva, struggling against the bandages that held it.

I WATCHED it, unable to believe the evidence of my eyes. And yet I knew they were not lying to me. The movements went on and on. At times the thing would fall into quiescence, as if exhausted by the efforts that it had made, and then the horrible contortions would begin once more.

I was so sick with horror that many of the details of that awful scene escaped me. But I knew that Neil was prying off the lids of the caskets in quick succession, and that the stench of natron had become almost unbearable. And within each casket there lay, not the quiet mummy that had been there for uncounted centuries, but a writhing larva that struggled des-

perately to free itself from the wrappings that enclosed it, while mewing sounds came from the dead lips.

Then, last of all, Neil lifted the lids from the mummy of the princess. Sick though I was, acutely, physically sick, I moved forward to see, impelled by curiosity that could not be suppressed.

Amen-Ra's eyes were wide open! The eyeballs were not shrunken. The iris was a deep brown, the pupils large and luminous. They were the eyes of one who saw. She saw! She was watching Neil's face, and the little smile about her lips had deepened.

The swathes of linen, which had been carelessly refolded, hung loosely about her. But she was not attempting, like the other mummies, to free herself from them. She was not stirring.

And she was not a mummy. She was a woman. The waxen look had disappeared from her skin, which had the flush of pulsating blood beneath it. The tissues beneath were those of a living person. It was a living face that I was looking at.

And it was the face of Rita Ware. There was not a particle of difference between the two faces. They might have been twins. But they were not twins. They were identically the same person!

Coyne leaped to the farther end of the room, picked Rita up in his arms, and laid her down beside the casket. "Farrant," he cried, "look! For God's sake, look! Can't you see that these two are the same?"

Neil glanced carelessly at Rita? "The same? How do you mean, the same?" he asked carelessly. "There is a certain superficial resemblance, but that's all. What on earth are you driving at, Doctor?"

He stepped back to the cabinet. I saw Amen-Ra's eyes moving, following him. And the unconscious, living woman and the conscious dead one lay side by side. But it was the dead one that had the flush of health on the face, deepening every instant, and the living one who looked as white as death.

NEIL had taken something out of the cabinet. It was a dish of obsidian, of a dull green, and deep, shaped almost like a flower vase. Into it, from a paper, he poured a quantity of grayish powder. He set it down on a table and looked at us triumphantly.

"The secret?" asked the doctor faintly. He was badly shaken, his self-possession had almost deserted him. For the moment it was Neil who dominated our little group of three.

"The secret!" shouted Neil, and, at his words, the mummies writhed again and rapped their bony fingers against the sides of their caskets, while I leaned against the wall, too overcome to be able to utter a word. On the face of the princess was a smile of triumph, as if she understood. Perhaps Neil had somehow managed to tell her during those conversations he had had with her when he was in his alternating personality.

Neil's features worked spasmodically. "I'm going to let you in on the secret now!" he cried. "Quickly, because there's little time to lose. The secret that I learned from the papyri. The secret that makes the wisest of the learned Egyptians look like fools. The reason why the Egyptians embalmed the bodies of their dead.

"They weren't fools, those old Egyptians who embalmed their bodies without removing the brain and viscera. They didn't believe that the soul would ever return to the same habitation. They knew what has only been rediscovered of late, that time is an illusion. That the so-called future life and this life exist simultaneously. That the every

act of our physical bodies is simultaneously reproduced in the underworld by the Ba, the soul, and the Ka, the ethereal double.

"So long as the human organism remained intact, the soul would continue its active life in that underworld, until the cycle of reincarnation brought its activities to an end. Destroy the body, and the soul drowses helplessly for some three thousand years. Preserve the body, and the soul takes up the body's activities without a break or change.

"Do you think that the priests who slew Amen-Ra and her councilors escaped their vengeance when they themselves died? I tell you the drama has been going on and on, and we are to be the privileged spectators of it."

"HOW do you mean?" asked Coyne. He had recovered his poise to some extent, and was watching Neil closely, seeking to discover whether anything lay behind his words, or whether he was merely dealing with a madman.

"This incense," answered Neil, "which I got from the tomb, hermetically sealed in a phial of glass, is the fabled drug of immortality, known to the Egyptians alone of antiquity, though the Cretans had rumors of its existence. Its fumes act upon the human organism in somewhat the same way as hashish, but infinitely more strongly. They destroy the time illusion.

"So long as it burns, we three shall be liberated from the bondage of time. We shall live in the Ba, while our inert bodies remain here. We shall be transported to ancient Egypt, because that is the idea that dominates our thoughts. We shall be spectators of the continuance of that drama that began over three thousand years ago!"

It was incredible that the mummies could have understood, and yet that horrible knuckle rapping began again. I saw one of them, with a mighty effort, half raise itself in its casket.

"I tell you to lie down, old fellow!" yelled Neil, turning toward it. "Your time's coming. A grand time, old boy! You've been living it all these years, but you don't remember, now that you've been brought back to the flesh. Be patient!"

Neil struck a match and applied it to the powder in the bottom of the vase. Slowly a dark stain of combustion began to spread over it. Then the powder caught fire with a sudden tiny flare, and a thin wreath of smoke, with a pungent, sickly stench, began to diffuse itself through the room, quickly drowning the smell of the natron.

The powder flared up, exploding in tiny spurts. The stench grew thicker, stifling. I was aware of a strange feeling in my head. And in a queer way the room seemed to be growing dim, enlarging into a vista of long, shadowy halls.

"NOW'S your time, old boys!" Neil shouted. He snatched up a pair of scissors, and, stooping over the mummy at the end of the row, began quickly cutting the linen bandages. I heard grunts of satisfaction coming from the horrible thing within. The linen folds fell back. The mummy sat up in its casket, struggling to free its lower limbs.

It was a man, about seventy years of age, his long, white hair plastered about the gaunt, skeleton face, his eyes rolling horribly as they seemed to take in the surroundings. A skeleton clothed with skin; yet, as I looked, I seemed to see the tissues forming, the prominent bones receding. Something more dreadful than I had ever dreamed of seeing in my life!

And Neil was speaking to the

monster in a strange, hissing tongue, as if explaining, while the mummy sat like a man in a bath, eyes alight with intelligence, fixed upon his.

One by one, Neil was releasing the mummies from their shrouds. Out of the caskets popped heads and shoulders. Faces of old men, of dead men growing human!

And everything was growing misty as a dream, and I seemed to see Neil, Coyne, and the mummies from far away, or as one looks at a picture-book. I was no longer completely conscious of my own identity even. And the fumes of the burning powder, which was still exploding in little spurts, were choking me.

Four brown, gaunt, emaciated men were sitting up in their caskets, new-born corpses, flesh and blood instead of desiccated skeletons. I saw their arms upraised, I heard their gibbers rising into shrieks.

Then, at the touch of Neil's shears, the princess rose. She took off her shroud. Wrapped in some material of white, silken sheen, that looked as if she had just put it on for the first time, she stepped lightly out of her casket, a living woman of exquisite beauty. Apparently unconscious of the presence of Rita Ware, she stood beside her, her very double. She turned toward Neil, she extended her arms toward him.

Two words in an unknown tongue came from her lips, and on her face was a smile of utter happiness.

Neil dropped the shears, he turned to her, he caught her in his arms. Their lips met. I knew he had forgotten everything but her.

I COULDN'T stir. But hazily I was aware that Coyne was catching at my arm.

"Dewey, this is the time!" he cried. "We must save Miss Ware and end this witchcraft. I'm going to kill her. But first. . . ."

I saw him extend his hand toward the dish of incense—but with infinite slowness and uncertainty, like a palsied man; and I knew that the numbing influence of the smoke had him in its power, like myself.

"God, I can't see!" he cried, and his arm dropped to his side.

Of one thing more I was aware. With a sudden bound, the mummy in the coffin at the farther end had leaped to its feet. For an instant it stood swaying in the room, an old man wearing a robe of frayed and faded linen, and a long girdle that dropped almost to his feet. Shrieks of what sounded like invective poured from his lips as he stood there with extended arms, and his head rolled and lolled grotesquely upon the neck.

Then, with a sudden bound, he had reached the door, which was partly open. He collided with it, seemed to understand its usage, swung it open, and rushed, shrieking and gibbering, along the hall.

Or was it Coyne? The mummy had looked like Coyne—like the doctor, thirty years later. But this was the stupefying effect of the burning incense. I could no longer think rationally. The figures of Neil and the princess, locked in each other's arms, were becoming tenuous as those of phantoms.

In its flight, the mummy had collided with one of the two Egyptian chairs that were set against the wall. With infinite slowness I saw this begin to slip toward the floor. That was the last thing I knew. Utter blackness encompassed me.

CHAPTER VII

The Evil Star

I WAS myself, and yet for a moment I felt a sense of bewilderment. I was pacing a flagged

courtyard, with huge, cyclopean pillars on either side of it. The sun was setting, a huge, red ball, across the desert in front of me. Nearer at hand was a broad and stately river, with sloops, with lateen sails of white, amber, and buff, drawn up on either shore.

The courtyard that I paced was in front of an immense building, composed of enormous blocks of masonry, with sculptured images of the gods, of colossal size, on all sides of it. Within this building I could hear the sound of voices, which seemed to come from every part of it, and blended into a not unpleasant hum. Lights shone through apertures here and there, and the part immediately before me was brilliantly illuminated.

I was myself—I knew myself. Had I not been, for nearly six years, one of the trusted bodyguard of the Princess Amen-Ra, of Egypt? Was I not the son of a small nobleman of the country, with a score of slaves, and broad acres on both sides of the sacred Nile, chosen for my position because my family had been loyal to the ruling dynasty for generations?

I knew all this as well as I knew anything, and yet there was a vague confusion in my mind, as if I had been dreaming. There was a curious odor in my nostrils. I had just come on duty after witnessing the embalming of a distant relative of mine, an old man who had held high honor at court.

It was the odor of the natron and spices that had affected my head, I thought, as I paced the flags, my sword swinging at my side, my sandaled feet clacking monotonously on the stones. For three hours by the water clock that dripped in the courtyard I must remain on guard, since the Princess Amen-Ra was protected by her nobles, and not by the common rabble of soldiers.

Bitter and envious thoughts were stirring in my heart. This was the night on which her nuptials were to be celebrated with Menes, of Thebes, a noble who could claim no longer descent than my own, since we were both descended from the gods. She had fallen in love with him, and had sworn the Great Oath by Horus, which binds lovers together for three successive incarnations.

ALL Egypt was in ferment, for Amen-Ra claimed Osiris as her ancestor, and the marriage would surely end the golden age of peace that had descended on the land, when war had been forgotten, and the ships brought back riches by peaceful trading with the Cretans, the Hittites, and the Atlanteans.

And I had loved the Princess Amen-Ra since first I had set eyes upon her, a lovely child, six years before. This upstart had supplanted me, and the thought of the marriage was intolerable to me.

The sun had dipped into the desert while I was meditating. The long shadows of the pillars were merged in a universal twilight. The figure of a slave slipped past the water clock and bowed before me.

"Lord Seti," he said, "I come from the high priest, Khof. He awaits your pleasure."

"Tell him that I shall not fail him," I answered. "I shall be at his service at the appointed time."

The slave bowed again and vanished. I resumed my pacing. Presently another figure appeared between two of the pillars of the palace. It was that of a girl, who came tripping toward me.

"Lord Seti, the princess asks your presence," she said to me.

"Who guards the courtyard if I leave my post?" I asked.

She laughed merrily. "The Exalted One has no fears, Lord Seti,"

she answered. "The mouthings of Khof, the high priest, are like the wind, that blows and stops, and then blows again from another direction. She has her faithful followers, others beside yourself. Does the Lord Seti question the commands of the Sun-Descended One?"

"No, I come with you," I answered her. She was one of the princess' attendants, high in her favor, and I knew she looked with favor upon me. And, had not my heart been aflame with love of Amen-Ra, I might have been responsive, for our families had known each other for generations, our very lands on the Nile adjoined, and she was a beautiful girl over whom many men had striven. But toward none of them had she shown the least inclination.

"It is not often, Lord Seti, that you come where I am," said the girl timidly. "But that is not to be wondered at, since the Princess Amen-Ra has bewitched you."

"WHAT nonsense is this?" I answered roughly. "Have you no more sense than to chatter such things? Do you not know that if your words were overheard, dire would be your penalty?"

"Ah, Lord Seti," answered the girl, stopping and standing facing me in the twilight, "what care I? What is my life to me, when my love is not returned? Aye, I will speak now," she went on, her voice rising into an impassioned intonation. "I love thee, Seti, and thou hast known it for a long time, and thine infatuation for the princess is likely to involve thee in ruin.

"Now kill me with that long sword of thine," she added, making a gesture as if to bare her breast.

I was a little touched by the girl's devotion, in spite of the fires of jealously that were burning within me. "Aye, you have spoken the truth, Liftha," I answered. "I love the princess. I have loved her since I first saw her. And who is this upstart, Menes, whom she has chosen to be her royal mate? Is his lineage longer than mine, is his wealth greater? I tell you—"

"Hush—hush!" whispered the girl. "If those words were heard, you would be sent to the torturer. By Osiris I adjure you not to dream impossible things. Does not the princess rely upon you and your companions to protect her against the priests? Can a man be true to his trust and harbor such thoughts as those?"

I hesitated, and again that strange confusion came upon me. I seemed for a moment to be standing in a small room in some strange land, with the princess and Menes. But Menes was attired in strange, barbarian attire, and the high priest, Khof, stood beside me, one arm outstretched toward me. He was trying to tell me something, he was threatening to kill Amen-Ra, who stood locked in her lover's embrace. And he, too, wore the same barbarian clothes.

The vision faded. Decidedly it was the result of the fumes I had inhaled at the embalming that afternoon.

"Aye, you are right, Liftha," I rejoined, and accompanied the girl within the palace.

GUARDS, consisting of my companions, nobles like myself, paced the long corridors, their swords swinging at their sides. They saluted me as we passed, and I returned their salutations. Liftha led me through a long antechamber, in which six more of the guards were posted. These men were sons of the highest nobles in the land, and yet, by favor of Amen-Ra, I had been privileged to command them.

A curtain of crimson linen hung before a doorway. From within it

came the murmur of voices. The guard on duty called my name through the curtain. The benign voice of an old man answered, bidding me enter.

The curtain was raised, and I passed through alone, humbly bowing toward the dais on which Amen-Ra and Menes sat side by side. Seated on low stools in front of them were the four wise, ancient councilors of the realm, all men over seventy years of age, who had served the princess, and her brother before her, and their father and his father before that.

Amen-Ra and Menes were seated in chairs, and before them was a plain board on which was bread and salt, goblets, and a flagon of Nile water. The marriage had just been performed by one of the lesser priests, who had braved the wrath of Khof in doing so, and the royal lovers were about to bind it by partaking of the ceremonial meal.

I bowed, and then stood up. I dared not look at the princess. But I fixed my eyes upon Menes, seated beside her like a king—Menes, who had supplanted me. Had he had wit, he must have read my mind.

But all his mind was wrapped up in the princess. The two had eyes for none except each other, and it was not until I had approached the circle of wise councilors, bowing repeatedly, in accordance with ceremonial etiquette, that Amen-Ra looked away from Menes and saw me.

She signaled me to approach her, and I kneeled before the dais.

"My Lord Seti," she said, "I have sent for you because you are my friend, and I trust you as I trust no one, except my husband and these wise councilors of mine."

OF a sudden the rage in my heart gave place to coldness. It had almost been in my mind to rush upon Menes with my sword, and slay him. Had the High Priest Khof known that such an easy chance would come to me, he assuredly would not have laid the elaborate plans that had been staged.

I looked at Amen-Ra, and the love in my heart turned to pitiless coldness. There had been a time, while she was approaching womanhood, when I could have wooed her successfully. I knew that, and I knew that she had given me more than a passing thought before Menes appeared on the scene.

There he sat, the upstart, arrayed in purple linen, at the side of Amen-Ra, regarding me with the haughty composure of a king.

"Promise me that you and your companions will guard me well this night, and forever," said the princess. "And it is our plan to advance you to a post of the highest dignity."

"You may be assured, Bride of the Sun, that I shall fulfil my duty," I replied.

She smiled. "I knew you would, Lord Seti," she replied. "And yet my astrologer tells me that there is an evil star in my horoscope. Even now he is observing it. It is at the very point of transit across Aquarius—a new and unknown star whose appearance betokens dire peril. Not till it is beyond Aquarius' fringe may Menes and I partake of the ceremonial meal together."

She turned to the oldest of the wise men and nodded to him, and he motioned to me to approach him.

"Have you news of Khof, Lord Seti?" he asked me.

"The high priest," I answered, "dares do nothing. Think you that he would lay violent hands upon one who is descended from Osiris?"

The princess heard me. "Ah, but I am all alone, except for my Lord Menes," she cried in sudden anxiety. "If the high priest excite the rabble against me. . . ."

"Then, Sun-Descended, they shall die at the point of my sword, and those of my companions," I answered. "Fear not."

"It is well," she answered with new composure. "My fears are gone, Lord Seti."

And she turned and smiled at Menes, and with that the last doubts in my heart vanished. At that moment the curtains behind the dais parted, and the astrologer entered. He was a man between sixty and seventy years of age, with scrutinizing blue eyes, and a deeply wrinkled face. He bowed low before Amen-Ra, his robes, stamped with images of the Sun-god and the Hawk-god, sweeping around him.

"THE evil star—hath it passed Aquarius?" asked the princess breathlessly.

"Not yet," answered the astrologer, "but even now it is upon the fringe of the constellation. Within an hour it should be clear of it, and then, Exalted One, it will be permissible to partake of the ceremonial meal, for the peril will be overcome."

"And if it pass not?"

"If it pass not, but continue in its parabolic course, within the attraction of Aquarius, there will be peril of floods, issuing from the dominance of the watery constellation, Exalted One."

"Floods — and what besides floods?" queried the princess.

"The position of the planet Mars indicates bloodshed. There may be civil commotions, even warfare."

"Aye," answered Amen-Ra, a touch of bitterness in her tones, "but why deceive me with half truths? Have I so many who are willing to speak the truth to me that you must needs prevaricate? What are the omens for myself and my lord Menes?"

"If, in its parabolic course, the evil star sweep within twenty-five degrees of Mars, and Jupiter, the benign guardian, be not yet arisen, there will be dangers other than those," said the astrologer reluctantly.

"Dangers?" queried the princess. She sprang to her feet. "Speak the whole truth to me!" she cried. "I adjure you, in the name of Osiris, Isis, and the child Horus, of the holy trinity whose names may not be taken in vain."

"There will be death," the astrologer whispered, and flung himself upon his face before her.

CHAPTER VIII

Treachery

I PACED between the statues of the gods. I glanced at the water clock. The water dripped steadily upon the flags, and the dial showed that a little more than an hour remained before my watch was ended. The palace was still ablaze with lights, but the voices within it were hushed. Not a sound could be heard without, save the monotonous lapping of the little waves of the rising Nile against his banks.

It was as if all nature waited in suspense for the passing of the evil star. And I, with my heart hot with rage and hatred—what was I but a pawn, moved by the powers of the wandering orb that had swung into the sphere of Aquarius?

Yet I pictured Amen-Ra, seated beside Menes at the board, with her wise councilors, waiting for the propitious hour to begin the repast, and my heart was touched. How lonely she was, she, the ruler of the greatest empire in the world! Again I thought of her words of faith in me, and I hesitated.

I looked up at Aquarius, swinging overhead. I could see the errant star, for, like all the Egyptian nobles, I had been taught astrology, and the influence of stars and

planets upon human destinies. It was just clearing the edge of the constellation; but, a few degrees below it, Mars was rising, blood-red, into the dark sky. And I knew that already Mars held the wandering star in his embrace.

Stooping, I removed my sandals and strode noiselessly down to the water-front. The princess' pleasure sloop, with sails of purple linen furled, swung at her anchor. I did not turn toward her, however, but toward a smaller sloop, with sails of pure white linen. She was the swiftest vessel ever built, and she was mine. For three months skilled craftsmen had secretly labored on her, and I knew she could never be overtaken, given a start of a dozen drops from the water clock.

My chief slave, Kor, pacing the deck, stood rigid as a statue as he saw me approaching.

"Well? Is all in readiness?" I asked softly.

He moved toward me. "All is ready, my lord," he answered. "The anchor is held by no more than can be sheared away with one sweep on the ax, and the wind favors us."

"The supplies of food are below?"

"Aye, Lord Seti, sufficient to carry us to the land of Crete. All your commands have been obeyed."

"The two under-slaves are aboard?"

"They wait below, Lord Seti."

"It is well," I replied. "Serve me faithfully in this matter, Kor, and you become a freeman, once we touch the shores of Crete, where I am guaranteed refuge." And I turned away with a lighter heart. I had three followers among the royal guard, young nobles pledged to my service by the Oath of Horus, and, moreover, under indebtedness to me. It should not be difficult, in the confusion, to save Amen-Ra both from the guard and from the priests of the crafty Khof.

I calculated that when the two forces met in battle, I and my three could easily carry the princess down to the sloop, and, once aboard her, we would have a clear passage down the Nile and across the Middle Ocean to the land of Crete.

I TURNED and made my way toward the huge Temple of Serapis, which was dwarfed in dimensions only by the palace. In front of it stood the gigantic statue of the god, the corn measure upon his head, the scepter in his hand, the dog and the serpent at his feet.

The huge temple seemed in utter darkness. Nothing appeared to be stirring, save that a mongrel jackal-dog fled snarling with a mouthful of food that he had seized from the offal cast out daily by the priests. Yet, as I passed between two of the columns in front of the structure, a form leaped forward, dagger in hand, then recognized me, and fell into the same posture of stillness that my chief slave had shown.

It was the slave who had approached me an hour earlier in front of the palace.

"Greetings, my lord. The high priest, Khof, awaits you," said the man.

"Tell him I come," I replied; and the slave, bowing, moved away silent as a shadow.

I passed between the columns and entered the temple. The interior was so dark that only one who, like myself, had been initiated into its mysteries, could have found his way. Again a huge statue of Serapis confronted me, rising from floor to roof, the corn basket this time outstretched in the right hand, to receive the offerings of the votaries.

I passed along the aisle behind it. Now I saw the faint glimmer of a light behind the heavy curtains that veiled the entrance to the

priests' room. I stopped before them for a moment. In that moment I again reviewed the plans that I had made, and I could find no flaw in them.

I had pledged my faith to Amen-Ra, and I was fulfilling it in my own way.

I raised the curtains and entered. The high priest, Khof, and a dozen of his attendant priests, were awaiting me. He sat at the head of a small table, resplendent in his priestly garments, in the light of the small oil lamp that burned before him. His long white bead flowed down to his breast. His attendants were younger men, clean-shaven, after our fashion, and I could see the glint of steel in their girdles.

I bowed, and there was a moment's silence. Khof watched my face steadily.

"You have been tardy, Lord Seti," he said.

"Yea, Osiris-born. The princess deigned to send for me, to have me pledge my faith to her anew."

"You pledged it?" he asked quickly.

"Aye, but not by the secret vow by which I pledged myself to your service."

"Hath the sacred meal begun?"

"Not yet, lord. She and the accursed upstart still await the word from the astrologer. And, as I passed through the courtyard, I saw that the star was still within the influence of Aquarius, with Mars riding hard to catch him. There is no escape for them, Lord Khof."

"There is no escape," he answered. "For I, who have another lore than the stars, have read what is written in the lights of my breastplate."

HE glowered at me so somberly that I felt a chill of fear run up my spine. I knew that the high priest was in possession of a lore that made the prophecies of the astrologers as a child's game—a lore brought to Egypt by a wise man from India, centuries before.

"What have you read, Lord Khof?" I asked.

"I have read death and treachery," he answered, "but death to who betrays. I have read of disasters, which, nevertheless, cannot be averted. So we must go on. Within how long will the destiny of the evil star be decided?"

"In less than an hour," I answered.

"Your men—can you pledge them?"

"Sufficient of them to ensure that the plan can be carried out," I replied.

"Go back, then, to your duty. At the appointed time you will admit us to the palace. And we rely mostly upon your valor, my lord Seti."

"Aye, but what of my reward?" I asked, to make him think that my motives were other than they were. "The reward you pledged yourself to give me?"

"A roomful of silver, and the highest post in the land, under me."

"It is well. You will not find me wanting," I answered. I glanced into the faces of the younger priests. These men were fanatics, who would stop at nothing, but old Khof, crafty and guileful, had schemes of his own. These men believed that they were fulfilling the wishes of the gods in murdering Menes, but Khof knew that the gods themselves are only aspects of the One and Indivisible. It was statecraft and not fanaticism that guided him.

I bowed myself out and made my way back to my post in the courtyard before the palace. I resumed my sandals. Only their monotonous click-clack broke the stillness. It was eery, that utter silence within,

the thought of the princess and Menes awaiting the passing of the evil star.

And it would never pass. I looked up and saw that the star and Mars were within a few degrees of each other.

A SHADOW glided across the court toward me. It was the girl, Liftha. She came up to me and stood with hands crossed upon her breast, looking up into my face pleadingly.

"Well, what do you want now? Another summons from the Sunborn?" I asked roughly.

"Not so, Lord Seti. But there is evil news from within the palace."

"How so?" I asked.

"The evil star passes not. The ceremonial meal is delayed. I love thee."

I laughed. "Is that part of the evil news?" I inquired of her.

She laid her hand upon my arm. "Harken, Lord Seti. Play not with me. I am a child no longer. Pledge thyself to take me for thy bride as soon as the issue of these affairs is settled, or I cannot live. Speak the truth to me, and put me off no longer."

I looked at her, pleading with me there, and a sudden fury shook me.

"Spoke I ever words of love to you, Liftha?" I asked.

"Never, Lord Seti, and yet love hangs not upon words, but has glances for speech, and, moreover, an unknown tongue that depends not upon the lips. It is my fate that I would know once for all."

"Know it then," I returned. "I do not love you. I love none save Amen-Ra, and never shall. Seek some young noble among her bodyguard and forget me."

"That is thy decision?" she asked softly.

"Aye, by the trinity of Osiris, Isis, and the child, Horus," I responded, speaking the oath that may not be broken.

She made a swift gesture, raising her hand to her lips. It dropped, with the tinkle of a piece of metal. I seized her by the arm.

"What folly is this?" I cried.

"'Tis nothing, Lord. Only a piece of meat set out for the jackals, filled with a potent poison. My life is ended. Be—happy—as you can. Perchance. . . ."

She tottered and slipped to the stone flags. I tried to raise her, but already she was breathing her last. She died within a dozen drips of the water clock. That meat, shot through with a subtle poison known only to the priests, had been set out for the jackals that profaned the sanctuaries by stealing the votive offerings.

So the evil star had found its first victim. I looked up, and saw that the star and Mars were now only a finger-breadth apart.

Then I was aware of shadows moving softly toward me among the columns, resolving themselves into the high priest and his attendants. All of them wore swords and daggers, and I could see by the bulge of their garments that they had mail beneath them.

"All is well?" hissed Khof.

"All is well," I returned.

"Then lead the way," he responded.

I HALF drew my sword from its sheath and passed once again into the palace. The guards still paced the corridors, but the advent of the high priest merely brought them to the salute. It was only when the band was nearing the curtain of crimson linen that those of them who were pledged to me came quietly forward and arrayed themselves beside me.

I put out my hand and raised the crimson curtain. Nothing seemed to have changed since I had been

there an hour before. The princess and Menes were still seated side by side before the board, with its untasted bread and Nile water, their councilors beneath them. Beside them stood the astrologer, his head bent upon his breast. He was saying something in a low voice, and on his face was despair.

At the raising of the curtain, Amen-Ra raised her head and looked at me. Her eyes looked straight into mine. And in that moment I think she read my heart to its uttermost depths.

She looked at me, she half rose. "What means this intrusion, my Lord Seti?" she asked. "Have I sent for you, or have I—Ah!"

Her glance fell upon the high priest, and the body of attendants. Their swords were half out of their sheaths, and they were glaring at Menes with a fury that could not be suppressed. And what happened was so sudden that I see it only in flashes of quick movement.

Amen-Ra turned to Menes, who had already risen to his feet, and was standing these unarmed beside her. She flung her arms around his neck. The four old councilors were struggling up with cries of alarm. The guards in the antechamber were starting forward in confusion. Khof, the high priest, shouted, and, swords in hands, the attendant priests leaped forward.

CHAPTER IX

Bonds of Fate

"HALT, Khof! Thou knowest the power reposed in me, which even thy spells are incapable of preventing!" shouted the oldest of the councilors, standing before the dais with uplifted hand. "Halt, I say, or by the gods Anubis and Mesti I shall shake down this palace and cause the Nile to overflow. Again I say, halt! Thou knowest me!"

For a moment Khof and his attendants halted. Upon the dais I could see the lovers standing, their arms about each other. There was no fear in the looks of either, but deadly scorn in the eyes of the princess as she turned her gaze upon me.

"Traitor!" she cried in a clear voice. "Traitor to your trust! Come, do your worst, but you shall pay—aye, you shall pay, or the gods exist not!"

I had hesitated too, but now the sight of Amen-Ra in the arms of my rival proved too much for me. I sprang toward the dais. I heard the old councilor chanting the formula, used only in cases of extremity, and confided only to the hereditary wielder of the chief power beneath the throne. I paid him no attention. I leaped at Menes. Amen-Ra flung herself before him in the effort to shield him. For an instant she baffled me. Then I saw my opening, and like a snake my sword darted in and pierced him through and through.

I tore the girl away, I raised the form of the dying man in my arms and hurled it into the midst of the struggling crowd.

Yells of triumph and derision greeted my deed. By now the hall was a melée of figures, the guards fighting furiously with the invaders, as they sought to rescue Amen-Ra, and the later engaging them in battle with equal ferocity, while three or four, led by Khof himself, were cutting down the councilors. And my own three men, taking no part in the fight, were trying to work their way toward me as I stood, holding the princess, who had fainted.

The eldest of the councilors, who alone survived, though horribly slashed by the priests' swords, still stood upon his feet. He was still chanting the sacred formula. He ended, with a note of ecstasy on

his lips, and I saw him fall under a terrific sweep of old Khof's sword.

And then, of a sudden, the whole palace rocked. I stumbled, and, still holding Amen-Ra in my arms, went rolling down among the dead and dying, who lay piled up together.

THE palace was shaken to its foundations. The old, dead gods, the earliest gods of the land, long sleeping, had been stirred by the magic formula known only to the old councilor. They were moving in their hidden tombs beneath the palace and the temples. And the palace and the temples were crashing down in ruins.

The mighty columns quivered, and bowed, and fell in shapeless heaps of stone, with reverberations as if the very heavens had fallen apart. The roof collapsed above my head. The walls were riven, and the floor opened.

I felt a stunning blow upon the forehead. Everything grew black, the yells of the contending priests and guards died away. I was plunged into an abyss of blackness, silence, and unconsciousness.

Yet not for long. At this supreme moment, for which I had so long planned, I did not intend to let myself be cheated of my reward. And, with a mighty effort of will, I pulled myself up out of the depths.

All about me were huge stones fallen from the palace roof. I had escaped death by a miracle, for, by the light of the stars that shone through the opening above, I could see guards and priests lying in mangled heaps. I had escaped without even a broken limb.

Outside I heard the confused cries of a crowd, but within the palace nothing stirred or sounded. I staggered out of the hole made by the fall of a mighty stone, which had miraculously saved me. I made my way over the stones and bodies toward the dais.

And there I found her, Amen-Ra, alive, like myself, and tugging fiercely at a stone that lay across the dead body of my rival, Menes. And, as she tugged, she began whimpering little words and phrases of love, so that I stood and watched her, amazed at her devotion.

I spoke her name softly, but she did not hear me. I took her by the hand. "He is dead," I said. "Come with me, Amen-Ra, and let us seek safety in flight together."

SHE fell back, she stared at me as if she did not know me. Then it was as if a film cleared from her eyes.

"Traitor!" she cried. "You live, and he lies dead, my lover! But know this: if the gods have suffered you to live, it is only that you may suffer such torments as would move even me to pity. The curse of Thoth, the curse of Horus, of Anubis, the jackal-headed, of hawk-headed Mesti, of great Osiris himself rest upon you forever!"

She was like a coiled snake, crouched, waiting to sting me. But I sneered triumphantly. What meant the names of the gods to me, who had passed the Greater Initiation, and knew that they are all aspects of the single Unity?

"I loved you since I saw you," I replied. "Once you deigned to smile upon me, until this upstart came along. Is he of better birth than me? I love you, I say, and I speak to you no longer as servant to princess, but as man to woman, since your realm goes out in darkness. Hark!" I added, as the cries of the mob grew louder. "Even now the peasants come to drag you from your throne!

"I have a ship in readiness," I went on. "For three months my

slaves have labored on her. No vessel made by man can catch her. I have wealth enough aboard her to make you a princess in some other land that I shall conquer. Come with me, and let us forget all the past in our love!"

Still she stared at me, but now her eyes seemed to soften. I mistook that look of hers; I thought that I had touched her, that she was yielding. I leaped forward and caught her by the hand again.

"I will love you as no man has ever loved a woman!" I cried. "Is it not for love of you that I have destroyed the throne of ancient Egypt? I swear to you that I will carve you out another realm, even greater than this one. Come with me, Amen-Ra!"

Her solemn words broke in upon my frenzy. They held me as if spellbound. And there was no more hate in them. Rather they sounded like the chanting of some ancient sibyl.

"Lord Seti," she said to me, "all this was dimly foreshadowed to me by my astrologer. He could not know, since the advent of the evil star had not been predicted; nevertheless he revealed to me that some day the one I trusted most should betray me.

"Aye," she went on, "and that he, too, was a puppet of destiny, and bound to the wheel of fate. And more, Lord Seti.

"For he showed me that some day, when the cycle of reincarnation has grown complete, it is through this man that Menes, my lover, and I shall meet again, because we pledged ourselves by the oath of Horus, which cannot be broken. It is your task some day to restore what you have broken.

"Meanwhile it is my wish to rejoin my lover in the shades where Osiris rules. And for you, Lord Seti, there is one chance of redemption. Take it, and the gods will pardon you. Refuse it, and eternal punishment shall be yours, punishment so terrible that even the gods will avert their faces in pity."

"What is this chance of redemption?" I whispered hoarsely.

She put her hands to her robe and drew out a curious dagger. It was two-bladed, with a double cutting edge, and fashioned in such a way that, with the thrust, the blades separated, producing a fearful double wound that must instantly prove fatal, if delivered in the body.

"SLAY me, Lord Seti," whispered the princess, moving toward me. And I saw that her eyes were alight with the longing for death. "Thus only, said the astrologer, can destiny be appeased. Slay me!" I had taken the dagger from her hand. I hesitated. I knew full well that Amen-Ra could never be mine, and yet to kill her was impossible.

"It is madness!" I cried.

"It is truth. It means eternal peace for my lover and me; and, for you, release from the terrific judgment that Osiris will surely mete out to you after you die, unless you do what I have said."

I hesitated, then thrust the dagger into my girdle. "Never!" I cried. "Think you that I have done what I have done in order to lose you? Let me but have you in this life, and I am willing to face even an eternity of suffering, knowing that even eternity comes to an end some time, and in the dim ages that are to come I shall be free once more!"

I seized her in my arms. She offered no resistance, and yet she did not faint. I bore her away. I must have gone insane with exultation. I remember shouting as I forced my way over the heaps of fallen stone, with the crushed bodies beneath. I tore at the masonry that blocked the entrance to the palace. I must have

been dowered with superhuman power, for, clutching the princess to me, with my hands I hurled the great masses of fallen débris to one side and the other, stones that a strong man with his arms free could hardly have lifted. Then, holding the princess, I went staggering out into the darkness.

A prowling jackal cried, and others took up the cry. Across the Nile, red flames were leaping up toward the black sky. I heard the yells of the looting mob, but I saw why they had not come near the palace. Palace and temple stood on a little slope of elevated ground, and between them and the river there stretched an expanse of water into which I went floundering, knee-deep, waist-deep.

Then, bearing up Amen-Ra, I swam fiercely to where the channel of the Nile had run, shouting the name of my chief slave, Kor. But there came no answer, and, in the darkness, it was impossible to discern where I was until I saw the tops of the timbers of the quays before me.

The Nile had already risen a dozen feet, and a great mass of water was whirling down, against which I battled with my whole strength. That waste of waters stretched away as far as I could see, red as blood in the distance, where it reflected the fires of the blazing city.

But my sloop, my pride, my hope, was no longer at her slip. Nor was the princess' sloop, with the purple sails. Nor any other. In a moment I understood. All who could escape had taken sail. Kor had betrayed me, and had himself sailed for Crete, with all my treasures aboard!

TREACHERY for treachery! I cried out in despair, and, gathering the limp body of Amen-Ra to me, I swam to where a platform projected above the swirling waters. It was a wooden framework on which the watchman had been wont to stand to shout news of sloops or galleys approaching up or down stream. It had been high above the waters, but now it was a scant two feet above the surface, and it was only a matter of a little while before it would be totally submerged.

I dragged Amen-Ra up with me and looked into her face. Her eyes were open, and she was watching me with a quiet little smile about the corners of her mouth. She looked like one who has passed through all the wrongs and outrages of life, and fears nothing any more.

"Now slay me, Lord Seti, that the will of the gods may be fulfilled," she said, "and that you may escape the penalties and tortures of the hells."

"Never!" I cried. A fierce exultation had taken possession of me. The love of life was rising in me. I would pursue Kor, my treacherous slave, to the land of Crete, and regain ship and treasures, I would carve out a new empire for Amen-Ra, or perchance regain for her the realm of Egypt.

By the pale light of the arisen moon I could see boats pushing across the swollen stream toward the palace. I heard the shouts of their occupants. They were slaves and peasants who, having glutted their vengeance upon the city, were putting out to possess themselves of the fabled treasures of the Egyptian kings, which were supposed to lie in the crypts of both palace and temple.

I could hear the shouting of them, as I crouched on the platform, holding the limp body of Amen-Ra. Unseen behind the projecting timbers, I watched them approaching.

But then I was aware of another figure crouching at the end of the platform, where the shadows lay

deepest. It came slowly toward me, and I recognized, first the water-draggled garments, and then the face of the old astrologer who had predicted the woes that had descended on us.

A FIRE of rage burned in me. I snatched the double-bladed dagger from my garments and held it aloft. I regarded the old man as the cause of all that had miscarried. I threatened his breast with the pointed blades.

He scrambled to his feet and came onward fearlessly. He stood before me, and some power seemed to hold me back from delivering the fatal stroke. He looked at Amen-Ra. "Slay her!" he whispered. "Slay her, that the will of the gods may be fulfilled. Only thus may she regain her lover in her next cycle of mortal life."

"Fool," I shouted, "think you that I am willing to let her go, to lose her forever?"

He laid his hand upon my arm. "Lord Seti," he answered, "your course and hers are none otherwise than as the evil star that has swept within the scope of Mars. Soon they two part forever. So it is with you and her. In your next birth you will see her, and recognize that she is not yours. Your desire for her will pass. Slay her now, and so fulfil the gods' intentions, and the plans that were laid down before the creation of the world. Slay her, I say, and escape the punishment of the underworld, and restore her to Menes."

I heard the long howling of the jackals, driven out of the desert by the floods. I seemed to smell a pungent odor, choking, stifling me. A pit of darkness seemed to be opening before me. What devil's magic was this? The forms of Amen-Ra and the old astrologer were growing indistinct.

"Kill her!" he cried again.

I raised my arm irresolutely. But the darkness was already all about me, and I was choking in the fumes. I was falling down, down. . . . Something crashed. . . . Then my eyes were widen open, and I was in the room in Neil Farrant's house again.

One of the two Egyptian chairs, set against the wall, had fallen to the floor. It was the crash of its impact that had awakened me from a dream already growing dim. And the gaunt, brown form of the escaping mummy was vanishing through the doorway.

And after it, staggering, reeling, and uttering shrill, birdlike cries, the other mummies ran. But not the princess Amen-Ra. I was holding her in my arms, and in one hand I held the pair of long, sharp-edged scissors with which Neil had cut the mummies' shrouds.

CHAPTER X

"Kill Her!"

I WAS standing nearly knee-deep in water, which was pouring steadily into the room through the open door. Outside, the rain was still pelting down, the wind raged, the storm seemed to have reached an intensity greater than anything I had ever known. The roar of the surf was even louder than the wind.

"Stop them! Stop them!" I cried confusedly, as I saw the mummies disappear. I had not yet quite regained my normal consciousness—or, rather, it was still confused by the vanishing fragments of the dream.

The powder in the obsidian vase had burned itself out, but the pungent stench still filled the room. Neil Farrant was standing against the wall, apparently in a daze; close beside me was Coyne, and he, too, seemed to be trying to orientate himself.

"Kill her!" he cried. "Kill her!"

And then I realized that it was he who had thrust the scissors into my hand.

Kill her? The mummy? But this was a living woman whom I held in my arms, though she was wrapped in linen from the casket. Kill her? Her eyes sought Neil's and seemed unable to discern his face, for she was peering forward, as if she, too, had just come back from that infernal scene.

"Kill her! See! See!" shouted the doctor, pointing.

And then I saw the still, white form of Rita Ware upon the dais. Line for line, save for the whiter skin, the face was the duplicate of Amen-Ra's. And I remembered what Coyne had said to me, that one of the two must die.

At that moment the princess seemed to perceive Rita Ware for the first time. Suddenly, with frightful force, she disengaged herself from my arms and, snatching the scissors from my hand, she leaped at her.

It was Coyne who stopped her. The points scored red rips along his cheek. He seized the princess' hand and, with all his strength, just managed to prevent her from wreaking her hatred on the body of the living woman.

"Dewey! Dewey! The scissors! Get them! Kill her!" he cried.

THE struggle that ensued was the most awful part of the whole grisly business. I realized that Amen-Ra was no human being, but a corpse endowed with vampiric life, that the life of Rita Ware depended upon her destruction. No woman, for no woman could have exercised the diabolical strength that she put forth. No, but flesh and blood, recreated by deviltry, and animated by will without intelligence. Amen-Ra was the effigy of the princess of old time, and the real Amen-Ra was Rita Ware, lying as if dead upon the dais beside us.

Dimly I realized that if Amen-Ra succeeded in killing Rita Ware, we would have let loose a devil on earth, and that Neil Farrant's sanity, his very soul depended upon the destruction of that vampire that had arisen from the casket.

"Menes! Menes!" she shrilled. And then some words in what must have been the old Egyptian tongue, though they awakened only faint memories within me, and I did not know their meaning.

But Neil heard. He awoke. He leaped toward us, no longer Neil, but again the long-dead Menes of Egypt, and in his mind, I had no doubt, he was again fighting the palace conspirators. No, fighting me. I believe he saw me as the traitor, Seti. He came leaping forward, while Coyne and I wrestled with Amen-Ra, to keep her from plunging the deadly scissors into Rita's heart.

"Hold her a moment!" I hissed at the doctor, and turned upon Neil. I had been a pretty good boxer when I was a boy, and I dealt him a blow that dazed him and sent him staggering back against the wall.

Then I turned to Amen-Ra. Just in time, for she had wrenched the scissors away and turned upon Rita.

I caught her hand and bent it backward till I heard a bone in the wrist snap. She spat at me like a wildcat, and the nails of her left hand scored my face. And Neil was coming back to help her.

THIS time it was Coyne turned upon Neil. "Kill her! For God's sake, kill her!" he cried to me, and hurled himself at Neil—a frail old doctor against a man in the prime of life, with all his muscles and sinews toughened by the desert life, and a reserve of almost superhu-

man strength, such as comes to one who, in a trance, draws upon the hidden storehouse of his vitality. Coyne went down under a smashing blow that stretched him full length in the water that was now more than knee-deep upon the floor.

I could never fight Neil and the princess. But fate intervened. Neil, reaching forward in the swing that knocked Coyne to the floor, tripped over the fallen chair and lay prostrate. Again I wrestled with Amen-Ra. I had her by the broken wrist, but, even with the bone snapped, she was delivering frantic swings and lunges at Rita with the scissors. I flung my body in the way. The points caught in my coat—and then, by a miracle, I succeeded in wresting the weapon out of the creature's hand.

"Menes! Menes!" she wailed, and that cry was like the echoing cry of one eternally lost.

Neil had picked himself up. He roared, he came on like a madman. And what happened next was, by the grace of God, a matter of a split second's advantage.

I had the shears. I swung at Neil with my left hand, and dealt him a stinging blow in the face that halted him. I turned upon Amen-Ra, and plunged the deadly weapon straight into her heart.

The shears pierced through her body. So hard I struck that my fist collided with her breast. Blood spouted, ceased. For a moment Amen-Ra stood upright, pinned by the steel. And then it was as if all the devilishness went out of her face.

She was the young girl, the beauteous maiden whom I had seen in the casket, whom I remembered dimly, as if in a dream, to have seen in Egypt. A smile of heavenly sweetness flickered about her mouth. And then, before my eyes, she was dissolving into dust.

The weapon eased itself from the crumbling form. No mummy this—nothing but a little heap of dust that flaked down upon the dais. Of Amen-Ra, as I had seen her in the casket, no trace remained.

I CHOKED with the horror of it. I flung the scissors from me and turned to await Neil's mad onset. But Neil was standing against the wall, looking about him as if he had awakened from a dream. And Coyne was rising out of the water and coming toward me.

He gasped, he looked at the heap of dust, already covered by the oncoming stream. He ran to Rita Ware and raised her out of the water, which was lapping against her face. And I saw that her eyes were open, and she was staring confusedly about her.

Coyne carried her to a couch and laid her down. She was mumbling, still half conscious. Neil was muttering too. Coyne turned to me.

"Thank God, Dewey!" he cried. "I knew that I could trust you not to falter. That was not Amen-Ra. This girl is Amen-Ra, reborn. So long as that vampiric double of hers had lived, three souls would have remained in hell—her own, and Farrant's, and this girl's. Thank God the evil spell is ended!"

Neil Farrant came staggering toward us. "Where am I?" he muttered. "Where's all this water coming from? What happened? The experiment—it didn't work? I don't seem to—remember—but I dreamed. I dreamed I was that fellow Menes, and you two were in the dream too."

He began laughing hysterically, and then of a sudden his eyes fell upon Rita Ware. "Who is she?" he whispered hoarsely to the doctor.

"I'll tell you later, Farrant," answered Coyne. "We've got to get out of here. The water's rising

steadily. We'd best get to the sanitarium while we can make it. If there's anything that's specially liable to be damaged, and we can carry it. . . ." He looked doubtfully about him.

"The mummies are gone!" Neil shouted. "What happened to them?"

"Washed out of their caskets," answered Coyne tersely. "You took them out, you know."

"Well, good luck to them," cried Nell in high-pitched tones. "I'm about sick of them, Coyne. That magic formula was a fake, and I feel kind of—soured on them."

HE pitched forward as he spoke, but Coyne caught him and steadied him. "Take it easy, Farrant," he said. "Think you can make it? Dewey, you help me get Miss Ware away."

"Where am I, Doctor?" asked Rita faintly. And her voice was so like that of Amen-Ra that for an instant the whole picture of the dream flashed back into my mind. "I thought—they'd sent me to—your sanitarium for a rest. This isn't the sanitarium, is it?"

"No, but we're going there," replied Coyne. His lip was bleeding from Neil's blow, his clothes hung grotesquely about him, dripping water—as, indeed, did mine—and yet he was again the suave head of the institution whom I had met that night for the first time. "This gentleman and I are going to carry you," he added. "There's a high tide that has flooded us.

"No, don't try to walk. Make a seat with our hands, Dewey," he said. "You know the way?"

I assented, and together we raised the girl from the couch. The water was almost to our waists. Outside confused cries rose above the wind and the roaring of the waves. A streak of light shot into the sky.

"God, what's that?" shouted Coyne.

Neil stopped at the door. "Look out for the hawks!" he warned us.

"I guess the hawks won't trouble us any more," the doctor answered.

Neil opened the door, and a sudden, violent gust of wind almost tore it from its hinges. In an instant the room was filled with the blast, and the water came pouring in. Carrying Rita, it was as much as we could do to wade along the central rooms and again the front door. And as we reached it there came a violent hammering upon it.

Neil flung it open. We bent our faces to the blast. We struggled on by inches. A group of men were in a large boat at the entrance, two of them standing up with poles in their hands.

"Git in! Git in!" one of them shouted. "Didn't look for to see none of you folks alive. Why, it's you, Doctor! Don't you know your place is on fire? And them damn mummies is running wild all over the island!"

It was the ferryman, Old Incorruptible.

CHAPTER XI

The Oath of Horus

THERE was no need to tell us that the sanitarium was on fire, for we could see the blaze through the trees. The whole building seemed to have caught, and to be doomed. We lifted Rita Ware into the boat and struggled in after her. Coyne looked crushed.

"Reckon your folks will be saved, doctor," said Old Incorruptible. "There's a half dozen of the boats round the place, doing their best. But I'll tell you to your face, we was coming to make an end of Mr. Farrant's mummies if that fire hadn't broke out. And we ain't going to have them things running wild over Pequod Island and scaring our womenfolks and kids."

"Nonsense! Nonsense!" answered the doctor testily. But Neil said nothing. He was bending over Rita Ware, and his face appeared transfigured.

The high tide had submerged the lower half of the island. The breakers were crashing among the trees. The gale was still at its height, and even as we poled our way toward the sanitarium more trees came crashing down. But the rain was ceasing, and overhead there was a rent in the murky sky.

At the edge of the higher ground, on which the sanitarium stood, the boat grounded. We leaped out. Neil swung Rita in his arms and carried her a little way.

"You stay here with Miss Ware, Farrant," said Coyne. "Come along, Dewey!"

Boats were moving all about the buildings, and I could see that the higher ground was black with figures. The fire seemed to be burning uncontrollably, in spite of the rain, and it was evidently only a matter of an hour or so before the entire group of structures would be gutted. Coyne ran, and I followed.

One of the attendants came rushing up, and recognized the doctor. "We've got them all out safe," he babbled, "except the—the—the. . . ."

I knew what he meant. Coyne and I ran into the thick of the crowd, who were being shepherded by the hospital staff. The attendant, who had followed us, came panting up and pointed, still babbling incoherently.

On the roof of the small building that had housed Rita Ware, four wild, half-naked forms were gathered. They were chanting and gesticulating, their arms raised to the skies.

"WE can't get them!" cried a man who had joined us. "What are they? I never saw them before."

The leaping flames made the scene as bright as day. The four upon the roof, heedless of the flames that encompassed them, were leaping and dancing, and the wild chant that came from their lips was faintly audible above the roar of the wind and the pounding of the breakers.

"God, it's the doctor!" someone yelled.

And then I saw that the leader of the band was the duplicate of Coyne. Yes, Coyne in face and figure, save that he was robed in rags of linen. And I knew him. He was the astrologer of Amen-Ra's court. Back into my mind there flashed the forgotten dream, never to be effaced thereafter.

Coyne ran forward. "Nonsense!" he shouted. "I'm here! Don't you see me?"

"We've got to get them down, whoever they are," panted a little man, his face blackened with smoke, his hair scorched by the flames. "We've got all the rest out safely, but those four—I never saw them before."

"There's no chance, Sellers," answered Coyne. "It would be death to attempt it."

"But who are they? Where did they come from?" Sellers shouted.

"It's them damn mummies," yelled Old Incorruptible. "Let 'em die. We ain't going to have them frightening our womenfolks and kids. Good riddance to them!"

A hoarse shout of approval came from the assembled fishermen. And all the while a wild, whirling dance went on, while the flames roared about the four, until they stood silhouetted against a wall of leaping fire.

And suddenly the end came. There came a furious uprush of fire, the whole roof collapsed, sending up a sky-high pillar of flame. Into that fiery furnace dropped the four dead-living men. One instant they stood

clear against the flames—the next there was nothing but a raging holocaust.

Coyne turned to me, his face white, his body quivering. "That's the end, Dewey," he said. He turned to Sellers. "Get our folks down to the village in the boats," he ordered. "We'll have our hands full to-night."

I MADE my way back to where I had left Neil and Rita Ware. They were standing together in the same spot, and they seemed utterly absorbed in each other, so much so that neither saw me until I stood beside them.

"Well, everybody's safe," I said to Neil.

"That's good," he answered. "Jim, do you and Miss Ware know each other? She says she's met you somewhere. She thinks it was in Philadelphia."

"Well, it may have been in Philadelphia," I answered, though I had never been in that city.

"Jim, listen. You're my friend. What I'm going to say to you will sound crazy, but I'm through with the mummies and Egyptology for all time. You see, we're going to be married just as soon as—"

"Can we trust your friend?" asked Rita Ware, looking at me with a strange expression. "I—I've been ill, you know. A—a sort of breakdown. But I'm well now, and if you're Neil's friend. . . ."

"I hope that I shall be the friend of both of you for life," I answered. "I'm happier than I've ever been to know that this has happened."

"I know it sounds crazy," said the girl. "But, you see, we—we recognized each other the instant that we met. I don't know whether we met in this life or in some other one, but we know beyond all doubting that we just—well, we just belong."

And she turned to Neil again, and I saw that both of them had forgotten me. And that was how I wanted it to be. For I knew that the oath of Horus had brought those two souls together, three thousand years after their bodies had been sealed into their tombs. Neither water nor fire, nor my own treacherous sword had been able to sunder them.

I turned away and went back to help in the work of rescuing the inmates. And a dead weight was lifted from my heart.

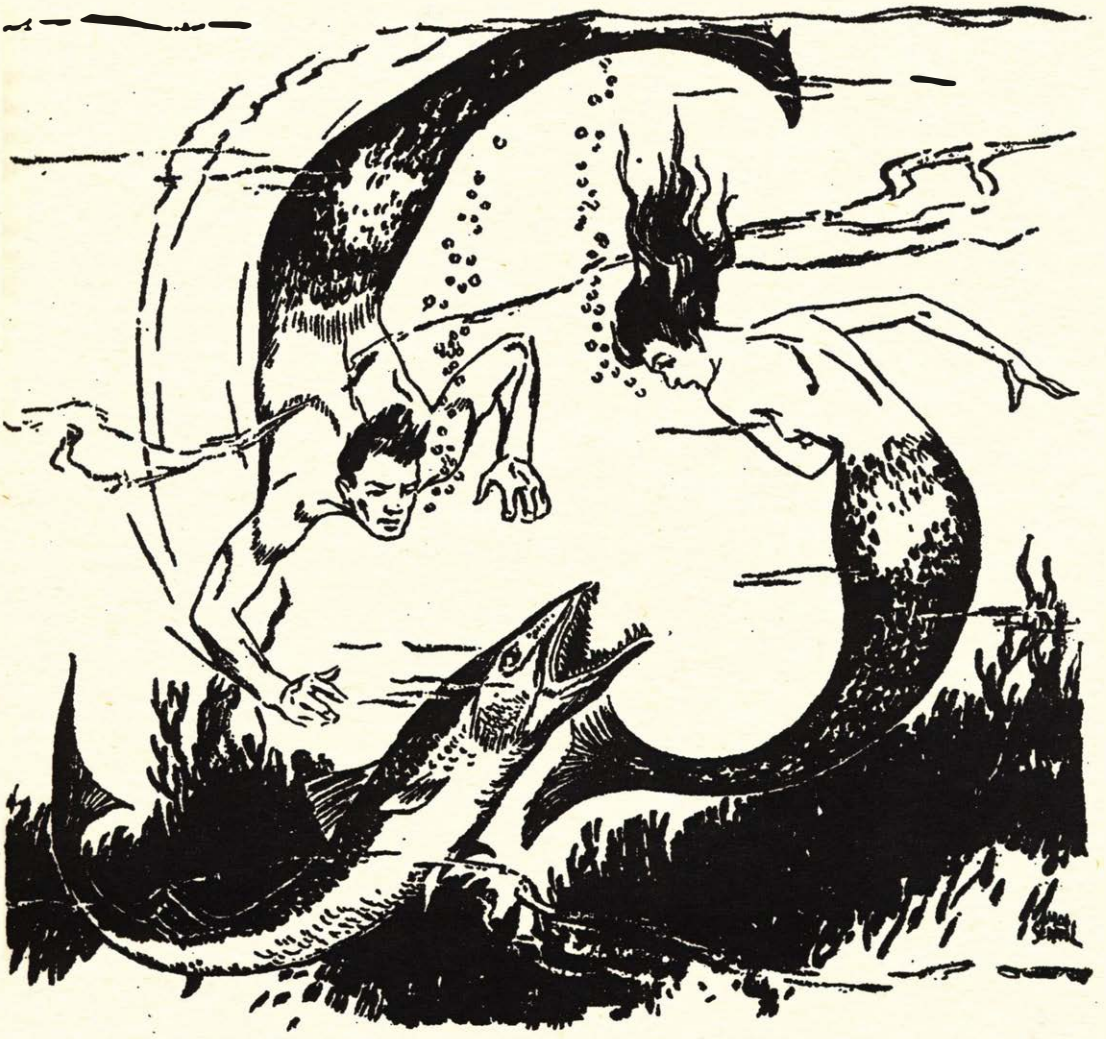
Injustice Triumphant

NOT always is virtue tri mphant and the wrongdoer punished in the folklore of nations. An example is that concerning Treryn Castle, an ancient British fortress whose Cyclopean walls and outer breastwork can still be traced. This castle is said to have been the dwelling of a famous giant and his wife, the giant being chief of a daring band which held possession of all the lands west of Penzance.

Among his following was a fine and handsome young giant who made his home in the pile of rocks upon which the Logan Rock now stands. This young fellow grew very fond of the great chief's wife, and it seems his illegal affection was returned.

As time passed and nothing ever happened to dispose of the chieftain, the young giant at last took matters into his own hands; and one day, while the giantess was reclining on the rock still known as the Giant Lady's Chair, and the good old giant was dozing in the Giant's Chair which stands near it, the young and wicked lover stole behind his chief and stabbed him in the belly with a knife. The giant fell over the rocks to the level ridge below, and there lay rapidly pouring out his life-blood. And from that spot the young murderer kicked him, still living, into the sea, where he perished in the waters.

The unjust but happy ending is that the guilty pair took possession of Treryn Castle and lived happily forever after.



She had succumbed in the direful struggle with the sea-beast.

Sea-Tiger

By Henry S. Whitehead

ARTHUR HEWITT'S first intimation of the terrific storm which struck the *Barbadian* off Hatteras, *en route* for the West Indies, was a crash which awakened him out of uneasy sleep in the narrow berth of his cabin. When he staggered up to the saloon-deck the next morning after an extremely uncomfortable, sleepless night, he looked out of the ports upon a sea which transcended anything he had ever seen. The *Barbadian*, heeling and hanging, wallowed in the trough of cross

Merman and Mermaid were they in the drowning Hewitt's revealing vision.

seas which wrenched her lofty bridge-deck.

A steward, who was having a rather difficult time keeping his feet, fetched him a sandwich and a cup of coffee. In a little while two other passengers appeared for breakfast: one a British salesman, and the other an American ship's officer, out of a professional berth and going to Antigua to help take off a sugar crop. The three men, warmed now by the coffee and the comfortable security of the lounge, snored and chattered intimately.

Nevertheless, a sinister foreboding seemed to hang over them. At last Matthews, the American, voiced it plainly:

"I hope she'll make St. Thomas! Well—I've always heard that Captain Baird knows his business; a good sailorman, they say."

"Do you think there'll be any let-up when we get into the Gulf Stream?" This was the Englishman, breaking a long, dreary silence.

"More likely a let-*down*, I'd say," replied the pessimistic Matthews. "She'll be worse, if anything, in my judgment."

This gloomy prediction justified itself the following morning. The *Barbadian* had entered the Gulf Stream, and the malevolent fury of the sea increased with daylight. Hewitt came on deck, and, leaning against the jamb of a partly opened hatch on the protected lee-side, looked out upon a world of heaving gray-green water with that feeling of awe which the sea in all its many moods invariably awakened in him. A gust of wind caught his unbuttoned coat, and out of a pocket and onto the wet, heaving deck slid the morocco-bound Testament which his mother had given him years before.

He stepped out through the hatchway, cautiously, making his way precariously across the deck to where it lay caught in the metal scupper. He arrived safely against the rail, which he gripped firmly with one hand, while he stooped to recover the book with the other. As he bent forward the tail-end of an enormous overtopping wave which had caught the vessel under her weather-quarter, caught him and raised his body like a feather over the rail's top.

But Hewitt was not cast into the sea. With a frantic, instinctive movement, he clung to the rail as his body struck violently against the ship's side.

With the *Barbadian's* righting herself he found himself hanging on like grim death, his body dangling perilously over the angry waters, the Testament clutched firmly in his other hand.

HE attempted to set his feet against one of the lower railings, to hook his legs about a stanchion. He almost succeeded, and would doubtless have been back upon the deck in safety had not the crest of the following wave dislodged his one-hand hold on the rail. The angry sea took him to itself, while the laboring ship, bounding into the teeth of the gale, bore on, all unconcerned over his sudden, unceremonious departure.

The incidents of Hewitt's life marched through his consciousness with an incredible rapidity. He remembered his mother poignantly—his mother dead these eight years—and a salt tear mingled with the vast saltiness of this cold, inhospitable ocean which had taken him to its disastrous embrace.

Down and down into the watery inferno he sank, weighted down with his winter boots and heavy overcoat. Strangely enough, he was not afraid, but he responded to the major mechanical impulses of a drowning man—the rigid holding of his breath, the desperate at-

tempts to keep his head toward the surface so as to stay the sinking process, the well-nigh mechanical prayer to God.

His lungs were bursting, it seemed! Hot pain seared him, the red pain of unendurable pressures. He must resist as long as he had consciousness. He clamped his jaws desperately together.

It was calm down here, and dark! Here was no trace of the raging tempest on the surface, that tumultuous surface of lashed fury. The water seemed constantly heavier, more opaque, a vast, pervading indigo.

The pain and the burning pressure were gone now. He seemed no longer to sink. Nor did he rise, apparently. Probably he could not exhale his breath now if he wanted to. Well, he did not want to. It was no longer cold. Here was a world of calm, of perfect peace. Drowning is an easy death, after all. . . .

He hoped the *Barbadian* would make St. Thomas. . . .

His last conscious sensation was of a gentle sinking through a vast, imponderable blueness, which seemed pervading the universe, a restful blueness to which one could yield readily. He relaxed, let himself go, with no desire to struggle. He sank and sank, it seemed. . . .

* * *

HE lay now upon a beach, his chin propped in his cupped hands, his elbows deep in the warm sand. It was from this warmth that he derived his first conscious sensation. A soft sea-wind, invigorating from its long contact with illimitable expanses of tropic seas, blew freshly. He felt very weary, and, it seemed, he had newly awakened out of a very protracted sleep. He turned his head at some slight sound and looked into the face of a girl who lay on the sand beside him.

He realized, as the march of events passed through his mind, that he must have gone through the gate of death. This, then, was that next world of which he had heard vaguely, all his life long. It was puzzling, somewhat. He was dead. He knew he must be dead. Do the dead lie on tropical beaches, under faint moonlight, and think, and feel this fresh wind from the sea? The dead, surely, do not dream. Perhaps they do dream. He had no knowledge, no experience, of course. He had read tales of after-death. Most of them, he remembered, revealed the surprise of the hero at the unexpectedness of his surroundings.

The girl touched him gently on the shoulder, and her hand was unbelievably cool and soothing. As he turned and looked at her in a kind of terror, the faint moonlight abruptly faded. Then the rim of the sun broke, red and sharp, like a blazing scimitar blade, across the horizon. The leaves of many trees stirred, welcoming the tropic day. Little monkeys swung and chattered overhead. A great flaming macaw sped, arrow-like, across the scope of his vision. The girl spoke to him:

"We must be gone to the sea."

The girl moved delicately towards the place where, near at hand, the turquoise sea lapped softly against weed-strewn boulders and freshly gleaming white sand. As he, too, induced by some compelling impulse beyond the scope of his understanding, moved instinctively to seek the refuge of the sea, he saw his companion clearly for the first time. Stupefied, incredulous, he glanced down at his own body, and saw, glistening, iridescent in the new light of fresh dawn, a great flashing, gleaming tail like that of some fabled, stupendous denizen of enchanted deeps. Then, his wonderment losing itself in a great exultation, he followed his mermaid

into the shining, welcoming waters. . . .

ON an early afternoon—for the sun was high in the heavens—he emerged from the sea into the shallows of that sandy beach where he had awakened to amphibian existence seemingly ages ago. Slowly, painfully, he dragged himself upon the warm sand. He was very weary, for he had finished an enormous swim, away from the scene of a fearful combat which he had waged with a now dimly remembered monster of the great deeps of the warm sea. His companion, who, during these long, dimly remembered eras, had been dear to him, was gone. She had succumbed in the direful struggle with the sea-beast. His heartache transcended the immediate painfulness and fatigue of his bruised and weary body.

He had had his vengeance, though. Beside her body lay that of the sea-beast, crustaceous, horrible, slain by him after a titanic struggle, mangled in the imponderable ooze. . . .

He rested at last, prone upon the yielding, sun-soaked sand. The insistent light of the glaring sun troubled him, and he moved impatiently. A vague murmur, too, was disturbingly apparent. He decided, wearily, to shift his position to the nearby shade of a palm grove. He turned over, slowly, painfully.

Then the light from the sun smote his eyes, attuned to the cool dimness of the sea-deeps, and as he moved towards the palms he raised a hand to his brow. That disquieting murmur took form abruptly, became intelligible. It seemed, somehow, to take on the familiarity of a remembered human voice. He lowered his hand, puzzled, disturbed, and found himself looking at an electric-light bulb. In its light he saw three men sitting on a leather sofa. He rose on his elbow, still painfully, for he was very weary after that dire combat, and peered at them. He now fixed his dazed stare on Matthews, who was in the middle of the row, and mumbled some incoherent words. The man seated at the end of the sofa rose hastily, and came towards him. He saw that it was Hegeman, the *Barbadian's* doctor.

"BACK awake, eh?" It was Hegeman's cheerful voice. The doctor placed a hand on Hewitt's pulse. "You'll do," he announced confidently.

Matthews was standing beside the doctor. Over Matthews' shoulder Hewitt could see, peering, the spectacled face of the salesman. Matthews was speaking:

"We were through the Gulf Stream a day ago, and the sun's out. It was a narrow squeak! Old Baird should have the Board of Trade medal for getting you. Thought you'd never come up!"

"A bit battered but right as rain, what!" The Englishman had added his word of cheer.

"You'll be on your pins in a day or two," said the doctor. "Keep still for the present." Hewitt nodded. He did not want to talk. He had too much to get settled in his mind. Those experiences! Or what seemed to be experiences, the chimeras of the unconscious mind.

"One of the stewards saw you go," added Hegeman. "Two of your teeth are chipped, where you clamped your jaws to hold your breath. Plucky thing to do. It saved your life.

Hewitt held out a heavy hand. The doctor took it and placed it gently by his side. "Go back to sleep," he ordered, and the three filed out.

* * *

DURING the remainder of the voyage Hewitt slowly recovered from the severe shock of

his long immersion in wintry sea-water. He was chiefly occupied though, with the strange history of his experience, which continued to stand out quite sharply in his mind. He could not shake off the notion that it had been, somehow, a *real* experience. Why—he could remember the details of day after day of it. He seemed to have acquired some unique knowledge of the ways of the sea's great deeps: the barely luminous darkness of animal phosphorescence; the strange monsters; the incredible cold of that world of pressure and dead ooze; the effortless motion through the water; the strange grottoes; above all, the eery austere companionship of the mer-woman and the final dreadful battle. . . . His mind was filled to overflowing with intimate details of what seemed a long, definite, regulated, amphibian life, actually lived!

There remained, permanently, even after the process of time had done its work in rendering most of the details indistinct in his mind, the desire for the sea: the overwhelming urge to go into, under, the water; to swim for incalculable distances; to lie on dim, sandy depths, the light, blue and faint, from above, among the swarming, glowing, harmless parrot-fish. And, deeper than all, in this persistent urge of consciousness, was the half-buried, basic desire to rive and tear and rend—a curious, almost inexplicable, persistent set of wholly new instincts, which disturbed his mind when he allowed himself to dwell on them. He looked forward to the first swim in the Caribbean, after landing at his port, St. Croix, in the Virgin Islands.

Fully restored to his ordinary physical vigor, he joined a swimming party on the afternoon following his arrival in Frederiksted. There had been rumors of sharks, but his hosts hastened to reassure their guests. No! Sharks were virtually negligible, anyhow. Sharks were cowardly creatures, easily frightened away from any group of swimmers. If it were a barracuda, now—that would be quite another matter. Over in Porto Rico, so report had it, there had been a case of a barracuda attacking an American school-teacher. Terribly injured—permanently, it was said. Months in the hospital, poor fellow.

But, barracuda rarely troubled the bathing beaches. Occasionally, yes, one would take the bait of one of the Negro fishermen, far out in their little boats, and then the fisherman, if he were agile, would cut his line and row, gray-faced, inshore, perhaps not to venture out again for days. They were the sea-tigers, the barracudas.

Their attack was a fiendish thing. With its eighteen-inch jaw, and its rows of rip-saw teeth, it would charge, and charge again, tearing its helpless victim to ribbons, stripping flesh from bones with relentless avidity. There was no escape, it seemed, once those lightning rushes had begun. They came in such rapid succession that unless the victim were almost on shore there was no escape. Yes, a kind Providence save us from a barracuda!

THE party, a gay one, entered the water under the declining afternoon sun. The beach here shelved steeply, four or five steps being quite enough to reach swimming depth. The water was so clear, over its white, sandy bottom, that a swimmer, floating face downward, could see bottom clearly, and count the little parrot-fish, like flashing sunbeams, as they sported about, apparently near enough to be gathered up by extending the hand; a curious, amusing delusion.

Hewitt swam easily, lazily, revelling with satisfaction in the stimulating clear water which in these latitudes is like a sustained caress to the body.

He had never felt so much at ease in the water before. It seemed, however, quite natural to him now. It fitted, precisely, into what had grown to be his expectations during the past few days on the ship. It was as though latent, untried powers deep within him had been stimulated and released by the strange, mental experience he had undergone during those few hours of his unconsciousness. He dived deeply, and all the processes involved—the holding of the breath, the adjustment of muscular actions and reactions, the motions of underwater swimming—were as natural and effortless as though he had been, he told himself musingly, really amphibious.

Unnoticed by him, the remainder of the swimming party, only about half of whom he had met, retired to the beach and spread themselves in little sociable groups along the sandy edge. A few lingered in the shallows.

HE was floating on his back, the little waves of that calm sea lapping against his cheeks when he heard faintly the terrified, cutting scream of a girl. He treaded water, and looked towards the beach, where he saw the various members of the large party rushing towards a young girl whom he had not especially noticed before. The girl was one of those who had remained in the shallows, and as he looked he saw many hands extended towards her, and drawing her upon the sand, and he saw, too, a pinkish froth of fresh blood about the place from which she had emerged.

Something seemed to snap inside his brain. That terrible, atavistic, inexplicable sense of combat, the desire to rend and tear suffused him. In the grip of this strange, primitive, savage urge, he turned abruptly and dived straight down to where a flickering gray shadow passed; to where an enormous barracuda slowed to turn for its lightning rush at its second victim. Hewitt sped down like a plummet, exulting. . . .

A moment later the attention of the group on the beach was distracted from the young girl whose foot had been cruelly gashed by the sea-tiger's teeth, to a seething, foaming, writhing thing that rose from the calm surface of the sea a hundred feet out from the beach, struggled furiously on the lashed surface for a few seconds, and then as abruptly disappeared in a tortured mass of foam. A sunburned young Navy doctor went on binding up the girl's foot, but the rest, wonder-stricken, silent, scanned the surface eagerly for another glimpse of this strange, titanic combat. "What is it?" "What can it be?" The questions ran from mouth to mouth.

The barracuda rose again, this time within twenty feet of the beach, and Hewitt lay locked along the steel-gray back, his hands closed in a viselike grip about the terrible jaws, his tensed muscles corded with the fearful strain. Over and over, sidewise, backwards, forward, moved fish and man as one, locked together in dives and turns and dashes so swift as to baffle the gaping eyes of the amazed onlookers, standing now in a wondering, intrigued row upon the edge of the sand. And always, with great, powerful lunges of feet and sweeps of elbows and hand and knees, now above, now beneath, but ever unrelaxed in that deadly grip, on the frothing surface or in the quiet depths, Hewitt forced his demon antagonist towards the beach.

IN the course of their fourth emergence, the two, rolling over and over upon the bottom sand of the shore shallows, shot out upon the beach, and Hewitt, finding his feet, with a great wrench, raised the sea-tiger in his hands and with a great sweeping motion which bent the iron-like head and its cruel jaws towards the rigid, mackerel-like tail, cracked the giant killer's backbone, and flung the barracuda down on the sand where it lay, crushed and broken, writhing out its life in convulsive leaps.

Hewitt took several deep, restoring breaths, and the killing-lust passed from him, the strange urge satisfied by his successful struggle. The members of the swimming party slowly gathered about him. There was, it appeared, nothing much to say. One of the men cautiously rolled over the crushed barracuda with a tentative foot. Hewitt raised his eyes and looked towards the young girl, who was now standing lightly on the bandaged foot, supported by the Navy doctor.

She looked back at Hewitt, and there was a great wonder in her sea-blue eyes. The fresh wind moved her coppery hair, now released from the rubber bathing-cap.

Oblivious of the chorus of admiration and bewilderment of the rest of the swimming party, Hewitt gazed at her, awed, overcome, feeling suddenly weak. For—wonder of wonders!—leaning on the arm of the solicitous young doctor, there stood before him the perfect embodiment of his sea companion, that strange, alluring, product of his recent subconscious experience, his extraordinary dream.

He drew several long breaths, to steady himself. Now the remarks of the swimmers began to break through his dazed consciousness, and he came to himself. He stepped towards the injured girl, fumbling in his rapidly clearing mind for some suitable expression of sympathy. . . .

Abruptly the members of the swimming party fell silent, realizing that they stood here in the presence of some inexplicable drama; of something subtle and vague, but something unmistakably finished, appropriate.

"I hope you were not hurt very badly," was all that Hewitt could manage.

The girl answered him not a word but looked steadily into his face, and Hewitt knew that here was the beginning of his real life.

Statement of the ownership, management, circulation, etc., required by the Act of Congress of August 24, 1912, of Strange Tales of Mystery and Terror, published bi-monthly at New York, N. Y., for April 1, 1932. State of New York, County of New York, ss. Before me, a Notary Public in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared Edwin F. Borden, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the Business Manager of the Strange Tales of Mystery and Terror and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management (and if a daily paper, the circulation), etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, embodied in section 411, Postal Laws and Regulations, printed on the reverse of this form, to wit: 1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are: Publisher, W. M. Clayton, 155 E. 44th St., New York, N. Y.; Editor, Harry Bates, 155 E. 44th St., New York, N. Y.; Managing Editor, None; Business Manager, Edwin F. Borden, 155 E. 44th St., New York, N. Y. 2. That the owner is: (If owned by a corporation, its name and address must be stated and also immediately thereunder the names and addresses of stockholders owning or holding one per cent or more of total amount of stock. If not owned by a corporation, the names and addresses of the individual owners must be given. If owned by a firm, company, or other unincorporated concern, its name and address, as well as those of each individual member, must be given.) The Clayton Magazines, Inc., 155 E. 44th St., New York, N. Y., W. M. Clayton, 155 E. 44th St., New York, N. Y., Nathan Goldmann, 80 Lafayette St., New York, N. Y. 3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: (If there are none, so state.) None. 4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner; and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest direct or indirect in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him. Edwin F. Borden, Business Manager. Sworn to and subscribed before me this 25th day of March, 1932. Eugene A. Boast. (My commission expires March 30, 1933.)

The Dead Walk Softly

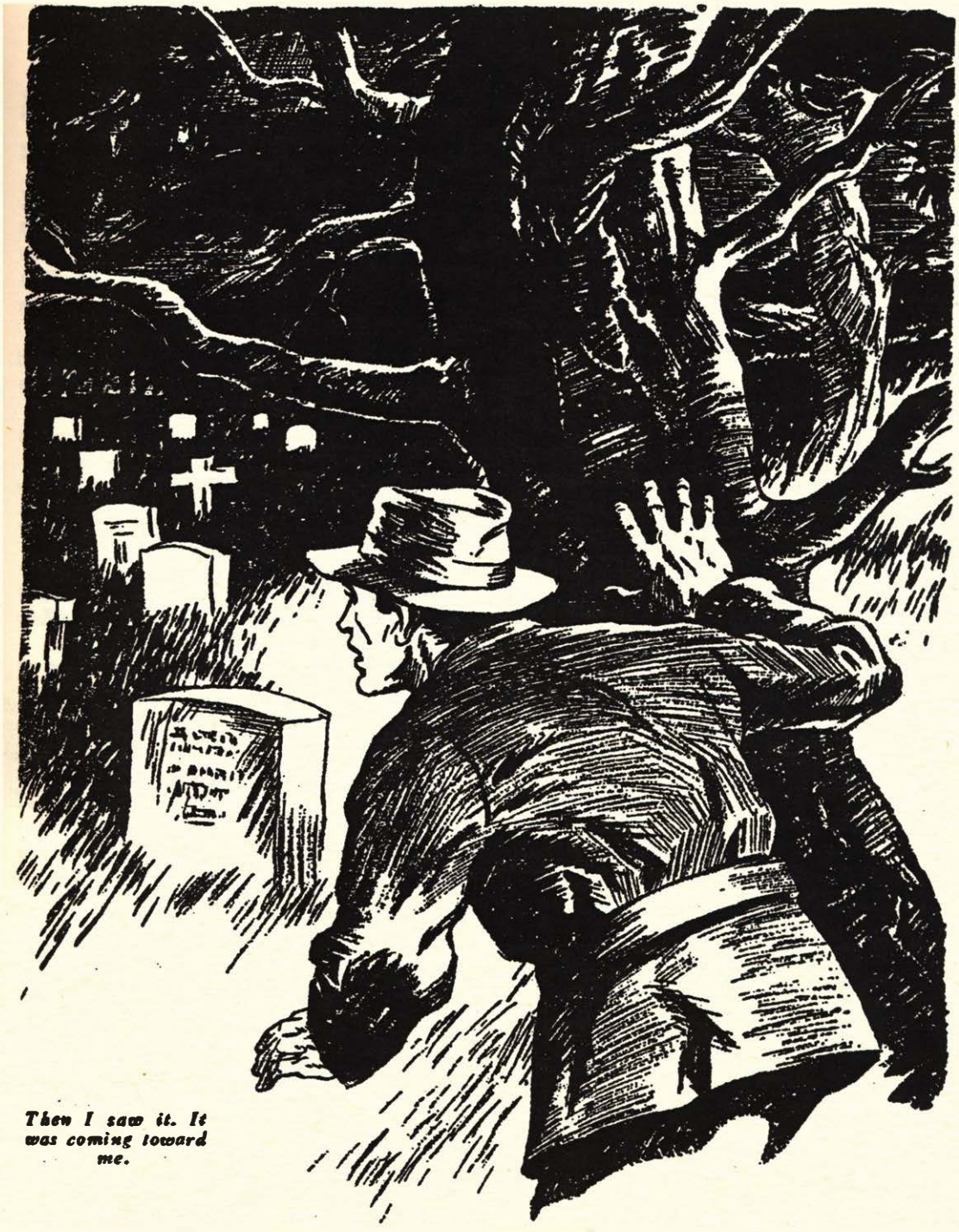
By Sewell Peaslee Wright

I DO not like strange beds. This was a very comfortable one, but it was not the simple, modernistic bed in my own rather austere bachelor apartment at home.

Set at an angle in one corner of the room, the two windows, one in the side of the house, facing the Atlantic, and the other in the end of the house, were too far away to give me the rush of fresh air to which I was accustomed. Brooke's summer place had been built, I remembered, in the days when night air was supposed to carry all manner of ills. However, I was weary from a hard day's drive, and it was a matter of but a few minutes before I was asleep.

Icy with fear Jordan waits 'mid the gravestones — waits for he knows not what.

But I do not



Then I saw it. It was coming toward me.

sleep well in a strange bed. I awakened presently and glanced at my wrist watch. It was twenty minutes of one by the green-glowing dial. I had been asleep but little more than an hour, and I felt uncomfortably wide awake.

Propping myself on one arm, I searched on the table beside the bed for cigarettes and matches. I have a bad habit of smoking in the middle of the night when I am restless, but even this small favor was to be denied me that night, for I

could see, by the faint haze of moonlight from the windows, that the necessary articles were not there. Only the change, the keys, and the bill-fold I had placed there before retiring. My cigarettes I had tucked in a shirt pocket, I remembered all too well, now.

For a moment I considered the possibility of getting up and securing the cigarettes, but remembering how loudly the old floor creaked, I decided not to disturb the household with my foolishness, and closed my eyes with the fixed determination to get back to sleep in the shortest possible time.

I suppose everyone has had the experience of trying to force himself to sleep. It isn't much of a success. I lay there with my brain damnably alert, and free from every vestige of sleepiness.

It was close in the room. Terribly close. These old houses. . . . Firmly, I began counting sheep.

I HAD hopelessly counted the eighty-seventh sheep when I heard the latch on my door click softly. Instantly I opened my eyes and swung both feet to the floor.

"Brooke?" I asked quickly. There was no answer.

"Hello! Who's there?" Someone, I knew, had just closed that door. If it were not Brooke, then—

Hastily, I glanced at the little table beside the bed.

My bill-fold was gone!

I ran across the room, the old boards fairly shrieking beneath my feet. There was no one in the living room which had been an old New England formal parlor, and no one in the kitchen when I looked there. Nor was there anyone in sight outside, when I flung open the front door and looked around the moonlit, peaceful yard, with its old-fashioned flowers, closed and drooping sleepily on their stalks.

But there was a commotion now in the chambers over my head, and Brooke's voice was anxiously calling my name:

"Tom! What's the matter? What's up?" I heard his bare feet pattering down the stairs, and in a moment he had joined me in the kitchen.

"Sorry," I said, as calmly as I could. "We've had a visitor."

"A visitor?"

"A professional visitor," I nodded. "Lifted my roll, I imagine he'd put it."

"A—burglar?" asked Brooke.

"Right. But he's gone, so let's forget it."

"Hardly that," said my host. "How did you happen to discover your loss. Did he wake you up?"

"No; that's the odd—" I broke off suddenly, staring at Brooke, I imagine, as though I'd never seen him before.

WHY, I'd been *awake* when the money was taken! Wide awake as I have ever been in my life. I knew, positively, that I had seen the bill-fold there on the table when I searched for cigarettes. No possible doubt about that. And yet. . . .

"What's the matter, Tom?" asked Brooke hastily. "What are you thinking about?"

"You'll say I've been dreaming," I replied gravely, "but I'll swear there's something strange about this. I woke up, and looked for a cigarette on the little table beside the bed. There were none there; I'd left them in my shirt pocket—but my bill-fold was on the table then. I saw it as plainly as I see you.

"Then I closed my eyes and tried to go to sleep. Couldn't, however—you know how it is, sometimes. Then I heard the door shut, and I jumped out of bed. There was no one in the room, and—the money was gone."

"Came right into the room while you were awake, eh?" said Brooke. "Pity you didn't happen to open your eyes and grab him."

"Yes," I said, not looking at Brooke now. "But have you ever noticed how the floor creaks in that room of mine? A cat couldn't have crossed it without attracting my attention; not in that silence."

"But—but what—what do you mean?" stammered Brooke. "If you didn't drop off—"

"I know I didn't," I interrupted almost grimly.

"Then how could a man have walked across the room without your knowing it?"

"He couldn't," I said flatly.

"Ah!" said an eerie voice from the closed stairway. *"But the dead walk softly!"*

WE whirled, startled and frightened, toward the source of the voice. There in the stairway, holding an old gray bathrobe around her thin body, was Aunt Nettie, nodding at us wisely.

"What are you doing here?" asked Brooke sharply, glaring at his housekeeper. "And what made you say that?"

"I thought you might be needin' of me, what with all these goin's on all hours of the night," she replied crisply. "I didn't know but what the house was afire."

"And what made you say—what you did?"

"I heard what Mr. Jordan was tellin' you,' and it just popped out natural-like. You 'member what happened to young David Pierce, don't you? And what the poor dear girl who was with him said? The gun dropped to the ground—without her bein' able to see the hand that dropped it—and the only track they could find for all their lookin' and searchin' was not so deep as a baby would 'a' made, and a naked foot, at that! The dead do walk softly, when they walk, Mr. Gregory!"

"Nonsense!" snapped Brooke, in the harshest voice I had ever heard him use. "We'll excuse you now, Aunt Nettie. Tell Mrs. Gregory there's nothing to be alarmed about; Mr. Jordan merely had a nightmare. Understand?"

"Sure, Mr. Gregory," she said, nodding, her dark eyes searching my face. "A nightmare, was it?" And still nodding, she slipped silently up the stairs.

"Odd creature," commented Brooke. "Full of an old woman's superstitious ideas. Startled me, though, when she chimed in so unexpectedly." He drew his hand across his forehead, which I could see was beaded with perspiration. And the night was cool. "I guess we'd best forget it until morning; there seems to be nothing to be done just now, eh?"

"Right. Sorry to have disturbed you. I was a bit startled myself. Run along and forget it. See you in the morning.

I WENT back to my room, and lit the lamp. It seemed to me there was a strange, unpleasant odor hanging in the air—probably the smell of the clam-flats at low tide. I got out my cigarettes, and carefully examined both the windows. They were my only hope. But the screens were firmly in place, and undisturbed. Whoever—or whatever—had taken my billfold, had come and left through the door. And the boards of the floor had not creaked!

I do not feel ashamed to say that old Aunt Nettie's words kept coming back to me, sending icy tricklings along my spine, and that I spent the remainder of the night in an old splint-bottomed rocker beside the window through which the moonlight came, smoking one cigarette after another, and think-

ing, thinking, until daylight came and the mist began to lift from the ocean before me.

Brooke came down early and invited me for a swim. It was just what I needed, and I accepted the invitation with alacrity.

"Who was this David Pierce your housekeeper mentioned last night?" I asked as we walked down the steep, crooked path to the shore. "And what about this business of a gun that dropped from an invisible hand, or something of the sort?"

Brooke looked out across the gray Atlantic, just beginning to glow with the light of the morning sun.

"It's a local mystery," he said slowly. "You remember meeting Colchester, the poet, yesterday?"

"Surely," I nodded. Immediately after my arrival, Brooke and Irene, his wife, had taken me for a stroll along the shore. We had run into the man Brooke had mentioned: a powerfully built man with a great mane of white hair, and a short beard of iron gray.

COLCHESTER was not a man easily forgotten. His deep-set eyes were blue and most electrically brilliant; his mouth generous and very expressive. Only in the height of his forehead and the length of the wavy white locks which framed his face, was there the suggestion of the poet.

"Well," said Brooke, "this chap Pierce was the man to whom Colchester's daughter, Marie, was engaged. Young fellow from the village, here; owned a store, and was doing quite well.

"Marie isn't a particularly attractive girl, and I fancy she hasn't had many suitors. The old man objected to the proposed match, but Marie finally told him she was going to marry young Pierce whether or not. Marie has money of her own—I'm not sure, but I think most, if not all, of the Colchester money is in her name. Probably that was one very good reason why Colchester opposed the match. The poetry business isn't a particularly profitable one, from what I hear."

We paused by the edge of the water, and Brooke glanced at me with a peculiar look in his eyes.

"The rest of the story is hard to believe," he commented, "but this is the way it goes: the night before the wedding, Colchester went to town, leaving the two turtle doves to coo. Marie and young Pierce were in the garden, according to her story, seated on a stone bench overlooking the ocean, when suddenly, without the least warning, there was the crash of a revolver, and Pierce sagged forward. Marie caught him in her arms, instinctively glancing back into the young firs which grow in a little semicircle behind the bench.

"She says she saw the gun—an old revolver made thirty years ago—fall to the ground, and saw the branches of the firs switch back into place. But—that was all. And the moon was shining brightly."

"Pierce was dead?"

"A bullet through the brain," nodded Brooke.

"You think . . . it couldn't have been . . .?"

"Colchester? No. Couldn't imagine him in that rôle, and besides, he was in town when it happened. That was proved beyond doubt."

"Any footprints, or anything like that?"

"No." Brooke laughed queerly, it seemed to me, and gazed down reflectively at the sand. "They found powder-stains on the fronds of one of the firs, proving that Marie's story as to where the shooting had occurred was true. But although the ground all around was damp sand, wet by a rain the forenoon before, there was no trace of foot-

prints. Except"—and again Brooke laughed that queer, apologetic laugh—"that one man swore he found a very faint imprint, just where the killer must have stood to fire the fatal shot. But the impression he claimed to see was of a *naked foot!*" He turned abruptly, and waded out into the surf. "Let's swim," he said. "Breakfast'll be ready in a few minutes."

BREAKFAST was ready and waiting by the time we finished our swim and changed into presentable costumes.

Brooke had apparently convinced Irene that the adventure of the night before was no more than a nightmare, for she mentioned the matter only once, and then lightly.

"Lots of news in the paper this morning," she said when the meal was finished.

"There were two robberies in the village; two tourists were the victims. One lost nearly two hundred dollars, and the other over three hundred, and jewels valued at nearly fifteen hundred dollars. Then—"

"Nothing strange about that, dear," chuckled Brooke, with a swift, warning glance in my direction. "Robbing tourists is a legitimate business around here."

"This is no joking matter," protested Irene seriously. "The other story is even stranger. You remember we were reading the other day of the very wealthy Mrs. What's-her-name, who has that huge summer place near the old lighthouse, and who is entertaining Madame Lombard, the famous spiritualistic medium? Well, they had a seance last night, and right in the middle of it—but wait; I'll read the newspaper account to you."

She left the table and picked up the paper. Brooke and I stared at each other uncomfortably as we waited for her to find the item she had mentioned.

"Here it is; listen!

"'The medium, Madame Lombard, had already passed into the trance state, and was under the influence of her control, when one of the women of the party, aroused by a peculiar and exceedingly disagreeable odor, looked up and screamed. Instantly there was pandemonium, for each of the ten persons present is prepared to swear that there was a ghostly figure in the room. "It was the figure of a man," one of the guests revealed to a reporter from the *Express*. "The room was dimly lighted, but we could see the ghastly figure very plainly. He was about medium height, with long, snaky-looking hair hanging down his cheeks. He was utterly unclothed, and I distinctly saw the face of a big grandfather's clock through his body. The figure was as transparent as a clear jelly."

"'Police are working on a theory they refused to divulge, in an effort to recover the jewelry the ghostly figure tore from the necks and fingers of the shrieking guests, all of whom were women. The touch of the strange being was said to be cold and clammy; several women fainted at the contact and were so much affected they are still under the care of Dr. Bell.'"

Irene folded the paper.

"The thief, whoever or whatever you wish to call it, took over thirty thousand dollars' worth of jewels, the headline says. It's rather serious—and very odd, isn't it?"

A SUDDEN crunch of gravel by the door interrupted the conversation before either of us

could reply. We all turned, and rose quickly. Framed in the doorway was one of the most beautiful young women I have ever seen—and a bachelor of my age, reasonably presentable and not without a fair share of the world's goods, generally has many opportunities to meet charming young women.

"Why, Anita! What a wonderful surprise!" Irene was at the door instantly. "But, dear! You're ill!"

It was certainly true that the young woman appeared to have recently experienced a grave illness. Her eyes were sunken and darkly circled; her lips were pale and moved in an uncertain smile.

"I—I know it," she said in a beautiful low voice. She glanced at me as she entered, and hesitated. "Oh!" she exclaimed softly. "I—I wouldn't have come if I'd known—"

"Don't be absurd!" said Irene firmly. "Anita, this is a very old and very dear friend of ours, Tom Jordan. Tom, you've heard us speak of Anita Claymore, the artist?"

I had; they had raved about her, and now I understood why. She was beautiful, exquisite, despite the ravages of some terrible, recent experience.

The usual introductory remarks over, Anita turned to Irene. Her lips were trembling, and there was a haunted look about her eyes.

"You're the only friend I have here, Irene," she said. "I guess that's why I've come to you with my troubles. I don't know what's happened to me.

"Yesterday I felt wonderfully well and full of ambition; I worked like a demon, as I always do when I'm happy. I even resented stopping work long enough to be civil to Mr. Colchester, when he happened by where I was working, down on the shore. He stayed some time, and kept me from my work so long I didn't feel like starting in again."

SHE paused, and frowned, as though trying to bring something to her memory.

"I picked up my things and went back to the house. I ate my evening meal, and fussed around the garden for a time, until it grew too dark to work. And—and after that I don't seem to remember what happened.

"I have a vague recollection of driving through the darkness . . . driving. . . . And then I must have come home, for I awoke in bed, utterly exhausted, so weak I could hardly move. And when I looked in my mirror—oh, I must have had some terrible nightmare. But it has me worried, awfully upset. I look so ghastly!"

"You were ill, of course," said Irene quickly. "What's more, you still are. And I'm going to drive you home this minute and put you in bed."

Anita protested, but Irene usually has her own way. In a very short time the two girls were whirring down the lane in Brooke's car.

"Well," said Brooke with a gruffness which poorly concealed his real feelings, "what do you make of it, Tom?"

"Of what?"

"Don't spar!" Brooke whipped out a cigarette and lit it with nervous quickness, tossing me the pack. "Let's talk fast while Irene is out of hearing."

"I don't know what to think," I said as I drew deeply on my own cigarette. "But—something's in the wind, Brooke. Something damnably strange."

"In the wind?" repeated Brooke savagely, pulling on his cigarette until it glowed. "You're right there's something in the wind. In the night wind. And something damnably strange, as you say. The question is: what are we going to do about it?"

"Is there any need to do anything? We've had our visit—"

"We've had one visit. We could have another. And only God knows what might happen a second time. Young Pierce . . . Anita . . . it isn't only money and jewels, Tom!"

"What? You're going back and linking the murder with—with these other things?"

"You remember the story I told you?" asked Brooke queerly. "A nearly invisible *thing* that could carry away a bill-fold or thirty thousand dollars' worth of jewels could also—pull the trigger of a revolver."

"But, good God, man—"

Brooke held up his hand.

"Wrong answer, Tom," he said solemnly. "We're dealing with quite a different Power."

I STARED at Brooke, my heart thumping suddenly against my ribs.

"What are you trying to say?" I asked.

"I'm not sure, Tom. But there are a great many things modern science can't explain. Some of the old tales, the old superstitions, have endured too long to be utterly without foundation."

"You don't believe in—in ghosts?"

"No; no more than those women who had their jewels snatched from them by a *thing* which emitted an evil odor, a *thing* through which they could see as through a jelly; a thing with a cold, damp touch which sent women into hysterics. No more than young Pierce. And no more than you, who told me *something* came across a floor that would squeak under the tread of even a child, while you lay in bed awake, in the silence of the night, and yet heard no sound."

"True," I muttered. "True. And you think there's more to come?"

"I don't know. But I believe it's a possibility, and a dangerous possibility. You saw Anita. What happened to her?"

"Something ghastly. But who—or what," I cried desperately, thinking of the cruel lines on Anita Claymore's face, "is back of all this?"

Brooke's eyes narrowed thoughtfully.

"Now you're asking a question I can't answer. But I do believe this: the old graveyard up the road is concerned in the ugly business somehow."

"What?"

Brooke nodded.

"You've seen it; we drove by it yesterday afternoon, bringing you in. Remember it?"

I NODDED. It was a weed-grown, forgotten old cemetery, with a decayed picket fence, and leaning, neglected headstones—one of the hundreds to be found in New England.

"There are strange stories afoot about that cemetery," continued Brooke. "I'm not a superstitious man, but I think I wouldn't care to live where Colchester does, almost on the edge of the dismal place. Aunt Net knows all the gossip, of course, and she swears that lately more than one person has seen strange figures roaming there."

"White-sheeted ghosts! Good Lord, man, every old cemetery has stories like that clustering about it!"

"No." Brooke shook his head doggedly. "Not white-sheeted ghosts. That's the peculiar part of it. These are the figures of naked men—and their bodies are transparent. Like a clear jelly!"

I thought of the newspaper account Irene had read to us, and I'll confess a little icy trickle ran down my spine. Brooke was in such deadly earnest!

"Even admitting that," I said, "what's to be done about it?"

"We'll have to find out," replied Brooke. "We'll have to know more, first. But the old graveyard's our starting place."

"Starting place?" I echoed blankly.

"Right," nodded Brooke grimly. "We'll keep watch there and see—what we shall see. One there, the other here, to make sure nothing happens. . . ."

"To Irene," I finished as he hesitated, hating to put the thought into words.

"To Irene." He nodded again, a haunted look in his eyes. "Oh, I feel like taking her away, sending her away, before something happens. Do you believe in premonitions, Tom?"

"I've had many hunches come true."

"Hunches, premonitions — call them what you will. I believe in them. Always have. And I'm worried about Irene."

"Then why don't you take her away, as you suggested?"

"She wouldn't go," groaned Brooke. "She's a proud-spirited little thing, Tom; a thoroughbred. I'd have to give her some reason, you see. She wouldn't run from danger; I couldn't make her."

"True, she's a game little thing, Brooke. And here she comes now."

I GLANCED through the open door, through which came the pinging sound of plump tires on rough gravel.

"How'll we arrange things?" I added.

"You'll help?"

"Of course; anything you say goes with me, Brooke."

"Then you watch in the cemetery to-night. We'll turn in early; and as soon as possible, get out of the house and stroll up that way. Be as quiet as you can, and don't show yourself. You're not afraid?"

"I'm not crazy about the idea of spending a night in a dew-drenched cemetery, but I'm not afraid of ha'nts, if that's what you mean."

"Good. And keep your eyes open, Tom. Don't take any chances. We're up against something, if I'm guessing right, that one man can't lick." Then, as Irene's shadow fell across the threshold, "Sure, I'll take you for a spin in the old tub," he said carelessly. "Back so soon, dear? How's Anita?"

"In bed," said Irene, studying us with suspicious eyes. "What have you two been talking about?"

"About going for a trip down the bay," lied Brooke easily. "All set?"

"I'll stay home and housekeep, if you don't mind," decided Irene. "Aunt Net and I have some work planned. Riddin' up after two men, as she says, is a big job. You two run along; I'll go with you some other time." She seemed to have her mind made up, so Brooke and I did not debate the matter with her.

We cruised around rather aimlessly until nearly noon, almost silently taking in the many beauties of the lower bay. Now and then Brooke pointed out some spot of interest or particular charm, or gave to an island or headland its proper name; that was about all. Neither of us was in a conversational mood.

Irene had lunch ready when we returned.

"You're fortunate to have anything at all to eat," said Irene. "I've been pestered with visitors. Some of Aunt Net's relatives drove by in their brand-new car, and wanted her to take a spin, so of course I told her to go. Then Mr. Colchester strolled up from the shore to present me with that volume of his things he promised us. Just after Aunt Net returned, Anita, the thoughtful darling, sent Mrs. Witt over to tell me she was

feeling very much better, and not to worry. It's been a hectic forenoon; it's a wonder I accomplished anything."

"You should have come with us," said Brooke. He was studying Irene with puzzled worried eyes. "What's the matter, dear?" he added gently. "You look tired. You're not worrying about that—that silly business you were talking of this morning?"

"No," said Irene hastily, turning away. "I feel fine, Brooke, really. Just a bit upset about Anita, I guess."

"Of course," nodded Brooke. "But she's better, you said. Don't worry any more."

He dropped the subject there, but his eyes seldom left her face during the entire meal, and the worried look deepened in his eyes.

AT the corner of the graveyard, I paused, seeking a gap in the gray palings. With the dew-drenched weeds clinging to my ankles, I left the road, bent low to pass under the top rail of the fence, and strained my eyes to locate some point of vantage.

A few feet away, a dim, unused path led, between a double row of graves, back toward the center of the cemetery. Picking my way as carefully and quietly as possible, I soon found myself at the spot I had selected for my vigil: a family lot, guarded by an ornamental iron fence of which only the vestiges now remained, and marked by four bushy cedars, one on each corner of the lot. I had dropped safely to the ground, close to one of these concealing treetrunks, when the moon freed itself from the clouds, which had obscured it, and sailed, brilliant and serene, over the distant bay.

Making sure I was in deep shadow, I carefully looked around, studying my surroundings.

All around me were these silent records of men and women who had lived and had died, and who had found their last resting place in this patch of forgotten earth. Fat stones, thin stones, some black, and some nearly white, all of them leaning as though ready to fall back upon the earth from which they had come, as those whose resting place they marked had been received into the receptacle of all earthly things.

Somewhere a night bird shrieked raucously, like a rusty hinge swinging in the wind; the sound startled me so that I barely suppressed a cry. It seemed to me the very earth gave up a faint but distinguishable miasmatic stench, the musty and horrible aroma of decay. My lungs were filled with it; it was mounting dizzily to my brain.

COLDLY, bringing all my logic to bear, I told myself I must snap out of it. But I kept thinking: "For dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." Around me, beneath this fecund sod, was no more than dust. Dust. No more. These reeling stones, with their pools of curdled shadow at their feet, were but slabs of granite and marble, quarried from the earth and marked with the chisel. This ground should be feared less than other spots, for this had been consecrated: it was God's acre.

But with terror rising in my soul, I realized cold logic and reasoning were availing me nothing. There was something in the air; something more than the fetid odor of decay which assailed my nostrils, something more than the gentle rustling of the black, shadowy fronds above my head. All about me was something malignant . . . full of enmity. . . .

Shivering, my hands shaking, I slowly rose to my feet.

I looked around, cursing myself

for a fool. The cold sweat of terror prickled my forehead, and my hands, pressed behind me against the rough bark of the cedar, shook as with an ague.

The odor of death, which I had noted before, was even stronger now. It seemed to be coming down the wind. And the wind was blowing from behind me.

I had an insane, an almost irresistible desire to turn, but my pride would not permit. I might be a fool, but not so great a fool as that.

And now another cause for fear was added to my burden. A black cloud slid across the moon, and darkness closed in upon the pitiful relics around me—and as it did so, I heard a soft whispering sound, as of feet treading very softly upon drenched grass.

With a gasp I turned, pride and will-power deserting me. Face to face with the wind, the reek of decay struck me with almost tangible force. Shaking like the fronds of the cedar above me, I moved slowly around the trunk of the tree, my eyes, wide with fear, searching the darkness.

Then I saw it. It was coming toward me. The cloud over the moon was thinning; I could distinctly see the rank grass bending beneath its feet!

I SAY *it*, for though this thing bore the shape and form of a man, it was not human. It came swiftly, a naked figure with long, gnarled arms and gaunt legs knotted with stringy muscle. Its hands were held out toward me, the long fingers working, twitching like talons, hungry for my throat.

A shriek of pure terror stuck in my dry throat as I started to run. This thing was a peril to my sanity, to my life. It was not of earth, for despite its human form, my eyes could pierce its body *like a jelly!*

A dozen great leaps, spurred by fear, and I almost reached the fence. Somehow, I felt that if I could only escape from this spot of moldering stones and rank weeds which fed upon the dead, I would be safe. I would breathe the fresh air from the ocean, feel clean earth beneath my feet—be free!

A trailing briar twined around my legs, throwing me off balance. I gasped and tried to save myself from falling, but too late. I crashed solidly to earth, glancing over my shoulder as I did so.

The thing was upon me! It was running with outstretched arms, head bent forward eagerly. Its eyes were smudges of smoky blue fire, its mouth a black and toothless shadow. As it threw itself upon me, I leaped up, beating at it with both fists, my breath coming in great gasps which seemed to tear my throat.

The touch of it was cold and slimy, like thin wet rubber. The smell of death and decay emanated from it nauseatingly. And it gibbered in obscene whispers as it fought.

Back and forth we raged, stumbling over sunken graves, jostling against headstones, tripping in the long, clinging grass, drenched and slippery with dew. Then, suddenly, the thing reached down, and swept up a long, sharp sliver of black stone, a portion of a fallen headstone, cracked by the frost. I cried out again, and tried to leap away, but the thing was after me like a flash.

The heavy stone crashed against my head just above the ear, and the universe shattered in a blast of sound and jagged blue flame.

SOMETHING cold was patting my face. Something cold, gratefully cold. My head was afire, swollen with fire and pain.

For a moment, as I opened my

eyes, I did not remember what had happened. There was a face bending over mine: a woman's face, pitying, marked with deep lines of suffering. She was patting my forehead with a handkerchief wet, I gathered, in the dew.

The whole thing came back to me as I saw where I was, and I jerked to a sitting position, despite the girl's cry of protest.

"Who are you?" I asked sharply. "And what are you doing here?" I looked around fearfully as I spoke, dreading what I might see. Beside me was the long fragment of stone; there was no other evidence, save my thumping head, of my ghastly visitor.

"I am Marie Colchester." Despite the unwarranted sharpness of my questioning, there was no resentment in the girl's voice. She spoke in a low, dreary monotone, her lips barely moving, her face never altering its expression. "I heard you shout, and came to see if I could help. We live at the other end of the cemetery; almost adjacent to it."

"I beg your pardon, Miss Colchester," I said quickly, "for speaking as I did. I—I have just been through an unnerving experience. How—how long was I unconscious?"

"I should say about ten minutes. And no apology is necessary; I understand. Do you live near?"

"Quite near; I'm visiting the Gregorys."

"Oh. Then you're Mr. Jordan. Father mentioned you."

"Right!" I managed to get to my feet, shaking my head fiercely in an effort to stop its spinning. "You have been very kind to a stranger, Miss Colchester; may I see you safely home?"

"No; that's not necessary." For the first time I glimpsed a sign of emotion in her sunken, lusterless eyes. For some reason I could not fathom, she was afraid to have me come to her home. "But if you think you're able to make your own way back, I must be leaving you. Father might come home—" She stopped short, and turned swiftly away. "Good night, Mr. Jordan," she added jerkily, and with bowed head made her way toward the dark, invisible house.

I STARED after her until the shadows swallowed her up; then with a last shuddering look around the silent graveyard I hurried in the opposite direction.

It was queer that she had asked no questions. She had heard me cry out in the night, and had come to aid me, finding me beaten to the ground, senseless, in an ancient cemetery, and yet she had asked no questions as to how I happened there, or the cause of my injury. She had taken it for granted, almost as a matter of course.

I stumbled on, trying to clarify the thoughts which swarmed my aching head, but no order came of that chaos. All the things which had happened, all the facts in my possession, seemed utterly unrelated.

I turned off the road, into the lane which led to Brooke's house. I could see it, clear and sharp against the sky, drowsing beneath the moon.

Softly, I opened the screen door. Rather to my surprise, the other door was ajar.

"Brooke!" I whispered. There was no response.

He was upstairs, I decided, keeping close watch over his sleeping wife. I knew, however, he would hear my movements below, so I crossed the old-fashioned kitchen, which served us as a dining room, and opened the door which gave on the closed stairway.

"Brooke!" I repeated, in a soft voice.

A terrible feeling of dread swept over me then. Somehow, I knew I spoke into an empty chamber.

"Brooke!" I fairly shouted the word—and still there was no answer.

Snatching a flashlight from the mantle, I ran upstairs, flashing the beam wildly. The door into Brooke's chamber was wide open, and I did not hesitate, though I dreaded what I might find there.

THEIR bed had been slept in—by one person, for only one pillow was dented. The covers were drawn back very neatly, as though the sleeper had aroused and very carefully turned them back. Beside the bed a chair had been drawn up, but it, too, was empty!

Aunt Nettie, I knew, slept in a little unfinished chamber over the summer kitchen. Calling her name, I rapped loudly on her door, and then flung it wide. Her bed also had been slept in, but she was not there now.

Irene was gone. Brooke was gone. Aunt Nettie was gone.

I stood in a deserted house; as deserted as a grave which has given up its dead—and as silent.

Wildly, muttering under my breath like a drunken man, I dashed down the steep, narrow stairs, and out into the stolid, peaceful moonlight.

The dooryard was as tranquil and undisturbed as though the shadow of tragedy and mystery had never crossed this ancient threshold, before which I stood.

I felt impotent, confused. They were gone, and I knew not which way to turn, or where to seek them. My friends were in trouble, and I could not even guess their fate.

As I stood there, trying desperately to decide upon some course of action, I heard the soft beat of steps upon the hard, sun-baked earth. Someone was running toward me, and running at top speed.

"Brooke!" I shouted, but it was not Brooke who darted around the corner of the house. It was Aunt Nettie, her bare legs showing beneath her old gray wrapper, and her grizzled hair streaming witch-like beneath a night cap of some flowered stuff.

"Oh, Mr. Jordan!" she gasped. "She's gone, too. Mis' Witt is 'most crazy. That's twice, and the poor dear was so weak she could hardly walk. Oh, what's come upon us, what's come upon us?"

SHE sank upon the doorstep, panting, her shoulders quivering, her head sunk in her hands.

"What do you mean?" I asked. "Who's gone? Where are Mr. and Mrs. Gregory? And where have you been?"

"I don't know! Oh, I'll try to tell you just how it was, but my mind's all of a flutter. I was sound asleep in my own room when first thing I knew there was a terrible poundin' on my door. It was Mr. Gregory, and he was that wild-lookin' I hardly knew him.

" 'Do you know where Mrs. Gregory is?' he shouted at me. 'She's gone! I must have dozed for a moment, and when I awoke, the bed was empty.'

"I told him I hadn't seen or heard a thing, and he dashed down the stairs like a man out of his senses. 'You go over to Miss Claymore's!' he yelled back at me. 'She might be there. I'll go the other way, down along the shore.'

"Well, I just slipped into my kimono and my slippers and ran over to Miss Claymore's place, shakin' so I could hardly keep my feet under me. I heard a motorboat runnin', but it wasn't Mr. Gregory's; his makes a deep, kind of powerful sound. This was one of them outboard motors, that sound

almost like an airyplane goin' over, so it wasn't him. I don't know what's become of him, Lord help us all!

"I roused up Mis' Witt—her who's helpin' Miss Claymore, you know—and she said Miss Claymore had gone to bed right early. But somethin' told me we'd better make sure, so we went up to her chamber and rapped. She didn't answer, so we walked in. Her bed had been slept in, but she wasn't anywhere around.

"Then I heard you callin' Mr. Gregory's name—it's an amazin' thing how a voice will carry when a night's so still—and I came back as fast as I could. Oh, there's the devil's hand in all this, Mr. Jordan, and I know it!"

"Don't be silly, Aunt Nettie! We've got to do something to help. You have no idea which way Mr. Gregory went?"

"No more'n I told you. But don't be callin' me silly; there *is* the devil's hand in all these goin's on around here lately. Only the devil would use the dead for his own mean ends—the devil, or somebody in the devil's favor!"

"But who?" I asked, capitulating. "Who's at the bottom of all this?"

THE old woman rose suddenly to her feet, her eyes blazing into mine from beneath the ludicrous nightcap.

"Who? I'll tell you who I reckon it is: that poet fellow! Didn't he hate poor David Pierce, and warn't he killed the very eve of his weddin'? Ain't he hard-pressed for money, and owin' everybody, to account for all these robberies, and strange goin's on? Didn't Mis' Witt tell me he talked with poor Miss Claymore yesterday, just before she went off so strangely, and came back some ungodly hour lookin' like she'd been through a terrible sickness? And didn't he come nosin' around here talkin' to Mis' Gregory, the Lord love her, just this very blessed afternoon? And ain't his poor daughter just about crazy, worryin' about somethin' a whole lot more terrible than just losin' her man, like she did? And what's more, don't he have a boat with one of them outboard motors onto it, just like I heard to-night?"

She thrust out her head like a malignant snake about to strike, shaking a long, skinny finger fairly in my face.

"I've seen him before this, roamin' in the old buryin' ground, and a-settin' there on the old graves, all by himself. There was vi'lent men put away there; men who weren't afraid to break the law or slit a throat, in their time. . . ."

I was no longer paying any attention to the garrulous old woman. Colchester! Could it be that he was the instigator of all these terrifying happenings?

"You stay here!" I interrupted her. "If they should return, tell them I'm at the Colchester place." And without waiting for a reply, I hurried down the steep, crooked pathway to the shore.

FORTUNATELY, I had taken the flashlight with me; by its aid I was able to pick my way rapidly along the beach, trotting most of the way.

I paused for an instant at the foot of the path which led up to the great gray house beside the graveyard. Colchester's boat-buoy bobbed gracefully in the moonlight —empty!

The Colchester place presented its long face to the ocean. A hospitable porch, shrouded in shadow now, ran the whole length; above, a row of unlighted windows glared blankly in the light of the moon.

To my right was a great grove of pines, their tips touched with silver; the mass of them black against

the midnight sky. Beyond, I knew, was the old cemetery. To my left was an old-fashioned garden, surrounded by a creeper-grown stone wall.

I paused on the lowest step leading to the porch; my attention distracted by a faint sound coming in from the garden: a low, undulating moaning sound, as of someone in pain. An eery, unearthly sound, at that hour. Silently, I entered the garden. The sound, unmistakably, was that of a woman sobbing in bitter grief. I paused, every instinct arguing against intrusion; then, remembering my errand, I strode briskly forward.

With a startled cry, Marie Colchester rose from the little bench of natural stone upon which she had been seated. Behind it, the clump of firs clustered in the arc of a circle, and I realized that I beheld the scene of young Pierce's death.

"You!" she whispered, her tortured eyes searching my face, her hands, clenched and white, held closely to her sides. "Why are you here? Why did you come back? Can't you see—" Instinctively, she glanced behind her, toward the firs, through which the fatal bullet had sped.

"I know," I said. "I'm sorry. But if it were not important, no business would bring me calling at such an hour. Where is your father, Miss Colchester?" I shot the question at her suddenly, with a quick change of voice, and her face went whiter still beneath the light of the moon.

"My father?" she repeated, in a sort of daze. "Why do you wish to see him, Mr. Jordan?"

FOR a moment I hesitated. Surely this unfortunate woman had had enough grief in her life! But her eyes as well as her words demanded an answer.

"Miss Colchester," I said slowly, looking beyond her, at the motionless firs, "there have been many strange things happening in this vicinity, the past few days. Very strange things.

"Last night, as perhaps you know, Miss Claymore had an unnerving experience, about which she remembers next to nothing, but which sent her to bed, a nervous and physical wreck. To-night, she is gone again, and with her, the wife of my dearest friend."

"Not Mrs. Gregory?" gasped Colchester's daughter, her long, white hand fluttering to her breast.

"Yes!" I said sharply, taking a step toward her, and laying both hands on her thin, sharp shoulders. "Anita and Irene. Both. And Brooke—Mr. Gregory—is missing also. I have reason to believe you know who is responsible for all these happenings. Tell me the truth: do you know?"

She turned her head away, quickly, breathing tremulously, like a runner who has finished a desperate race.

"This is perhaps a matter of life and death," I reminded her gently, as she hesitated. My heart went out to her in sympathy, but I steeled myself to go on. "Tell me: do you know who is responsible?"

Slowly, like an automaton, she nodded.

"Yes," she said. "Yes. My father —God help him!"

"Are you sure?" I whispered, trying to get a grip on myself.

"Sure," she repeated—and crumpled suddenly, at full length, on the bench, her whole emaciated body shaken with sobs. I knelt beside her, helpless in the presence of her grief.

"I'm sorry, Miss Colchester. This is a terrible thing. But you must help me more. Where is he? Where are my friends?"

She shook her head, choking on her words.

"Please!" I pleaded with her. "You must. My friends are in danger. Where are they?"

"In the cavern." She did not lift her head, and her voice broke on every word. "Old White Horse . . . you know it?"

"Yes." Brooke had pointed out the great old promontory the afternoon before.

"There are caves along the shore. The waves . . . the tides . . . made them. There is one . . . that isn't known. Father discovered it . . . years ago. There is a great boulder . . . shaped something like a bell . . . before the entrance. The entrance is behind this bell-shaped boulder . . . very small. There is a curving passageway . . . and then a large cavern. I have been there. That's where he is . . . where the others are. I know because one night . . . he went on foot . . . the motor had broken down . . . and I . . . I followed him. Oh, God . . . God forgive him!"

I HATED to leave her, but I had wasted precious minutes already. I took the path to the shore in a dozen steps, and in a few seconds was back at Brooke's place.

Aunt Nettie was seated in the moonlight on the doorstep, and she looked up quickly as I came running up the path.

"I know where they are!" I cried. "You were right. And if you want to do a fine thing, and aren't afraid, run over to the Colchester place. Miss Colchester's there alone, and she's not well. Her mind's gone, I'm afraid."

"Poor dear! Of course I'll go. I'm not afraid; there's nothin' that'll hurt an old woman." She got briskly to her feet, and I jumped into my car, tossing the flashlight on the seat beside me.

I found, a few minutes later, a narrow road which seemed to lead from the main highway out onto the rocky promontory known as White Horse. It was a winding road, running through a dense growth of evergreens which switched viciously at the sides of the car, but I took it at reckless speed. It ended in a clear space at the very tip of the headland, from whence, I imagine, there was a beautiful view of the bay and its islands.

I turned off the ignition and jerked on the emergency brake; almost before the wheels stopped moving, I was out of the car and working my way swiftly down the precipitous side of the cliff.

The first thing I saw when I felt the comparatively level floor of the beach beneath my feet, was Colchester's little boat, drawn high on the shore.

About a hundred yards away, in a little cove, I located a rock, perhaps ten feet high, which flared out at the bottom, and narrowed in to a sort of dome at the top. Undoubtedly, this was the bell-shaped rock Colchester's daughter had described.

On all fours, I crept behind the rock, and found, without difficulty, the entrance to the curving passageway the girl had mentioned. So far, at least, she had spoken the truth.

Pausing for a moment, I listened intently. It seemed to me I could hear the soft rumble of a human voice, but I could not make out the words.

Slowly, my pulse hammering in my throat, I moved forward. I entered the passageway, and worked my way inward perhaps ten feet. Here I could see, just beyond the curve, a faint glow of white light, and the voice was quite distinct—familiar.

I recognized it instantly; it was Colchester's soft, musical speech, and the first word I heard was Brooke's name!

"MR. GREGORY," he was saying, "you are an unfortunate man. You really should not have interfered. I realize this must be a most unpleasant experience for you."

"I'll tear your throat out, for this night's work," came back Brooke's deep, savage rumble. "I will, God help me, I will!"

"On the contrary," murmured Colchester. "I have it all arranged. You'll be found drowned, probably some time to-morrow. Your boat, a side caved in by a reef, will be found washed ashore. Your charming wife, here, will testify you went fishing early in the morning—and did not return. It will be most unfortunate. I trust you have adequate insurance?"

Brooke snarled something I did not catch.

"Ah," reproached Colchester, "you should not curse when your end is so near! To-morrow you pierce the shining veil; in one swift gesture you attain a height of knowledge known to no mortal man. Even to me, and as you know, I have stumbled upon some most interesting facts!

"It's a pity we moderns give no more serious consideration to the knowledge of the ancients, is it not? In some of these old books is undreamed of wisdom; the charlatans we scorn to-day were not without their little stores of knowledge. I think I told you I found the secret of my experiment in an ancient book picked up on a stand in the city for a few cents. Amazing, is it not?

"A great deal of chaff, true; but the one grain of wheat was well worth the winnowing. And lest you believe the first experiment was but an accident, let me show you how well it works in the second case. Miss Claymore has once before kindly consented to be a donor; I would not impose upon her again so soon did I not have a special need of her. See, Gregory, how simple this thing is!"

ALL the time Colchester had been speaking, I had been inching my way forward. As he finished, I had progressed to a point where I could peer directly into the cavern; indeed, I was within a few feet of the exit, and only the comparative gloom kept me from instant discovery.

The cavern was, as the girl had said, fairly large; perhaps twice the height of a man from floor to rocky roof, and roughly circular in shape, perhaps ten yards across.

In the center a gasoline lantern shed a white, unmerciful light upon two still figures lying side by side. The first was Irene, her head thrown back in an unnatural position, her mouth open, her lower jaw hanging pendulous. Her eyes were closed, and the lids were blue and sunken. Beside her was Anita.

Anita was resting peacefully, as though she slept, and she seemed more rested, less exhausted, than when I had seen her last. Brooke, hands and legs bound with anchor rope, was propped up against one wall, his face haggard, and his terrified gaze fixed on Colchester, who stood, suave and immaculately dressed, beside Anita.

"First," continued Colchester, "as I believe I explained, it is necessary to control the will of the subject by hypnotic suggestion. Had you been less stubborn, less fractious, I should have used you, and you would have saved me the decidedly unpleasant necessity of doing away with you. Yours, now, will be the second shuffling off which has been forced upon me. The ladies were more amiable; indeed, they were both under the influence before they were aware of what had happened, and, of course, remembered nothing of what had

occurred, at my command. Just as they remembered my command to be at a certain place at a certain time. Another little trick of the charlatans, hypnotism; laughed at by one age, and accepted by the next, even by the ultra-conservative medical profession, which hailed it as a panacea!

"And now, see!" Colchester drew from his pocket a little case of wood and flicked open the lid. "You saw this heavy, bluish powder before, I believe. Two very common herbs, a mineral substance, and the dried pulp of a tropical fruit, also not uncommon, combined in equal proportions. No more." He bent swiftly, before I could guess his intent, and forced a pinch of the stuff between Anita's lips.

AS I gathered my legs beneath me for a leap, Brooke groaned a protest. Colchester whirled like a flash, holding up his hand in warning, arresting my spring.

"Silence!" he ordered sharply. "Any voice save mine, now, might have a most unfortunate effect. The least shock. . . ." He shrugged his shoulders. "Her death would be on your hands, Gregory."

Brooke stared at him, his lips working, but held his peace. He felt, as I did, the gravity of Colchester's words. He dared not speak, for Anita's sake; and I, for the same reason, dared not move.

"You see," went on Colchester silkily, watching Anita's expressionless face, "this simple little compound has a very peculiar effect on one who has been rendered hypnotically sensitive to it. A child, now, would be sensitive, without hypnotic suggestions; we older people have learned to guard our vital forces better.

"Life, the ancients held, departed through the mouth. We laugh at that to-day—not you, however, and not myself. We have seen, have we not?" He laughed softly, twining his fingers in his beard.

"And this life is a precious thing. It is not ours without envy; there are those who have lost it, and have found no other life, who envy us our pitiful spark, and—but I believe I told you of that.

"Sometimes these others find a means of securing strength from those who have it. Most often, I believe, from babies. Sleeping babies. When I was younger, I remember hearing old women saying that cats sucked a baby's breath; those old women were most unjust, for they maligned a faithful creature susceptible to the presence of these others who would steal the strength of the living, and were merely doing their instinctive best to guard the infant they loved. It was only when these feline guardians were driven away that the babies suffered—and then the old women said they had driven the cat away too late. We're an ungrateful race, Gregory, are we not? And lacking in understanding?

"And now—careful, Gregory! No move; no sound. This is the critical moment. Can you see the expression in her face? She hates to bow the knee; she is fighting . . . fighting . . . as they all do. My own daughter so far forgot herself, and so as perhaps you noticed, did your charming wife, so soon to be a widow. Useless, Gregory, useless; it is a hopeless fight."

I COULD see Anita's face, and the sight of it chilled me. Her body did not move, but her eyelids quivered, and her lips twitched as though she forced them shut against some inner power which would open them.

My fingers itched to close upon the throat of this gloating monster who stood over her, but I was afraid to move; afraid, almost to breathe.

"See!" cried Colchester. "Her lips

open! Slowly, reluctantly, but they open. And the vapor, that blue vapor, rises for a hungry one to seize upon. He is here with us now; has been here, invisibly watching, awaiting this moment, all the time. Watch, Gregory, watch! In our time, only your eyes and mine have seen this bit of necromancy! One from beyond feeding on the strength of a mortal!"

I clenched my teeth, my one hand knotted so that I felt the nails bite into the flesh, the other closing around the body of the flashlight until the metal gave silently beneath the pressure.

Anita's lips were slowly opening, and from them was pouring a thin blue vapor, not unlike the smoke of a cigarette, save that it rose slowly, instead of swiftly. And, a few inches from her mouth, it disappeared completely, abruptly.

"He is here," chuckled Colchester. "Gleason, his name is, one-time smuggler and cutthroat. You'll see him presently, Gregory, just as you saw Kindred. A pair of feckless rakes, and eager still to lay their hands upon the property of another even though they have nothing to gain but the experience. You saw the jewels they have brought me, Gregory, the jewels, and the money? Sadly needed, too; Marie's little fortune is nearly gone, you see, and I am used to the little luxuries of life.

"Kindred is an eager one; that's why I called him first and sent him on a mission so quickly. Eager and disobedient, he prefers to roam aimlessly, centering his activities around the place where lie his ashes. Gleason is easier to handle. You haven't tired in this hour and more of waiting? I trust not; I've tried to be entertaining. It was Kindred who removed the objectionable Mr. Pierce; it will be Kindred, I think, who'll attend your unfortunate end, Gregory.

"But look! Can you see him now? The faint outlines—there! You're not too far away?"

I think Brooke saw, for a little gasp escaped him. My own eyes were fixed on the unholy sight before me.

Crouching hungrily over Anita's still body was a shadowy figure, the naked figure of a man, the outlines barely visible, but growing more distinct every instant. It was a brother, unmistakably, to the monstrous thing which had come across me in the graveyard and struck me down. Less potent as yet, and less visible, but born of the same unholy power.

And it was sucking into its hungry, gaping mouth, the vapor which poured slowly upward from Anita's parted lips!

I WATCHED in paralyzed silence as the thing grew more distinct. Details filled in slowly; the hideous features picked themselves out, and the corded muscles along the tense legs were as clear as the intent wrinkles at the outer corners of Colchester's narrowed eyes.

"Enough," he said, and reached in his pocket for a tiny vial. The thing glanced up at him, and held out a clawlike hand in protest; but Colchester thrust it aside, and tilted the vial to Anita's lips.

"Enough, I said! There'll be another time, Gleason. You've strength enough now to last until daybreak. You see," he added, speaking to Brooke over his shoulder, "they can't create energy to make up for what they use. Perhaps that's as well, for they're rowdy and mischievous creatures—aren't you, Gleason?"

The creature straightened up, gazing at Colchester with arms set akimbo.

"Truth, sirrah," he said in a sibilant voice that was less in volume

than a whisper, "'tis a hard question you do be asking. Be ye not something of a rascal in your own right, since ye ask?"

"That's neither here nor there," said Colchester sharply. "You'll take orders from me or else I'll get another to fill your place."

The thing cringed, and Colchester chuckled, running his fingers through his beard.

"See how well I use the hold I have over them, Gregory? Speak up man; the critical period has passed. The fluid neutralized the powder."

It was true that the bluish vapor no longer rose from Anita's parted lips, but what a change had taken place in those few minutes!

THERE were great hollows around her eyes, and her cheeks had fallen in against her open jaws. Her face was utterly colorless, even to her lips.

"Vile . . . vile. . . ." whispered Brooke over and over again, like a man in a dream. "Vile."

"No. Selfish, perhaps, but not vile. In two days, three at the most, neither of these two charming subjects will show the least sign of this experience; nor will they suffer from it in any way. I know, because my daughter and others have served several times. Your widow will look charming in her weeds, Gregory! And now, Gleason, listen." He turned to the thing which stood beside him, patiently waiting, and gave me the chance for which I was looking. "There's a new cottage about a mile—"

At that moment I leaped, and brought the flashlight, my only weapon, crashing against Colchester's head. The blow sent him sprawling, groggy, but not unconscious, for he fumbled in his hip pocket where I caught the outline of a gun.

I heard Brooke shout something; I'm not sure what, for the creature Colchester had animated was upon me in a flash.

It came straight for my throat. Its cold, rubbery fingers closed tenaciously around my neck, like the tentacles of an octopus. I tore them away with one hand, beating at the ghastly face with my other fist. It was like striking a punching bag; the face gave beneath the blows, but always returned, as though on a spring.

Colchester had his gun out now, and was trying to lift himself into a position to fire. Brooke was shouting a warning, and struggling desperately to free himself from his bonds. And the clammy fingers of the thing were tearing at my throat.

The same ghastly odor I had noticed in the graveyard was rank in my nostrils, and it brought out the cold sweat on my forehead. I realized, now, I was fighting something which had been dead for a century and a half, perhaps more; fighting for my life against a being conjured up from the grave....

THERE was a great roar of sound, and I realized Colchester had fired. The bullet was wide, however; it struck a rocky wall and sent a shower of rock-dust flying.

Colchester fired a second shot, but again it was wild. I had struck him a terrific blow, and undoubtedly his head was spinning dizzily.

All the time the thing was trying desperately to get a death-grip upon my throat, while I dodged and whirled about the cavern, trying to keep myself free from that ghastly embrace, and at the same time make myself a difficult mark for Colchester.

He was on his feet now, leaning heavily against the rocky wall of the cavern, his head wabbling uncertainly on his shoulders, his beard daubed and heavy with blood, and

his blue eyes fairly blazing with hate.

My heart sank as he slowly lifted and leveled his gun. At such close range, he could not keep on missing me—yet if I closed with him, his unholy ally would strangle me.

Better, I decided, the crashing, merciful death of a bullet than to die beneath the rubbery talons of this monster from beyond the grave. Colchester fired, and this time it was not a miss. I felt the shock and the burning stab of it in my left shoulder, and I realized dully that it must have passed clear through the body of my antagonist without in any way harming him.

But a moment later, just as Colchester steadied his gun, holding it in both hands, I noticed something was happening to the thing with which I fought. It was fading!

EVERY second it was growing less distinct; its efforts to reach my throat were weaker. For an instant, I thought the bullet had injured it, after all, and then I realized that such a being could not be harmed by a leaden slug. A man cannot die twice.

I remembered, then, what Colchester had told Brooke. These beings could not replace used energy. They absorbed so much, and when it was used, they became as they were: invisible and impotent spirits of the air.

These minutes of terrific fighting had sapped the energy this thing had drawn from Anita's unconscious body. My own body was shaking from the unusual exertion, but heart and lungs kept supplying me with new strength. I had won!

With a shout I flung the thing from me; it went spinning away like a whirl of smoke. Just as Colchester fired for a fourth time, I rushed him, knocking the gun upward so that the bullet crashed point-blank on the roof.

I was terribly weary, but Colchester was in no better shape, from the effects of the blow I had dealt him. I put every ounce of strength I could command into a short right jab to the jaw, and with a sharp, gusty grunt, he crumpled to the floor.

It would have been a hard thing to convince me, a few days before, that I could have been induced to strike, in anger, a man whose hair was white, and whose beard was grizzled with age, but I stood there for an instant staring down at Colchester's motionless figure, with a feeling of savage satisfaction which was more animal than human.

I have never, to this day, regretted the act.

BROOKE, despite all he had been through, had the cooler head.

"Let's not talk about it—about anything that's past. Not just now. We've got to think ahead. To think of *them*."

I nodded. Somehow, we must, if possible, save the girls from any knowledge of this night's happenings.

Colchester moved slightly, and groaned. I sprang to his side and bent over him with the gun just as he opened his eyes.

"Take it easy!" I snapped. "You've had your fun!"

"You are strong," he said gently. "Poor Gleason had no chance. But be careful of the gun, Mr. Jordan; it would be most unfortunate should I be snuffed out just now." His slow gaze traveled significantly to the two girls, still silent and motionless on the rocky floor of the cavern. "I am still master of their minds, you know."

"But not for long," gritted Brooke, swinging up. "Speak to them, and tell them they will

awaken in thirty minutes, remembering nothing of what's happened. We'll camouflage the rest, somehow."

"And in return, what?" asked Colchester softly. "My freedom? Your story wouldn't stand up in any court of law, anyway; they'd laugh you off the witness stand. You realize that?"

Brooke glanced at me, hesitantly. I shook my head, slowly, solemnly.

"We'll make no bargains with you. Tom, let me have that gun."

Wonderingly, I passed him the gun, and stood aside.

"No bargains," he repeated. "Just a proposition. Either you'll do what I tell you, exactly what I tell you, and take your chances with the law, or by the living, Almighty God, I'll kill you where you stand!"

THERE was no doubt in my mind that Brooke meant exactly, literally, what he said. If ever grim determination shone in a man's eye, or limned the set of his jaw, then Brooke spoke no more and no less than the simple truth.

Colchester saw death in Brooke's face; certain, immediate death. He shrugged, very slightly.

"I should dislike, exceedingly, to have my blood upon your hands," he sneered. He turned his back on Brooke and, followed alertly by the muzzle of his own weapon, crossed to where the two girls lay.

"Mrs. Gregory!" he said sharply. "You hear my voice; you recognize it. Answer me!"

Irene's throat twitched; her pendulous jaw clicked shut. Her pale lips fluttered as she spoke:

"I . . . I hear you," she whispered.

"Then listen. You will awake in thirty minutes exactly. You will remember nothing which has happened to-night. Nothing. Do you understand?"

"I will awaken in thirty minutes exactly. I will remember nothing which has happened to-night," she repeated dully. "I understand."

I shuddered. The dominance he held over the minds of these two helpless creatures was a terrifying thing. I glanced at Brooke as Colchester repeated the same formula, and received the same response from Anita. Brooke's face was utterly bloodless, and the hand which held the revolver was shaking.

"Get the women out, Tom, while I guard him," said Brooke. "Can you make it?"

"Of course!" I picked up Irene and carried her to the entrance of the passage, returning immediately, for Anita. Colchester followed me out, Brooke close on his heels.

"This way, Brooke," I called. "His boat's just a short distance down the shore. We'll go back in it—"

It was just at that instant, while Brooke's attention was directed on what I was saying, that Colchester whirled with lightning swiftness, and sent the gun spinning from Brooke's hand. It flashed in a brief arc and fell into the ocean, a dozen feet away.

"You fools!" gibed Colchester. "Did you really think you could do it? I'm free, and you—you dare not leave your precious women! If you do—" He laughed, and laughing, started to run down the shore, both Brooke and I on his heels.

BUT Colchester was in better shape than either of us. Brooke's legs were cramped from being bound so long, and I was nearly done in. Given time, Brooke, at least, might have caught him. But there was not time—not if we loved the women there on the sand.

Thirty minutes, we had, and nearly ten were gone already.

Brooke realized this as well as myself. He cast me an agonized, despairing glance.

"God!" he groaned—and as though the word had been a prayer, instantly answered, Colchester stumbled and fell.

A receding wave caught him, flailing wildly, and rolled him back toward the sea. An incoming breaker lifted him, whirled him along as lightly as any bit of flotsam, and hurled him against a ledge.

We paused, the water rushing around our legs. There was a soft, crunching sound as Colchester's head struck the solid rock. When the wave receded, it rolled his body with it—no longer floundering.

Silently, with one accord, not looking at the battered head, with its dank, dark-stained white hair, we waded into the icy water and drew the body ashore, high above the irregular line of driftwood which marked the limit of the tide. . . .

AS we hurried back along the shore, back to Irene and the girl I knew now was the only one in the world for me, the words of poor Marie Colchester drifted through my brain. "My father—God help him!" she had said.

God help him!

I found it in my heart to make that wish for the silent figure alone standing there on the rocky beach behind us.

Odd Superstitions

A SAILING vessel is supposed always to sail fastest when running from an enemy.

Many old seamen believe that they will get better speed out of their craft by encouraging it, as one would a horse.

It is generally considered bad luck for a boat to sail on a Friday, though nowadays steamers do not fear to chance this as much as formerly.

When a shark follows a ship it is a sure omen of death to one of the passengers or crew.

The christening of new ships is a custom descended from the ancient rite of offering wine to Neptune as a sacrifice to insure his favor.

Sailors dread the carrying of dead bodies on shipboard. People who die during a passage are usually burled at sea.

It is good luck for a waiter to have a hunchback customer. It is bad luck to wait on a one-armed man.

Evil fortune is betokened by the crossing of letters in the mail.

Furniture that creaks at night without visible cause portends death or illness.

The ancients used to pour wine upon the ground in honor of the gods. Nowadays a person drinks to the health of another by pouring it down his own throat.

* * *

Among Orthodox Jews there are many interesting beliefs and superstitions. Some of them are:

Bachelors are regarded with disfavor, for it is not good to live alone, and every man is supposed to marry. When a bachelor is conducted to the cemetery to be buried, sand is strewn before the hearse as a reproach.

It is lucky to kill a bat with a gold coin.

It is dangerous to go away and leave a book open.

For girls to sit on the bed of a bride is lucky. It will cause other marriages.

If, on returning from the marriage canopy, the groom takes the bride's hand, he will be the ruling power in the family; but if the bride takes the groom's hand, she will be the boss.

It is unlucky for three married brothers to live in the same town.

An undeserved curse usually rebounds, and brings the one who curses bad luck.

A dead person knows what is going on until the last spadeful of earth is placed on his grave.

Throwing dirt after a man leaving the house is unlucky.

The curse of the Evil Eye can be averted by spitting three times on the fingertips and making a quick movement of the hand through the air.

The fingers should be held downwards while being washed, to allow the evil spirits to depart with the dripping water.

Itching feet indicate that their possessor will make a voyage to a place he has never been before.

It is a sign of bad luck for the rats to leave your house and go to another, but good luck for the other house.

A person takes over another's sins when he spits at him.

The fourth husband of a widow will die soon after his marriage.

Two brothers should not marry two sisters. It brings bad luck.

I wanted to turn my head, but could not.

Bal Macabre

By Gustav Meyrink

Author of "The Golem," etc.

Translated from the German by Udo Rall

LORD HOPELESS had invited me to join the party at his table, and introduced me to the gentlemen.

It was long after midnight, and I have forgotten most of the names.

Doctor Zitterbein I had already met before.

"You always sit by yourself. That is too bad," he had said while he shook my hand. "Why do you always sit by yourself?"

I know that we had not drunk very much. Nevertheless we were under the spell of that delicate, barely noticeable intoxication which makes some words seem to come from far off, a condition

"... All at once a strange-looking acrobat was at our table. ..."

peculiar to those late hours when we are lulled by cigarette smoke, the laughter of women, and cheap music.

Strange that out of such night-club atmosphere—with its combination of gipsy music, cakewalk, and champagne—should develop a discussion of things supernatural! Lord Hopeless was telling a story.

Of a society which was really supposed to exist, of men and women—rather of corpses or apparent corpses—belonging to the best circles, who according to the testimony of the living had been dead a long time, even had grave markers and tombs with their names and the dates of their deaths, but who in reality lay somewhere in the city, inside an old-fashioned mansion, in a condition of uninterrupted catalepsy, insensate, but guarded against disintegration, neatly arranged in a series of drawers. They were said to be cared for by a hunchbacked servant with buckle-shoes and a powdered wig, who was nicknamed Spotted Aron. During certain nights their lips showed a weak, phosphorescent gleam, which was a sign for the hunchback to perform a mysterious manipulation upon the cervical vertebrae of his charges. So he said.

Their souls could then roam about unhampered — temporarily freed from their bodies—and indulge in the vices of the city. With a greediness and intensity which transcended the imagination of the craftiest roué.

Among other things they knew how to attach themselves, in vampire fashion, to those living reprobates who stagger from vice to vice—sucking, stealing, enriching themselves with weird sensations at the expense of the living masses. This club, which, by the way, had the curious name, Amanita, possessed even by-laws, and rules and severe conditions concerning the admission of new members. But these were surrounded by an impenetrable veil of secrecy.

I COULD not catch the last few words of Lord Hopeless' talk, due to the noisy racket of the musicians and the singers who dished up the latest couplet:

"I took the whitest flow-ower
To cheer my darkest hou-our,
Tra-la, tra-la, tra-la,
Tra—la-la-la—tra-la."

The grotesque distortions of a mulatto couple, which accompanied the music with a sort of nigger cancan, added like the song to the unpleasant effect which the story had made on me.

In this night club, among painted prostitutes, slick waiters, and diamond-studded pimps the entire impression seemed to grow somewhat fragmentary, mangled-up, until it remained in my mind merely as a gruesome, half-real, distorted image.

As if time should suddenly, in unguarded moments, hurry with eager, noiseless steps, so can hours burn into seconds for one intoxicated—seconds which fly out of the soul like sparks, in order to illuminate a sickly web of curious, dare-devilish dreams, woven out of a confused mingling of the past and the future.

Thus I can still, out of the vagueness of my memory, hear a voice saying: *"We should send a message to the Amanita Club."*

Judging by that, it seems that our talk must have repeatedly reverted to the same theme.

In between I seem to remember fragments of brief observations, like the breaking of a champagne glass, a whistle—then, that a French cocotte settled herself on my lap, kissed me, blew cigarette smoke into my mouth, and stuck her pointed tongue into my ear.

Again later a postcard full of signatures was pushed towards me, with the request that I should sign my name too—and the pencil dropped out of my hand—and then again I couldn't manage, because a wench poured a glass of champagne over my cuffs.

But I remember distinctly, how all of us became suddenly sober, searching in our pockets, on and below the table, and on our chairs for the postcard, which Lord Hopeless wanted to have back by all means, but which had vanished and remained vanished for good. . . .

"I took the whitest flow-ower
To cheer my darkest hou-our,"

The violins screeched the refrain and submerged our consciousness in the darkness again and again.

If one closed one's eyes, one seemed to be lying on a thick, black, velvety carpet, from which flamed forth a few isolated ruby-red flowers.

"I want something to eat," I heard someone call. "What? What? Caviar? . . . Nonsense! Bring me . . . bring me . . . well . . . bring me some preserved mushrooms."

And all of us ate of those sour mushrooms, which were swimming in a clear, stringy liquid, spiced with some aromatic herb.

"I took the whitest flow-ower
To cheer my darkest hou-our,
Tra-la, tra-la, tra-la,
Tra—la-la-la—tra-la."

* * *

ALL at once a strange-looking acrobat, dressed in a cover-all tricot which was much too large and wabbled crazily about him, was at our table and at his right sat a masqued hunchback with a white flaxen wig.

Next to him was a woman; and they all laughed.

How in the world did he get in here—with those? And I turned around: the hall was empty, except for ourselves.

Oh, well, I thought—never mind. . . .

The table at which we sat was very long, and most of its tablecloth shone as white as a sheet—empty of plates and glasses.

"Monsieur Phalloides, won't you please dance for us?" said one of the gentlemen, patting the acrobat on his shoulder.

They must know each other well—it went through my head in a sort of a dream—very probably he's been sitting here a long time already, that—that tricot.

And then I looked at the hunchback next to him, and our eyes met. He wore a mask glazed with white lacquer and a greenish, faded jacket, badly neglected and full of crude patches.

Picked up from the street!

When he laughed, it sounded like a cross between a wheeze and a rattle.

"Crotalus!—Crotalus Horridus." That phrase which I must have heard or read somewhere some time went through my mind; I could not remember its meaning, but I shuddered nevertheless, as I whispered it to myself.

And then I felt the fingers of that young wench touching my knees under the table.

"My name is Albina Veratrina," she whispered to me falteringly as if she were confiding a secret to me, while I seized her hand.

She moved very close to me; and I remembered darkly that she had once poured a glass of champagne over my cuff. Her dresses exuded a biting odor; one could hardly keep from sneezing when she made a movement.

"Her name is Germer, of course—Miss Germer, you know," said Doctor Zitterbein aloud.

Whereupon the acrobat gave a

quick laugh, looked at her, and shrugged his shoulders, as if he felt obliged to excuse her behavior.

I was nauseated by him. He had peculiar epidermic scars on his neck, as broad as a hand, but all around and of a pale color, giving an effect of ruffles—like the neck of a pheasant.

And his tricot of pale flesh color hung loosely on him from neck to toe, because he was narrow-chested and thin. On his head he wore a flat, greenish lid with white dots and buttons. He had got up and was dancing with a girl around whose neck there was a chain of speckled berries.

"Have new women dropped in?" I asked Lord Hopeless with my eyes.

"That's only Ignatia—my sister," said Albina Veratrina, and while she said the word "sister," she winked at me from the corner of her eye and laughed hysterically.

Suddenly she stuck her tongue out at me, and I noticed that it had a dry, long, reddish streak down its middle; and I was horrified.

It's like a symptom of poisoning, I thought. Why has she that reddish streak? It's like a symptom of poisoning!

And again I heard the music coming from afar:

"I took the whitest flow-ower
To cheer my darkest hou-our,"

and, although I kept my eyes closed, I knew how they all wagged their heads to the music in crazy rhythm. . . .

It is like a symptom of poisoning, I dreamed—and woke up with a chill.

The hunchback in his green, spotted jacket had a wench on his lap and jerked off her clothes in a sort of St. Vitus' dance, seemingly to the rhythm of inaudible music.

Doctor Zitterbein arose awkwardly and unbuttoned her shoulder straps.

* * *

"BETWEEN second and second there is a brief interval, which does not belong to time, which belongs only to the imagination. Like the meshes of a net"—I heard the hunchback orating insinuatingly—"these intervals are. You can add them together, and they will still not result in actual time, but we think them nevertheless—once, twice, once again, and a fourth time. . . .

"And if we live only within these limits and forget the actual minutes and seconds, never to remember them—why, then we are dead, then we live only in death.

"You live, let us say, fifty years. Of that your schooling takes away ten: leaves forty.

"And sleep steals twenty: leaves twenty.

"And ten are filled with cares: remains ten.

"Of those you spend nine years in fear of to-morrow; thus you may live one year—*perhaps!*

"Why wouldn't you rather die?

"Death is beautiful.

"There is rest, eternal rest.

"And no worry about to-morrow.

"There is the eternal, silent Present, which you do not know; there is no Before and no Afterwards.

"There lies the silent Present, which you do not know! These are the hidden meshes 'twixt second and second in the net of time."

* * *

THE words of the hunchback were still singing in my heart. I looked up and saw that the chemise of the wench had dropped to her waist and she sat on his lap, naked. She had no breasts and no body—only a phosphorescent nebula from neck to hip.

And he reached into that nebula with his fingers, and it sounded

like the strings of a bass viol, and out of this spectral body came pieces of clinkers rattling to the floor. Such is death, I felt—like a mess of slag.

Slowly the center of that white tablecloth soared upward, like an immense bubble—a chill draft swept the room and blew away the nebula. Glittering harp-strings appeared, reaching from the collar-bone of the wench to her hips. A creature, half woman, half harp!

The hunchback played on it, so I dreamed, a song of death and lust, which ended in a strange hymn:

"All joy must turn to suffering;
No earthly pleasure can endure!
Who longs for joy, who chooses joy,
Will reap the sorrow which it brings:
Who never yearns nor waits for joy,
Has never yearned for sorrow's end."

And an inexplicable longing for death came over me, and I yearned to die.

But in my heart, life gave battle—the instinct for self-preservation. And death and life were ominously arrayed against each other; that is catalepsy.

My eyes stared, motionless. The acrobat bent over me, and I noticed his wrinkled tricot, the greenish lid on his head, and his ruffled neck.

"Catalepsy," I wanted to stammer, but I could not open my mouth.

As he walked from one to another and peered into their faces with a questioning leer, I knew that we were paralyzed: he was like a *toadstool!*

We have eaten toadstools, stewed with *veratrum album,* the herb which is also called *white Germer.*

But that is only a spook of the night, a chimera!

I wanted to shout it out loud, but could not.

I wanted to turn my head, but could not.

The hunchback with the white, varnished mask got up noiselessly, and the others followed him and arranged themselves in couples, just as noiselessly.

The acrobat with the French trumpet, the hunchback with the human harp, Ignatia with Albina Veratrina—thus they moved right through the wall in the twitching dance step of a cakewalk.

Only once did Albina Veratrina turn her face towards me, accompanying the look with an obscene gesture.

I wanted to turn my eyes sideways or close my lids, but I could not. Constantly I had to stare at the wall-clock, and at its hands which crawled around its face like thieving fingers.

And in my ears still sounded that haunting couplet:

"I took the whitest flow-ower
To cheer my darkest hou-our,
Tra-la, tra-la, tra-la,
Tra—la-la-la—tra-la,"

and like a *basso ostinato* it came from the depths:

"All joy must turn to suffering:
Who never yearns nor waits for joy,
Has never yearned for sorrow's end."

* * *

I recovered from this poisoning after a long, long time; but the others are all buried.

It was too late to save them—so I was told—when help arrived.

But I suspect that they were not really dead, when they were buried.

Even though the doctor tells me that catalepsy cannot result from eating toadstools, and that the symptoms would have had to be different. I suspect that they were not dead, and with a shudder I have to think of the Amanita Club and of its weird hunchback guardian, Spotted Aron, with his white mask.

Ghost Vengeance

COMPARATIVE folklore shows how universal is the belief that the spirit of those who have suffered a violent death are malicious beings.

The spirit is kept from its desired rest and is required to flit about the haunts of the living, and, by its unearthly molestation, compel them to make every possible reparation for the wrong done. This must go on till the crime is expiated. Attempts to lay such a ghost are ineffectual; no art of exorciser is able to induce it to stop its visits.

Ghosts are sometimes seen as white spectres in churchyards, where they terrify people and make a general disturbance, and sometimes as executed criminals who haunt the place of their execution by moonlight with their heads under their arms. In some countries they are said to pinch people while asleep, and the black and blue marks thus made are called ghost-spots or ghost-pinches. In Sweden the belief exists that the spirits of little children who have been murdered wander about wailing for as long a time as their lives would normally have lasted on earth, had they not been destroyed. Their sad cry of "Mama! Mama!" is a terror for unnatural mothers who destroy their offspring. Sometimes when travelers pass by them at night they will hang onto the vehicle, and then the horses will sweat as if they are dragging too heavy a load, and before long come to a dead stop.

The buccaneers who used to kill the men who helped them bury their treasure often did so not only to keep its location their own secret, but to provide ghosts that would haunt the spot and keep away treasure seekers.

Sir Walter Raleigh quotes an incident of a captain who killed one of his crew in a fit of anger, and, because the man had threatened to haunt him, cooked his body in the stove kettle. But the ghost of the man followed the ship, and, according to the crew, took his place at the wheel and the yards; and the captain was so troubled by it that he finally jumped overboard, where, as he sank under the water, he threw up his arms and was heard to exclaim, "Bill is with me now!"

There are thousands of old houses that have a haunted room in which the unhappy ghost of a murdered person is supposed on certain occasions to appear. For generation after generation do these troubled spirits return to the scene of their lives on their long wait for someone bold enough to stay in the haunted room and question them as to the reason for their periodical visits.

Ghosts do not go about their business of obtaining justice like human beings. Where there has been a murder the ghost never goes and lays its information before the nearest justice of the peace, or to a near relation, but it seems to prefer to appear to some poor laborer who knows none of the parties, or to some old nurse or other innocent, or else to hover about the place where its body is deposited.

There is an account of a person being tried in England on the pretended evidence of a ghost. A Warwick farmer on his return from market was murdered. The next morning a man called on the farmer's wife and related how on the previous night her husband's ghost had appeared to him and, showing him several stabs on his body, told him that he was murdered by a certain person and his corpse thrown into a marl-pit. After a search the body was found in the pit, and it bore wounds exactly as described by the informer.

The person accused was brought to trial on the charge of murder; and the jury would have convicted him as rashly as the magistrate had committed him had not the judge interfered and said that he did not put any credence on the ghost dream, since the prisoner was a man of unblemished reputation and no ill-feeling could be shown to have existed between him and the deceased. He added that he knew of no law that admitted the evidence of a ghost in court, and that even if there were, the ghost had not appeared in his court; so the crier was ordered to summon the ghost, which he did three times; and, the ghost not appearing, the judge acquitted the prisoner and caused the accuser to be detained and his house searched.

Strong proofs of the man's guilt were discovered. He confessed the crime and was executed for murder shortly after.

Strange Tales and True

By Robert W. Sneddon

THE Book of Truth holds tales more strange than any found in the pages of fiction. Here are a few.

As strange an affair as ever puzzled human imagination is that which occurred in St. Petersburg, as Leningrad was then named, towards the close of the last century. It is to be found in the police records of that city.

It began with a crime which created an immense sensation in the city. A young girl of fourteen was found dead in the attic of an apartment house. She had been outraged and strangled.

The public and the press kept up an incessant demand for the capture of the murderer, but, though the police made every effort, they failed to discover the criminal, and after six months the case was shelved as unsolved.

Several fascinating weird tales of unquestionable authenticity and truth.

It was not forgotten, however. A well-known painter had been so impressed by the dramatic atmosphere of the crime that he made a realistic painting of his conception of it. The canvas was exhibited in the Academy of Fine Arts, received the first prize and was later placed in the window of the leading art dealer of the city.

It drew crowds every day. There was the attic as it had been in reality, with the body of the young victim in a crumpled heap. In the background was the assassin stealing away after the commission of his heinous offense. With his right hand he was opening the door, and looking over his shoulder at the body. A frightful hunchback, the expression of his hideous face was such that it could not be forgotten. He had an enormous mouth, a red pointed beard, ears standing out from the skull, and small evil-looking eyes.

The picture had been in the window about ten days when a strange choked cry rose from someone in the crowd gathered in front of it. The crowd split as a man in its midst fell to the ground, writhing in a fit. And all at once the people saw that the man was a hunchback —and that he was the living image of that on the canvas. He was hurried to a drug store and brought back to consciousness. When he came to himself he asked to be taken to the nearest police station, and there, in the clutches of an overwhelming terror, confessed that he was the long-sought murderer of the girl.

"I HAVE never had a moment's peace since that night," he babbled. "I saw her before me, I heard her heart-rending cries. Today I happened to see the crowd and made my way into it—and I was stricken with terror. There was not only my victim, not only the attic in every detail, but I saw my own portrait. How could it be? Who had seen me? It was a miracle, some hellish trick of the great tempter Satan."

The Chief of Police, Tchoulitski, did not look at the business with the same superstitious eye. He at once suspected that the artist knew everything, and that he might have actually been an accomplice in the crime. Detectives were sent to

bring the artist to headquarters, but returned without him. He was in Italy.

Tchoulitski tried in vain to explain the mystery. There was not the least doubt that the hunchback's terror had been genuine. A number of witnesses had seen him go into a fit at sight of the painting. The criminal swore that he knew nothing of the painter.

On the other hand, the painter must have known the hunchback in order to depict him with such fidelity. But how did he come to paint him as the criminal? It was out of the question to imagine that the hunchback had knowingly served as model.

Had the painter been an unseen witness of the crime? If so, why had he not interfered? Why had he not assisted the police?

The police with the usual thoroughness of the continental system of prying into the private life of the ordinary citizen investigated the painter's life and character and found that he was the last person in the world to be connected with a crime. Nevertheless when he returned from Italy he was at once arrested and questioned.

HE was amazed by the whole business, but told a story which explained the facts but not the mysterious revelation of the crime.

"Like everybody else," he said, "I was much impressed by this sensational crime, and it occurred to me I would like to do a painting of it. I went and sketched the attic, and at the morgue I saw the girl. In my effort to reconstruct the scene in my imagination I questioned the morgue keeper as to just how the body had been found and I got a very good idea of the position.

"Soon I had everything but the murderer, the principal figure in the painting. And somehow or other, I seemed to see him as a deformed creature, a sort of Quasimodo, the hunchback of Notre Dame. I used to stroll about the streets to find my models in the drinkshops and inns. One day I went into an inn and sat down at a table. I had not been there very long when a hunchback figure hobbled into the room. I looked up and beheld a man so like the imaginary portrait I had made of the murderer, that I was positively startled. He asked for tea and sat down not far from me.

"I hastily took out my sketchbook, and taking care not to let him see I was drawing, made a sketch. The man seemed to be in a hurry, for he quickly drank his tea and walked out. I asked the host who the man was and where he lived, but he knew nothing about him except that he came in to his place nearly every day at about the same time. Taking advantage of this information, I went back there every day, and in five sittings the portrait was completed without the hunchback so much as knowing that I was using him as a model.

"I can't explain anything but that. What I have told you is the truth. You may call it coincidence if you will, but perhaps it is something more inexplicable than that."

The innkeeper called as a witness corroborated the painter's story, and the artist was released.

The hunchback was sentenced to twenty years with hard labor.

* * *

STRANGE things happen within the confines of the tomb, and guardians of the last resting places of the dead could, if they were permitted, reveal terrors more hideous than can be imagined.

To touch upon just one aspect of this horror, it has been declared that in England and Wales, where enbalming is not in force, there are

frequent cases of people being buried alive.

But premature burial does not enter into this strange tale of a tomb, set down by the Reverend Thomas Orderson, Rector of Christ Church in the Island of Barbados, and attested to by reliable witnesses.

The vault is still to be seen, but it is untenanted, for the dead once committed to it would not lie in peace, and so they were removed.

It is built of heavy blocks of coral cemented together above ground and carried down into the limestone rock. The visitor goes down several steps into a vault, twelve feet long by six and a half wide, with a smooth rock floor and slightly arched roof. There is not the slightest crack or crevice in wall, roof or floor. The only entrance is the door, once sealed by an enormous slab of marble which now leans against the tomb.

The first to be entombed in this abode of the dead was a Mrs. Goddard, on July 31, 1807. She was the only one of several to follow whose body was not coffined in a lead casket, within a wooden case.

This body was still there when the vault became the property of the Chase family of Barbados.

The first of the Chases to be buried was an infant daughter, Mary Ann. When the little coffin was placed in the vault, that of Mrs. Goddard was lying exactly as it had been set, eight months earlier.

Both caskets were undisturbed when Dorcas Chase, daughter of Thomas, and a suicide, as they say, to escape his harsh discipline, was entombed July 6, 1812.

Thomas Chase himself took his own life a month later. And when the vault was opened to receive his body, a strange sight met the eyes of the funeral party. The casket of Dorcas had been moved, and that of the infant had been thrown from the northeast corner of the vault to the corner opposite and was standing head downwards against the wall.

The Negroes working on the tomb fled in terror, and had to be forced to arrange the caskets and seal the tomb again. The slab was cemented tight in the doorway.

FOUR years later another infant child, Samuel Ames, died. When the vault was unsealed, it was at once seen that some mysterious intruder had been tampering with the caskets. The leaden casket of Thomas Chase, which was extremely heavy and required eight men to lift it, was lying on its side. All the others but that of Mrs. Goddard had been shifted. The caskets were set in order again by a number of people.

These same people were present at the opening of the tomb to receive the body of Samuel Brewster, November 17, 1816, and saw that once more the caskets were in confusion. No possible explanation could be offered.

But when in July, 1819, Thomasina Clarke was to be buried in the vault, the authorities had to do something to allay threatened disturbances among the frightened Negro population. It was discovered that once more the caskets had been moved around.

The Governor of Barbados, Lord Combermere, took part in a thorough inspection of the vault. With him were the Reverend Thomas Orderson, Sir Robert Clarke, the Honorable Nathan Lucas and other reliable witnesses who left testimony of what they had seen.

The vault was examined, inside and outside, sounded, probed, and not a sign of any entrance other than the door found. The floor was then covered with sand and raked smooth. Mrs. Goddard's casket being

only of wood had crumbled away. The fragments and her bones were tied in a bundle and set against the wall.

The caskets were then arranged as follows: the three large ones were placed side by side on the sanded floor, with the foot of each coffin facing the door of the vault. On top of these coffins were placed the smaller coffins.

This done, the vault was closed up. The heavy marble slab was, after much labor, set in the doorway and firmly cemented. Before the cement dried the Governor set his seal in it, and the others present made their own individual marks.

ON April 18, 1820, Negro rumors to the effect that strange noises had been heard within the tomb induced the Governor to have the vault opened. He called his witnesses and it was seen without the shadow of a doubt that the seals had not been tampered with. Not a living soul had disturbed the vault.

Workmen, under promise of extra pay, began to open up the tomb. The cement was laboriously picked out, and six men levered away the slab.

The tomb was open. The investigators peered in, then gingerly descended. There was not a footprint on the sanded floor, not a sign of human intruder.

Only Thomas Chase's coffin was swung right round with its head pointing to the door. The little coffin of Samuel Ames which had been placed upon it was lying now on the sand, upside down.

Thomasina Clarke's coffin which had been on top of Samuel Brewster's was now under it, its head towards the door.

The head of Samuel Brewster's casket lay on the foot of that occupied by the remains of Dorcas Chase. This last coffin which had been headed towards the back of the vault was now lying at an angle, almost across the vault entrance, while the small coffin of Mary Chase left on top of it was on the floor.

This apparent restlessness of those who should have lain in peace was too much for all concerned. The bodies in the vault were cleared out and buried elsewhere in the churchyard.

The vault was never used again, though it is still on view for the curious visitor.

Many have tried to solve the mystery. It was suggested that earth tremors caused the shifting of the coffins. Against this theory is the fact that no earthquakes, minor or major, disturbed the island during the period from 1812 to 1820.

Psychic investigators have an idea that the presence of two suicides within the vault may have been responsible.

But whatever the agency responsible for these strange disturbances it remains to this day, unnamed.

* * *

IT is only those who have never lived in the Orient who cast doubt upon the strange stories which come out of it. The longer white men live in India, China and Africa, the less skeptical they become of phenomena attributable to but one power, black magic. Only when confronted with disbelief they as a rule prefer to keep their experiences to themselves and avoid argument.

There are a good many men who could vouch for instances of magic as mysterious and uncanny as the following true story.

A captain in the Indian Army while on leave in England married a beautiful woman and took her back to India with him.

She was charmed with every-

thing she saw, save one thing. Outside of the compound or garden of their up-country bungalow sat a repulsive old beggar with bleary eyes and an outstretched hand. He gave the *mem-sahib* of the bungalow a malicious look every time she passed, and she could not help shrinking back with a look of disgust.

Finally she asked her husband to have the beggar sent away, but he laughed at her attitude as childish. When she persisted he told her quietly that if he sent the man away it would cause trouble as he was looked upon by the natives as a wise man.

But the problem was apparently solved without further trouble. The old man did not come one day, nor the next. A week elapsed and still there was no sign of him. The wife, however, now conceived a sudden craving to visit the native quarter. Her husband strongly disapproved of this notion and absolutely forbade her to go anywhere near it.

The wife pouted and argued, but reluctantly obeyed. The next day, during the absence of the English captain, the beggar made his reappearance. This time he entered the compound and came up to the door of the bungalow. The wife ordered him to leave the grounds, but he merely smiled maliciously. At last he said he would go away if the *mem-sahib* would give him a few hairs from her head.

IN a panic of fear, and fascinated by his compelling eyes, she at last agreed and went inside. But indoors she had a sudden revulsion. Instead of cutting the hairs from her own head, she cut them from a Chinese mat woven of hair, in shade very much like her own locks, and coming back to the door, presented them to the old fakir. He took them with a mumble and departed.

When her husband came home she told him the story and her ruse of giving the mat hairs instead of her own, and he told her she had done right. He could have told her that by possession of the hair or nail clippings of a man or woman, these fakirs believe that they can obtain power over the owner.

One night about a week later, the captain and his wife were alarmed to hear a strange flapping in a room overhead, and the sound of something coming downstairs.

The captain snatched up his revolver and going into the hall fired thrice at some dimly seen object which passed out of the door and into the garden.

At the shots, servants ran out with lights, and there to their horror saw the Chinese mat crossing the compound without human agency, flopping and writhing like a live thing, animated, as was presumed, by the will of the fakir.

But for the trick played by the captain's wife, she and not the mat would have obeyed the imperious magic summons to the native quarter.

* * *

MOST of us have heard of the Indian rope trick, which briefly is this: the fakir throws the end of a rope into the air where it remains as though suspended from an unseen hook. A boy then climbs the rope and disappears, to appear again, after ten minutes or so of tom-tom beating, either on the rope or on the outside of the crowd. The rope is no longer than fifteen to twenty feet and stands erect like a stick.

The usual explanation is that the spectators are hypnotized, but several people who have seen the trick deny that they were so. They have no idea how the illusion, if it is one, can be worked in the open air.

A British officer in the Indian

Medical Service gives a reliable account of an experiment which convinced two young officers, newly attached to a regiment, that there was something more than hokum in the powers of the magic workers of the East.

Their attitude towards their elders who had seen incredible things was one of pity and scorn, and the colonel of the regiment resolved to teach them a lesson. He sent for a highly intelligent Brahman to whom he had been of service once, and invited him to demonstrate his powers.

The two young officers agreed to undergo the test, still with the same exasperating assurance that they could not be fooled.

They came into the room where the colonel, several of his officers, and the fakir were waiting, and were somewhat amazed to see that the fakir, for apparatus, had nothing but a piece of chalk in his hand.

With this he drew a straight line on the floor. He then asked the first of the young doubters to cross the line.

THE subaltern set off boldly, but the moment he came to the chalk line he stopped short as though he had run up against a wall.

"Go ahead, old man," said his friend, "cross the line."

He tried again. He raised his foot, but could not lift it over the narrow line.

"Something wrong here," he muttered. "Let's see you do it."

The other officer nodded and grinned. He ran at the line, only to be halted with a jerk.

"There's something in front of us, pressing us back."

He looked over at the fakir, then his eyes went to the floor, and to his horror he saw that the two ends of the chalk line were rapidly curving to meet each other. They joined and formed a complete circle.

Then the mysterious wall of intangible pressure which they had run into first, encircled them. They felt that life was being slowly pressed out of them.

Finally one of the pair in the magic circle exclaimed in fear, "All right, I'm beaten."

The fakir looked inquiringly at the colonel who nodded. The fakir smiled, and at once the pressure was released.

Thereafter the mess was not annoyed by juvenile arguments on the magic of the East.

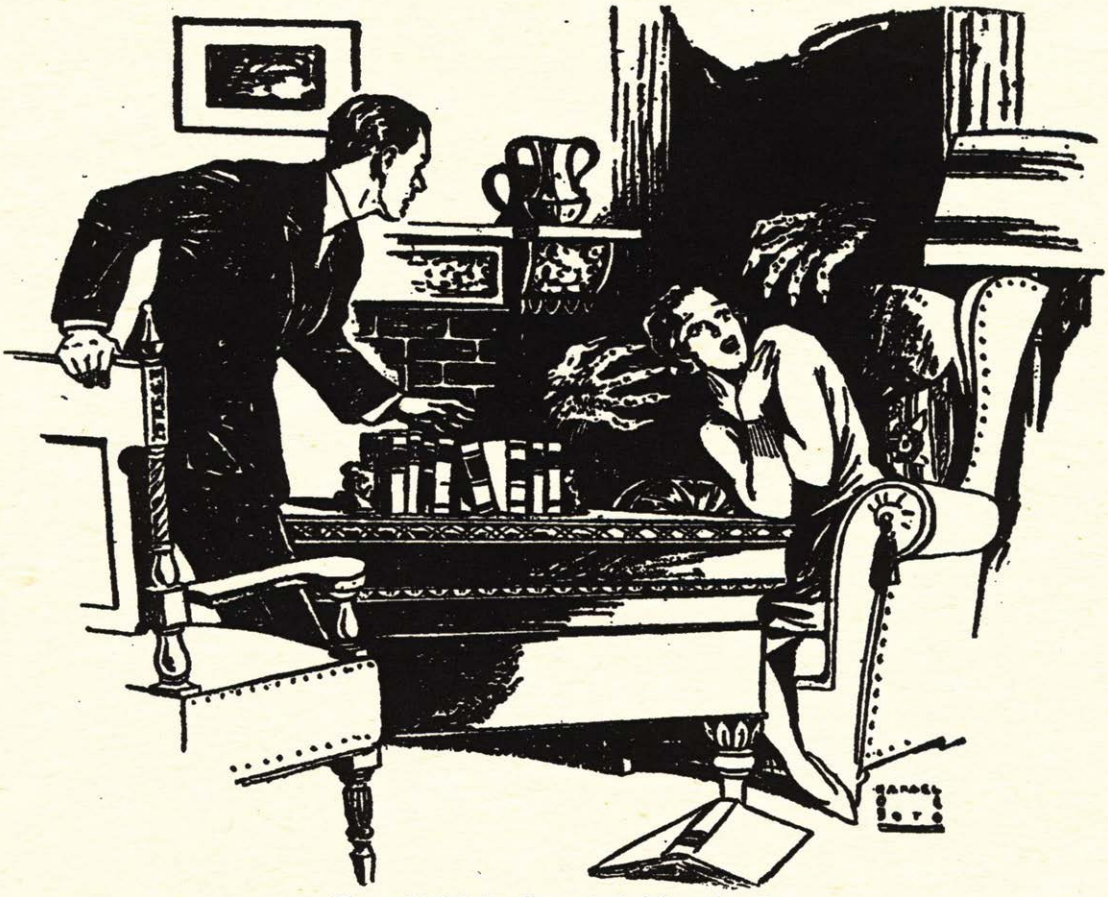
Hypnotism? Perhaps. But the strange thing was that the straight chalk line certainly became a circle without the agency of any human hand. Of that, the medical officer is absolutely convinced.

Bird Spirits

UNDER one form or another there exists all over the world the belief that the soul at death occasionally assumes the form of a bird. Russian peasants say that the souls of the departed haunt their old homes in the shape of birds for six weeks, watching the grief of the bereft, after which time they fly away to the other world. Sometimes breadcrumbs are placed on a piece of white linen at a window during these six weeks, so that the soul may come and feed upon them.

In Sweden it is believed that the ravens which scream by night in forest swamps and wild moors are the ghosts of murdered men whose bodies have remained undetected where their murderers hid them and so have had no Christian burial.

There was once an English lady who, imagining her dead daughter to exist in the form of a singing bird, furnished her pew in church with cages full of that kind; and, because she was rich, and because her eccentricity resulted in beautifying the church, no objection was made to her harmless eccentricity.



Huge, bluish hands encircled her throat.

The Infernal Shadow

By Hugh B. Cave

IT was one o'clock on that fateful morning of December 14th when Mark Mallory called me. A dismal hour, with rain drooling down the windows of my study and a chill wind whining against the glass. And Mallory's cracked voice, coming over the wire, was harsh, uncontrolled, excited.

"Doctor Lovell?" he demanded. "Lovell, my daughter is dying—horribly! Come at once, man! Hurry!"

The phone clicked. An instant later I had closed the door of my room and was walking fretfully through the restive semidarkness of Cheyney Lane.

Death, mysterious and horrible, lurks in the house of Mark Mallory.

I had no time to wonder or be bewildered. Mallory's residence was close by, across the square, in After Street. More than once during the past months I had had access to that huge gloomy structure of hypocrisy and hate, and always I had dreaded the next visit. Now, before many minutes had passed, I found myself ascending the gleaming stone steps, and pressing the bell, and pacing along

the low unlighted corridor with Mark Mallory himself before me.

He said nothing. At once he led me to the great central staircase and thence to a chamber on the floor above. Here, holding the door open for me, he allowed me to enter ahead of him.

And Anne Forsythe was dead. There was no question of it. A single glance at those twisted features, at the queerly distorted position of her head, was quite sufficient. I said simply:

"I can do nothing. It is too late."

Mallory glared at me. From the set stare of his eyes I guessed that my words were no surprise to him. But he said thickly, gutturally:

"Look at her throat."

I turned the girl's head gently. Presumably she had fallen or been struck upon the head by something. Without a doubt the spinal column and cord were shattered.

"She died almost instantly," I said. "Her neck is broken."

"And there are no fingermarks, Lovell! No fingermarks!"

"What?" I frowned, staring at him.

"There should be marks," he muttered. "She's dead, Lovell. Dead! She was gone before I called you. Her neck—broken—and no sign of fingermarks. . . ."

HE drew me outside and closed the door abruptly. I followed him, utterly confounded, down the winding stairs to the floor below. There at the bottom of the stairs he swung on me with sudden vehemence.

"She was murdered," he said hoarsely. "Do you know that? Do you?"

I could only gape back into his fixed glare and stand motionless. Before I could grope for a reply he took my arm violently and dragged me into his study. Here he motioned me to a seat, and then, standing before me in that small, dimly lighted room, he described to me, nervously and harshly, the first event in that strange affair of the bleak house in After Street.

"My daughter's husband," he blurted, "is now on his way to the police. He left as soon as she died. Captain Forsythe is a soldier, Lovell. A man more given to vengeance than to grief. Headstrong, violent. Determined to bring the murderer to a terrible justice."

Mallory leaned forward abruptly, poking at my shoulder.

"Mind you," he said, lowering his voice, "what I'm going to tell you is only hearsay. *He* told it to me."

I nodded. I knew Mark Mallory better than he knew himself. I had been his private physician, his nurse, his keeper if you like, for longer than I cared to remember. An eccentric old man, full of hates and whims and habits and petty lusts. He was not Anne Forsythe's father, but her stepfather. He disliked her; he resented Forsythe's love for her; he distrusted even me.

"To-night after I had retired," he said suspiciously, "Forsythe and his wife sat in the library, reading. The library is a big room, Lovell, with a single table against the fireplace. You know; you've been in it more than once, snooping around. Jean and Anne were seated on opposite sides of the table there.

"There's only one door to the library, Lovell. Only one door, and it leads out on the lower corridor. According to Forsythe that door opened with a sharp click and swung inward, as if the wind had blown it open. But there was no wind, or any draft in the hall. I won't have windows open at night, Lovell. You know that. And they weren't open to-night or any other night. If that door opened, it was opened by somebody with a pair of hands, Lovell, and the knob turned.

"But the doorway was empty,

Jean says. He picked up his book again and went on reading. For about two minutes—maybe more—he gazed down at the book. Then, all at once from the other side of the table, Anne screamed. A horrible scream, Lovell. Horrible! So Forsythe says."

"YOU don't believe him?" I suggested.

"Believe him? Let me finish, and decide for yourself. I was saying, Jean dropped his book again and stared across at his wife in amazement. He jerked to his feet just in time, horrified as a pair of misty, huge bluish hands encircled her throat. Those hands, he says, snapped her out of the chair with such uncanny strength that her scream died instantly. Mind you, Lovell, there wasn't a living thing near her. Not a suggestion of any human form. Yet she was whipped out of the chair with awful quickness, and those unattached hands broke her!

"Forsythe got to her side somehow, just as the hands darted back and dangled in midair. The girl slumped down. There was a sudden sucking, scraping sound and a rush of air, and the hands were gone. Huge hairy hands, Lovell, distorted beyond belief. And the girl was dead. Dead with a broken neck."

"And Forsythe," I said, "told you this?"

He glared at me balefully for a moment, as if expecting me to say something more violent. Then, with a shrug:

"Jean took his wife to her room," he said curtly. "That was about quarter to one. He called me immediately. I sent for you. What do you think, Lovell? Hey? What do you think?"

I was silent.

"It's beyond you," he nodded, bending closer. "I thought it would be, Lovell. Too much for you. You don't believe in the supernatural."

I was still silent. Did I believe in the supernatural? Did I believe that a door could open under the pressure of hairy horror-fingers? Or that the same fingers could crush the life from Jean Forsythe's young wife and leave no mark, no slightest print, on her throat as evidence of their actuality?

It was strange business. Forsythe himself had told this improbable story; and Forsythe had been alone with Anne at the time of the murder. There was something underhanded here. Yet surely if the man were inventing an alibi to cover himself, he would have chosen some yarn that the police would be more likely to credit! He was a soldier, a sane man. He would not expect any living soul to accept this fantastic tale of supernatural fingers!

I sat there, pondering over it. Did I believe? Did I suspect. . . .

BUT I was not forced to answer Mark Mallory's question. His voice came to me abruptly, disrupting my morbid thoughts. And I found myself suddenly staring at the door of the study.

"Lovell, I want you to meet Captain Forsythe and. . . ."

His second introduction was hardly necessary. The man who stood there, beside the powerful, rangy form of Captain Jean Forsythe, was a man who had been with me on more than one suspicious case. Thomas Drake, the cleverest police inspector at headquarters!

I took his hand silently. There were many times when Drake had been more than welcome, but on that fearful night in Mallory's grim house on After Street I could have thrown my arms around him and cried out with relief. He was the one stolid indifferent power of

reason so sorely needed in our little house party of horror.

And as usual, he wasted no time. He stepped past me casually and stood by the table, glancing at all of us with vague interest.

"I've heard very little of the story," he said. "If one of you will outline the events of the evening from the very start, I'd be grateful."

He waited. And so once again I heard the story of the unknown monster which had murdered Anne Forsythe. This time the story came from the lips of the one man who had witnessed that murder, and came with a grim deliberation that removed my suspicion of the man's guilt. His description was so fiercely and undramatically told that he could not have been inventing it for our benefit. He simply couldn't. And his face, too, showed a fearful strain which could not have been assumed without real cause.

His story was, except for a single significant detail, no different from Mallory's. That solitary point of variation was Jean Forsythe's concluding statement.

"I carried her out of the room and into the corridor," he said. "There I turned to go up the stairs, and at the end of the hall I saw a shadowy form in the darkness. It wasn't a man; I'd swear to it. It was something squat and deformed. Something—well, like a monkey."

"You're quite sure," Drake suggested quietly, "that you didn't see this same shadow at the moment of your wife's death scream? You're positive it wasn't standing at the back of her chair, throttling her?"

"I tell you, sir" —Forsythe's face was livid—"the room was empty. Empty, do you hear? There was nothing behind her chair!"

"All right," Drake shrugged. "I'll have to look about. You've examined the victim, Lovell? Of course. No fingermarks. No — anything. Well, come along with me."

He paced out and I followed him. As we moved along the main corridor toward the library, a clock somewhere above us struck a single note. It was half past two o'clock.

I WILL not attempt to describe our search. Enough to say that it lasted more than an hour and that it uncovered an unusual number of narrow gloomy passages and cell-like rooms. Mark Mallory, with his stepdaughter and her husband, had inhabited only a small portion of the immense structure. The remaining rooms and corridors were closed.

Yet for all its age and desertion, the great house offered not the slightest clue to our fantastic mystery. Its rooms were dark and shadow-filled, but empty. Its halls were sinister and unsavory, but abandoned. There was nothing.

"Who owns this place?" Drake demanded of me as he groped along an upper hall, in the dark. "Mallory?"

I told him what I knew. The house belonged to the murdered girl and had for years been the town house of her family. Mallory had come into it as a stepfather, shortly before the death of Anne's mother.

"Any hard feelings anywhere?" Drake quizzed.

"I believe there are," I replied cautiously. "In fact, I'm quite sure that. . . ."

But Drake was not listening to me. He was rattling the knob of a narrow little door in the wall beside him, and frowning impatiently. The door was locked. Drake stood quite still and stared at it thoughtfully, and I could read his mind. The other doors, the other corridors, had been deserted and bleak, but open. This door, of the entire network of shadows, was the only one to which we had been denied access.

"What's this room?" Drake demanded.

"His laboratory," I smiled.

"His what?"

"That answers your other question. Mallory is a bit queer, Drake. Has odd ideas. He potters about up here at all hours of the night, fiddling with chemicals and whatnots."

"Hm-m. And they didn't like it?"

"The girl resented it. She—well, she was afraid sometimes about Mallory being up here alone. She didn't know just what to think. The place was dreadful enough at night, she used to tell me, without having strange noises and creaks and mutterings in the unused rooms."

"And Forsythe?"

"He was bitter. Very bitter. He doesn't get along with the old man at all, and hasn't for a long time. There's a very genuine hate between the two. A smoldering, silent sort of hate, Drake."

DRAKE glanced at me significantly but said nothing. He stared at the door again, and rattled it; then he nodded and turned away. I trailed him back through the maze of gloomy passageways in complete silence. And so, at the end of our unpleasant tour, we came again to the lower hall and found Mallory and Captain Forsythe awaiting us in the library.

"You've found something?" Forsythe asked eagerly.

"I'd like to have a look at a certain locked room up there," Drake scowled.

Mallory's fingers strained slightly on the arm of his chair. He frowned, then deliberately forced his frown into a vague smile.

"My private laboratory, Mr. Drake," he said casually. "I keep it locked because the room sometimes contains a number of very delicate — er — experiments. I'll answer for that room. The only time it is entered is when I enter it. I have the only key."

"But not the only hands," Drake retorted softly. "And locks can be forced. I must insist, Mr. Mallory."

"You—insist?"

"Sorry, but I must."

Mallory's smile thinned visibly, but he shrugged and turned toward the staircase. "Very well," he said. "Come."

I caught Drake's significant glance, and would have followed. But Mallory stiffened, glaring at me.

"You must come alone, Drake," the old man snapped. "My laboratory is not a public sitting room."

And so I stood very still, while Mallory and my friend vanished into the shadows. For some time I stood there, concerned with my own thoughts. Forsythe finally touched my sleeve and said quietly:

"Shall we wait in the study, Doctor?"

I nodded, and followed him. We sat down in silence, with the lamp between us; and presently Forsythe bent forward to say in a low voice:

"Doctor, I wish you'd stay here to-night."

"Here?" I frowned.

"In the house. I've a premonition that more will happen. You can call your housekeeper and let her know, and if any calls come for you they can be sent here."

"You think it is that important?"

"I am sure of it, Doctor. Will you—grant me that much?"

I HESITATED. It seemed unnecessary, and I had really had quite enough of this ghastly place. But other things had to be considered. My profession is one which hangs upon the good will of my clients; and Jean Forsythe was a man of influence. Under the circumstances I could hardly risk his disapproval and condemnation by refusing him in an hour of need, whether the need was imaginary or real.

"I'll stay," I nodded. "If you wish it, I'll stay."

"And—you'll speak to Drake? You'll ask him to stay also?"

"Is that necessary?"

"It is safer, Lovell."

"I'll talk to him," I said lamely.

A smile crossed Forsythe's face, and he was silent after that. We simply sat there, each with his own thoughts, and waited. And at last Mallory and Drake returned from their inspection of the laboratory.

"Well, that's that," Drake said petulantly. "We can't do anything more. Have to wait for something to develop."

"You think something will?"

"Don't know what to think," Drake shrugged.

I drew him aside and told him, very quietly, what Forsythe had requested. He glanced at me queerly and said, after a moment's hesitation:

"Queer, Lovell. Damned queer. I had an idea he'd be glad to get rid of both of us."

"Then you'll stay?"

"Believe I will, for a while at least. We might not have to remain long. There's danger, Lovell. Want to take a chance?"

"You found something upstairs?"

"No. Nothing but a queer notion of my own. But we'll see. We'll see before long."

HE turned and spoke to Mallory, announcing his intention of staying the night. Then he moved toward the door, and in silence we followed him out. Mallory closed the door after us and led the way to the great staircase.

"There is a telephone in the corridor above," he said irritably, "if you wish to use it. I am going to bed."

He scuffed away. I was watching him from where I stood at the foot of the banister. I had just drawn a cigarette from my case, and was lighting it, when suddenly I saw Mallory, already halfway up the incline, draw a white handkerchief from his coat pocket. With the kerchief, as he drew it out, came a small gray box—a little square container about the size of a tin of aspirin tablets. It fell upon the stairs at Drake's feet, as Drake followed him.

The thing made no sound on the thick carpet. Mallory was not aware that he had dropped it, for he did not hesitate in his ascent. He hobbled on up, gripping the rail with bony hands and wheezing with the effort. But Drake, with a sweep of his hand, scooped up the box as he stepped past.

I stood there, staring. Instead of handing the box to Mallory, Drake dropped it into his own pocket. An instant later I heard the old man pointing out to him the door of his room on the floor above. And then, at my side, came Captain Forsythe's summons.

"Come, Doctor. Let me show you to your room. You've earned a rest, God knows."

And so, following him, I climbed the stairs.

IT was an hour later, after I had retired, when the door of my room opened softly. I heard Drake's whispered command for silence. Then the detective stood beside me, holding that little gray box in his hand.

"Lovell, listen to me," he said. "You heard Forsythe's story of the shadow in the lower hall. Look at this!"

With unemotional fingers he removed the cover of Mallory's tiny box and held it out to me. I examined it, bewildered. The box contained a small phial half full of brownish liquid. It might have been tincture of iodine except that it had a decided lackluster appearance. I took the phial and lifted it to

my nose. It had no noticeable odor.

Then, as I was about to replace the tube in its former position, I saw something more. A folded bit of paper lay in the bottom of the box, barely visible. I opened it cautiously. It was a brief note, written in a peculiarly stilted upright hand, as if the writer had been a man unused to penning English script. I read the note carefully; and as I read it, the sense of horror which swept over me must have been visible, for Drake smiled thinly.

It was terse, straight to the point. And it was signed at the bottom with a single significant word—Reigmann. Reigmann! The name of Germany's most distinguished contemporary medical genius!

"Mean anything to you, Lovell?" Drake demanded softly. He must have known that it did. He could not have failed to see the sudden tightening of my face.

"Mean anything? It might mean everything!" I exclaimed. "Doctor Reigmann is the most renowned medical. . . ."

Drake listened very quietly, letting me talk on and on without interruption. I told him what I knew and what I had heard. Reigmann—Franz Reigmann—was a man of fantastic beliefs and practises. A man who had been denounced by every reputable medical society on the Continent. A man who traveled in far places, in strange countries, in pursuit of knowledge. And much more.

When I had finished, Drake was smiling cruelly.

"Thanks," he said curtly. "You've helped, Lovell. Helped a lot. Keep your door locked to-night."

And that was all. I heard the door close, and then came the dull tread of Drake's steps as he returned to his own chamber. And I was alone again with the memory of that infernal box and the malignant bit of paper it had contained.

THE following day at After Street contained three incidents of importance. The first of them occurred at eight A. M.

I had left my room and closed the door behind me. As I paced along the upper landing I heard the sound of footsteps on the great staircase which stretched down to the floor below. Quickly I advanced to the top and looked down. And there, halfway down the ramp, I saw Mark Mallory. He was groping slowly to the bottom, holding the rail for support.

Then suddenly he stopped. I saw him glance at his feet with a quick start, and heard the sudden intake of his breath. He bent over abruptly and picked up something that lay on the stairs—something which I recognized instantly as the little gray box which Drake had brought to my room the night before. Mallory dropped it hastily into his pocket—covertly, I thought—and then, with that same shuffling step, he continued down the stairs.

I stood quite still. So Drake, after studying the contents of the box, had replaced it on the stairs in the exact spot where he had found it! He had put it there deliberately, so that Mallory would retrieve it without suspicion. A surge of genuine apprehension came over me as I realized the detective's purpose. Then, before I could turn away, Drake himself stepped out of the darkness and stood at my elbow.

"Shall we go down?" he suggested.

I glanced at him. He must have read the question in my gaze, for he said casually:

"I thought it best to return his property. He'd raise the very devil when he missed it. And it may help us to get somewhere. Any rate, it can't do any harm if we're on our mettle."

I TRAILED him silently down the stairs. At the bottom he turned again to confront me.

"There was a chance, of course," he shrugged, "that Forsythe might precede Mallory this morning. That would've been unfortunate. If Forsythe should see that box . . . However, Jean wasn't well last night. Pretty horrible for him, the whole affair. I guessed he'd be down late."

I could not help but admire Drake's matter-of-fact reasoning. Moreover, his logic was correct, for Forsythe did not descend for more than an hour later. Then his face was still haggard and colorless, and his eyes as he looked into Drake's set features were rimmed with deep red. Evidently he had slept but little during that night of uncertainty.

Yet, in spite of his exhaustion, his fingers closed firmly over Drake's head.

"Have you found anything, Inspector?" he said tensely.

Drake shook his head. I saw his shoulders lift in a shrug of seeming resignation, perhaps to throw Forsythe off guard.

"Nothing," he said vaguely. "I'd like to ask you a few—er—rather intimate questions."

Forsythe said nothing.

"Tell me," Drake asked quietly, "has there been anything unusual about Mallory's mail? Has there been, for instance, a certain foreign letter or package that seems to come at regular intervals?'

Forsythe's eyes met Drake's in a puzzled frown. He hesitated; then:

"There's been a letter from the French Congo," he said slowly. "A large envelope, bulky, that comes every tenth day."

"Do you know what those envelopes contain?'

Forsythe shook his head. I could see from the smoldering expression of his eyes that he resented this deliberate questioning.

"My dear fellow," he said curtly, "I know nothing whatever about Mark Mallory's affairs. He is nothing to me. I'm not his lackey."

Drake nodded and turned away without a word. He was frowning a little as he walked down the long hall to the library.

THAT was the second incident. The third, and perhaps the most significant, came at nine o'clock in the evening, when the great house lay once again in gloom.

Forsythe and I sat together in the library. I had just returned from a hurried visit to my own home in Cheyney Lane, and was wondering how much longer this infernal state of inaction would continue. Then the door opened and Drake appeared on the threshold, calling my name. I rose and followed him into the corridor. He said to me, in a guarded voice:

"I must have another look at that locked room, Lovell. May need your help."

I glanced toward the library.

"Forsythe won't follow us," Drake said quickly, guessing my thoughts. "He's not the type. As for Mallory, he seems to be nowhere about. I've looked and I can't find him."

I went along without further protest. Drake led the way, and with that almost uncanny sense of direction of his he led me to the very passage which contained the sealed door. Alone, I could never have found that particular corridor. but Drake neither hesitated nor blundered. The passage was unlighted and silent. Our destination lay at the farther end of it.

And here, as we approached the door, Drake's hurried steps slowed to a maddening shuffle. I kept close to him as he groped forward. So close that when he suddenly came to a halt I lurched clumsily against him. I felt his hand on my arm, steadying me and warning me to be

still. Then I heard the sound that had reached his ears and caused him to hesitate.

It was the grating noise of a key turning in some nearby lock. Hardly audible, yet unmistakable in the utter stillness of the passage. And its source was obvious. It came from the door before us; and even as we watched, the door opened very slowly with extreme caution. Standing on the sill, blinking at us in the dark, was Mark Mallory.

IT was Drake, of course, who accepted the situation first. He stepped toward our host with an abrupt smile.

"Thought I might find you here, Mallory," he said quietly. "I wanted to ask you as a very special favor to conduct us through this room of yours. We've gone over the rest of the house pretty thoroughly."

"You have already seen this room once," Mallory snapped.

"True, but Lovell hasn't. Fact is, I'm at my wit's end, and I've got to use Lovell's eyes for a while."

It was a direct challenge and Mallory accepted it as such. He held the door open and motioned us to enter. When we had crossed the sill and he had closed the door after us, he made a light and faced us quietly.

"You are suspicious, of course," he said. "That's quite all right. Quite natural. This door was locked; every other door in the house was open, eh?"

And so for the first time I saw the interior of Mallory's laboratory. It was a small room, dimly and inadequately lighted by means of a single drop lamp that hung over the long table. Evidently the upper portion of the house had never been wired for electricity, and Mallory had rigged this room himself. The walls were lined with upright cases, filled with a conglomerate mess of instruments and containers. There were test tubes and burners, calipers and slide rules, huge jars of colored acids. A veritable salmagundi of chemical junk.

All this was a first impression, as I stood just inside the door. Then, as I became more accustomed to the faint reddish glow of the chamber, I saw something that really took my fancy. It was a long narrow test tube, propped in the center of a heavy table. From its mouth ran a thick coil of wire, extending through the table top to a boxlike compartment below. In that compartment lay a row of small metallic containers, each one connected by an auxiliary wire to a solid, massive coil above.

The test tube itself was half filled with a bubbling brownish fluid, very similar to iodine. I stepped forward abruptly to examine it. And as I did so, Mallory's fingers dug into my arm and drew me back.

"No, no, Lovell," he said softly, and he was smiling a little as he said it. "Too delicate for clumsy fingers. The rest of my house is open to your infernal curiosity, but here you are my guest."

I GLANCED at him in surprise. I repeat, he was smiling; but the smile was a grim affair and rather sinister. Moreover, he deliberately placed himself between me and the table, in order that I might not disobey.

"What's the name of the thing?" Drake demanded, staring at the apparatus with an amused grin. "Looks like a tangled bunch of wreckage to me."

Mallory's lips twitched. But Drake's bantering tone brought results. The old man said harshly:

"You would change your attitude, sir, if I but mentioned a certain name to you! A name, do you hear? You have heard of Franz Reigmann? No? It is Herr Riegmann's invention you are sneering at!"

"Reigmann, eh?" Drake scowled. "Really?"

"Reigmann and myself," Mallory declared loudly. "The basic principle is his; the improvements are mine. Do you hear? Mine!"

"And—er—you think they're over my head?"

"They—" But Mallory caught himself. "That is my own affair," he said curtly. "If you are finished here. . . ."

Drake answered with a casual nod. He was disappointed, I am sure. But he stepped to the door and opened it and motioned me to follow him. And as he stood in the shadows of the passage, with that weird red glow reflected in his face, he turned to Mallory and said indifferently:

"Thanks. I'm afraid our mystery is no nearer a solution. I'd hoped to stumble on some sort of clue, Mallory. Something to work on. But—well, thanks for your assistance, anyway."

Then, smiling significantly but saying not a word, Drake stepped back into the darkness and hurried away.

THAT was nine-thirty. At ten o'clock, as Drake, Captain Forsythe, and I sat restlessly in the library, I heard Mallory mounting the staircase to the upper floor. He had been pacing up and down the corridor for nearly an hour. He did not announce his departure, but under the circumstances I thought it not unusual that he should retire without excusing himself. He was nervous and troubled, and after all we were not his guests in the full sense of the word.

At eleven o'clock Drake glanced at Forsythe significantly and stood up.

"I'll have another look around before turning in," he said quietly. And he paced to the door.

At eleven-thirty by the mahogany clock on the mantel, I murmured my excuses to Jean Forsythe and went to my own chamber on the floor above.

And there, less than an hour later, the final drama of that abominable house in After Street began to unfold.

I had closed the door of my room and locked it, remembering Drake's warning. The single light, suspended over the writing table in the corner, was still burning. For perhaps fifteen minutes after entering my room, I had been sitting at that table, under the light, writing a routine report of Anne Forsythe's death.

Then of a sudden the pen slipped from my fingers and I sat up with a jerk. From the corridor outside the closed door of my room came the sound of stealthy footsteps.

I rose quietly, with great haste, and went to the door. For an instant I crouched there, listening intently. The sound continued.

The lock turned noiselessly as I twisted the key. I slid the door open and stepped silently into the passage. It was dark, forbiddingly dark. The light from my table made only a thin silver of amber across the thick carpet. And suddenly I was aware that at the bend of the great staircase, not twenty feet distant from me, stood a shadowy outline in the gloom.

I SAW its crouching form straighten suddenly and begin to climb. I could hear its fingers scrape along the banister, and the tread of its feet on the heavy carpet. And it went up—not down toward the lower hall and the library, but *up* toward the vague unlighted corridor that led to the locked laboratory in the abandoned bowels of the house.

I would have followed. I stepped into the hall and closed the door behind me, and moved forward very

slowly. Then, out of the gloom a hand came to hold me back, and a voice, Drake's voice, whispered with significant softness:

"No, Lovell! No!"

I swung about sharply. The detective stood behind me, with a finger to his lips. He drew me along the corridor and stood motionless again, listening. Far above us I heard the *shf-shf-shf* of dragging feet.

"Mallory, going up to his den," Drake muttered. "Come. I want you."

I went with him to the staircase and down to the lower hall. There, as he paced ahead of me beneath a single light at the entrance to the library, I saw his face in detail. It was white, set, stiff as wood. It was not Drake's face at all, but a mask in which fear and resolution were fighting for mastery.

He stopped before he pushed open the library door. Pressing against it, he called out softly. It seemed foolish, then, but then I did not know the reason for it.

The door opened, and Forsythe was waiting there. His face, too, was colorless. He gripped Drake's arm and said thickly:

"He's—coming?"

"He's gone to the laboratory," Drake warned in a low voice. "We haven't much time!"

He pushed Forsythe forward. The room was in semidarkness, illuminated only by the upright reading lamp by the fireplace. Forsythe paced to the chair there and slumped in it. He picked up a book and glanced at us nervously.

"All right?" he said.

"No. Turn the chair a bit. That's it." Drake's gaze was darting quickly, methodically about the room, taking in every indistinct detail. "We want your back to the door, man! And don't turn."

"I—I won't," Forsythe promised huskily, with an obvious effort.

HE slumped down with his book. Drake swung me about and dragged me roughly along the wall to a curtained alcove, where he thrust aside the hangings and motioned me to get out of sight. For a moment he continued to look around him; then he crossed to the door, closed it noiselessly, and returned to my side.

"Get where you can see," he ordered curtly. "You've a gun?"

I shook my head. He frowned and pressed an automatic revolver into my hand.

"Don't lose your head, Lovell," he cautioned savagely. "Keep your nerve. Watch the door, and don't use your gun until I use mine. And then don't miss!"

"But—"

"Sh-h," he whispered. "Not a sound. Wait."

And so I waited. An eternity went by, it seemed to me, while I crouched there with my fingers knotted in the curtain and my shoulder flat-pressed against the side of the alcove. I could see the entire room. There was Forsythe sitting like a mummy before the fireplace, swathed in the diffused yellow glow of the lamp. There was the table beside him, and the vacant chair in which Anne Forsythe had died. And row upon row of somber lifeless volumes, merging into restive gloom. And the closed door.

I waited, and there was no sound. There was nothing—nothing but the thumping of my own heart and the occasional twitch of the man beside me. And my finger began to grow stiff and sore in the trigger guard of my gun, and began to ache fiendishly.

HALF an hour must have passed at least. Half an hour in which my nerves became tighter and more vibrant, until they were on the verge of cracking com-

pletely. I wanted to laugh wildly and violently, and to fling myself forward, and to scream to high heaven.

And then it came. Drake's hand clenched abruptly on my wrist, holding me motionless. A warning whisper came from his lips. His arm stretched past my face, pointing with a long gnarled finger to the door.

I looked, and went suddenly rigid. There was no mistake. The knob was turning before my eyes—turning slowly, deliberately to the left. Then it stopped. A dull click, soft enough to be audible only in my imagination, reverberated across the room. And the door began to open, and continued to open, and slid wide!

What happened then is a nightmare. I stood transfixed, frozen, with my eyes wide open and fixed on the aperture. I heard nothing. Nothing at all. But I *saw*.

There on the threshold was a shapeless bluish haze, moving within itself, swirling slowly as it advanced. As I stared, it took definite form and became a pair of ghoulish naked feet—hairy, satanic feet which clung to the floor and twisted upwards into stumps of malformed legs. They moved forward, one after the other, into the room—misty, macabre outlines of horror. And they progressed with mechanical precision, one-two, one-two, one-two, straight toward the back of Jean Forsythe's chair.

They were almost upon him when my nerves snapped at last. I lunged forward, screaming hideously, tearing the curtain as I went. I reeled into the open, and stumbled, and fell sprawling. And the revolver in my fist belched again and again, spewing fire from its mouth, vomiting bullets into the ceiling above me.

I saw the hands then. They materialized from nowhere and took form with frightful swiftness. Horrible bluish-black hands, huge beyond belief, hovering over Forsythe's head. Then they struck, lunging downward with the speed of a striking serpent. Forsythe's body writhed with terrible agony, twisting backward convulsively, even as he tried to escape. His own hands went up to his throat, letting the book clatter to the floor. He wrenched at the uncanny talons that were throttling him. They jerked him into mid-air, and a sobbing, choking cry came mewling from his mouth.

I STRUGGLED to my feet. The very sight of the man's helpless terror was enough to drive any cowardly fear from my own heart. I should have reached his side and attempted to do battle with the ghastly creature which had him in its death hold.

I say that I intended to do this. But before I had taken two steps, a blinding spurt of flame seared across the room before me. It was Drake's revolver, roaring at last. The whole room shuddered to those grinding explosions, as the gun bellowed its challenge.

The hairy hands released their hold. Forsythe, with his arms flailing the air, staggered grotesquely backward, just in time. The huge paws thrashed forward. Savagely they whirled about, rushing over me and past me. A sudden stench of unspeakably foul air rushed into my face as the thing hurtled by; and the hairy feet were so close that I might have reached out to snatch them. Then beyond me in the mouth of the alcove Drake was fighting wildly, hand to hand, with that invisible, hellishly powerful nothing.

Somehow I went to his assistance. I swung my gun, hammering with it, slashing with it. I gulped great mouthfuls of that awful

stench, and tore frantically, madly, at the horrible hairy creature in my grip.

How it ended I do not know. Sharp teeth buried themselves in my shoulder and I went down in a wave of blackness. I heard Drake's revolver roaring very close above me, almost in my face. There was a sickening hiss of breath, a whimpering snarl, and a great weight slumped across my legs, pinning me to the floor.

After that I was delirious. Drake pulled me out and stood me up. Forsythe was standing beside me, staring down and trembling like a leaf.

"Good God," he whispered violently, "what is it? What. . . ."

But then a merciful darkness swooped down and left me unconscious.

LATER, I was lying on a great leather divan in the guest room. Drake was beside me, bending over me. Forsythe, very white and nervous, sat facing me.

"I still don't understand," he was saying thickly. "You say that. . . ."

Drake stood up.

"Wait here. I'll show you," he said.

He left the room, and when he returned a few moments later he held in his hand a little gray box. He passed it quietly to Forsythe.

"Perhaps, if you read this," he suggested.

Forsythe removed the cover with clumsy fingers. I watched him intently as he took out the little phial of liquid, now empty. He stared at it. Then, unsteadily, he unfolded the bit of paper.

He read it aloud, in a strained voice:

> "To be taken, as usual, before retiring. As a strict warning I must caution you again against experimenting with these endocrines, as you have stated several times in your recent boastful letters. Such experimentation as you describe will very likely have the result of increasing the strength of the endocrines beyond measure, in which case they are likely to affect your mental as well as physical condition. These endocrines are prepared, as you know, from the glands of the anthropoid ape, and an overdose may have fatal results. The preparation will reach you, as before, every ten days during my stay in Libreville.
>
> F. Reigmann."

Forsythe folded the paper slowly and looked at us.

"Do you mean—this is a medicine?" he demanded.

"Medicine?" I muttered. "Any medicine that comes at regular intervals from such a man as Reigmann is more likely a drug. Mallory was evidently under this surgeon's care. The drug was perhaps necessary for his life."

"And he experimented with the drug after he received it!"

"He did," Drake said simply. "When Mallory entered the library to-night, he came straight from his laboratory, where he'd been monkeying with these endocrines. He was a fanatic. He ignored Reigmann's warning and continued to experiment with the preparation in his own way. Even boasted about it. You know the result."

"But I don't understand."

Forsythe left his mumbling unfinished. I knew what he was thinking. So did Drake. Mark Mallory, in his childish desire to experiment, had made a horror of Reigmann's medicine. The petty resentments in his heart, toward Anne Forsythe and Jean, had become diabolical hates, possessing him beyond all power of reason. But there was something else, far

more terrible. What endocrines, or what ductless gland preparations known to medicine, could ever give a human being that power of becoming invisible at will? That frightful power of *supernaturalism?* For Mark Mallory lay dead on the floor of the library, even now, in a state of semi-invisibility; and those parts of him which possessed shape and form were not human, but anthropoid!

"I don't know," Drake said stiffly. "I—well, I don't go in for such things. Reigmann will have to answer."

AND Reigmann did answer. Twenty-four hours later a cablegram arrived for Mark Mallory —a significant, terrible message, explaining what might better have been forever left a mystery:

"Libreville. French Congo. On pain of death do not take the endocrines last sent to you. They were prepared from the glands of a vicious drill ape which was no real ape but a horrible were-ape of supernatural power. Four hours after death the monster regained life in its original form of a Bakenzenzi witch-doctor of evil reputation as a black magician and murderer. Swore horrible vengeance. For God's sake destroy the endocrines at once.

Reigmann."

He was aroused by a strong grip on his shoulder.

The Artist of Tao

By Arthur Styron

IT was bitterly cold. Kito, in his light garment of red Lhassa cloth, was shivering. His fingers, which he kept dipping in cold water lest the slightest warmth from them dissolve the half-frozen butter he was molding, were stiff and numb. He was tired, too. Since daybreak he had been working, without stopping even to eat, on the butter likeness of the Jewel of the Lotus, the patron goddess of the lamasery, that was to be used in to-night's ceremonial feast in her honor.

The story of Kito and the jealous Jewel of the Lotus.

The chanting-hall where he worked was almost in darkness. Through the nu-

merous red-lacquered pillars the gilded image of the God of Learning glowed dully. The high ceiling, covered with ceremonial umbrellas that swayed with ghostly quietness in the cold draft, oppressed him with its mysterious imminence. A sudden flash of the sun, that died away slowly like the last spurt of flame from a burnt-out log, reminded the young artist that the light of day was almost spent.

He sighed and reluctantly dried his frozen fingers on his red gown. It would be better not to work any longer; in the obscurity he might destroy the delicate likeness. The panel, though, had been actually finished for some time. Kito had continued working on it because he was loath to surrender the image until the last minute, adding a bit of color here and there, breathing the likeness into life. The young lama smiled to himself in the semi-darkness. All would exclaim when they gazed at the panel how beautiful was the Jewel of the Lotus; but Kito alone would know that it was not at the goddess's likeness they were gazing with so great admiration and awe, but at the image of the young forest girl he had seen down by the river. . . .

HE rose from his bench and went to the tall window where he stood, slender and still, gazing down from the ridgy eminence of the lamasery terrace with dark, brooding eyes. The valley, shimmering with golden lights against a black sunset, stretched before him. Kito loved the wild forest with its precious woods and ferocious animals and profound essence. Even now, when winter had bared its gnarled poplars, and stripped the thinly laid bark from its birches, and driven its animals mad with hunger, Kito knew the fragrance and melodiousness and wild beauty of the forest. . . . There, beyond the trees, lay the river like a yellow snake asleep, its cascades in the distance like gleaming scales.

At this crepuscular hour the women would be carrying water in their buckets up to the village of Tao, between the river and the lamasery. Perhaps *she* would be there, his slim-limbed forest girl of the translucent skin. He could still see her as he had seen her down there by the river, in her peasant garment of a single sheepskin with one shoulder and breast bare. She was not more than sixteen, but strong and sturdy, a beautiful bud that would open with the warm breath of desire. She had smiled at him, her white teeth flashing, her dark skin showing the rose of health beneath, her eyes, under their black lashes, like purple wine.

He had smiled back then, too timid to speak to her. Then she had sped away like a mountain goat, her dark hair flying in the wind, leaving behind her a vividness like that of the sun on the burnished neck and brilliant plumes of a gorgeous bird, or of the changing colors of a living prismatic gem.

He had not seen her again. The next day Wung-Ko, the Grand Lama, had ordered him to begin work on the panel of the Jewel of the Lotus, the largest and most important of all the butter panels for the feast: work that had kept Kito all day for a month in the cold, dark chanting-hall. But he had kept the forest girl's memory by molding her likeness instead of the goddess's in the butter panel. And yet, the apostasy had not been altogether intentional, for his eyes, having rested with desire on the forest girl, henceforth saw only her face in the mass of stiff butter where even the jealous Jewel's likeness was obliterated.

THERE was a sudden rustling at the door and a flash of bright light as someone pushed through the heavy silk curtain. "What, Kito, dallying? Do you not know that the hour of the feast draws near?" It was Wung-Ko, the Grand Lama, speaking in his deep, bass voice.

"The panel is finished, my father," said Kito. He came from the window back to his butter panel.

Wung-Ko raised the lamp he was carrying and gazed intently at the image. The four delicate hands, the small feet, set like the petals of a clover leaf, the large, pointed ears, were surely those of the Jewel of the Lotus. But that thin, oval face, with its peach-bloom, its upturned, mocking mouth, and great, lustrous eyes, could only be that of a beautiful, sensual creature.

"It is very beautiful," said Wung-Ko finally, lowering the butter lamp, "but were it a likeness of the goddess it would be more useful." His voice was smooth and silky, but there was in it a profound knowledge of the ways of men.

"Must art then be useful, my father?" asked Kito eagerly.

"That," said the Grand Lama, "is its function. There are those of the faithful who would believe that this image is the Jewel herself."

Kito made a gesture of anger. "But it is merely the work of my hands! There is no breath in it!"

"You weary yourself with the vanity of words," said Wung-Ko loftily. "Does your limited intelligence rise above the phenomenon of the God of Learning?" He motioned towards the gilded idol that shone malignantly in the far end of the hall.

"What profits the graven image that the maker hath graven it?" muttered the young artist. Yet, despite his stubbornness he was puzzled and frightened.

"There is much in what you say," said Wung-Ko softly, "—much heresy." He was gazing intently at Kito. There was something in the boy's wide-set, brooding eyes—a sad yearning to clothe all nature with the attributes of an artistic soul, that would allure many women—women puzzled to know whether it was the soul or the body they were seeking. Ah, such a fascination was not for a lama, a celibate destined to serve spiritually one woman, the Jewel of the Lotus. . . . Wung-Ko suddenly moved towards the door. "I shall send those who will remove this likeness not of the Jewel," he said.

Kito stood quite still staring at the swaying curtain that had fallen behind the Grand Lama. Had he offended Wung-Ko's religious sensibilities? Or, worse still, had he sinned against the gods themselves? The punishment for heresy was so cruel and severe that the lamas discussed it in whispers: not only was it the penalties of men, but the more subtle and pitiless vengeance of the gods. Poor Kito, who had merely glimpsed intellectual emancipation, could only shudder. He almost ran after Wung-Ko from the dark chanting-hall.

ON the terrace all was confusion. Lights were flashing everywhere. Some of the lamas were running about talking excitedly, while others were raising colorful banners, or fastening butter panels to wooden frames so they could be hoisted on high posts. People were already beginning to assemble in the courtyard below the terrace. The young man's heart gave a quick beat. Perhaps the forest girl would be here! If she came he would speak to her; would tell her that at last he was free to meet her on the morrow by the river!

Hurrying by the *yamen,* the Grand Lama's residence, and the House of the Recompense of Kindness, Kito entered the Temple. It was his task to fill every evening the butter lamps and water bowls before the great gilded clay Buddha and the numerous brass images.

As he worked he thought of *her,* the forest girl. Soon it would be Spring, when, on account of the heat, it would not be possible to make butter images. The courtyard would be gay with peonies and lilacs; the forest he loved would be green and glad, and the mountains soft and blue and friendly. Together, he and the forest girl would walk beside the yellow river. He would tell her that he only wore the red dress; that in his heart he was not a lama but a man, though little older than herself, to whom life meant love. He would tell her how he had never wanted to be a lama: his parents having brought him to the lamasery when he was a child.

Growing up without the strong physique needed for more arduous work, or without a heavy, virile voice for the chanting, he had been given the most obscure of occupations in the lamasery—molding butter panels for the feasts. Yet, he had been content withal until he had seen the forest girl; then everything was changed. Now that his eyes were only for her, it seemed that through them all else was different: the lamasery drab and monotonous, the lamas dull and ignorant, and the gods themselves petty and exacting.

What if he did adjure his vows? He would only fellow the example of other lamas—some said, of Wung-Ko himself—who, if they were celibates, were also men, men of the soil, very human; although they were careful to teach the people that their priestly commission was inherent and not dependent on their private virtues. The forest girl, too, was of the soil, the rich earth whence spring the rarest flowers which even in their full beauty are dependent on the soil for life: so that she would understand when he clasped her in his arms to mingle her flowery breath with his. . . .

"Is, then, your breath so sweet that the gods welcome it?"

KITO started violently and dropped the water bowl he was cleaning, the crash reverberating through the stillness of the Temple with terrifying distinctness. The voice was hardly more than a whisper, yet sweet and clear. He had been so engrossed with his thoughts that he had not heard anyone enter the Temple. He peered about the great room whose walls and ceilings were almost hidden with multi-colored flags and gorgeously colored strips of silk. "Who is it?" he called shrilly.

There was no answer.

The young artist's hands began to tremble violently. Even though the images could not speak, still there were the spirits of the righteous which must come to the Temple to worship the gods. The old lamas sometimes related awesomely how as neophytes they had heard Voices in the Temple when they had thoughtlessly offended the gods. Kito passed a shaking hand over his damp brow. What had he done? Ah!—his *breath!*

A terrible chill of fear began to steal slowly up his spine. He had forgotten the ritual of putting a cloth over his mouth to keep from defiling the images! He wiped his damp forehead with the sleeve of his gown and glanced about fearfully. In the darkness of the Temple the flickering of the butter lamp was like the darting anger from a god's eye. Surely, though, formalities were nothing to the

gods—they to whom all earthly acts were mere accidents, and to whom love was a Person!

Kito staggered to his feet. He had worked enough for to-night. On his way out, he stopped before the great brazier that glowed in the center of the Temple to drop some lumps of perfumed charcoal on the fire as a votive offering. Was it imagination, or did he hear —seemingly coming from the left of the golden altar dossalled with heavy yellow silk, where was the shrine of the Jewel of the Lotus—a soft, laughing sound, such as the north wind makes in the Fall when it comes to begin its cruel work of destruction?

IN the refectory an elderly lama remarked to the young artist that he seemed pale and tired. Kito did not reply. He scarcely touched his supper of butter, tea, and barley-flour, and, rising, made his way to the courtyard. The huge butter panels were now in place, set in wooden frames hung on their strong, lofty posts. Butter lamps, ranged on shelves before the images, illumined them with a brilliant, white light. The bright colors of the panels made a glowing splash against the night sky.

The lamas guarding the crowds were having difficulty in keeping the undisciplined people out of that part of the courtyard reserved for the panels, the lamas, the notables, and the ceremonies. Armed with heavy sticks, they were beating the trespassers unmercifully.

Kito ran over to the edge of the enclosure. "Why beat them for their zeal?" he cried indignantly to one of the guards.

The big lama rested his arm. "Discipline must be maintained, oh artist."

"They know no discipline," said Kito warmly, "they who are simple children of the grasslands."

"Like the goats," said the guard laughingly. Nevertheless, he good-naturedly desisted in the punishment.

It was then that Kito caught a glimpse of the forest girl near the edge of the surging, giggling, shrieking crowd. Her starry eyes were fixed upon the young artist with a look half sensual, half adoring. The blood rushed through Kito's body in quick surges. For an instant his timidity was gone, consumed in the elemental exaltation that gripped him. "To-morrow at sunrise?" he murmured. The girl nodded, her eyes very bright. No one else had understood.

IN a daze, Kito made his way back to join the red-robed lamas who sat in long rows before the butter panels. The singers were beginning to chant in deep voices to the accompaniment of drums. The great feast had commenced! Sitting quietly in his place, Kito raised his eyes, so full of the forest girl's sensual loveliness, to the brightly illumined butter panel in which her image had supplanted that of the Jewel.

"Ah!" He clutched at his red gown, and his eyes dilated with horror. Something frightful had happened! That frowning brow, that small pinched mouth—they were not the features of the forest girl but of the Jewel herself! Was it the weird effect of the butter lamps or of his fevered imagination, or were the eyes of the goddess fixed upon him with cruel malevolence? A sharp cry of fear escaped from his wide-open mouth.

There was a terrific blast from the numerous trumpets on the roof of the Temple. The notables were arriving: first the Prince, gorgeous in his heavy silks, and then the Living Buddha, swaddled in stiffly embroidered vestments. Both in turn kotowed low to the butter

panels, and took their places on a dais in a reserved place. The lamas rose and kotowed, and, sitting down again, resumed their chant which gradually became louder and more sonorous.

Kito, his thin face white with terror, sat huddled over, staring at the ground, not daring to lift his eyes to the transformed face on his panel. There were renewed blasts from the trumpets, and the dancers, hideous in their colored masks, entered the courtyard and began to gyrate with uncouth abandon. Something in their ugly masks stirred a faint hope in the young artist's breast: perhaps the lamas, angry because the Jewel's likeness was not in the panel, had themselves changed the face!

Kito raised his eyes eagerly, and slowly they distended with horror as he gazed at the image. The face was no longer that of the goddess, *but that of the forest girl as he had carved it!* He sank forward with a moan. Now he was certain that the Jewel was angry. Oh, what would she do now to punish the profane eyes which he had let wander from her sacred beauty to sensual worship?

HE was aroused by a strong grip on his shoulder. "Arise, little artist," said Wung-Ko's deep voice. "A great honor has befallen you. As a reward for beautifying her on the panel, the Jewel of the Lotus has been pleased to elect you as presiding lama of the great feast."

Kito's body grew suddenly rigid. "But I cannot!" he cried passionately. Surely the Jewel had some ulterior design: she could not mean to honor him thus, in view of his apostasy! "I—I am not worthy," he stammered.

"Who are you to contest the will of the Jewel?" demanded Wung-Ko sternly. "Lots were cast, and she has elected you. Add not to your heresy, and follow me."

The authority of the lots—the oracle through which the gods voiced their desires—was infallible and final. The shivering young artist had no recourse but to obey. He rose to his feet, his legs trembling so that he could scarcely stand, and followed Wung-Ko across the courtyard. He strained his eyes to get a glimpse of the forest girl, as if desperately seeking something real—an image of her, truer than the delusion he had created in butter—to take with him he knew not where. . . .

At the far end of the courtyard Wung-Ko stopped and briefly explained to the half-dazed boy the duties of the presiding lama. They were simply to build a fire and, at the proper time, to produce an explosion wherein the evil spirits should be exorcised. There was no danger if the presiding lama was nimble—and, of course, if the gods were favorable to him and protected him from the enraged evil spirits, as they must certainly be towards one whom they selected by the sacred lots.

Under the Grand Lama's directions Kito built in the courtyard a small fireplace of stones, and lit a fire of dried chips. On top of the fire was placed a great copper kettle filled with vegetable oil.

THE chanting of the lamas grew in volume and passion as the fire gained in intensity. The mob moved and sighed in unison. Above the weird, strained noise the Grand Lama's voice was heard raised in prayer, coercing evil demons into a bit of triangular paper he held in his hand. His heavy voice trembled with emotion as he pronounced the doom of heretics and unbelieving monks. Kito was numb with fright when an old lama brought a piece of yellow silk and proceeded to

wind it on his right hand. The Grand Lama fixed the paper, into which he had coerced the demons, upon a long, forked stick. All the lamas except Kito stepped back from the fire.

The next instant the vegetable oil in the kettle boiled over and caught fire. As if greedy to lick the air, the bright flames leaped up, to be driven by the wind into obscurity with a shower of sparks. The chanting of the lamas was now a weird howling. The crowd wailed and screamed. The ceremonial offering of the presiding lama was at hand.

Someone thrust into Kito's trembling hand a bowl filled with sulphur, salt, and red wine. With a sudden shrill exclamation of warning, the Grand Lama thrust the triangular paper at the end of his long stick into the flames. At the same instant Kito ran close to the fire and flung the contents of his bowl into the roaring mass.

There was a sharp, blinding explosion. A high blue flame spurted upward, and all the bad luck and demons that had been coerced into the paper disappeared at once in smoke. . . .

The furious beating of the drums, the shrill blaring of the trumpets, the howling of the lamas, and the screaming of the people, drowned Kito's cry of agony as he fell clasping his hands to his tortured eyes. It was both a cry of farewell and of greeting: farewell to the girl of the forest who would vainly await him on the morrow by the river bank as the light grew and the wind whispered in the foliage and the evaporating moisture gathered like a bloom on the feathery fronds; greeting to the memory of all her unimaginable grace and loveliness and joy, that, as a new-found image, went to dwell with him on the vast plain of everlasting twilight where even the likeness of a goddess was invisible.

Indian Guardian Spirits

THE Indians of early America used to consider the events which occurred in their dreams to be just as real as those that happened while they were awake. Their first dreams after reaching maturity can be listed as among the most important events of their lives, for it was in these dreams that the budding warriors first met their individual guardian spirits.

They knew that fasting was a sure way of inducing these dreams, so, upon arriving at manhood, each one would go to some hidden retreat, cave or forest tree or the summit of some lofty mountain, and wait and fast. After a varying time the dream would always come, and then the famished Indian would at once hurry home, happy in the inspiration that had come to him; though, sometimes, when so weak from starvation that he could not return without help, friends had to seek him out to lend their aid when the secret act was over.

The first dreams were religious acts, and the first or most prominent thing they dreamed about became their personal manitou or fetish. As soon as they were able they would direct all their efforts toward obtaining this object.

To have dreamed about anything that was proof against the arrow or tomahawk showed them to be proof against the enemy, and made them invincible warriors. To dream about any kind of animal would be to take on the qualities of that animal. One of the favorite manitous was the bird, for he who had it would be able to escape from impending danger just as easily as does the bird.

These dreams influenced almost every act of their lives. For instance, when a chief was organizing a war expedition he would call his men together and ask them, one by one, what they had dreamed of during their fast-days, and what manitous they could rely on for assistance. Those who had dreamed of war, or of things proof against the weapons of their enemies, would be selected for the coming expedition; and usually the choice of these men proved wise on the field of battle.

The Ojibways have a tradition of a body of warriors who effected an astonishing string of victories, and there is no doubt that part of the secret of their success lay in the fact that every man selected had had a dream which nerved him for the trial of battle.

Agonizingly he was jerked in the air.

In the Lair of the Space Monsters

By Frank B. Long, Jr.

JIM HARVEY lay upon his back and stared in horror at the wet steel roof above him. Slowly, relentlessly it was descending. Water glistened on its smooth surface and dripped at intervals into his eyes. He could only guess at the submarine's precise position in the darkness, but he knew with certainty that something massive and substantial had collided with the craft and was riding it down, pressing down upon it, crushing in the almost indestructible walls and causing the

By what strange mischance was the S-87 immersed in that impinging other-world?

entire structure to sway and vibrate.

Harvey was alone in a small compartment at the rear of the vessel. One part of the roof had collapsed completely and it spread level with the floor, hemming him in. When he endeavored to extend his feet they at once encountered a closed surface.

Now even the steel above his head was succumbing to the pressure, was slowly sinking floorward. As it continued jerkily to descend a rigor passed through him, and his eyes became like those of a man in the throes of an epileptic convulsion.

"Oh, my God," he muttered helplessly, "what am I to do?" His hands went fumbling in the dark for something to seize upon. He was obsessed with the utterly insane notion that if he beat with a hard, metallic object on the rapidly collapsing roof he might, somehow, impede its descent. He had to do that, or go mad. It was of great and tragic consequence to him that the wrench with which he had been working when the collison occurred lay just beyond the reach of his fumbling fingers. His inability to recover it chilled his heart like ice. Without ceasing to grope for it he raised his left hand, and beat with his knuckles upon the unyielding steel. Faster and faster, in frantic despair. The blood pounded in his ears; his features were convulsed. If only, dear God, something would intervene to save him—

Suddenly the floor beneath him seemed to rise up, to tilt, and he felt his shoulders moving. For an instant he was spared dislodgment. Then, as the floor rose higher, his entire body was sent sprawling in a heap against the impassable impediment of the joined wall and ceiling. The submarine was plunging downward.

DOWN . . . down. Harvey uttered a shrill scream and tried to straighten himself out. The submarine was sinking with unbelievable rapidity, as though it had been seized and taken in tow by some vast unknown entity in the outer darkness. A frightful cold seeped into the locked chamber, and as the descent continued the bolts and beams of the wrecked vessel began horribly to creak.

Harvey had a sense of falling through illimitable gulfs. The submarine seemed to be plunging irresponsibly down an inclined plane. So violent and rapid was the descent that it diminished the cold, and infused a curious warmth into the metal plates above Harvey's head.

He reached up and touched them. They were so heated they conveyed a sensation of burning. It was incredible. A shimmering heat had driven out the cold. Even his clothes were becoming moist and hot. His forehead was bathed in a steaming sweat.

Suddenly the vessel began to rock wildly. It pivoted to and fro, and careened and danced, like a cork in a bawling maelstrom. Its convulsions, frenetic and captainless, sent a swift, ominous rustling through the steamy interior. The plates of steel were crackling and doubling up, surging inward in response to the terrific pressure.

But Harvey was no longer aware of what was taking place. He lay with his arms outthrust, his head thrown back. A stream of blood was trickling from the corner of his mouth, and his eyes, which had been opened on horror, were now closed in repose.

* * *

HOW long he lay thus, stunned and unconscious, he had no way of telling. He only knew that the period of darkness could not have been brief, for when he opened

his eyes an extraordinary change had taken place in his surroundings. The compartment in which he lay was both luminous and stationary. A golden light had crept into it, burnishing the walls and causing the roof to shine with an eery radiance. Yet it was not sunlight which greeted him. It was a denser glow, a thick, unnatural radiance which rested with an almost concrete ponderability on the objects which it illumined.

Harvey raised himself on his elbow and stared bewilderedly about him. The submarine was no longer moving. It lay upon its side, apparently, for the roof of the compartment was at first invisible to Harvey's gaze and the right wall supported his semi-prone body. Turning his head he could see the familiar plates of the roof lying, all crushed and battered, at his elbow. But what amazed him chiefly was the opening in the chamber. It was no longer sealed by the juxtaposition of wall and ceiling. The cohering surfaces had been pried or wedged apart, and a light streamed from between them. The unearthly illumination seemed to come from the torpedo room.

Harvey managed to bring his body erect. Every muscle, nerve and tendon ached and throbbed; but his fright and curiosity were so intense as to make him indifferent to physical suffering. His first thought was of his companions; he must discover if they were still alive, if they had survived the shock of the collision and descent. His face was set in grim lines as he crawled forward on his hands and knees. The light, when he neared the aperture, grew almost blinding, but so intent was he on what lay in the adjoining compartment that he ignored the glare. As he drew himself up and thrust his body through the narrow opening, jagged steel pressed in upon him, lacerating his shoulders and ripping the sleeves from his uniform.

But stubbornly, valiantly he pressed forward, wriggling his shoulders free and grasping with his hands a vertical girder in the torpedo room. A moment after, he was standing erect beneath a blaze of light. The torpedo room was open to the air, a great jagged vent looming in the shattered steel of the ceiling and walls. But was it the sky which he saw? An amber orb, blinding, immense, glowed down at him from above, but if it was the sun, where was he and what had happened? Was he at the bottom of the sea, or dreaming, or mad, or dead?

HE stared upward till his eyes could no longer endure the unnatural glare. Then, sick and shuddering with terror, he dropped his gaze to the floor of the torpedo room. His companions were dead. They lay about in grim, pathetic attitudes, Willis with his hand on a metallic pressure gage, Taylor and Andrews lying prone upon the floor, and young Johnny White with his back against a torpedo tube. It was tragically apparent that the shock of the descent, and an ensuing flow of deadly gases into the air-tight chamber had wrought a frightful havoc. Harvey knew that the remainder of the crew could not have survived the onrush of water in the upper chambers, and the ghastliness of his predicament sent a chill to his heart.

He gazed frantically about him, trying desperately to orientate himself to the strangeness of what he saw. Where was he and what had happened? Darkness and death were preferable to so hideous an enigma. He could not endure to stand there and speculate, to stand in that wrecked room amidst so vast an uncertainty, so vast a hor-

ror. The bodies of his companions were a taunt and a menace.

He looked hysterically about for something to climb upon. His one thought was to get out of the chamber, to emerge into the light which streamed down from above. But his strength seemed to have left him, and it was several seconds before he could move at all.

A low boiler was the most likely means of ascent which presented itself. That, and a swinging circle of wire which hung pendulous from a half-shattered girder above the torpedo tube. It occurred to him that if he could get his feet upon the latter he might be able to utilize it as a kind of trapeze, and swing himself upward by the sheer impetus of his undulating weight. By no other means could he hope to reach the jagged rent which yawned in the roof of the chamber. In the blind hope of reaching the light he was prepared to risk the fatal fall which would probably ensue. It would be better to join his companions on the floor of the chamber than to remain immersed in an uncertainty which unseated reason.

SLOWLY, painfully he clambered upon the box and stretched out his hand to grasp an end of the swinging wire. From somewhere below came the ominous trickle of water. He had a sudden, insane impulse to shriek aloud, to break the silence with a shout or a curse. The light above him was so inexplicable, so blinding.

Keeping his eyes averted he pulled the wire downward and started to climb upon it. In order to get it between his feet, however, he was compelled to concentrate his gaze on a point level with the opposite wall, and while so doing he became suddenly conscious that a dark shape was slithering down its wet metallic surface.

Then a black tentacle had curled over the jagged opening above his head and was slowly descending into the chamber. In girth it was about the size of a man's arm, with small, luminous disks on its lateral surface, and it terminated in a hideous, claw-like appendage which opened and closed as Harvey stared at it.

Sickened, Harvey dropped the wire and descended to the floor. The thing was filthy beyond description and the mere sight of it sent him reeling to cover. He took refuge behind a coil of wire as it continued to descend, the claws opening and closing with a sickening greediness.

Harvey was not left long in doubt as to the object's purpose in entering the chamber. It was seeking prey. The claw went fumbling over the floor, feeling awkwardly about for something to seize on. In a moment it encountered the prone form of William Andrews, and stopped.

HARVEY nearly screamed in revulsion at what followed. The claw tightened on Andrew's neck, tightened so viciously that the latter's tongue protruded in the most shocking manner. Then, with a jerk, the tentacle contracted and the body was wrenched upward out of sight. In a moment the claw had returned to the chamber and was feeling about for another victim.

Harvey pressed back against the metal plates in panic terror. One by one, before his horror-struck gaze, his companions were seized and wrenched upward. The malignant intruder did not always fasten on the necks of its victims. Taylor it seized about the ankles; young White it elevated by intangling its loathsome claws in the youth's matted hair. There was a lapse of nearly a minute before it returned for Harvey.

There wasn't much that Harvey could do, but he had the presence of mind, before the claw reached him, to extend a portion of his clothing rather than a portion of himself. The claw did not discriminate. It seized on Harvey's coat-sleeve with an insatiable greediness, and in a moment he was being jerked through the air toward the amber sun which oscillated like a kite in the firmament above him.

The tentacle deposited him on a hard, wet surface. For a moment his eyes were blinded by the full glare of the new light and he saw only dark shapes through a mist—huge shapes that moved slowly backward and forward before his line of vision. Then, slowly, his sight improved, and he was able to make out the details of the rough, pitted surface of the cup-like depression in which he lay.

FOR several feet about him stretched a hard, black, granulated expanse of soil and rock, which glistened in the amber light, and which was pitted here and there with poxlike indentations from which moisture oozed. The circumambient soil was all of the same dark color, rough and level, but at a little distance from his body it rose to form the walls of a miniature crater. He was lying upon his back in the center of a small, craterlike depression and staring upward at a sky which shone with an unearthly radiance, an amber sky surmounted by an amber sun, and flecked, here and there, with clouds so densely black that they conveyed a sense of cosmic unreality, of hidden menace.

It was not the sky, however, that threatened his sanity, but the aberrant, hostile shapes which, surrounding the cavity in which he lay, menaced him with their waving tentacles and clawlike hands.

Only the claws and tentacles were clearly visible from where he lay, but dimly through the radiance which poured down on him from above he could discern the animating bodies behind these appendages. They were tall and vaguely anthropomorphic in outline—manlike bodies surmounted by faces whose luminous eyes glared down at him through the yellow glare.

Desperately he fought to keep their claws from piercing his clothes, struggled and pleaded and moaned, while they toyed with him, in insatiable curiosity. They turned him over, lifted him up, and with shrill, stridulous ululations examined his arms, his legs, the very garments which covered him. At last one of them, more persistent than its fellows, imbedded its claws in his hair and lifted him ruthlessly from the earth.

AGONIZINGLY he was jerked into the air, and held aloft for the edification of his tormentors. Beneath the dazzling light he could see the creatures clearly, and his mind reeled at the abnormality of what he saw. From the waist upward they resembled men, albeit men of a simian and degraded caste, with hairy torsos, pointed ears and huge arms terminating in black, stubby hands. But in lieu of legs they supported themselves on eight squirming tentacles, which spread downward and outward from their thighs, branching as naturally and inevitably from their bodies as limbs in a normally constituted being. So long were these tentacles that when the creatures caused them to straighten and used them to walk with, the body from which they depended was elevated twenty feet from the ground.

It was from one of these tentacular legs, gelatinous and noisome, that Harvey dangled. The creature had relinquished its hold

upon his hair and twined its talons under his armpits, and was slowly waving him backward and forward.

There were eleven octopus-men in the group which surrounded him, and each held aloft in its claws one of his shipmates. Some of the dead men were suspended by their legs, others by the hair, and still others had been trussed up so grotesquely that they seemed half alive, their legs and arms moving in purblind animation as the grasp of their captors alternately relaxed and tightened on their shoulders and torsos.

In the bright glare the distraught and wan features of Frank Taylor stood out vividly. Taylor had been Harvey's comrade and confidant, but there was nothing reassuring now in his presence so near to the man whom he had known so well in life. So at least Harvey thought, suspended in agony in an alien world. Nothing reassuring about poor Taylor's face, with its shut eyes and gaping mouth. It was not until the tentacle which held Taylor was brought to within a few feet of the tentacle which held Harvey that the latter perceived his mistake.

Taylor was not dead. He had opened his eyes and was staring in stark bewilderment at the man beside him. "Harvey!" he gasped. "Harvey, old fellow, in God's name, where are we?"

HARVEY did not reply. He opened his mouth, but the words would not come. His tongue adhered too closely to the roof of his mouth; his will was too completely in abeyance. He could only stare and gesture, could only point and moan.

And now he was lifted higher, away from his friend. The octopus-men were moving. They had spread out in an orderly alignment, and were advancing over the pitted ground. The tentacle holding Harvey had ceased to wave. It surged stiffly forward, high above the earth; but by twisting and turning Harvey could see both the ground beneath and the mysterious sky with its dark clouds and coruscating sun.

The landscape through which he was moving was unearthly. The depression in which he had lain was merely one of many which pitted the ground as far as his gaze could penetrate. The entire landscape was composed of miniature sunken craters with brief stretches of smooth gray gravel between the hollows, and, save for the tininess of the depressions, was unmistakably reminiscent of the lunar landscapes so vividly portrayed in the weird, imaginative paintings of Segrelles and John St. Clair.

The creatures moved unevenly over this strange terrain, now gliding with their claw-tipped tentacles down the sides of the craters, now surmounting the occasionally rather uneven rims by shifting from a vertical to an oblique posture, and frequently swaying so fantastically that the weight and position of their bodies seemed curiously at variance with the laws of gravity. Once the creature which was carrying Harvey lowered him in curiosity to within reach of its apelike hands and began to paw him. It was a nauseous, almost unbearable ordeal, but Harvey endured it without flinching.

HE was intent on satisfying a curiosity of his own. So intense, indeed, was this impulse, that it banished fright. Avidly he scanned the horror's face, endeavoring in the few seconds vouchsafed to him to form some conception as to its intelligence and purpose. The eyes were small and red-rimmed, and stared down at him from a broad expanse of yel-

low and very wrinkled flesh. The cheeks were abnormally wide, the nose flat and sunken. The mouth was a straight slit in a chin which tapered grotesquely. The skin was soft and hairless, and the face, in its entirety, was very crudely analogous to that of an extremely wrinkled and vindictive old woman. Harvey was relieved when the tentacle jerked him upward out of sight of the thing's malevolent eyes.

The procession continued to advance. Harvey's throat was dry; his eyes ached and throbbed. When he turned his face upward the sun was a live coal on his forehead and eyes. Yet he could not bear to keep his gaze fastened on the earth. The craters were menacing, and their air of alien, primordial desolation appalled him.

He shut his eyes very tightly and tried to reason in the darkness. Something ghastly and unprecedented had happened to him, and he was lost in a mad world. He had been projected into a world that was irrational, incredible, insane.

TAYLOR'S voice cut sharply through the blackness: "Harvey—Harvey, I say. I'm here. Right beside you. Open your eyes, old fellow."

Jim Harvey obeyed instantly, and for a moment the two men stared at one another in silence. Then Taylor spoke.

"What do you suppose happened to the submarine, Jim? I lost consciousness, you know. Did you? Tell me, did you?"

"No," said Harvey.

"Then what happened?"

"I don't know."

"In God's name, Jim, tell me!" Taylor begged.

"I say I don't know. We hit something—a submerged hull, I guess—and the ship crumpled up. The 'tin' came down and almost crushed me. Then she sank. Sank like a hunk of lead. Faster and faster. I thought she'd never hit bottom. But she did, apparently, for the jolt knocked me senseless. When I came to the ship was open to the sky, and—"

"We're ashore somewhere, of course," interposed Taylor suddenly.

"I don't know."

"You don't know. Good God, man, we can't be at the bottom of the sea. Unless—unless we're dead!'

The tentacular arm which held Harvey was jerked suddenly upward, as though Harvey's captor disapproved of the conversation. Harvey could no longer see his friend, but he called out loudly: "We're not dead, Frank. And we're not at the bottom of the sea. We're *farther down* than that. *Under* the bottom!"

HARVEY didn't see Taylor again until they passed into the forest. And then it was only for a moment, in a clearing between the trees. It was Taylor who spoke first.

"They won't spare us, Jim," he said, in a tremulous voice.

"I know, old chap," rejoined Harvey, grimly.

"They're not friendly."

"No."

Taylor burst out fiercely: "How can you take it so calmly, Jim?"

"I don't take it calmly. But we may as well face the inevitable without whining or cringing. We'll never see *our* world again. We've gone down a chute. A chute at the bottom of the sea."

"How do you know?" murmured Taylor.

"I'm not sure, of course, but it's the only explanation I can think of. It's preposterous to suppose we could have been washed ashore. No island on earth could contain vege-

tation like this and creatures like this. We're either dead, or else we're beneath the bottom of the sea. And I don't think we're dead. You, these animals—everything here is too *real*, too concrete and substantial. Death can't be like this. We're far down within the earth, Frank. There must be a great vent or abyss on the floor of the Pacific leading to this world. The submarine didn't sink. It fell or went down a chute. A chute envacuumed to keep out the water. An inclined plane leading downward. That's it. Don't you see?"

The octopus-man holding Taylor did not wait for the latter to reply. It lumbered forward through the trees, leaving Harvey to his speculations, while his own mount advanced at a more leisurely gait.

THE forest was more hideous in its myriad convolutions than the crater-pitted plain over which they had passed. Great trees, so tall that they shut out the sun, spread upward and outward above the procession, and from low limbs and overhanging branches dark, gleaming reptiles hung in coils, hissing and moaning. Nature, or whatever it was that had usurped her functions in that abysmal place, had not fashioned the trees of wood, but of a soft, yielding substance which was almost indestructible. The octopus creatures advanced by twisting the interlacing branches upward and outward, and even, in the case of the smaller trees, by bending the boles adroitly to one side. Every tree and twig, every shred of vegetation in the forest, was fashioned of this same strange rubbery substance, and was infinitely compressible.

There was no snapping of twigs as that weird procession passed, no crunching, even, of the leaves on the forest floor. Even the domed and vermilion-hued fungi that sprouted so prolifically from the boles of the taller trees were compressible, plastic. No growth in the forest, apparently, was destructible. The trees, the flowers, the very vines could be pushed to one side, trampled upon, and twisted out of all semblance to their original shapes.

The journey through the forest was more interminable in its duration than the trip over the crater-pitted plain. Harvey's body was brushed and bruised by the rubbery vegetations and befouled by the saliva which fell from the drooling mouths of the huge reptiles. The loathsome creatures were of a pale, yellowish hue save where, at intervals, vermilion rings encircled their python-thick bodies; and their flat heads and gaping jaws glistened. Not even their green, tooth-rimmed jaws, however, were as repulsive as the foul odor they exuded.

THE octopus-men paid no attention to these creatures, but lumbered resolutely forward, holding their captives high above their heads and occasionally using them as battering rams to break down the massive walls of vegetation which impeded their progress. Only the dead men, however, were so used. Harvey and Taylor were spared this ignominy, as though their captors sensed that they were not likely to survive with fractured skulls.

There was growing up in Harvey's mind the conviction that he and Taylor were, in a sense, objects of especial solicitude on the part of their captors. It was as though they had never seen a *living* man before, as though they were familiar only with the dead of his kind, as though dead men were familiar objects in their world while he and Taylor were awe-provoking anomalies.

He was not given much time, however, in which to ponder. For now the creatures were emerging from the forest and descending a steep, rock-dotted slope. The creatures were compelled to exert all their resourcefulness to maintain a footing on this steep incline. The tentacular legs advanced with caution, feeling their way fumblingly for temporary foot rests in the steeply shelving soil, and stopping from time to time to feel about and explore.

The octopus-men had covered nearly a hundred feet in their descent when the cavern came into view. It was a low rectangular opening in the gray, rock-strewn embankment and the creatures approached it with a hissing noise that smote ominously on Harvey's ear. His surprise and amazement were intense when these weird sounds were answered from within. The creatures now accelerated their descent, and in a moment were standing at the base of the aperture, swaying backward and forward as though reluctant to enter unannounced.

AFTER a moment, however, they began to advance into the cavern, and it occurred to Harvey that their apparent hesitancy was in reality nothing more than a kind of mystical ritual which they felt impelled to perform, precisely as a Japanese would tarry to remove his shoes before the door of his dwelling, or a Moslem make obeisance at the entrance of a mosque.

The interior of the cavern was illumined by an unearthly bluish glare which seemed to come from somewhere far within, and the actuality of its remoteness was confirmed as they advanced farther into the cave by the ever-increasing brilliance which rested on the floor, walls and roof. The cave was so low-roofed that the octopus creatures were compelled to bend back their bodies at right angles to their tentacular extremities, and to shorten the latter by twisting them into folds and spreading them over a wide expanse on the floor beneath.

The procession was a queer one, each octopus creature advancing slowly over the uneven ground, like so many cramped and distorted spiders crawling in slow sequence into the interior of their burrows. Twice Harvey was brought perilously close to the low-arching roof, and once a stalactite grazed his brow, causing him to wince in agony, while a stream of blood ran down his cheek and into his mouth. The entire roof of the cave was covered with stalactites. They glowed with an eery radiance of their own, a silvery glow which contrasted strangely with the colder, paler light of uncertain origin which furnished the dominant illumination.

It was several minutes before they came to the first of the side chambers. The cavern had narrowed and shelved, and Harvey was in such constant and deadly anger from the projecting stalactites that he almost failed to notice it. But when his captor had pulled and squeezed itself free from the cramping narrowness of the passage, at the particular point where this novel enclosure emerged into the main tunnel, and was floundering down an even steeper gradient, the meaning of what he had seen came to him with a terrible vividness, an actual physical retching. He had caught a glimpse, instantaneous, appalling, of a square, empty enclosure the size of a small room, with a floor that was smooth and polished and destitute of all embellishment. And on this burnished and blue-green floor, which mirrored the stalactites like a lake of

glass, there reposed in loathsome disarray a hideous collection of *white human bones.*

THE ensuing journey was a nightmare and a madness. Not one, but dozens of auxiliary chambers jutted off from the main cavern, and in each there rested human remains—gleaming, fleshless skullcaps, tibias, limb and jaw fragments. Harvey was frozen with terror. He lay rigid as a corpse. From far behind there came a man's shriek, prolonged, agonized, horrible. Harvey recognized the timbre of the voice, and a tremor passed over him. It was Taylor crying out in fright at what he saw, Taylor who was less stoical than his companion, less able to endure in silence the threat implicit in the fleshless bones.

But Harvey remained through it all keenly observant. He noticed that to a few of the bones adhered clothes, which invariably were of a dark texture, coarse garments bearing unmistakable evidences of prolonged wear. Brass buttons gleamed from several of these fragmentary garments, while on others were insignias in rusted gold and scarlet, insignias which Harvey recognized and shuddered at. On the floor of one cavern there reposed a circular cap, upturned, with peaked visor. The visor was corrugated and eaten away at the edges, but its maritime derivation was unmistakable.

There was little doubt in Harvey's mind as to the profession which the skeletons had pursued in the world of men. Though inured to the sea, they, too, had succumbed to the Pacific's dark treachery, had fallen through a vent in the bed of the ocean. For hundreds of years, perhaps, they had been descending in ships into an alien world through a vent at the bottom of the ocean, which yawned to receive the living and the dead. No other explanation was tenable. The living and the dead. Or only the dead, perhaps. Drowned men, corpses. Harvey was a novelty in that world; the octopus-men regarded him with wonder, with awe. Perhaps he and Taylor alone, of all men. . . .

HIS captor had come to a sudden halt, standing very still in the blue light before an empty chamber. Harvey's gaze swept the enclosure in vague apprehension, which mounted to a shrill fright when the creature lowered its tentacles and deposited him in the center of the burnished floor. For an instant he relinquished hope. In the course of the journey past the dark chambers he had correlated his impressions and reduced them to some sort of meaning, and he was convinced that the creature intended to devour him.

But his captor had other plans. It simply deposited him in the center of the floor and retreated precipitously, with shrill ululations. Harvey was left alone in the vacant enclosure. For a moment he lay there prone, too stunned and frightened to move or cry out. His mind was in a turmoil; momentarily he expected that a claw would fasten on his throat, would dash out his brains. If the side chambers, with their gruesome relics, were not slaughter stations, what were they?

Harvey was not vouchsafed an immediate reply. He was simply left lying in the center of the chamber, whilst the octopus creature busied itself elsewhere. Even when he rose to a sitting posture and stared frantically about, no one interfered with him. It was only when he gained his feet and staggered, shakily, toward the central cavern that the octopus creatures reappeared. His original captor reappeared, and also several others.

One of these, he perceived with horror, was holding the limp form of Taylor. Taylor had fainted.

THE creatures bobbed about in the passage without and glared at Harvey with their small, red-rimmed eyes. When they saw that he was intent on emerging, one of them raised a tentacle and struck him a thud upon the chest which sent him sprawling. When he again raised himself his horror-struck gaze encountered an extraordinary sight. Taylor was lying prone upon the floor and one of the creatures was spraying him with a greenish fluid. This exudation drooled from the creature's mouth, a thick substance that descended in a stream on Taylor's extremities. Harvey did not immediately perceive the significance of what was taking place; he was too frightened.

But when one of the creatures seized him and began spraying him with the same sticky, evil-smelling liquid, he awoke to the seriousness of his predicament. The creatures were gluing his arms and legs together so that he would be powerless to escape, powerless to so much as move about in the enclosure.

There was no doubt in Harvey's mind that the creatures intended to imprison him in the enclosure. The gluelike substance hardened almost instantly on his arms and legs and held them in a rigid vise. So acrid was the odor that surged from it that it half strangled the breath in his throat. But worst of all, he was not permitted to assume a natural posture, but was glued into a cramped and agonized attitude, and trussed up like a beetle in amber against the wall of the chamber.

Having deposited him against the wall the octopus creatures retreated to the main passageway, and stood for an instant silently gazing in at him, their small eyes glowing with malicious satisfaction. Then they withdrew, their places being taken, after a moment, by others of their kind. For nearly an hour Harvey and Taylor, glued helplessly to the wall, were viewed and reviewed by the detestable creatures. With an insatiable curiosity they clustered about the entrance to the chamber and reveled in the sufferings and agony of their captive guests. They seemed to exude, beside the gluelike substance which dripped from their mouths, a malignancy, a hate so intense that it could actually be felt, as though it emanated in tangible vibrations from their bodies.

AT last, when more than a hundred of the octopus-men had passed and repassed before the chamber, and the more agile and aggressive of the creatures, who seemed to exercise a kind of leadership, were showing evident signs of weariness, a change became evident in the proceedings. Five of the creatures congregated before the entrance and began, slowly, to make grotesque gestures in the air.

Harvey was not left long in doubt as to the meaning of their strange behavior. They were walling him up! Skilfully and with a hellish deliberation they drew out the exudation from their mouths and converted it into a finely meshed, cohesive web by the cooperative movements of five pairs of hands working in harmony with numberless tentacles. They wove the threadlike strands in and out among the tentacles, using the latter as looms, staples and shuttles, when the need arose, as it alternately did, for thicker and finer integuments. They worked with a spiderlike precision and it was not long before a heavy veil spanned the entrance of the enclosure, dimming the radiance within and increasing Harvey's despair. The octopus creatures became dim shadow-shapes on

a blue-lighted screen, vague distortions moving slowly backward and forward in the shifting light.

Then Taylor moved and spoke: "Is that you, Jim?"

Harvey started and turned about as far as his shackles would permit. The two men were trussed up side by side against a rock fissure with innumerable cutting protuberances. The octopus-men had done their work well. Not only were Harvey and his companion secured so tightly that they were powerless to struggle; they were virtually impaled against the wall, fastened by innumerable strands of gutty integument to the outcropping rocks and so placed that the slightest movement caused the most excruciating agony. But Harvey valiantly turned his head, ignoring the pain which wracked him.

"Yes, Frank?"

"I can't see very well. Where are we?"

"In one of the side caverns. You saw them?"

THERE was a moment of silence. Then a groan came from the man by Harvey's side.

"I saw them, yes. Oh, my God!"

"Get a grip on yourself, Frank," admonished Harvey. "We're still alive. That ought to mean something to you. We've been privileged beyond most of the poor devils who came here. I don't think the vile creatures ever saw a *live* man before."

"What do you supposed they walled us up in here for?" murmured Taylor.

"I don't know. But we've got to try to work ourselves free. It will be painful, I know, but we've got to try. As soon as they leave, Frank, we'll see what can be done."

"It's useless, Jim. I can't move at all. Unless they release us we're goners. What do you think they intend to do with us?"

Harvey smiled crookedly. "Do you know anything about social life among the insects, Jim?"

Taylor started. "Social life?"

"I mean, do you know what certain species of wasps and beetles do with the caterpillars they capture and sting into insensibility?"

The fear in Harvey's eyes belied the assumed levity of his tone.

"Do you know what they do with the caterpillars, Jim?"

Taylor remained silent.

"THEY wall them up with clusters of new-laid eggs. Some species of wasps merely wall up the caterpillars and eggs together, and others go further, depositing the eggs on the body of the captive host. I don't think we'll find any eggs on our persons, but I'm not so confident about the rest of this cave."

"It's preposterous," mused Taylor, hoarsely. "They are *not* insects."

"No, but their social habits may be roughly analogous. Their web weaving, for instance, is spiderlike. You can't deny that. And who knows what instincts and habit patterns they may have acquired during millions of years of subterranean evolution? In our world social insects which spend most of their lives underground are cannibalistic, particularly in the rearing of their broods. Why is the comparison so fantastic, Jim? They've walled us up for a definite purpose."

"The cave is empty," affirmed Taylor, tremulously.

"I wish it were. That mound, over in the corner there. . . ."

"I saw it. But surely you don't believe. . . ."

"I don't like the looks of it, Frank."

"But it's solid earth, I tell you. A mere unevenness in the soil."

"No, Frank. You see it's—it's moving."

"I've been watching it. It started to move several minutes ago, while you were unconscious. I've been watching it continuously. There's something alive under that mound. I'm certain of it now. An instant ago, just before I called your attention to it, it *heaved up*. Just as though—well, it's impatient to get out, I guess."

"It isn't moving now," protested Taylor.

"Not at this moment. But keep your eyes on it and you'll see."

TAYLOR watched. Only his rapid breathing betrayed his agitation. After a moment, the breathing stopped, its cessation heralded by a short hiss. When Taylor spoke again there was a note of appeal in his voice:

"But I can't believe there's anything alive down there. An earth tremor. . . ."

"No." Harvey was pitilessly firm. "It's too obvious. As soon as I saw what they intended to do with us, as soon as they started spinning, I began to suspect the truth. And when I saw that mound and saw it *move*—" He broke off, abruptly. Then, after a moment: "Those skeletons in the other chambers gave me an inkling of what to anticipate. I knew that these were feast stations. Only I thought—it was amusing—I thought we were destined for the adults. I flattered myself that we were destined for mature stomachs. Not—*maggots*."

"Cut it," groaned Taylor. "No sense in that kind of talk."

Harvey smiled wanly. "No sense in any kind of talk—now."

Taylor began violently to struggle. But only his back and shoulders were unconfined, and the more he moved the more terribly the rock projections cut through his garments, lacerating his flesh.

It is to Harvey's credit that he remained outwardly calm and immobile. Even when the mound bubbled and heaved he did not cry out or attempt to move his limbs. He simply thrust forward his head and watched, with a consuming curiosity, the small shapes emerge from the soft loam, watched their globular heads sway backward and forward in the dimming light. They were moist and glistening greenish globes that expanded in girth till they sagged with an excess of fleshly tumescence and enveloped in balloonlike folds the repulsive and malignant faces beneath. Yet despite their bulging craniums the shapes were grotesquely small—eight-inch caricatures of the larger monsters without, with faces so shriveled and deformed that the mere sight of them sent a chill to Harvey's heart. As he strained forward the sweat dripped from his forehead. The monsters beyond the blue-lighted partition were at least partially anthropomorphic; but in these tiny less mature faces adhered no kinship to humanity—at all, no remote suggestion of anything but the fiendish and bestial.

They were savagely *eager*, an eagerness that, in a manner of speaking, was wholly dental. Their eyes were vacant, blind, and only their teeth-rimmed mouths were alive and prescient. These were puckered in an instinctive eagerness, a blind rage of hunger that clamored for appeasement.

ONE by one the creatures came from the broken earth and surged across the chamber on thin, transparent tentacles. And as they advanced their faces contracted even more menacingly, and their lips writhed upward from their razor-sharp teeth. Interminably they continued to appear, till the entire floor of the chamber was a squirming mass of translucent tentacles and dark hairy limbs. And presently the vanguard reached the

ledge where Taylor and Harvey were confined and, clambering swiftly over the outcropping stones, swarmed upon the unfortunate men.

A surging fury of revulsion raced through Taylor's veins. At least fifteen of the things had climbed upon him, and their wet bodies were clinging tenaciously to his clothes and coiling about his shackled limbs. Their white, fish-like eyes stared sightlessly upward as they wriggled, and their acrid breath made him choke and gasp. Presently he heard an insatiable gnawing and the clashing of teeth all about him. The sound deafened him.

The creatures were viciously eating their way to his flesh, eating away both his clothes and the hardened exudation which covered them.

For a while these activities continued without abatement, and then —torture: excruciating torment in his flesh, piercing stabs of pain on his chest, shoulders and legs. Agonizingly he struggled to free himself from the merciless jaws that were snapping and tearing at his confined limbs.

HE lashed about, and gradually as he squirmed the gutlike strands, which had been loosened by the creatures' blind and insensate gnawing began perceptibly to give way. They relaxed, broke, and the entire upper portion of his body sagged downward. Fiercely he continued to struggle, and in another moment his legs were also free, and he was sliding from the ledge.

Swiftly downward his body plunged, striking the earth with a thud, and dislodging a dozen of his tormentors. But no sooner was he on the ground than another score of the creatures leaped upon him and clawed at his lacerated flesh. When he endeavored to rise they pressed in so suffocatingly upon him that he was powerless to move. The whole chamber was aswarm with their writhing tentacles. It was an inferno, a seething carnival.

And then from out of the darkness above there came an outburst of insane laughter. In his effort to face the inevitable stoically Harvey had overtaxed his endurance, and his nerves were in revolt. High up on the ledge, above Taylor's head, he had begun horribly to laugh—mirth demoniac, rhythmic, mad, the hideous cackling of a man in the last extremity of mortal fright.

And as the awful sound rose in volume and intensity there occurred an incident more mysterious than all the shapes and sounds of that unearthly world—a sudden quelling of the bestial orgy, a shifting of impulse in the voracious hordes. For the high-pitched, semi-rhythmic reverberations of Harvey's insane mirth appeared to generate a cataclysmic reaction in the swarms of larval octopi.

WITH spasmodic jerks they descended from the ledge and from Taylor's body, and formed into a phalanx in the center of the chamber. In haste they huddled together, as hypnotically responsive to the wild sound as were the rats of Hamelin to the pipings of the minstrel—oblivious to everything but their own frenzied cavortings. For an instant they went careening in a body about the chamber, clambering up the wall toward the ceiling and falling back upon the floor in a quivering swoon. Several times they repeated this wild, irrational dance, lying for an instant as though stunned, and then beginning again. Faster and faster, in a mad fury about the narrow enclosure. Faster and faster, in rhythmic dance, a whirling

waltz, macabre, blind. Louder swelled the laughter of poor Harvey and wilder became the leapings and cavortings of the larval monsters, their mouths white with a drooling froth.

And suddenly they leaped upon the partition and began furiously to attack it with their teeth. Like a swarm of locusts they fell upon the confining web of exudation and gnawed and bit at it. Their jaws worked spasmodically, filling the cave with a crunching din. Backward and forward over the web they moved, jostling one another in their fright. And presently a black hole yawned in the blue-lighted screen, and the larvae were swarming through it. And then another hole appeared, and another, till the entire partition was riddled, and the creatures streamed through each of the yawning vents. Gradually they vanished, and only the prone form of Taylor on the floor and the hysterical, screaming form of Harvey on the ledge remained in the chamber.

With a supreme effort the former got unsteadily to his feet, and blundered toward the ledge. His friend, free of his shackles, was clinging helplessly to the uneven projections, staring insanely at the opposite wall and laughing like a gorilla under torture. When Taylor reached out tremulously to steady and reassure him Harvey struck aside the proffered arm and shrieked horribly. All of Taylor's remonstrances were of no avail. Harvey drew himself up against the ledge and refused to descend. Taylor was compelled to climb up beside him, and plead and struggle with him, and finally, in desperation, to strike him a vicious blow upon the chin.

In another moment Taylor was dragging the unconscious form of his friend through the collapsed partition toward a luminous void. Out, in frantic haste, along a dark, wide passage, up a steep incline and between narrow walls dripping with ooze. And to keep from going mad he too laughed as he advanced—shouted and laughed and wept.

* * *

WHEN Harvey recovered consciousness he was lying upon his back and Taylor was kneeling beside him. The sky above his head was very blue; the sun shone with a warm and very earthly radiance. In instinctive bewilderment he put out his hand and felt the soil upon which he was lying. It was sandy soil, moist and soft.

Taylor was staring at him solicitously. "I hope you're all right, old fellow. It was a nasty blow I gave you, but I had to do it. You were hysterical—helpless."

Harvey groaned, raising himself on his elbow. "I feel a little dizzy," he murmured. "I don't know—I don't know where I am. Weren't we in—a cave? I seem to recall a cave. It's all so confused. Something terrible. . . ."

"Steady, Jim. You'll be all right in a moment. We *were* in a cave. The octopus people—remember? They walled us up."

Harvey's face contracted spasmodically, and in a moment he was trembling. "I remember," he murmured. "The submarine, the *vent*—oh, my God!" He sprang to his feet and stared wildly about him. Then quickly, with an agility that was appalling, he began racing about, staring up in bewilderment at the luxuriant foliage of the coco palms, and peering with incredulous eyes at the heavens flecked by white normal clouds and the long white beach that sloped in a steep gradient to the sun-reddened ocean.

He was faint with excitement when he came back to where Taylor was kneeling above the ashes of an extinguished fire. "A dream, then?" he murmured, sinking to his knees.

"No," Taylor shook his head. "I don't think so."

"But how did we get here?"

"I DON'T know precisely how. I broke through the wall and dragged you out into the main passage. I remember doing that. And then—everything dissolved. I mean just that. The cave, the stalactites, everything."

"And the submarine."

"It's on the other side of the island. It's all battered in, twisted, smashed. We were caught up in a tidal wave, Jim, and cast on this island. That accounts for the sensation we had of falling through space. After the smash—you understand? It's my guess we had a collision first. The S-87 got tangled up with a submerged hull or something of the sort, and then a tidal wave came along, and sent it spinning. There's no doubt about its having been a tidal wave. All the trees on the other side of the island are uprooted, and the S-87's a hundred yards from the shore. It must have been a frightful cataclysm. The island's practically washed out over there."

"But the cave, the octopus people?"

"I don't know where they are. They're right beside us, perhaps, in another dimension."

"Another dimension?"

"Yes. That's what I've been thinking. It's much less hard to believe than that we fell through a hole at the bottom of the sea. Besides, we didn't. We know now that we didn't. I'm not much of a bookworm, but I've read something of what modern scientists are thinking nowadays about the fourth dimension, and it's my guess that we're very near to it, that there's another world impinging—I think that's the word they use—impinging on this island. By some crazy mischance we stumbled into it. Or rather, the S-87 was immersed in it. Now it's passed. You understand. We stumbled out of it, escaped from it. A misstep and we may get back into it again. It may be lying very close to us. It apparently moves about, for the submarine is now in *our* world. But it may come back and immerse the submarine and us. You know what the books say, the books that have to do with such matters. I can remember one passage almost word for word: 'Above the familiar seas and islands of the world there lie other invisible islands and seas, fourth-dimensional islands and seas, peopled by strange and horrible creatures unlike anything with which we are familiar.' Those sailors—the skeletons in the cave—were lost like us. Castaways. The other world broke through and engulfed them."

HARVEY was nodding excitedly. "I think you've hit it," he murmured. "But if it's true, if it's really true, we're still in danger."

"Chances are," continued Taylor, "we're safe for the present. But it may come back before we can get away. I've been hoping and praying that we'll be picked up before anything like that happens. See that sail?" Taylor gestured toward the sea. "I've been watching it for an hour. I even lit a fire to attract it. But it doesn't come any nearer."

But in another moment he had risen to his feet and was gesturing and pointing excitedly. "It's putting on sail!" he exclaimed. "It's heading toward the island. Don't you see?"

"You're right, by Heaven."

Taylor's eyes fastened on the sail with a consuming curiosity. "They see us," he murmured. "If only they can get here in time. . . ."

The two men started running swiftly down the beach toward the sea. "I think we're safe!" shouted Taylor. "We're out of it, com-

pletely. Good thing, though, we made an effort. We'd have been carried away if we hadn't. Like the sailors. They were carried away because—because they were dead. *You* were as helpless as a dead man. Good thing I knocked you out."

A few minutes later they were clambering aboard a small sailing craft captained by a dark-skinned Oriental with sunken cheeks and small, shifty eyes.

"Bad island," he muttered, truculently, when he had recovered from his astonishment. "Bad island. Never go there. Strange things happen people go there. Never once come back. Bad island for men to go to."

The celerity with which he gave instructions for getting away, ordering his crew about as though they were vermin, bore eloquent testimony to the reality of his trepidation. He was profoundly agitated, as were Taylor and Harvey until a half mile of open sea stretched between their sun-scorched persons and the island of horror.

Fairies of Folklore

THE folklore of nearly every people makes mention of fairies, human in form and usually diminutive, with unusual powers for good and evil. These little creatures have the power of making themselves invisible when they wish. They are never worshipped, but are often invoked for aid. They come right into the homes of people to spread their gifts. It is best to keep in their good graces, for if offended they can do much mischief.

Among the Persians are the Peris, delicate, ethereal females, who, though not immortal, live very long. To assist a Peri, or to otherwise get into her good graces, brings good luck, and to offend one brings bad luck.

The Shedim, a species of fairy descended from Adam, were believed in by the Jews. They have wings and are physically similar to angels; they eat, drink and are merry, and are glad to help any mortal who is kind to them.

The Djinns of Arabia are a more dangerous kind. They are males with the power of making themselves invisible, and it is important to keep on the right side of them, for they can do great damage if offended. War and accident have slain many of them, but they were once a mighty race. It is known that a shooting star always marks the death of a Djinn.

The Greek and Roman fairies were called Fauns and Satyrs, Dryads and Naiads. They often mingled with mortals, and sometimes even intermarried with them. They would reward kindnesses and bring good luck if properly treated.

In France are Follets who are always invisible but whose voices can often be heard. They have a strange sense of humor or are perhaps just mischievous, for they love to pelt peasants with stones and enter houses and throw about utensils and otherwise create disorder. Like other fairies they do good and make rewards to those in their good graces. It is lucky to find their tracks in the grass.

In France are also Fees, Lutins and Goblins. These little folk dance in fairy rings by night, haunt springs and solitary grottoes, tie up horses' manes to form stirrups and then ride their mounts hard. They give presents, help lovers and preside at births, bringing luck to babies they take an interest in. Sometimes they are very naughty and steal a child from its cradle, leaving one of their own kind in its place. Such a one is called a Changeling, and, while apt to be beautiful, its inclinations are for evil.

The Scandinavians have Elves, playful, mischievous little creatures who delight in vexing people by knotting the hair of sleeping children, stealing small articles, and other such things. Because they can cause no end of trouble it is well to be kind to them, especially by leaving food for them to eat in the grottoes where they dwell.

Ireland has multitudes of fairies, so it is only natural that their literature is full of tales of their deeds. They dress in green, are very pretty and kind, help poor peasants, bring lovers together and do good unobtrusively.

Fairies who do all kinds of mischief, Dwarfs, Trolls and Gnomes, are those found in Teutonic countries, and many are the rites and ceremonies resorted to by the peasantry to get into their good graces.

In Scotland are the Brownies and Kelpies. They sometimes take the form of cattle or horses, and throw people off who attempt to ride them. They are generally mischievous, and do nothing much of benefit.

"Fire burn and cauldron bubble"

A MEETING PLACE FOR SORCERERS AND APPRENTICES

Buried Death Fears

Dea Editor:

Congratulations! Your first number of Strange Tales is good; it has all the earmarks of another successful magazine. Cover strikes me as being better than any so far on Astounding Stories. My objection to the Astounding covers is that they try to be illustrations for some story; I mean that the artist usually develops the picture exactly as he would an inside illustration, showing characters in action. Now, to my way of thinking, the human characters who happen to be throwing a javelin at an ape or setting off some celestial pyrotechnics are not important on the cover. Inside they are 100% important, for there the pictu e must put an actual story-scene before us; must show us John J. Hero in action; but on the cover it is the *story idea* that is important rather than the portrayal of some definite action of the hero in the story.

And here I started to congratulate you on S. T., and have wound up by bawling you out for Astounding. But perhaps you will gather from this that I liked the S. T. cover immensely.

I have had time only for a hasty skipping through of the contents. What I have seen reads well; I believe that you are hit ing a high mark. And now for a suggestion—

Perhaps, even though the readers are invited to express their opinions and likes and dislikes, it is the part of prudence for a contributor to keep his mouth shut. I will take a chance, however, and offer a suggestion, and, since it is offered without my having read the magazine, it will be apparent that this is not a criticism of editorial policy as exemplified therein but merely my own ideas of a possible danger after looking over some of the yarns.

To continue publication you must develop a certain circulation. That means a big field of readers that you reach, and

consequently it follows that the magazine must be an instrument of good or evil effect upon those thousands of minds. Now, in this matter of horror tales, it seems to me that there is a distinct line that can be drawn. On one side are grouped the stories that are weird, gruesome perhaps, almost any type t at will make the shivers run up and down the readers' spines, *but*—they do not include the one class that must be placed on the ot er side of that dividing line: t e stories which fill the mind with fear of death.

"Why fear death? It is the most beau i-ful adventure of life!" Frohman's words when he stood on the sinking *Titanic*.

And anything which places in receptive minds a fear of that adventure, a terror of what awaits them in that "bourne from which no traveler returns" is an unmitigated evil.

Does that bar ghost stories? Not for a minute. Nor the depiction of evolving elementals or what have you. It bars no single type of story; it means merely that every type should be examined wit that thought in mind, and every story rejected if it crosses that invisible line of demarcation between the story that may be sheer horror but leaves no buried death-fear in the reader's mind, and the other story that *does* have a definitely detrimental *psychological effect*.

And again I call your attention to the fact that this is not a criticism of your policy, for I do not yet know your policy very well; but I have taken advantage of your invitation to submit suggestions and am giving you this one for what it may be worth. C. W. Diffin.

Likes Many Stories

Dear Editor:

Congratulations on the January number of Strange Tales. It is the best issue that you have brought out yet, and if you can maintain such a high level of excellence, your magazine will certainly be a crackerjack. I am also pleased to note that this issue contains eight stories. This is very much better than having, say, from five to seven comparatively long stories; and if Strange Tales occasionally contains nine or even ten stories it will be all right as far as I am concerned, as it will give the magazine plenty of variety.

I think "Wolves of Darkness" is one of the best weird stories I have ever read. It is told with great skill and remarkable vividness and shows us the werewolf from an entirely new angle. I found this story highly engrossing and entertaining from start to finish.

"The Door to Saturn" is a very amusing story and I had many a chuckle over Mr. Smith's fantastic drollery as I read it. I don't know whether or not the author intended this to be a satire on interplanetary stories in general, but it would do for such, admirably.

I also liked "The Door of Doom" very much as I am especially fond of stories dealing with grim, old, deserted houses. I hope you will publish many of this kind in Strange Tales.—Paul S. Smith, 56 Berwyn St., Orange, N. J.

"Oy! Oy! Oy!"

Dear Editor:

I have read the two issues of Strange Tales so far published, and think that you have the beginning of a fine magazine. In these issues, three tales stand way out above the rest, and it is of them that I would speak a couple of words.

In the present issue, "Cassius," by Henry S. W itehead, is remarkable. It is good, even for Whitehead, and that's saying a great deal. Dr. Whitehead is a past master at depicting he joys and sorrows and strange macabre terrors of the West Indian negro. The abnormal little evil entity, t e "twin brother" cheated out of his birthright, is a grotesque, yet very pathetic conception. Certain scenes in this story stand out as vivid, unforgettable pictures. The grotesque little black abnormality scuttering across the floor, blackagainst the white moonlight; the sinister suggestive swinging of the liana vine; the monstrosity pursuing the madly fleeing pickaninny lying crushed, bleeding and helpless, beneat the mangling and tearing claws of t e cat. In the depicting of the Western Indian negro, Whitehead has no equal, and all his pictures of them have all the color and subtle shading of an exquisite oil painting. Whitehead is not merely a supreme story-teller, he has the feeling of a true artist, and I hope in the future to see a great many of his stories in S. T.

"The Place of the Pythons," by Arthur J. Burks, in the last issue, is a masterpiece. No other word will adequately describe it. I consider it worthy of Poe or Bierce. I shall take very good care that my copy of this story is not lost. Its originality of conception is unique, astounding. The man's being the python, and the python the man, is exceedingly powerful, the more so as it is not postulated or explained; it is simply taken for granted. The steaming jungle night, the warm slash of the rain, the dread of the swamp, the sinuous and sinister shapes that glide; heads upraised among the vine-clad depts and the lyrical, exquisite poetical style in which these things are narrated; all these make up a story, the reading of which is one of the events of a lifetime. I congratulate the author most warmly on having produced such a wonderful piece of work, and am certain that it will go down in history as one of the finest masterpieces of weird tales. I cannot sufficiently express my admiration for it.

"The Return of the Sorcerer," by Clark Ashton Smith, is a deliciously gruesome tale. Oy! oy! oy! if those moving parts, separated or conjoined should to-night

make an entry into our bedroom—*Quick Henry, the Flit!* Oy! oy! oy! What a story to read when one is all alone on a sharp autumn night when the wind rattles the shutters, the bare boughs beat on the side of the house and the wildly weeping autumn raindrops tap insistently at the pane!

All success to Strange Tales, its enterprising editor, and its gifted authors.—Bernard Austin Dwyer, West Shokan, N. Y.

We Improve

Dear Editor:

Congratulations on the best issue of S. T. to date. "Wolves of Darkness" was great, with the suspense well handled and the explanations to the point and not anti-climactical. For second place I couldn't decide between "Dead Legs," "The Moon Dial," and "The Door of Doom." For third, I select "The Shadow on the Sky," for fourth, "The Black Laugh," and for fifth and sixth, "The Door to Saturn" and "The Smell."

Was again somewhat disappointed in Clark Ashton Smith's offering—that writer can do much better than his last two S. T. tales.

Keep up the good work, but I do wish you'd get hold of a lot of stock cuts for head and tail-pieces, etc. The cover this time was exceptionally well done, though the last issue was positively lousy. I would also like to see some weird or exotic verse occasionally. Really, this number is so far ahead of the last that I would not be much surprised to learn the magazine is going to be issued monthly instead of bi-monthly.—Bruce Bryan, 635 N. Gramercy Pl., Los Angeles, Calif.

I Am Overcome

Dear Editor:

The first story I read in the January issue was "Dead Legs." The yarn was a wow! and goes to show, as I have long suspected, that Edmond Hamilton is a master of Weird Fiction.

Seems to me that Wesso was a little careless with the cover on this issue. Jack Williamson, in "Wolves of Darkness," describes the girl as follows: "Her skin was white, with a cold, leprous, bloodless whiteness. Almost as white as the snow." Wesso shows her epidermis as fair as one could desire. The other features are correct. When I saw those eyes I nearly dropped. The cold, green glint in them would quail a statue.

As for the other tales in the mag, I am sure that they uphold the tradition set up by Mr. Bates in the other mag he edits. I haven't got to them yet.

Now I want to extend my heartfelt congratulationa to the guiding genius at the helm of Astounding Stories and Strange Tales—Mr. Harry Bates. Each of these mags has contained stories by the best fiction writers of the day. And to top that, their stories are not hackwork. They reserve the best products of their pens for the above named magazines. In a recent issue of Astounding Stories, a writer gave three literary cheers for Mr. Bates. I but echo his sentiments when I give him three cheers and a double tiger and wish him a very, very happy New Year. [A little late, but we'll change it to Fourth of July. And thankee, thankee.—Ed.] I hope, that for many years to come, he will guide the destinies of two of my favorite mags. [Mr. Clayton, please notice. —Ed.]—Fred C. Miles, 3000 Springfield Ave., New Providence, N. J.

Congrats

Dear Editor:

Congrats on the best issue, by far, of the first three. How could it help being with Hamilton, Williamson, Smith and Flagg in the same number!

I think Flagg's and Hamilton's yarns were the two best. Both were entirely different. Flagg's idea was quite novel, I thought, inasmuch as it was the first tale I remember that used the sense of smell for the theme. And Hamilton's "Dead Legs" was excellent, too, because of its strange plot. Williamson's story was fine, and it had me guessing for a long while—perhaps too long. I like short stories. Long ones usually bore me a bit. I thought "Wolves of Darkness" was just a bit too drawn out. Smith managed to contrive an interplanetary strange tale, and a mighty fine one at that.

Let's have more plots that don't deal just with reincarnations, elementals, ghosts, etc. Of the rest of the stories I liked "The Door of Doom" and "The Black Laugh." The other two I did not care for, and I thought "The Moon Dial" particularly uninteresting.—Forrest J. Ackerman, 530 Staples Ave., San Francisco, Cal.

Says It with Verse

Dear Editor:

Being a regular reader of your Astounding Stories, I thought I would write and tell you how much I enjoy it. I have been reading it for about a year now and I never seem to tire of it the way I do the other weekly or monthly magazines. Now I see you have published a new book called Strange Tales, which I think is even better than Astounding Stories, though it is hard to tell which is the most interesting.

Being a British reader, it is about a month later that I can obtain my copies, but, nevertheless, they are worth waiting for.

In appreciation of the good stories published both in A. S. and S. T., I have written a verse about each:

I like to read good stories,
With thrills in them galore;
Astounding Stories has them all,
But try and give us more.

I'd like to meet the authors,
Ray Cummings and the rest,
They all sure know their onions,
But tell me who's the best?

And now Strange Tales you've printed;
It makes your backbone cold;
It grips you till you're finished,
Whether boy, girl, young or old.

I've read your first edition;
And though I get it late,
It's something I just live for—
One hundred years I'd wait!

—Thomas McCartin, 10 Rossendale Rd., Collokshaws, Glasgow, Scotland.

A. S. and S. T.

Dear Editor:

I have just read a group of old copies of Astounding Stories, and I want to tell you I think A. S. is simply great. I read most every Science Fiction magazine I can buy, trade, or borrow, but yours gets my attention first.

Now just a word of praise for A. S.'s companion magazine, Strange Tales. It's the best yet. I can assure you that I will never miss a copy. Why can't we have a "Readers' Corner" in Strange Tales? I'm sure all the readers will agree with me that it would be a good idea. [All right—accept our "Cauldron." —Ed.]

I think the best stories in the three issues that I have read were: "The Dead Who Walk," "The Thirteenth Floor," "Webbed Hands," "Cassius" and "Wolves of Darkness." I can't say enough for this last; it was the best story I have read in any magazine of the type of Strange Tales. "Dead Legs" was so good a second as to almost be a first. Be sure and keep Edmond Hamilton on the staff; he's great. "The Door of Doom" comes next and "The Smell" last. "The Moon Dial" I did not like at all nor "The Door to Saturn." "The Black Laugh" and "The Shadow on the Sky" were not too bad.

If this letter is printed, and anyone reading it would like to correspond with me, I would be glad to hear from them. —Chester A. Payfer, Rte. 3, Yale, Mich.

Ride 'Im, Cowboy!

Dear Editor:

Toosday I stops by Hogan's hole-in-the-wall to buy me a seegar like I do reg'lar sence I come off the range an' play like I'm a city guy; an' I gits me a Strange Tales offen Hogan, an' reads it, same as I do reg'lar ever' time it comes out. That is, callatin' I'm sober at the time.

Pardner, you got a good book o' yarns in the Jinuary number. I could feel myself runnin' an' snarlin' with that green-eyed girl an' them wolves Jack Williamson tells about, an' the bristles raisin' on my backbone when Hamilton's "Dead Legs" uses the ax, an' on along through the whole mess o' darn good ghost stories—thankful for one ladleful o' happiness dished out in the "Moon Dial" by that feller Whitehead—just smokin' along casual an' havin' a good time, not takin' any of 'em too serius.

But for Pete's sake! That Francis Flagg, him that wrote "The Smell!" Somebody hawgtie him and git a iron on him! Pronto! You can round up a critter an' deal with him when you know where he b'longs, but this Flagg, now, a man don't know whether to tell him to set an' chaw or git to hellengone outa here. Is this slick-ear tryin' to tell us that if the decent part of us could see what we reely injoy to waller in it would prove plumb fatal? Or is he sayin' that if the orneriness in us could ever meet up square with the shinin' face of what we'd aspire to be that the lousy old beast would lay right down with its hoofs up an' the best of our constitushun would float off an' be a angel? Or is he throwin' a skeer into us an' givin' us the horse laugh?

Good gravy! My hair ain't laid down sence Toosday. Come again, Strange Tales.—Buckaroo Hart, 553 Natoma St., San Francisco, Cal.

Now, You See!

Dear Editor:

There is a little final touch to a story I came across in the British Medical Journal not long ago which might be of interest to readers of Strange Tales. It occurs at the end of an account, by a medical officer in West Africa, of how fourteen native women were all struck and killed by lightning while under the same galvanized iron shelter.

All the natives, including the driver of the motor-lorry which had been sent to remove the bodies to a mortuary, firmly refused to enter the shelter, as there was a prevalent belief that anyone removing the bodies before the "ju-ju" had been appeased by a ceremony of purification by the "thunder women" would die within a week.

However, the European manager of the local transport company drove the bodies to the mortuary in spite of the warnings he, too, received. And three days later he was admitted to the European hospital at Accra, where be lingered for three more days and then died from yellow fever.—Allen Glasser, 1610 University Ave., New York, N. Y.

Why Not?

Dear Editor:

I recently saw the picture, "Murders in the Rue Morgue." It was described as being more weird than "Dracula" and "Frankenstein.' Naturally I expected to see a good picture, but I was disappointed. The picture was not weird and the plot was silly. The thing was, in my estimation, a complete flop. I do not understand how it ever happened to be released.

If the producers want to put out some real weird pictures, why don't they pick on some modern weird story? Take "The Duel of the Sorcerers," for instance. If filmed it would make a peach of a thriller. Provided, of course, it was not changed.

Wesso's cover for the March Strange Tales is good, as are his drawings.

Let's have more of Dr. Muncing.

I hope that Strange Tales will soon be published every month, but I think that you ought to add more pages first.

The more blood-chilling stories are, the better I like them.—Jack Darrow, 4225 N. Spaulding Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Yessir

Dear Editor:

Words fail to express my rapture on receiving the March issue of Astounding Stories. It was a truly wonderful issue. "The Affair of the Brains," by Anthony Gilmore, was splendid, and the second installment of "Wandl, The Invader" was superb. Your, or should I say "our," magazine is rapidly improving (if that is possible), and I hope to read many more issues like the present.

The March issue of Strange Tales by far surpassed all of the former issues. It was perfectly grand!

"The Duel of the Sorcerers," by Paul Ernst, could not have been excelled. "By the Hands of the Dead," by Francis Flagg, was magnificent. "The Feline Phantom," by Gilbert Draper, "The Case of the Sinister Shape," by Gordon MacCreagh, "Tiger," by Bassett Morgan, "Back Before the Moon," by S. Omar Barker and "The Veil of Tanit," by Eugene de Rezske all were ecellxent.

Keep up the fine work!—Fred J. Walsen, 5609 E. 17th Ave., Denver, Colo.

And Long Life to You!

Dear Editor:

I thank you for some especially good stories in the March number of Strange Tales. Francis Flagg is a favorite Science Fiction writer, and "By the Hands of the Dead" is well written and thought provoking. "The Trap," by Henry S. Whitehead, is one I have particularly enjoyed. You see, my favorites are those that combine the fascinating possibilities of scientific discovery with good fiction. But, also, I am very happy with such delightful little tales of love and faith as "Back Before the Moon," by S. Omar Barker, and "Tiger," by Bassett Morgan. Surely you have almost "pleased everyone" in this number of the magazine, for probably there are people who like even those other stories which seem to me only fantastic and tiresome, and they have as much right to be entertained as I.

Long life to your fine, clean book!—Lucy Reynolds, 553 Natoma St., San Francisco, Cal.

A Whole Novelette Is Coming!

Dear Editor:

Just a line to let you know that of all the stories in your March issue, "The Case of the Sinister Shape" appealed to me most.

Gordon MacCreagh seems to have a thorough knowledge of his subject, and the way it is handled makes very interesting reading. It is nice to have each step explained—each exorcism explained in full, as MacCreagh does. I read his other Dr. Muncing story some months ago in your magazine, and on seeing his name in this issue I turned to it first. Please give us more of Dr. Muncing.—Melville Keating, 64 W. 9th St., New York, N. Y.

"Clicks"

Dear Editor:

Strange Tales certainly clicks with me. Rousseau, Cummings, Flagg, Williams, Ernst, Whitehead, Smith—boy, there's a list of writers that would wow anybody.

"The Duel of the Sorcerers" in this issue makes your hair curl, and no fooling. I'll take my hat off—or rather the creeping of my scalp will shake it off—to Paul Ernst, and also Francis Flagg for "By the Hands of the Dead." Those fellows sure have imagination with a capital I. "The Case of the Sinister Shape," by MacCreagh, and "The Trap," by Whitehead, are another pair of yarns that make you afraid to sleep in the dark.—E. L. Miller, 630 E. 14th St., New York, N. Y.

Try Vaseline

Dear Editor:

I have been reading Strange Tales since its inception. It is a darn fine magazine. Cummings' story in the first issue was splendid for about half the story, and then it trailed off. Somehow the end left me feeling that the explanation for all that went before was hardly up to the expectations aroused. Still I got a kick from reading it. Rousseau was splendid.

I have just gotten the current issue of Strange Tales and the hair on my

head refuses to lie down. I like the variety of stories you give in this magazine—no two alike. Consider the difference in such stories as "Dead Legs," "Wolves of Darkness," "The Door to Saturn," "The Smell," "The Duel of the Sorcerers," "By the Hands of the Dead," etc.—and yet everyone of them sent the chills down my spine.

Flagg, Whitehead and Smith are your most original authors to date—and how they can write!—but I have yet to read a poor story in Strange Tales. If it's shivers one wants—well, here's the mag! —Lucius Trent, Beatty, Md., R. F. D. 3, Media, Pa.

Announcement

Recent developments in the magazine publishing business have made it advisable that we issue Strange Tales quarterly for a time, instead of bi-monthly as heretofore.

We are sorry to require our many enthusiastic readers to wait an extra month between issues, but the curtailed schedule should not remain in effect long—not more than two or three issues, as far as we can estimate at the moment.

So, meanwhile, stand by, everybody, and continue as in the past your hearty support of Strange Tales. We for our part shall of course continue to give you the very finest new Weird Fiction that can be procured.

"The Cauldron"

All readers are extended a diabolical invitation to come over to "The Cauldron" and throw in everything you've got that may add to the potency of our brew. Garlic, carbolic acid, the left hind foot of a hump-backed rabbit, old human bones, gall, ideas, brimstone, roses, horseshoes and good old-fashioned bricks—*everything*. You must season the brew to taste: *any* good sorcerer will tell you *that*.

Brains burn and "Cauldron" bubble!
—The Editor.

An Incantation

THERE occurs in some detail in the works of Horace the description of a horrible incantation. With three sorceresses to assist her, Canidia, an old hag, endeavored to concoct a charm whereby a certain young man named Varus, for whom she had conceived a passion, but who regarded her with the utmost contempt, might be made obsequious to her desires.

Canidia appeared with deadly serpents entwined in the locks of her dishevelled hair. Ordering a wild fig-tree and funereal cypress to be rooted up from the nearby sepulchres on which they grew, she caused them, together with the egg of a toad smeared with blood, the plumage of a screech owl, various herbs brought from Thessaly and Georgia, and bones torn from the jaws of a famished dog, to be burned in flames fed with perfumes from Colchis.

One of the assistant witches then traced with hurried steps the edifice, sprinkling it, as she went, with drops from the Avernus, the hair on her head stiff and erect like the bristles of a hunted boar, while another, who was believed to have the faculty of conjuring the stars and the moon down from heaven, contributed her aid. The last assistant sorceress, armed with a spade, with much labor dug a trench in the earth.

A beardless youth, naked, was plunged up to his chin in the trench until the time when his marrow and his liver were ready to be used in concocting the love potion from which the hags promised themselves the marvelous results.

The hapless youth endured their orgies with amazement, asking, by the gods who ruled the earth and all the race of mortals, what meant their dreadful rite. He then entreated Canidia, by her children, if she ever had offspring, by his high rank, and by the never-failing vengeance of Jupiter on such foul deeds, to tell him why she cast on him such frightful glances, most like those of a beast turned at bay.

Failing utterly in his earnest entreaties the victim in his agony at last heaped curses on his torturers. He told them that as a ghost he would haunt them forever; he would tear their cheeks with his fangs, by the power given to the shades below; he would sit, a nightmare, on their bosoms, driving away sleep from their eyes.

Much time went by; unmoved by these threats and execrations, Canidia only complained at the slowness with which her charms were operating. She gnawed her fingers with rage. She invoked the night and the moon under whose rays her outrages were being carried on, to speed the effects of her incantations and signalize their power beneath the roof of him whose love she sought. She impatiently demanded why her drugs should be of less potency than those of Medea, with which she poisoned a garment that, being put on, caused Creusa, daughter of the King of Corinth, to expire in intolerable torment.

She finally concluded that Varus had negated her power by previously taking a magical antidote, and resolved to prepare a mightier charm, that nothing on earth or in hell should resist. "Sooner," she said, "shall the sky be swallowed up in the sea, and the earth be stretched a covering over both, than thou, my enemy, shalt not be wrapped in the flames of love, as subtle and tenacious as those of burning pitch!"

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