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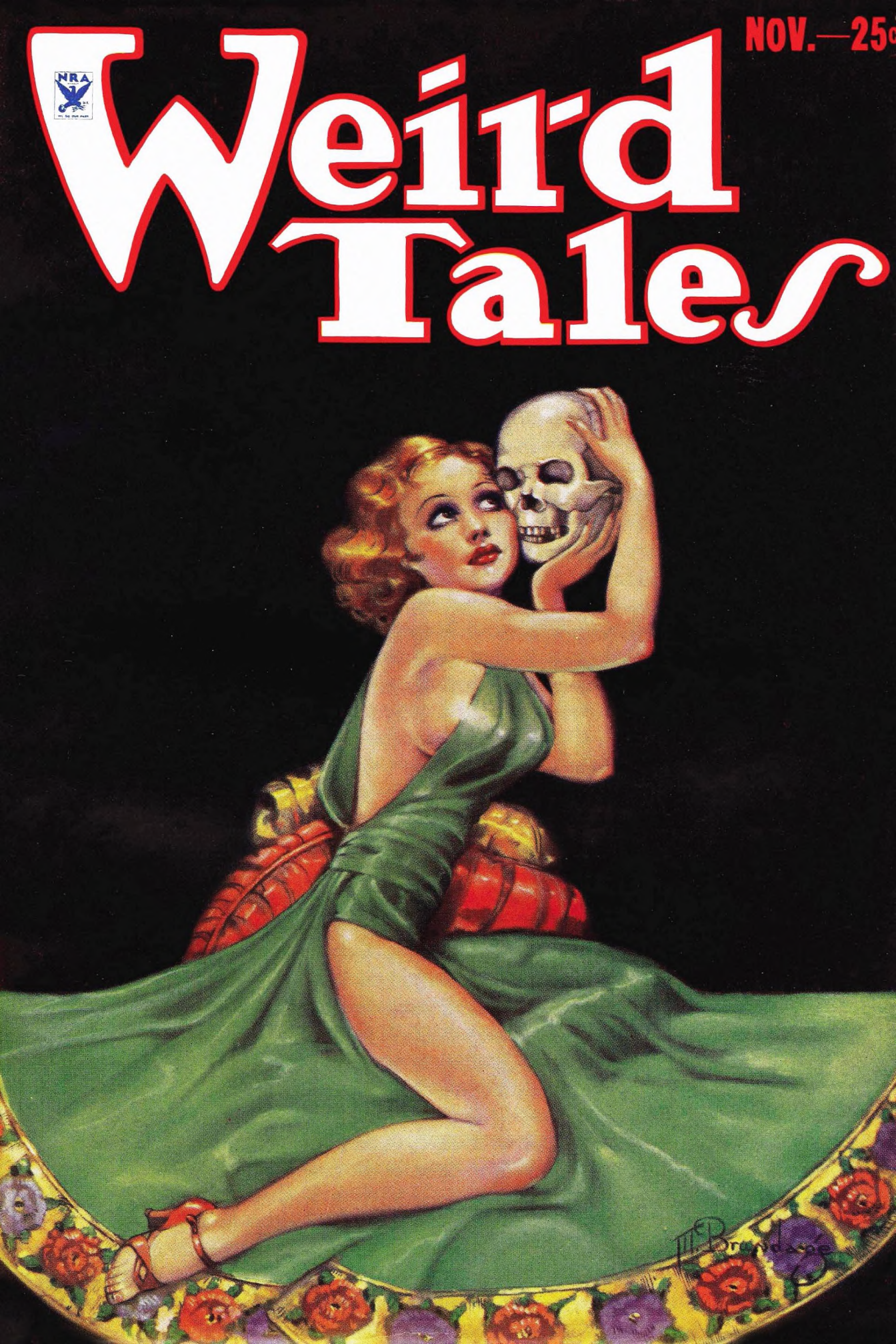

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Weird Tales

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"In her living cloak she swayed toward him."

Shambleau

By C. L. MOORE

An utterly strange and startlingly different story, about an alluring female creature that was neither beast nor human, neither ghost nor vampire—a weird and eery story of many thrills

MAN *has conquered Space before. You may be sure of that. Somewhere beyond the Egyptians, in that dimness out of which come echoes of half-mythical names—Atlantis, Mu—somewhere back of history's first beginnings there must have been an age when mankind, like us today, built cities of steel to house its star-roving ships and knew the names of the planets in their own native tongues—heard Venus' people call their wet world "Sha-ardol" in that soft, sweet, slurring speech and mimicked Mars' guttural "Lakkdiz" from the harsh tongues of Mars' dryland dwellers. You may be sure of it. Man has conquered*

Space before, and out of that conquest faint, faint echoes run still through a world that has forgotten the very fact of a civilization which must have been as mighty as our own. There have been too many myths and legends for us to doubt it. The myth of the Medusa, for instance, can never have had its roots in the soil of Earth. That tale of the snake-haired Gorgon whose gaze turned the gazer to stone never originated about any creature that Earth nourished. And those ancient Greeks who told the story must have remembered, dimly and half believing, a tale of antiquity about some strange being from one of the outlying planets their remotest ancestors once trod.

"SHAMBLEAU! Ha . . . Shambleau!" The wild hysteria of the mob rocketed from wall to wall of Lakkdarol's narrow streets and the storming of heavy boots over the slag-red pavement made an ominous undernote to that swelling bay, "Shambleau! Shambleau!"

Northwest Smith heard it coming and stepped into the nearest doorway, laying a wary hand on his heat-gun's grip, and his colorless eyes narrowed. Strange sounds were common enough in the streets of Earth's latest colony on Mars—a raw, red little town where anything might happen, and very often did. But Northwest Smith, whose name is known and respected in every dive and wild outpost on a dozen wild planets, was a cautious man, despite his reputation. He set his back against the wall and gripped his pistol, and heard the rising shout come nearer and nearer.

Then into his range of vision flashed a red running figure, dodging like a hunted hare from shelter to shelter in the narrow street. It was a girl—a berry-brown girl in a single tattered garment whose scarlet burnt the eyes with its brilliance. She ran wearily, and he could hear her gasping breath from where he stood. As she came into view he saw her hesitate and lean one hand against the wall for support, and glance wildly around for shelter. She must not have seen him in the depths of the doorway, for as the bay of the mob grew louder and the pounding of feet sounded almost at the corner she gave a despairing little moan and dodged into the recess at his very side.

When she saw him standing there, tall and leather-brown, hand on his heat-gun, she sobbed once, inarticulately, and collapsed at his feet, a huddle of burning scarlet and bare, brown limbs.

Smith had not seen her face, but she was a girl, and sweetly made and in danger; and though he had not the reputation of a chivalrous man, something in her hopeless huddle at his feet touched that chord of sympathy for the under-dog that stirs in every Earthman, and he pushed her gently into the corner behind him and jerked out his gun, just as the first of the running mob rounded the corner.

It was a motley crowd, Earthmen and Martians and a sprinkling of Venusian swampmen and strange, nameless denizens of unnamed planets—a typical Lakkdarol mob. When the first of them turned the corner and saw the empty street before them there was a faltering in the rush and the foremost spread out and began to search the doorways on both sides of the street.

"Looking for something?" Smith's sardonic call sounded clear above the clamor of the mob.

They turned. The shouting died for a moment as they took in the scene before them—tall Earthman in the space-explorer's leathern garb, all one color from the burning of savage suns save for the sinister pallor of his no-colored eyes in a

scarred and resolute face, gun in his steady hand and the scarlet girl crouched behind him, panting.

The foremost of the crowd—a burly Earthman in tattered leather from which the Patrol insignia had been ripped away—stared for a moment with a strange expression of incredulity on his face overspreading the savage exultation of the chase. Then he let loose a deep-throated bellow, "Shambleau!" and lunged forward. Behind him the mob took up the cry again, "Shambleau! Shambleau! Shambleau!" and surged after.

Smith, lounging negligently against the wall, arms folded and gun-hand draped over his left forearm, looked incapable of swift motion, but at the leader's first forward step the pistol swept in a practised half-circle and the dazzle of blue-white heat leaping from its muzzle seared an arc in the slag pavement at his feet. It was an old gesture, and not a man in the crowd but understood it. The foremost recoiled swiftly against the surge of those in the rear, and for a moment there was confusion as the two tides met and struggled. Smith's mouth curled into a grim curve as he watched. The man in the mutilated Patrol uniform lifted a threatening fist and stepped to the very edge of the deadline, while the crowd rocked to and fro behind him.

"Are you crossing that line?" queried Smith in an ominously gentle voice.

"We want that girl!"

"Come and get her!" Recklessly Smith grinned into his face. He saw danger there, but his defiance was not the foolhardy gesture it seemed. An expert psychologist of mobs from long experience, he sensed no murder here. Not a gun had appeared in any hand in the crowd. They desired the girl with an inexplicable bloodthirstiness he was at a loss to understand, but toward himself he sensed no such fury. A mauling he might expect, but his life was in no danger. Guns would have appeared before now if they were coming out at all. So he grinned in the man's angry face and leaned lazily against the wall.

Behind their self-appointed leader the crowd milled impatiently, and threatening voices began to rise again. Smith heard the girl moan at his feet.

"What do you want with her?" he demanded.

"She's Shambleau! Shambleau, you fool! Kick her out of there—we'll take care of her!"

"I'm taking care of her," drawled Smith.

"She's Shambleau, I tell you! Damn your hide, man, we never let those things live! Kick her out here!"

The repeated name had no meaning to him, but Smith's innate stubbornness rose defiantly as the crowd surged forward to the very edge of the arc, their clamor growing louder. "Shambleau! Kick her out here! Give us Shambleau! Shambleau!"

Smith dropped his indolent pose like a cloak and planted both feet wide, swinging up his gun threateningly. "Keep back!" he yelled. "She's mine! Keep back!"

He had no intention of using that heat-beam. He knew by now that they would not kill him unless he started the gun-play himself, and he did not mean to give up his life for any girl alive. But a severe mauling he expected, and he braced himself instinctively as the mob heaved within itself.

To his astonishment a thing happened then that he had never known to happen before. At his shouted defiance the foremost of the mob—those who had heard him clearly—drew back a little, not in alarm but evidently surprized. The ex-

Patrolman said, "Yours! She's *yours?*" in a voice from which puzzlement crowded out the anger.

Smith spread his booted legs wide before the crouching figure and flourished his gun.

"Yes," he said. "And I'm keeping her! Stand back there!"

The man stared at him wordlessly, and horror and disgust and incredulity mingled on his weather-beaten face. The incredulity triumphed for a moment and he said again,

"Yours!"

Smith nodded defiance.

The man stepped back suddenly, unutterable contempt in his very pose. He waved an arm to the crowd and said loudly, "It's—his!" and the press melted away, gone silent, too, and the look of contempt spread from face to face.

The ex-Patrolman spat on the slag-paved street and turned his back indifferently. "Keep her, then," he advised briefly over one shoulder. "But don't let her out again in this town!"

SMITH stared in perplexity almost open-mouthed as the suddenly scornful mob began to break up. His mind was in a whirl. That such bloodthirsty animosity should vanish in a breath he could not believe. And the curious mingling of contempt and disgust on the faces he saw baffled him even more. Lakkdarol was anything but a puritan town—it did not enter his head for a moment that his claiming the brown girl as his own had caused that strangely shocked revulsion to spread through the crowd. No, it was something deeper-rooted than that. Instinctive, instant disgust had been in the faces he saw—they would have looked less so if he had admitted cannibalism or *Pharol*-worship.

And they were leaving his vicinity as swiftly as if whatever unknowing sin he had committed were contagious. The street was emptying as rapidly as it had filled. He saw a sleek Venusian glance back over his shoulder as he turned the corner and sneer, "Shambleau!" and the word awoke a new line of speculation in Smith's mind. Shambleau! Vaguely of French origin, it must be. And strange enough to hear it from the lips of Venusians and Martian drylanders, but it was their use of it that puzzled him more. "We never let those things live," the ex-Patrolman had said. It reminded him dimly of something . . . an ancient line from some writing in his own tongue . . . "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live." He smiled to himself at the similarity, and simultaneously was aware of the girl at his elbow.

She had risen soundlessly. He turned to face her, sheathing his gun, and stared at first with curiosity and then in the entirely frank openness with which men regard that which is not wholly human. For she was not. He knew it at a glance, though the brown, sweet body was shaped like a woman's and she wore the garment of scarlet—he saw it was leather—with an ease that few unhuman beings achieve toward clothing. He knew it from the moment he looked into her eyes, and a shiver of unrest went over him as he met them. They were frankly green as young grass, with slit-like, feline pupils that pulsed unceasingly, and there was a look of dark, animal wisdom in their depths—that look of the beast which sees more than man.

There was no hair upon her face—neither brows nor lashes, and he would have sworn that the tight scarlet turban bound around her head covered baldness. She had three fingers and a thumb, and her feet had four digits apiece too, and all sixteen of them were tipped with round

claws that sheathed back into the flesh like a cat's. She ran her tongue over her lips—a thin, pink, flat tongue as feline as her eyes—and spoke with difficulty. He felt that that throat and tongue had never been shaped for human speech.

"Not—afraid now," she said softly, and her little teeth were white and pointed as a kitten's.

"What did they want you for?" he asked her curiously. "What had you done? Shambleau . . . is that your name?"

"I—not talk your—speech," she demurred hesitantly.

"Well, try to—I want to know. Why were they chasing you? Will you be safe on the street now, or hadn't you better get indoors somewhere? They looked dangerous."

"I—go with you." She brought it out with difficulty.

"Say you!" Smith grinned. "What are you, anyhow? You look like a kitten to me."

"Shambleau." She said it somberly.

"Where d'you live? Are you a Martian?"

"I come from—from far—from long ago—far country——"

"Wait!" laughed Smith. "You're getting your wires crossed. You're not a Martian?"

She drew herself up very straight beside him, lifting the turbaned head, and there was something queenly in the poise of her.

"Martian?" she said scornfully. "My people—are—are—you have no word. Your speech—hard for me."

"What's yours? I might know it—try me."

She lifted her head and met his eyes squarely, and there was in hers a subtle amusement—he could have sworn it.

"Some day I—speak to you in—my own language," she promised, and the pink tongue flicked out over her lips, swiftly, hungrily.

Approaching footsteps on the red pavement interrupted Smith's reply. A dryland Martian came past, reeling a little and exuding an aroma of *segir*-whisky, the Venusian brand. When he caught the red flash of the girl's tatters he turned his head sharply, and as his *segir*-steeped brain took in the fact of her presence he lurched toward the recess unsteadily, bawling, "Shambleau, by *Pharol!* Shambleau!" and reached out a clutching hand.

Smith struck it aside contemptuously.

"On your way, drylander," he advised.

The man drew back and stared, bleareyed.

"Yours, eh?" he croaked. "*Zut!* You're welcome to it!" And like the ex-Patrolman before him he spat on the pavement and turned away, muttering harshly in the blasphemous tongue of the drylands.

Smith watched him shuffle off, and there was a crease between his colorless eyes, a nameless unease rising within him.

"Come on," he said abruptly to the girl. "If this sort of thing is going to happen we'd better get indoors. Where shall I take you?"

"With—you," she murmured.

He stared down into the flat green eyes. Those ceaselessly pulsing pupils disturbed him, but it seemed to him, vaguely, that behind the animal shallows of her gaze was a shutter—a closed barrier that might at any moment open to reveal the very deeps of that dark knowledge he sensed there.

Roughly he said again, "Come on, then," and stepped down into the street.

SHE pattered along a pace or two behind him, making no effort to keep up with his long strides, and though Smith—as men know from Venus to

Jupiter's moons—walks as softly as a cat, even in spaceman's boots, the girl at his heels slid like a shadow over the rough pavement, making so little sound that even the lightness of his footsteps was loud in the empty street.

Smith chose the less frequented ways of Lakkdarol, and somewhat shamefacedly thanked his nameless gods that his lodgings were not far away, for the few pedestrians he met turned and stared after the two with that by now familiar mingling of horror and contempt which he was as far as ever from understanding.

The room he had engaged was a single cubicle in a lodging-house on the edge of the city. Lakkdarol, raw camp-town that it was in those days, could have furnished little better anywhere within its limits, and Smith's errand there was not one he wished to advertise. He had slept in worse places than this before, and knew that he would do so again.

There was no one in sight when he entered, and the girl slipped up the stairs at his heels and vanished through the door, shadowy, unseen by anyone in the house. Smith closed the door and leaned his broad shoulders against the panels, regarding her speculatively.

She took in what little the room had to offer in a glance—frowsy bed, rickety table, mirror hanging unevenly and cracked against the wall, unpainted chairs—a typical camp-town room in an Earth settlement abroad. She accepted its poverty in that single glance, dismissed it, then crossed to the window and leaned out for a moment, gazing across the low roof-tops toward the barren countryside beyond, red slag under the late afternoon sun.

"You can stay here," said Smith abruptly, "until I leave town. I'm waiting here for a friend to come in from Venus. Have you eaten?"

"Yes," said the girl quickly. "I shall —need no—food for—a while."

"Well——" Smith glanced around the room. "I'll be in sometime tonight. You can go or stay just as you please. Better lock the door behind me."

With no more formality than that he left her. The door closed and he heard the key turn, and smiled to himself. He did not expect, then, ever to see her again.

He went down the steps and out into the late-slanting sunlight with a mind so full of other matters that the brown girl receded very quickly into the background. Smith's errand in Lakkdarol, like most of his errands, is better not spoken of. Man lives as he must, and Smith's living was a perilous affair outside the law and ruled by the ray-gun only. It is enough to say that the shipping-port and its cargoes outbound interested him deeply just now, and that the friend he awaited was Yarol the Venusian, in that swift little Edsel ship the *Maid* that can flash from world to world with a derisive speed that laughs at Patrol boats and leaves pursuers floundering in the ether far behind. Smith and Yarol and the *Maid* were a trinity that had caused the Patrol leaders much worry and many gray hairs in the past, and the future looked very bright to Smith himself that evening as he left his lodging-house.

LAKKDAROL roars by night, as Earthmen's camp-towns have a way of doing on every planet where Earth's outposts are, and it was beginning lustily as Smith went down among the awakening lights toward the center of town. His business there does not concern us. He mingled with the crowds where the lights were brightest, and there was the click of ivory counters and the jingle of silver, and red *segir* gurgled invitingly from black Venusian bottles, and

much later Smith strolled homeward under the moving moons of Mars, and if the street wavered a little under his feet now and then—why, that is only understandable. Not even Smith could drink red *segir* at every bar from the *Martian Lamb* to the *New Chicago* and remain entirely steady on his feet. But he found his way back with very little difficulty—considering—and spent a good five minutes hunting for his key before he remembered he had left it in the inner lock for the girl.

He knocked then, and there was no sound of footsteps from within, but in a few moments the latch clicked and the door swung open. She retreated soundlessly before him as he entered, and took up her favorite place against the window, leaning back on the sill and outlined against the starry sky beyond. The room was in darkness.

Smith flipped the switch by the door and then leaned back against the panels, steadying himself. The cool night air had sobered him a little, and his head was clear enough—liquor went to Smith's feet, not his head, or he would never have come this far along the lawless way he had chosen. He lounged against the door now and regarded the girl in the sudden glare of the bulbs, blinding a little as much at the scarlet of her clothing as at the light.

"So you stayed," he said.

"I—waited," she answered softly, leaning farther back against the sill and clasping the rough wood with slim, three-fingered hands, pale brown against the darkness.

"Why?"

She did not answer that, but her mouth curved into a slow smile. On a woman it would have been reply enough—provocative, daring. On Shambleau there was something pitiful and horrible in it—so human on the face of one half-animal. And yet . . . that sweet brown body curving so softly from the tatters of scarlet leather—the velvety texture of that brownness—the white-flashing smile. . . . Smith was aware of a stirring excitement within him. After all—time would be hanging heavy now until Yarol came. . . . Speculatively he allowed the steel-pale eyes to wander over her, with a slow regard that missed nothing. And when he spoke he was aware that his voice had deepened a little. . . .

"Come here," he said.

She came forward slowly, on bare clawed feet that made no slightest sound on the floor, and stood before him with downcast eyes and mouth trembling in that pitifully human smile. He took her by the shoulders—velvety soft shoulders, of a creamy smoothness that was not the texture of human flesh. A little tremor went over her, perceptibly, at the contact of his hands. Northwest Smith caught his breath suddenly and dragged her to him . . . sweet, yielding brownness in the circle of his arms . . . heard her own breath catch and quicken as her velvety arms closed about his neck. And then he was looking down into her face, very near, and the green animal eyes met his with the pulsing pupils and the flicker of —something—deep behind their shallows—and through the rising clamor of his blood, even as he stooped his lips to hers, Smith felt something deep within him shudder away—inexplicable, instinctive, revolted. What it might be he had no words to tell, but the very touch of her was suddenly loathsome—so soft and velvet and unhuman—and it might have been an animal's face that lifted itself to his mouth—the dark knowledge looked hungrily from the darkness of those slit pupils—and for a mad instant he knew that same wild, feverish re-

vulsion he had seen in the faces of the mob. . . .

"God!" he gasped, a far more ancient invocation against evil than he realized, then or ever, and he ripped her arms from his neck, swung her away with such a force that she reeled half across the room. Smith fell back against the door, breathing heavily, and stared at her while the wild revolt died slowly within him.

She had fallen to the floor beneath the window, and as she lay there against the wall with bent head he saw, curiously, that her turban had slipped—the turban that he had been so sure covered baldness—and a lock of scarlet hair fell below the binding leather, hair as scarlet as her garment, as unhumanly red as her eyes were unhumanly green. He stared, and shook his head dizzily and stared again, for it seemed to him that the thick lock of crimson had moved, *squirmed* of itself against her cheek.

At the contact of it her hands flew up and she tucked it away with a very human gesture and then dropped her head again into her hands. And from the deep shadow of her fingers he thought she was staring up at him covertly.

Smith drew a deep breath and passed a hand across his forehead. The inexplicable moment had gone as quickly as it came—too swiftly for him to understand or analyze it. "Got to lay off the *segir*," he told himself unsteadily. Had he imagined that scarlet hair? After all, she was no more than a pretty brown girl-creature from one of the many half-human races peopling the planets. No more than that, after all. A pretty little thing, but animal. . . . He laughed a little shakily.

"No more of that," he said. "God knows I'm no angel, but there's got to be a limit somewhere. Here." He crossed to the bed and sorted out a pair of blankets from the untidy heap, tossing them to the far corner of the room. "You can sleep there."

Wordlessly she rose from the floor and began to rearrange the blankets, the uncomprehending resignation of the animal eloquent in every line of her.

SMITH had a strange dream that night. He thought he had awakened to a room full of darkness and moonlight and moving shadows, for the nearer moon of Mars was racing through the sky and everything on the planet below her was endued with a restless life in the dark. And something . . . some nameless, unthinkable *thing* . . . was coiled about his throat . . . something like a soft snake, wet and warm. It lay loose and light about his neck . . . and it was moving gently, very gently, with a soft, caressive pressure that sent little thrills of delight through every nerve and fiber of him, a perilous delight—beyond physical pleasure, deeper than joy of the mind. That warm softness was caressing the very roots of his soul with a terrible intimacy. The ecstasy of it left him weak, and yet he knew—in a flash of knowledge born of this impossible dream—that the soul should not be handled. . . . And with that knowledge a horror broke upon him, turning the pleasure into a rapture of revulsion, hateful, horrible—but still most foully sweet. He tried to lift his hands and tear the dream-monstrosity from his throat — tried but half-heartedly; for though his soul was revolted to its very deeps, yet the delight of his body was so great that his hands all but refused the attempt. But when at last he tried to lift his arms a cold shock went over him and he found that he could not stir . . . his body lay stony as marble beneath the blankets, a living marble that shuddered

with a dreadful delight through every rigid vein.

The revulsion grew strong upon him as he struggled against the paralyzing dream—a struggle of soul against sluggish body—titanically, until the moving dark was streaked with blankness that clouded and closed about him at last and he sank back into the oblivion from which he had awakened.

NEXT morning, when the bright sunlight shining through Mars' clear, thin air awakened him, Smith lay for a while trying to remember. The dream had been more vivid than reality, but he could not now quite recall . . . only that it had been more sweet and horrible than anything else in life. He lay puzzling for a while, until a soft sound from the corner aroused him from his thoughts and he sat up to see the girl lying in a cat-like coil on her blankets, watching him with round, grave eyes. He regarded her somewhat ruefully.

"Morning," he said. "I've just had the devil of a dream. . . . Well, hungry?"

She shook her head silently, and he could have sworn there was a covert gleam of strange amusement in her eyes.

He stretched and yawned, dismissing the nightmare temporarily from his mind.

"What am I going to do with you?" he inquired, turning to more immediate matters. "I'm leaving here in a day or two and I can't take you along, you know. Where'd you come from in the first place?"

Again she shook her head.

"Not telling? Well, it's your own business. You can stay here until I give up the room. From then on you'll have to do your own worrying."

He swung his feet to the floor and reached for his clothes.

Ten minutes later, slipping the heat-gun into its holster at his thigh, Smith turned to the girl. "There's food-concentrate in that box on the table. It ought to hold you until I get back. And you'd better lock the door again after I've gone."

Her wide, unwavering stare was his only answer, and he was not sure she had understood, but at any rate the lock clicked after him as before, and he went down the steps with a faint grin on his lips.

The memory of last night's extraordinary dream was slipping from him, as such memories do, and by the time he had reached the street the girl and the dream and all of yesterday's happenings were blotted out by the sharp necessities of the present.

Again the intricate business that had brought him here claimed his attention. He went about it to the exclusion of all else, and there was a good reason behind everything he did from the moment he stepped out into the street until the time when he turned back again at evening; though had one chosen to follow him during the day his apparently aimless rambling through Lakkdarol would have seemed very pointless.

He must have spent two hours at the least idling by the space-port, watching with sleepy, colorless eyes the ships that came and went, the passengers, the vessels lying at wait, the cargoes—particularly the cargoes. He made the rounds of the town's saloons once more, consuming many glasses of varied liquors in the course of the day and engaging in idle conversation with men of all races and worlds, usually in their own languages, for Smith was a linguist of repute among his contemporaries. He heard the gossip of the spaceways, news from a dozen planets of a thousand different events; he heard the latest joke about the Venusian Em-

peror and the latest report on the Chino-Aryan war and the latest song hot from the lips of Rose Robertson, whom every man on the civilized planets adored as "the Georgia Rose". He passed the day quite profitably, for his own purposes, which do not concern us now, and it was not until late evening, when he turned homeward again, that the thought of the brown girl in his room took definite shape in his mind, though it had been lurking there, formless and submerged, all day.

He had no idea what comprised her usual diet, but he bought a can of New York roast beef and one of Venusian frog-broth and a dozen fresh canal-apples and two pounds of that Earth lettuce that grows so vigorously in the fertile canal-soil of Mars. He felt that she must surely find something to her liking in this broad variety of edibles, and—for his day had been very satisfactory—he hummed *The Green Hills of Earth* to himself in a surprizingly good baritone as he climbed the stairs.

THE door was locked, as before, and he was reduced to kicking the lower panels gently with his boot, for his arms were full. She opened the door with that softness that was characteristic of her and stood regarding him in the semi-darkness as he stumbled to the table with his load. The room was unlit again.

"Why don't you turn on the lights?" he demanded irritably after he had barked his shin on the chair by the table in an effort to deposit his burden there.

"Light and—dark—they are alike—to me," she murmured.

"Cat eyes, eh? Well, you look the part. Here, I've brought you some dinner. Take your choice. Fond of roast beef? Or how about a little frog-broth?"

She shook her head and backed away a step.

"No," she said. "I can not—eat your food."

Smith's brows wrinkled. "Didn't you have any of the food-tablets?"

Again the red turban shook negatively.

"Then you haven't had anything for—why, more than twenty-four hours! You must be starved."

"Not hungry," she denied.

"What can I find for you to eat, then? There's time yet if I hurry. You've got to eat, child."

"I shall—eat," she said, softly. "Before long—I shall—feed. Have no—worry."

She turned away then and stood at the window, looking out over the moonlit landscape as if to end the conversation. Smith cast her a puzzled glance as he opened the can of roast beef. There had been an odd undernote in that assurance that, undefinably, he did not like. And the girl had teeth and tongue and presumably a fairly human digestive system, to judge from her human form. It was nonsense for her to pretend that he could find nothing that she could eat. She must have had some of the food concentrate after all, he decided, prying up the thermos lid of the inner container to release the long-sealed savor of the hot meat inside.

"Well, if you won't eat you won't," he observed philosophically as he poured hot broth and diced beef into the dish-like lid of the thermos can and extracted the spoon from its hiding-place between the inner and outer receptacles. She turned a little to watch him as he pulled up a rickety chair and sat down to the food, and after a while the realization that her green gaze was fixed so unwinkingly upon him made the man nervous, and he said between bites of creamy canal-apple, "Why don't you try a little of this? It's good."

"The food—I eat is—better," her soft

voice told him in its hesitant murmur, and again he felt rather than heard a faint undernote of unpleasantness in the words. A sudden suspicion struck him as he pondered on that last remark—some vague memory of horror-tales told about campfires in the past—and he swung round in the chair to look at her, a tiny, creeping fear unaccountably arising. There had been that in her words—in her unspoken words, that menaced. . . .

She stood up beneath his gaze demurely, wide green eyes with their pulsing pupils meeting his without a falter. But her mouth was scarlet and her teeth were sharp. . . .

"What food do you eat?" he demanded. And then, after a pause, very softly, "Blood?"

She stared at him for a moment, uncomprehending; then something like amusement curled her lips and she said scornfully, "You think me—vampire, eh? No—I am Shambleau!"

Unmistakably there were scorn and amusement in her voice at the suggestion, but as unmistakably she knew what he meant—accepted it as a logical suspicion—vampires! Fairy-tales—but fairy-tales this unhuman, outland creature was most familiar with. Smith was not a credulous man, nor a superstitious one, but he had seen too many strange things himself to doubt that the wildest legend might have a basis of fact. And there was something namelessly strange about her. . . .

He puzzled over it for a while between deep bites of the canal-apple. And though he wanted to question her about a great many things, he did not, for he knew how futile it would be.

He said nothing more until the meat was finished and another canal-apple had followed the first, and he had cleared away the meal by the simple expedient of tossing the empty can out of the window. Then he lay back in the chair and surveyed her from half-closed eyes, colorless in a face tanned like saddle-leather. And again he was conscious of the brown, soft curves of her, velvety—subtle arcs and planes of smooth flesh under the tatters of scarlet leather. Vampire she might be, unhuman she certainly was, but desirable beyond words as she sat submissive beneath his slow regard, her red-turbaned head bent, her clawed fingers lying in her lap. They sat very still for a while, and the silence throbbed between them.

She was so like a woman—an Earth woman—sweet and submissive and demure, and softer than soft fur, if he could forget the three-fingered claws and the pulsing eyes—and that deeper strangeness beyond words. . . . (Had he dreamed that red lock of hair that moved? Had it been *segir* that woke the wild revulsion he knew when he held her in his arms? Why had the mob so thirsted for her?) He sat and stared, and despite the mystery of her and the half-suspicions that thronged his mind—for she was so beautifully soft and curved under those revealing tatters—he slowly realized that his pulses were mounting, became aware of a kindling within . . . brown girl-creature with downcast eyes . . . and then the lids lifted and the green flatness of a cat's gaze met his, and last night's revulsion woke swiftly again, like a warning bell that clanged as their eyes met—animal, after all, too sleek and soft for humanity, and that inner strangeness. . . .

Smith shrugged and sat up. His failings were legion, but the weakness of the flesh was not among the major ones. He motioned the girl to her pallet of blankets in the corner and turned to his own bed.

FROM deeps of sound sleep he awoke, much later. He awoke suddenly and completely, and with that inner excite-

ment that presages something momentous. He awoke to brilliant moonlight, turning the room so bright that he could see the scarlet of the girl's rags as she sat up on her pallet. She was awake, she was sitting with her shoulder half turned to him and her head bent, and some warning instinct crawled coldly up his spine as he watched what she was doing. And yet it was a very ordinary thing for a girl to do—any girl, anywhere. She was unbinding her turban. . . .

He watched, not breathing, a presentiment of something horrible stirring in his brain, inexplicably. . . . The red folds loosened, and—he knew then that he had not dreamed—again a scarlet lock swung down against her cheek . . . a hair, was it? a lock of hair? . . . thick as a thick worm it fell, plumply, against that smooth cheek . . . more scarlet than blood and thick as a crawling worm . . . and like a worm it crawled.

Smith rose on an elbow, not realizing the motion, and fixed an unwinking stare, with a sort of sick, fascinated incredulity, on that—that lock of hair. He had not dreamed. Until now he had taken it for granted that it was the *segir* which had made it seem to move on that evening before. But now . . . it was lengthening, stretching, moving of itself. It must be hair, but it *crawled;* with a sickening life of its own it squirmed down against her cheek, caressingly, revoltingly, impossibly. . . . Wet, it was, and round and thick and shining. . . .

She unfastened the last fold and whipped the turban off. From what he saw then Smith would have turned his eyes away—and he had looked on dreadful things before, without flinching—but he could not stir. He could only lie there on his elbow staring at the mass of scarlet, squirming—worms, hairs, what?—that writhed over her head in a dreadful mockery of ringlets. And it was lengthening, falling, somehow growing before his eyes, down over her shoulders in a spilling cascade, a mass that even at the beginning could never have been hidden under the skull-tight turban she had worn. He was beyond wondering, but he realized that. And still it squirmed and lengthened and fell, and she shook it out in a horrible travesty of a woman shaking out her unbound hair—until the unspeakable tangle of it—twisting, writhing, obscenely scarlet—hung to her waist and beyond, and still lengthened, an endless mass of crawling horror that until now, somehow, impossibly, had been hidden under the tight-bound turban. It was like a nest of blind, restless red worms . . . it was—it was like naked entrails endowed with an unnatural aliveness, terrible beyond words.

Smith lay in the shadows, frozen without and within in a sick numbness that came of utter shock and revulsion.

She shook out the obscene, unspeakable tangle over her shoulders, and somehow he knew that she was going to turn in a moment and that he must meet her eyes. The thought of that meeting stopped his heart with dread, more awfully than anything else in this nightmare horror; for nightmare it must be, surely. But he knew without trying that he could not wrench his eyes away—the sickened fascination of that sight held him motionless, and somehow there was a certain beauty. . . .

Her head was turning. The crawling awfulnesses rippled and squirmed at the motion, writhing thick and wet and shining over the soft brown shoulders about which they fell now in obscene cascades that all but hid her body. Her head was turning. Smith lay numb. And very slowly he saw the round of her cheek foreshorten and her profile come into view, all

the scarlet horrors twisting ominously, and the profile shortened in turn and her full face came slowly round toward the bed — moonlight shining brilliantly as day on the pretty girl-face, demure and sweet, framed in tangled obscenity that crawled. . . .

The green eyes met his. He felt a perceptible shock, and a shudder rippled down his paralyzed spine, leaving an icy numbness in its wake. He felt the gooseflesh rising. But that numbness and cold horror he scarcely realized, for the green eyes were locked with his in a long, long look that somehow presaged nameless things—not altogether unpleasant things —the voiceless voice of her mind assailing him with little murmurous promises. . . .

For a moment he went down into a blind abyss of submission; and then somehow the very sight of that obscenity in eyes that did not then realize they saw it, was dreadful enough to draw him out of the seductive darkness . . . the sight of her crawling and alive with unnamable horror.

She rose, and down about her in a cascade fell the squirming scarlet of —of what grew upon her head. It fell in a long, alive cloak to her bare feet on the floor, hiding her in a wave of dreadful, wet, writhing life. She put up her hands and like a swimmer she parted the waterfall of it, tossing the masses back over her shoulders to reveal her own brown body, sweetly curved. She smiled, exquisitely, and in starting waves back from her forehead and down about her in a hideous background writhed the snaky wetness of her living tresses. And Smith knew that he looked upon Medusa.

The knowledge of that—the realization of vast backgrounds reaching into misted history—shook him out of his frozen horror for a moment, and in that moment he met her eyes again, smiling, green as glass in the moonlight, half hooded under drooping lids. Through the twisting scarlet she held out her arms. And there was something soul-shakingly desirable about her, so that all the blood surged to his head suddenly and he stumbled to his feet like a sleeper in a dream as she swayed toward him, infinitely graceful, infinitely sweet in her cloak of living horror.

And somehow there was beauty in it, the wet scarlet writhings with moonlight sliding and shining along the thick, worm-round tresses and losing itself in the masses only to glint again and move silvery along writhing tendrils — an awful, shuddering beauty more dreadful than any ugliness could be.

But all this, again, he but half realized, for the insidious murmur was coiling again through his brain, promising, caressing, alluring, sweeter than honey; and the green eyes that held his were clear and burning like the depths of a jewel, and behind the pulsing slits of darkness he was staring into a greater dark that held all things. . . . He had known—dimly he had known when he first gazed into those flat animal shallows that behind them lay this—all beauty and terror, all horror and delight, in the infinite darkness upon which her eyes opened like windows, paned with emerald glass.

Her lips moved, and in a murmur that blended indistinguishably with the silence and the sway of her body and the dreadful sway of her—her hair—she whispered —very softly, very passionately, "I shall —speak to you now—in my own tongue —oh, beloved!"

And in her living cloak she swayed to him, the murmur swelling seductive and caressing in his innermost brain—promising, compelling, sweeter than sweet. His flesh crawled to the horror of her, but it

was a perverted revulsion that clasped what it loathed. His arms slid round her under the sliding cloak, wet, wet and warm and hideously alive—and the sweet velvet body was clinging to his, her arms locked about his neck—and with a whisper and a rush the unspeakable horror closed about them both.

In nightmares until he died he remembered that moment when the living tresses of Shambleau first folded him in their embrace. A nauseous, smothering odor as the wetness shut around him—thick, pulsing worms clasping every inch of his body, sliding, writhing, their wetness and warmth striking through his garments as if he stood naked to their embrace.

All this in a graven instant—and after that a tangled flash of conflicting sensation before oblivion closed over him. For he remembered the dream—and knew it for nightmare reality now, and the sliding, gently moving caresses of those wet, warm worms upon his flesh was an ecstasy above words—that deeper ecstasy that strikes beyond the body and beyond the mind and tickles the very roots of the soul with unnatural delight. So he stood, rigid as marble, as helplessly stony as any of Medusa's victims in ancient legends were, while the terrible pleasure of Shambleau thrilled and shuddered through every fiber of him; through every atom of his body and the intangible atoms of what men call the soul, through all that was Smith the dreadful pleasure ran. And it was truly dreadful. Dimly he knew it, even as his body answered to the root-deep ecstasy, a foul and dreadful wooing from which his very soul shuddered away—and yet in the innermost depths of that soul some grinning traitor shivered with delight. But deeply, behind all this, he knew horror and revulsion and despair beyond telling, while the intimate caresses crawled obscenely in the secret places of his soul—knew that the soul should not be handled—and shook with the perilous pleasure through it all.

And this conflict and knowledge, this mingling of rapture and revulsion all took place in the flashing of a moment while the scarlet worms coiled and crawled upon him, sending deep, obscene tremors of that infinite pleasure into every atom that made up Smith. And he could not stir in that slimy, ecstatic embrace—and a weakness was flooding that grew deeper after each succeeding wave of intense delight, and the traitor in his soul strengthened and drowned out the revulsion — and something within him ceased to struggle as he sank wholly into a blazing darkness that was oblivion to all else but that devouring rapture. . . .

THE young Venusian climbing the stairs to his friend's lodging-room pulled out his key absent-mindedly, a pucker forming between his fine brows. He was slim, as all Venusians are, as fair and sleek as any of them, and as with most of his countrymen the look of cherubic innocence on his face was wholly deceptive. He had the face of a fallen angel, without Lucifer's majesty to redeem it; for a black devil grinned in his eyes and there were faint lines of ruthlessness and dissipation about his mouth to tell of the long years behind him that had run the gamut of experiences and made his name, next to Smith's, the most hated and the most respected in the records of the Patrol.

He mounted the stairs now with a puzzled frown between his eyes. He had come into Lakkdarol on the noon liner—the *Maid* in her hold very skilfully disguised with paint and otherwise—to find in lamentable disorder the affairs he had expected to be settled. And cautious inquiry elicited the information that Smith had not been seen for three days. That

was not like his friend—he had never failed before, and the two stood to lose not only a large sum of money but also their personal safety by the inexplicable lapse on the part of Smith. Yarol could think of one solution only: fate had at last caught up with his friend. Nothing but physical disability could explain it.

Still puzzling, he fitted his key in the lock and swung the door open.

In that first moment, as the door opened, he sensed something very wrong. . . . The room was darkened, and for a while he could see nothing, but at the first breath he scented a strange, unnamable odor, half sickening, half sweet. And deep stirrings of ancestral memory awoke within him—ancient, swamp-born memories from Venusian ancestors far away and long ago. . . .

Yarol laid his hand on his gun, lightly, and opened the door wider. In the dimness all he could see at first was a curious mound in the far corner. . . . Then his eyes grew accustomed to the dark, and he saw it more clearly, a mound that somehow heaved and stirred within itself. . . . A mound of—he caught his breath sharply—a mound like a mass of entrails, living, moving, writhing with an unspeakable aliveness. Then a hot Venusian oath broke from his lips and he cleared the door-sill in a swift stride, slammed the door and set his back against it, gun ready in his hand, although his flesh crawled—for he *knew*. . . .

"Smith!" he said softly, in a voice thick with horror. "Northwest!"

The moving mass stirred—shuddered—sank back into crawling quiescence again.

"Smith! Smith!" The Venusian's voice was gentle and insistent, and it quivered a little with terror.

An impatient ripple went over the whole mass of aliveness in the corner. It stirred again, reluctantly, and then tendril by writhing tendril it began to part itself and fall aside, and very slowly the brown of a spaceman's leather appeared beneath it, all slimed and shining.

"Smith! Northwest!" Yarol's persistent whisper came again, urgently, and with a dream-like slowness the leather garments moved . . . a man sat up in the midst of the writhing worms, a man who once, long ago, might have been Northwest Smith. From head to foot he was slimy from the embrace of the crawling horror about him. His face was that of some creature beyond humanity—dead-alive, fixed in a gray stare, and the look of terrible ecstasy that overspread it seemed to come from somewhere far within, a faint reflection from immeasurable distances beyond the flesh. And as there is mystery and magic in the moonlight which is after all but a reflection of the everyday sun, so in that gray face turned to the door was a terror unnamable and sweet, a reflection of ecstasy beyond the understanding of any who have known only earthly ecstasy themselves. And as he sat there turning a blank, eyeless face to Yarol the red worms writhed ceaselessly about him, very gently, with a soft, caressive motion that never slacked.

"Smith . . . come here! Smith . . . get up . . . Smith, Smith!" Yarol's whisper hissed in the silence, commanding, urgent—but he made no move to leave the door.

And with a dreadful slowness, like a dead man rising, Smith stood up in the nest of slimy scarlet. He swayed drunkenly on his feet, and two or three crimson tendrils came writhing up his legs to the knees and wound themselves there, supportingly, moving with a ceaseless caress that seemed to give him some hidden strength, for he said then, without inflection,

"Go away. Go away. Leave me alone."

And the dead, ecstatic face never changed.

"Smith!" Yarol's voice was desperate. "Smith, listen! Smith, can't you hear me?"

"Go away," the monotonous voice said. "Go away. Go away. Go——"

"Not unless you come too. Can't you hear? Smith! Smith! I'll——-"

He hushed in mid-phrase, and once more the ancestral prickle of race-memory shivered down his back, for the scarlet mass was moving again, violently, rising. . . .

YAROL pressed back against the door and gripped his gun, and the name of a god he had forgotten years ago rose to his lips unbidden. For he knew what was coming next, and the knowledge was more dreadful than any ignorance could have been.

The red, writhing mass rose higher, and the tendrils parted and a human face looked out—no, half human, with green cat-eyes that shone in that dimness like lighted jewels, compellingly. . . .

Yarol breathed "Shar!" again, and flung up an arm across his face, and the tingle of meeting that green gaze for even an instant went thrilling through him perilously.

"Smith!" he called in despair. "Smith, can't you hear me?"

"Go away," said that voice that was not Smith's. "Go away."

And somehow, although he dared not look, Yarol knew that the—the other—had parted those worm-thick tresses and stood there in all the human sweetness of the brown, curved woman's body, cloaked in living horror. And he felt the eyes upon him, and something was crying insistently in his brain to lower that shielding arm. . . . He was lost—he knew it, and the knowledge gave him that courage which comes from despair. The voice in his brain was growing, swelling, deafening him with a roaring command that all but swept him before it—command to lower that arm—to meet the eyes that opened upon darkness—to submit—and a promise, murmurous and sweet and evil beyond words, of pleasure to come. . . .

But somehow he kept his head—somehow, dizzily, he was gripping his gun in his upflung hand—somehow, incredibly, crossing the narrow room with averted face, groping for Smith's shoulder. There was a moment of blind fumbling in emptiness, and then he found it, and gripped the leather that was slimy and dreadful and wet—and simultaneously he felt something loop gently about his ankle and a shock of repulsive pleasure went through him, and then another coil, and another, wound about his feet. . . .

Yarol set his teeth and gripped the shoulder hard, and his hand shuddered of itself, for the feel of that leather was slimy as the worms about his ankles, and a faint tingle of obscene delight went through him from the contact.

That caressive pressure on his legs was all he could feel, and the voice in his brain drowned out all other sounds, and his body obeyed him reluctantly — but somehow he gave one heave of tremendous effort and swung Smith, stumbling, out of that nest of horror. The twining tendrils ripped loose with a little sucking sound, and the whole mass quivered and reached after, and then Yarol forgot his friend utterly and turned his whole being to the hopeless task of freeing himself. For only a part of him was fighting, now —only a part of him struggled against the twining obscenities, and in his innermost brain the sweet, seductive murmur sounded, and his body clamored to surrender. . . .

"Shar! Shar y'danis . . . Shar mor'la-

rol——" prayed Yarol, gasping and half unconscious that he spoke, boy's prayers that he had forgotten years ago, and with his back half turned to the central mass he kicked desperately with his heavy boots at the red, writhing worms about him. They gave back before him, quivering and curling themselves out of reach, and though he knew that more were reaching for his throat from behind, at least he could go on struggling until he was forced to meet those eyes. . . .

He stamped and kicked and stamped again, and for one instant he was free of the slimy grip as the bruised worms curled back from his heavy feet, and he lurched away dizzily, sick with revulsion and despair as he fought off the coils, and then he lifted his eyes and saw the cracked mirror on the wall. Dimly in its reflection he could see the writhing scarlet horror behind him, cat face peering out with its demure girl-smile, dreadfully human, and all the red tendrils reaching after him. And remembrance of something he had read long ago swept incongruously over him, and the gasp of relief and hope that he gave shook for a moment the grip of the command in his brain.

Without pausing for a breath he swung the gun over his shoulder, the reflected barrel in line with the reflected horror in the mirror, and flicked the catch.

In the mirror he saw its blue flame leap in a dazzling spate across the dimness, full into the midst of that squirming, reaching mass behind him. There was a hiss and a blaze and a high, thin scream of inhuman malice and despair — the flame cut a wide arc and went out as the gun fell from his hand, and Yarol pitched forward to the floor.

NORTHWEST SMITH opened his eyes to Martian sunlight streaming thinly through the dingy window. Something wet and cold was slapping his face, and the familiar fiery sting of *segir*-whisky burnt his throat.

"Smith!" Yarol's voice was saying from far away. "N. W.! Wake up, damn you! Wake up!"

"I'm—awake," Smith managed to articulate thickly. "Wha's matter?"

Then a cup-rim was thrust against his teeth and Yarol said irritably, "Drink it, you fool!"

Smith swallowed obediently and more of the fire-hot *segir* flowed down his grateful throat. It spread a warmth through his body that awakened him from the numbness that had gripped him until now, and helped a little toward driving out the all-devouring weakness he was becoming aware of, slowly. He lay still for a few minutes while the warmth of the whisky went through him, and memory sluggishly began to permeate his brain with the spread of the *segir*. Nightmare memories . . . sweet and terrible . . . memories of——

"God!" gasped Smith suddenly, and tried to sit up. Weakness smote him like a blow, and for an instant the room wheeled as he fell back against something firm and warm—Yarol's shoulder. The Venusian's arm supported him while the room steadied, and after a while he twisted a little and stared into the other's black gaze.

Yarol was holding him with one arm and finishing the mug of *segir* himself, and the black eyes met his over the rim and crinkled into sudden laughter, half hysterical after that terror that was passed.

"By *Pharol!*" gasped Yarol, choking into his mug. "By *Pharol,* N. W.! I'm never gonna let you forget this! Next time you have to drag me out of a mess I'll say——"

"Let it go," said Smith. "What's been going on? How——"

"Shambleau." Yarol's laughter died. "Shambleau! What were you doing with a thing like that?"

"What was it?" Smith asked soberly.

"Mean to say you didn't know? But where'd you find it? How——"

"Suppose you tell me first what you know," said Smith firmly. "And another swig of that *segir*, too, please. I need it."

"Can you hold the mug now? Feel better?"

"Yeah—some. I can hold it—thanks. Now go on."

"Well—I don't know just where to start. They call them Shambleau——"

"Good God, is there more than one?"

"It's a—a sort of race, I think, one of the very oldest. Where they come from nobody knows. The name sounds a little French, doesn't it? But it goes back beyond the start of history. There have always been Shambleau."

"I never heard of 'em."

"Not many people have. And those who know don't care to talk about it much."

"Well, half this town knows. I hadn't any idea what they were talking about, then. And I still don't understand, but——"

"Yes, it happens like this, sometimes. They'll appear, and the news will spread and the town will get together and hunt them down, and after that—well, the story doesn't get around very far. It's too—too unbelievable."

"But—my God, Yarol!—what was it? Where'd it come from? How——"

"Nobody knows just where they come from. Another planet—maybe some undiscovered one. Some say Venus—I know there are some rather awful legends of them handed down in our family—that's how I've heard about it. And the minute I opened that door, awhile back—I—I think I knew that smell. . . ."

"But—what *are* they?"

"God knows. Not human, though they have the human form. Or that may be only an illusion . . . or maybe I'm crazy. I don't know. They're a species of the vampire—or maybe the vampire is a species of—of them. Their normal form must be that—that mass, and in that form they draw nourishment from the—I suppose the life-forces of men. And they take some form—usually a woman form, I think, and key you up to the highest pitch of emotion before they—begin. That's to work the life-force up to intensity so it'll be easier. . . . And they give, always, that horrible, foul pleasure as they—feed. There are some men who, if they survive the first experience, take to it like a drug—can't give it up—keep the thing with them all their lives—which isn't long—feeding it for that ghastly satisfaction. Worse than smoking *ming* or—or 'praying to *Pharol*'."

"Yes," said Smith. "I'm beginning to understand why that crowd was so surprized and—and disgusted when I said—well, never mind. Go on."

"Did you get to talk to—to it?" asked Yarol.

"I tried to. It couldn't speak very well. I asked it where it came from and it said—'from far away and long ago'—something like that."

"I wonder. Possibly some unknown planet—but I think not. You know there are so many wild stories with some basis of fact to start from, that I've sometimes wondered—mightn't there be a lot more of even worse and wilder superstitions we've never even heard of? Things like this, blasphemous and foul, that those who know have to keep still about? Awful, fantastic things running around loose that we never hear rumors of at all!

"These things—they've been in existence for countless ages. No one knows when or where they first appeared. Those who've seen them, as we saw this one,

don't talk about it. It's just one of those vague, misty rumors you find half hinted at in old books sometimes. . . . I believe they are an older race than man, spawned from ancient seed in times before ours, perhaps on planets that have gone to dust, and so horrible to man that when they are discovered the discoverers keep still about it—forget them again as quickly as they can.

"And they go back to time immemorial. I suppose you recognized the legend of Medusa? There isn't any question that the ancient Greeks knew of them. Does it mean that there have been civilizations before yours that set out from Earth and explored other planets? Or did one of the Shambleau somehow make its way into Greece three thousand years ago? If you think about it long enough you'll go off your head! I wonder how many other legends are based on things like this—things we don't suspect, things we'll never know.

"The Gorgon, Medusa, a beautiful woman with—with snakes for hair, and a gaze that turned men to stone, and Perseus finally killed her—I remembered this just by accident, N. W., and it saved your life and mine—Perseus killed her by using a mirror as he fought to reflect what he dared not look at directly. I wonder what the old Greek who first started that legend would have thought if he'd known that three thousand years later his story would save the lives of two men on another planet. I wonder what that Greek's own story was, and how he met the thing, and what happened. . . .

"Well, there's a lot we'll never know. Wouldn't the records of that race of—of *things,* whatever they are, be worth reading! Records of other planets and other ages and all the beginnings of mankind! But I don't suppose they've kept any records. I don't suppose they've even any place to keep them—from what little I know, or anyone knows about it, they're like the Wandering Jew, just bobbing up here and there at long intervals, and where they stay in the meantime I'd give my eyes to know! But I don't believe that terribly hypnotic power they have indicates any superhuman intelligence. It's their means of getting food—just like a frog's long tongue or a carnivorous flower's odor. Those are physical because the frog and the flower eat physical food. The Shambleau uses a—a mental reach to get mental food. I don't quite know how to put it. And just as a beast that eats the bodies of other animals acquires with each meal greater power over the bodies of the rest, so the Shambleau, stoking itself up with the life-forces of men, increases its power over the minds and the souls of other men. But I'm talking about things I can't define—things I'm not sure exist.

"I only know that when I felt—when those tentacles closed around my legs—I didn't want to pull loose, I felt sensations that—that—oh, I'm fouled and filthy to the very deepest part of me by that—pleasure—and yet——"

"I know," said Smith slowly. The effect of the *segir* was beginning to wear off, and weakness was washing back over him in waves, and when he spoke he was half meditating in a low voice, scarcely realizing that Yarol listened. "I know it—much better than you do—and there's something so indescribably awful that the thing emanates, something so utterly at odds with everything human — there aren't any words to say it. For a while I was a part of it, literally, sharing its thoughts and memories and emotions and hungers, and—well, it's over now and I don't remember very clearly, but the only part left free was that part of me that was all but insane from the—the obscenity of the thing. And yet it was a pleasure so sweet—I think there must be some

nucleus of utter evil in me—in everyone —that needs only the proper stimulus to get complete control; because even while I was sick all through from the touch of those—things—there was something in me that was—was simply gibbering with delight. . . . Because of that I saw things —and knew things — horrible, wild things I can't quite remember—visited unbelievable places, looked backward through the memory of that—creature— I was one with, and saw—God, I wish I could remember!"

"You ought to thank your God you can't," said Yarol soberly.

His voice roused Smith from the half-trance he had fallen into, and he rose on his elbow, swaying a little from weakness. The room was wavering before him, and he closed his eyes, not to see it, but he asked, "You say they—they don't turn up again? No way of finding— another?"

Yarol did not answer for a moment. He laid his hands on the other man's shoulders and pressed him back, and then sat staring down into the dark, ravaged face with a new, strange, undefinable look upon it that he had never seen there before—whose meaning he knew, too well.

"Smith," he said finally, and his black eyes for once were steady and serious, and the little grinning devil had vanished from behind them, "Smith, I've never asked your word on anything before, but I've—I've earned the right to do it now, and I'm asking you to promise me one thing."

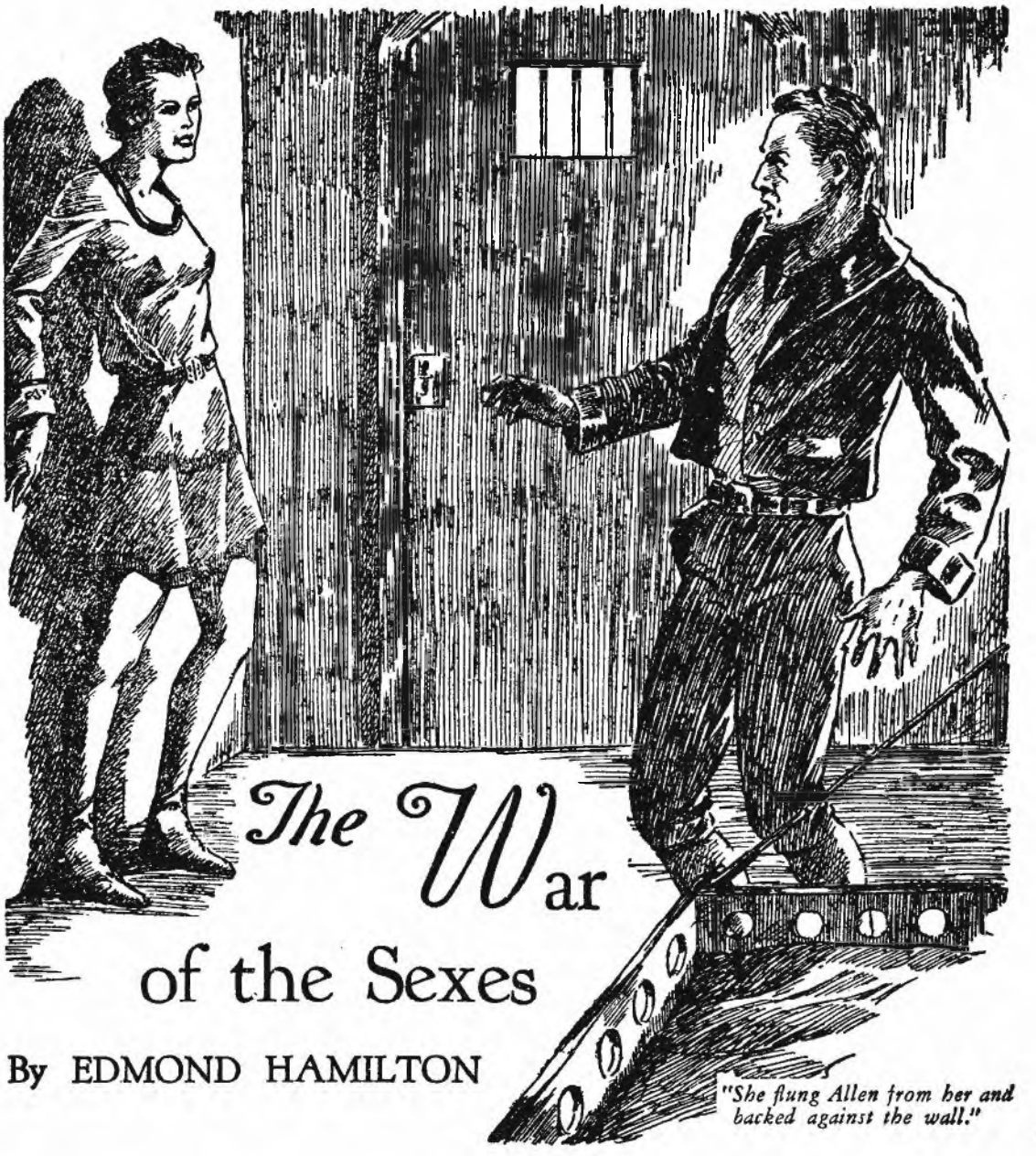
Smith's colorless eyes met the black gaze unsteadily. Irresolution was in them, and a little fear of what that promise might be. And for just a moment Yarol was looking, not into his friend's familiar eyes, but into a wide gray blankness that held all horror and delight—a pale sea with unspeakable pleasures sunk beneath it. Then the wide stare focused again and Smith's eyes met his squarely and Smith's voice said, "Go ahead. I'll promise."

"That if you ever should meet a Shambleau again — ever, anywhere — you'll draw your gun and burn it to hell the instant you realize what it is. Will you promise me that?"

There was a long silence. Yarol's somber black eyes bored relentlessly into the colorless ones of Smith, not wavering. And the veins stood out on Smith's tanned forehead. He never broke his word —he had given it perhaps half a dozen times in his life, but once he had given it, he was incapable of breaking it. And once more the gray seas flooded in a dim tide of memories, sweet and horrible beyond dreams. Once more Yarol was staring into blankness that hid nameless things. The room was very still.

The gray tide ebbed. Smith's eyes, pale and resolute as steel, met Yarol's levelly.

"I'll—try," he said. And his voice wavered.



The War of the Sexes

By EDMOND HAMILTON

"She flung Allen from her and backed against the wall."

A tale of twenty thousand years in the future—a loveless world in which the Males and the Females are engaged in a war of extermination against each other

"IS THIS the residence of Doctor Daniel Lantin?" asked Allan Rand of the tall, bearded man with penetrating eyes who had answered his ring.

"I am Doctor Lantin," the other told him. "You wish to see me?"

"About your advertisement," Allan said. "My name's Allan Rand—your ad asked for a young man without connections in search of exciting work, and I thought I might fill the bill."

"Please come inside," Doctor Lantin invited. "My laboratory is in the back of the house—this way."

Allan Rand, inside, went with the other down a narrow hall that opened into a square, white-tiled room. It was windowless, but a great lamp glowed at

the center of the ceiling. There was a desk in the corner and on it a photograph that caught Allan's eye—a picture of a vivid-faced young girl.

Under the ceiling-lamp stood a table and beside it were racks of shining instruments and complicated apparatus with rubber tubing that looked like anesthetic apparatus. Around the walls were shelves of chemicals and jars holding odd specimens of animal life.

"I am a research biologist," Doctor Lantin explained, "and I want a young man with cold-steel nerve and a strong body to accompany me on a scientific expedition I am making soon to the South American jungles."

"I don't know about the nerve," Allan Rand grinned, "but I think my body's strong enough."

"I can soon ascertain whether that is so," said Doctor Lantin. "Will you please stretch out on this table for examination?"

Allan Rand climbed onto the metal table and stretched out. Doctor Lantin bent over him and then came a metallic click, and another. Allan felt with the sound of the clicks that something had fastened shut on his wrists and ankles. He strove to sit up and found that he had been fettered to the table with metal clamps!

"What's the meaning of this?" he demanded indignantly. "You needn't fetter me to this table for an examination!"

"The examination was only a ruse, Mr. Rand," said Doctor Lantin coolly, "and the advertisement also."

"What is this, then—a hold-up?" asked Allan Rand.

"In a sense," smiled the doctor. "Only I am going to take from you, not your money, but your brain."

At Allan's blank look his smile deepened. "For a long time I have believed that a brain removed from a living body could be kept living indefinitely in the proper serum, just as a chicken-heart has been kept living in serum.

"Of course no one would volunteer willingly to have his brain removed for such an experiment. There was nothing for it but to use an unwilling subject, to lure some one here to be the subject. I inserted my advertisement, and it brought you to me."

A cold sweat broke upon Allan Rand's forehead at Doctor Lantin's words. The man spoke as dispassionately as of the vivisection of a rat.

"But that's murder!" Allan cried. "You can't do such a thing without it being found out!"

"Murder is quite justified when it is committed in the interest of science," Lantin told him coolly. "As to discovery, you have no connections to worry about you and will not be missed. I assure you I am quite capable of disposing of your body once I have the brain out of it."

With the words Doctor Lantin pulled toward him the rack of surgical instruments and the anesthetic-apparatus with its rubber tubing and cone. He then brought a container of thick, clear liquid. Allan Rand saw and strained at his fetters.

"You can't do this thing!" he cried. "Lantin, it's crazy—to try to keep my brain living in a jar of serum!"

Doctor Lantin had the rubber anesthetic-cone in his hand. "It may be I'll not succeed," he admitted, "but I think I will. In any case you'll never know, Rand, for even if your brain does live on in the serum it'll be unconscious.

"A whiff of this anesthetic now," he smiled, "and it will all be over for Allan Rand. Any last words before you go into the darkness?"

He was pressing the cone to Allan Rand's nostrils as he spoke and Allan

felt the stupefying scent overcoming his consciousness. Darkness indeed was gathering swiftly around him but out of that darkness he struggled with a last defiance to answer Lantin's mocking question.

"Last words? My last words are to—go ahead and—be damned to——"

Complete darkness and unconsciousness encompassed Allan Rand.

HE WAS aware of the return of consciousness, his first sensation a racking pain in his head. He groaned, stirred, and then was aware that he was lying on a softer surface than that of the table on which he had lost consciousness. He heard a murmur of voices, and opened his eyes.

Two men were bending over him and for a moment Allan lay motionless, looking up at them. The men were middle-aged, and both were clad in soft blue silk-like jackets and blue, close-fitting knee-length trousers. They wore belts with clasps of white metal, and in a sheath at each belt was a flat white metal rod. One of the men was a head taller and broader-shouldered than the other. Both had intelligent features.

Allan Rand stared wonderingly up at them, and then the smaller of the two men spoke. His words were in English, but an English that seemed distorted and strangely accented, so changed in fact that it was only with difficulty that he understood.

"He lives, Krann! The scientists have succeeded—he lives!" the man was exclaiming.

"Yes, he is living!" conceded the bigger man, Krann. "Never thought I to have seen it, Durul."

Allan Rand struggled to speak, and when he did so, he found that his voice sounded strange, unnatural. "What's all this about?" he asked weakly. "Where am I?"

Remembrance came to him suddenly, and swift anger. "Where's Doctor Lantin? I remember now—by heaven, Lantin's going to account to me for this!"

"You are angry with some one, lord?" asked Durul.

"Yes, with the bird who was going to remove my brain—who trapped me in this laboratory!" Allan Rand said. "When I find him I'll——"

He sat up as he said that, and then the words died on his lips in sheer amazement as he looked around. He was not in Doctor Lantin's laboratory. He was in a strange room such as he had never seen before.

Its walls were of blue as brilliant as though the room had been hollowed from a gigantic sapphire, the sunlight that streamed through windows in one wall reflected back and forth in shimmering azure lightnings. Just beneath the windows stood the padded metal table on which Allan sat.

He saw that besides Krann and Durul there were three others in the room, clad in blue silky jackets and trousers also. These three stood respectfully beside squat, complicated-looking apparatuses of metal and glass. There were also metal instruments like the surgical instruments of Doctor Lantin, and a square container of thick clear liquid. The three blue-garbed men beside these instruments returned Allan's stare respectfully.

Allan turned to the two men beside him, Krann and Durul, then with a sudden thought turned still further to look from the windows behind the table on which he sat. He looked, felt his mind reeling at what he saw. For outside there stretched in the sunlight not the buildings of the city in which Doctor Lantin's

house had stood, but a different and unearthly-looking city.

A city of blue buildings! Cubical buildings they were, mostly, but their size differed, ranging from small cubes of two or three stories to huge ones whose roofs were like glistening blue plains. This multitude of turquoise cubes extended to the horizon.

The streets between them, even, were blue, thronged with azure-garbed figures. Tapering white aircraft flashed to and fro above the city so swiftly that they were white streaks in the sunshine. Allan was aware as he looked forth that the building from whose window he stared was perhaps the largest in the city, an immense blue cube surrounded by a plaza on which a crowd was gathered.

ALLAN turned from the windows toward the two men beside him. "What's this place?" he asked dazedly. "And Lantin—where's Lantin?"

"You mean the man you saw last?" Durul asked. "He has been dead for twenty thousand years."

"What?" yelled Allan Rand. "What kind of joke is this? Or have I lost my sanity?"

"Lord, you are still sane," Durul reassured him. "But since the man you call Lantin made you unconscious, more than twenty thousand years have rolled across earth."

"Twenty thousand years—it's impossible!" Allan cried. "You can't tell me that I could have lived through all that time, that my body could have been preserved!"

"Your body was not preserved," Durul said, "but your brain was! Twenty thousand years ago your brain was taken from your body by a scientist, and placed in serum. In that serum your brain lived on long after the scientist himself was dead.

"Other scientists, though, cared for the serum containing your brain, generation after generation of them. In that way for two hundred centuries your brain has lived without consciousness in the serum. And now that it has been put back into a body and restored thus to consciousness, you seem to yourself to have just awaked."

"It can't be true!" Allan insisted, cold fear at his heart. "Why, even if my brain was preserved in that way, my body couldn't have been saved to put my brain back in!"

"I did not say that your brain had been put back into *your* body," Durul answered pointedly. "I said it had been put back into *a* body."

As the full import of his words struck Allan, he looked down at himself for the first time.

He saw that he was clad in blue trousers and jacket like those of the others. But his strong, hard legs—his massive torso—his long, steady fingers and superbly muscled arms and shoulders—these were not of the body that had been Allan Rand's!

He was handed a mirror, and as he stared into it, it almost dropped from his hands. The face that looked back at him from the mirror was no more Allan Rand's than the body—it was a high, aquiline, merciless face with ruthless black eyes and a straight mouth. This unfamiliar face was topped by close-cut dark hair.

Allan let the mirror fall. "Good God, whose body is this that you've put my brain into?" he exclaimed. "Who am I?'

Durul bowed as he answered. "Lord, you are Thur, ruler of the Males."

"Ruler of the Males?" Allan repeated. "What do you mean?"

"Lord, great changes have taken place on earth while your brain slept in the serum. In your day the two sexes, Males and Females, mingled. But for eight thousand years now they have been distinctly separate races, deadly enemies of each other."

"Do you mean to say that a war of sexes has been going on for eight thousand years?" Allan demanded.

Durul and Krann bowed affirmation.

"But how has the human race perpetuated itself, then?" Allan asked.

"I will explain," said Durul. "Until ten thousand years ago men and women lived as in your time, marrying and producing children cared for by their immediate parents. Then a woman biologist achieved ectogenesis, the production of children in the laboratory directly from the human gamete-cells or seed-cells.

"By treating the gamete-cells with a secret reagent she had evolved, she could fertilize them artificially and produce tiny embryos which, in an artificial environment equivalent to the placental arrangement of the human mother's body, grew into normal children.

"This woman biologist found she could produce children of whichever sex she wished, by controlling the number of chromosomes in the gamete-cells used. She chose to produce only female children, and she and the women disciples she gathered around her engaged in the large-scale production of females.

"The females would soon have outnumbered the males and dominated them had not a man biologist discovered the secret of ectogenesis also. He and his male associates determined to restore the balance of numbers and began producing male children on a large scale.

"Swiftly rivalry grew between the two sexes as to which should be dominant in numbers. Antagonism grew so great that association between males and females fell off. Marriage and the concepts of marriage and love declined until they had entirely disappeared.

"The children of the world were produced entirely by ectogenesis. The female scientists controlled the laboratories in which female children were produced, and the male scientists those in which male children were produced. Each sex produced as many children as possible, still hoping to outnumber and dominate the other sex.

"Sex riots broke out in the cities, males fighting females in the streets. Finally the two sexes separated, becoming two separate races, Males and Females. The rest of earth was gradually deserted as the two races settled wholly in this continent. The Males took the cities in the north, of which this city is capital, while the Females took the cities in the south, several hundred miles from here.

"Soon came open war between Males and Females, the Males going south in their flyers and with their fire-rods raining death on the women's cities, and the Females retaliating. That war has gone on ever since. In war as in peace, the Males have a single ruler, as do also the Females, and you, Thur, are that ruler."

"But I still don't see how it is that I'm Thur," Allan persisted. "Why did you put my brain in Thur's body?"

"For this reason," Durul said. "Thur has been our ruler for ten years and his strong rule alone has held up the Male morale against the constant attacks the Females have been lately making on us. But this morning in landing his flyer on the roof of this palace, Thur was killed, part of his skull being crushed in on his brain.

"Krann and I, who are Thur's chief councillors, knew that once the Males learned their strong ruler was dead they

would lose all courage. We asked the scientists if in some way they could not revive Thur. They said that as only his brain was damaged, putting a new living brain in his skull at once would reactivate Thur's body.

"There was no time to take out the brain of one of us to put in Thur's skull —every second was precious if Thur's body was to be reactivated. But the scientists said they had in their collections a brain kept living in serum for generations as a scientific curiosity. That could be used, they said, and we agreed.

"So the brain living in the serum, your brain, was brought and rapidly installed in Thur's skull, nerve-connections made, the broken parts of the skull fused. Then, when a little time had passed, your brain woke to consciousness in Thur's body. And now, lord, you are Thur, ruler of the Males, and their mainstay against the attacks which Nara, the Female ruler, and her lieutenants, Breela and Dulan, have been making on us. You must help the Males withstand them as Thur has done."

ALLAN RAND—despite that he wore Thur's body he could think of himself only as Allan Rand—was stunned. "And I'm Thur! What a nest of troubles Lantin shot me into—a war of sexes, and me ruler of the Males!

"Tell me, Durul," he said. "Isn't there a chance of stopping this war, of making peace between the Males and Females?"

Durul shook his head, and so did the big Krann. "There is no chance," Krann affirmed. "The Females will not stop their attacks on us until they have wiped out all Males and only Females live on earth."

"And our aim," Durul added, "is the same, to vanquish and destroy the Females so that the future will see Males only in the world."

"And a fine world it would be in either case!" said Allan disgustedly. "All men or else all women—some world!"

"And now, lord Thur," said Durul, "will you not show yourself to the Male crowds outside? Rumors have been spreading all day that Thur is dead, and they need but to see you to be reassured."

Allan hesitated. "All right," he said. "Since I've got Thur's body I suppose I'll have to live up to some of his responsibilities."

With the help of Durul and Krann he slid from the padded table. He tried his legs experimentally. He could walk and move as easily as he had ever done with his own body, he found.

Suddenly Allan wondered what had become of his own body. Destroyed by Doctor Lantin, twenty thousand years ago, he supposed. He felt a hysterical homesickness for that familiar body, a strangeness in inhabiting this of Thur's. But Thur's body now was his—he must make the best of it.

Durul informed him that it was Thur's custom to show himself to his people from a terrace on the palace roof, and Allan acquiesced. Durul and Krann walked with him out of the blue chamber into a turquoise-walled corridor. Along it stood guards with flat metal fire-rods, raising these in salute as Allan —or Thur—passed.

They went through the blue hallways until they reached a shining white stair that wound both upward and downward. They went up this and soon emerged onto the roof of the palace, so vast in extent that it seemed like a great glistening blue plain. Many of the white flyers were parked in regular rows on the roof.

There was a little terrace jutting out at one side of the roof, and Durul and Krann led Allan out onto this. He looked down there from a great height upon the

huge crowds of blue-clad figures that jammed the plaza below. His people, the Males!

And they were all Males. There were youths and even small boys among them, but not one woman.

He appeared on the terrace, and a tremendous shout of joy went up from the Male crowds as they looked up and saw Allan—or Thur.

Their shout was dying, when abruptly it welled up again in a great cry that was different in tone, a crescendo of surprize and fear. The crowd below was not looking now at Allan but up beyond him, pointing excitedly.

Allan looked quickly up with Krann and Durul, and saw a swarm of white flyers diving headlong onto the Male city from high above.

"A Female raid!" yelled Krann. "They'll be turning their fire-rods on us in a moment!"

"Back inside, lord Thur!" cried Durul, but Allan was held motionless by the weird sight.

From the Female flyers, as they swooped plummet-like upon the city, came flashing fire-bursts that cut swaths of scorching death across the crowds of running Males below.

The Males were not running for shelter, though, but toward their own flyers. Already dozens of Male flyers were swarming up to meet the Female craft.

The whole city had become a scene of wild uproar. The Female flyers formed a great upright revolving circle, the individual craft shooting down to loose fire-bursts and then zooming upward again as those behind them took their place. From roofs across the city the Males replied with fire-bursts as their own flyers took to the air.

Krann was running toward one of the parked flyers on the roof. Allan sprang with him to the craft.

"No, go not, Thur!" cried Durul, clutching to halt him. "You, the ruler, must not risk yourself in this battle——"

"Hell of a ruler I'd be if I was afraid to fight with the rest!" Allan flung at him. "I never dodged a scrap yet—let her go, Krann!"

He had crouched behind Krann on the flat deck of the tapering flyer. Krann grasped its control wheel, shoved a lever with his elbow, and as a mechanism under the flat deck began to hum, the flyer shot steeply upward from the roof.

Krann half turned to yell to Allan. "The stern fire-rods, lord Thur—the triggers loose the fire-flashes!"

There were fire-rods mounted on swivels at prow and stern, and Allan grasped the stern ones, his fingers closing on the triggers Krann had indicated. "I've got them—go ahead!" he cried.

KRANN headed the flyer straight toward the maelstrom-like center of the battle. The big Male kept one hand on the control-wheel and the other on the trigger of the prow fire-rod.

They rushed through the air, then were in the thick of the combat—Male and Female flyers darting, banking, diving all around them. Fire-flashes burned thick from flyer to flyer and craft of either side fell in flames as they were struck.

Allan could glimpse the Females as green-clad figures easily distinguishable thus from the blue-garbed Males. Fire-flashes scorched close past him as Krann swerved the flyer sharply. Two Female flyers were diving on them from above.

Allan swung the stern fire-rods up toward the down-rushing craft, his fingers tense on the triggers. For a split-second he saw clearly the faces of the Females on the diving craft—girl's faces, eyes

steady as they worked their own fire-rods.

Good Lord, he couldn't fire on girls! The thought held Allan's fingers motionless on the triggers and almost caused his death, for in a second the girls on the down-rushing Female flyers loosed their bursts together. Only another lightning swerve by Krann evaded them.

Quick as thought Krann circled back and worked his own fire-rod at the two Female craft before they could regain height. Krann at least had no compunction in firing on the Females—Allan saw the two flyers reel down in flames, hit. Krann drove up again into the thickest of the fight.

But now the combat was scattering. Allan saw that the Female flyers were withdrawing, massing together and heading southward. Their swift raid finished, they were retreating, outnumbered by the Male flyers that had risen to repel them.

One Female flyer flew above the mass of the rest as though directing the retreat. Krann drove headlong toward this. Instantly he was engaged in a single combat with it, the rest of the Female flyers continuing their flight pursued by the Males.

Krann dipped, circled, climbed, in aerial combat with the Female flyer. Allan, clinging to the deck, saw that on the Female craft were two green-clad girls, one working the fire-rods and the other piloting the flyer.

The fire-bursts of the Female craft almost got home, but Krann evaded them, achieved the advantage in height. Instantly his prow fire-rod spat a burst at the enemy flyer. It struck the Female pilot, destroyed her, and the craft reeled pilotless down toward the city.

Krann dived after it. Allan saw the remaining Female on the falling flyer struggling to reach its controls.

She had just done so, was levelling out the flyer in its downward plunge, when it crashed slantingly along the city's street.

Krann landed close beside it. The Female on the wrecked flyer leapt from it, a small hand fire-rod in her grasp.

But Krann and Allan were too quick for her. They seized her before she could use the weapon. She struggled, and Allan was amazed at the wildcat strength in this girl's lithe, slender body.

But Males in the streets were running to the scene, helped to hold the Female, Allan, panting, stepped back. He saw now that the girl wore jacket and short tunic of green.

Her black hair was close-trimmed and uncovered. Her dark eyes were flaming with wrath and her breast rising and falling as she stood in the grasp of her Male captors.

Through the gathering crowds of Males pushed a group of guards and with them came Durul, his anxious face seeking Allan.

"Lord Thur, you're not hurt?" he cried.

"No, thanks to Krann," Allan said. "And Krann and I seem to have taken a captive."

Durul turned his gaze on the girl. His eyes widened as he looked at her. "Do you know who this Female is?" he cried.

Allan and Krann shook their heads. "It's Nara, ruler of the Females!" Durul cried. "You've captured the Female ruler!"

"Nara!" shouted Krann. A fierce shout went up from the Males around. "Nara captured!"

The girl spoke, her eyes deadly in their hate. "Yes, Nara, you dogs of Males! And sorry I am that I could not kill more of you before this happened to me."

"You'll have the guards kill her at once, Thur?" Durul asked.

"Kill her?" Allan repeated.

"Of course—we Males kill all Females we capture and so do they any of us they

take prisoner. I will give the order to the guards."

Durul turned to do so but Allan's voice halted him. "Don't do it! You can't kill this girl like that!"

Durul and Krann stared at him in sheer astonishment. "Why not? She is a Female—a deadly enemy of all our race."

"Yes, and will be while I live!" exclaimed Nara. "I ask for no mercy from you, Thur."

Shouts went up from the Males around. "Death to Nara! Kill the Female!"

Allan asserted himself. "I am Thur, am I not?" he said coldly to Durul and Krann and the gathered Males. "It is my order that instead of killing this Female you imprison her securely."

For a moment Allan thought that Durul and Krann would rebel at the order. But they did not.

"You are the lord Thur," said Durul bowing. "The order will be obeyed."

He gave a brief order to the Male guards, who led Nara, a slim, defiant figure, toward the great palace of Thur in which Allan had awakened.

ALLAN looked up and saw that the sky over the city was now full of Male flyers returning from their pursuit of the Female flyers. The Male city was alive with excitement.

"The Females got away?" Allan asked, and Durul nodded.

"Most of them did, but many of them we destroyed. And they lost their ruler —this has been a disastrous raid for the Females."

With Krann and Durul, Allan walked back into the palace of Thur. As they entered it a guard reported to Allan.

"We have placed Nara in one of the cells in the lowest level of the palace, under guard, lord Thur," he informed.

"All right, keep her there for the present," Allan said. "I'll decide what's to be done with her."

But by the time night came Allan had made no progress toward a decision. He sat with Krann and Durul at a little table set upon the terrace that jutted from the palace's roof. He had eaten with the two Males a supper of synthetic foods of jelly-like consistency, strange but not unpleasant to the taste.

Now he sat looking out. Night lay over the Male city, whose buildings were outlined by the lights that blinked here and there in an irregular pattern. Swift humming shapes came and went in the darkness overhead, patrols of Male flyers on the alert against another Female attack.

"But it will be some time before the Females raid again," said Durul with satisfaction. "Yes, down in the Female cities, Breela and Dulan and the rest of the Females will be sad tonight thinking of their ruler Nara's capture."

"And will be sadder when they hear that we've killed Nara," added Krann, with a sidelong glance at Allan.

"Why are you so set on killing this Nara?" Allan asked. "Why do all you Males feel that you have to destroy every Female?"

"Lord Thur, had your best friends been killed by Females you'd have as much hate for them as we do," said Durul solemnly.

"And the Females feel the same way about the Males," Allan commented. "And just because this damned sex war started it'll be fought until one or the other of the sexes is wiped out."

"That is what we Males are fighting for—to rid the world of the Females!" said Durul fervently. "And to kill Nara will be a step in that direction—she has been one of the ablest Female rulers."

"There is in fact nothing you can do but kill her, lord Thur," Krann pointed

out. "You can not keep her prisoner for ever and you can not let her go back to the Females to make new raids on us."

"Well, I'll decide what's to be done with her," Allan said. "I wish I had the man who shot me ahead into this world, into another man's body and responsibilities and into this crazy war of sexes."

WHEN Durul and Krann had gone from the terrace, Allan sat on, looking out over the night-shrouded Male city and brooding further on the strange situation into which Lantin's mad experiment had projected him. What a world it was into which he had awakened so strangely! A topsy-turvy world, a loveless world in which the sexes had become the bitterest of enemies.

Allan remembered how back in his own time, even, there had been signs of this. The emergence of women from their age-old subjection to the other sex had stirred up no small amount of sex-jealousy. Rivalry of men and women had grown in many cases to antagonism and open enmity. And now that the mating of men and women was no longer necessary for the perpetuation of the race, the two sexes had come to open war and fought, each to wipe out the other.

And if one sex won, destroying the other completely, what would the world be then? A world in which only men or only women existed, a sexless world as devoid of color and warmth as that of some insects. A world in which all the violent emotional contrasts and upsets that had formerly enlivened earth were done away with, a cold, gray, loveless and sexless world!

Allan stood up suddenly. That vision appalled him—yet what could he do? What must he do? His thoughts swung to the girl captured that day, this Nara who was the Female ruler as he, Thur, was ruler of the Males. Could he, he wondered, get Nara to help him end this senseless war of men and women? Remembering the girl's fierceness, he doubted it. But it was worth trying.

He strode to the stair and passed down it to the lowest level of the palace, guards stationed on the soft-lit landings saluting him with their fire-rods as he passed. There he saw a corridor stretching away, dimly lit, with barred doors along its walls. Two guards stood in it. They saluted as Allan approached.

"In which cell is the Female, Nara, prisoned?" Allan asked.

One of the guards pointed to a door. "In that one, lord Thur."

"You have the key to it?" Allan asked. "Give it to me—I will speak with Nara."

"Shall we attend you, lord Thur?" the guard asked as he handed the key. "The Female is fierce, and we can go with you."

"To protect me from a girl?" Allan smiled. "No, I can take care of myself. Remain here."

He went down the corridor to the metal-barred door the guard had indicated, and stopped outside it, looking into the soft-lit cell.

NARA sat on a metal bunk, her slim, green-clad figure gallantly erect as she gazed out the cell's tiny single window.

As Allan inserted his key and entered the cell, Nara turned quickly. She recognized him and at once her eyes blazed defiance, her lithe body tense as that of some wrathful young tigress.

"Well, lord Thur, was capturing me not enough?" she asked bitterly. "Must you come to gloat over me too?"

"I'm not here to gloat," Allan Rand told her. "I'm sorry for you, Nara."

"Sorry for me?" Nara hissed the words in fury. "I know how sorry you are, you

Male dog! You who have done more than any other Male to wipe out the Females!"

"That's what I came to talk about," Allan said. "You see, I wouldn't want to see the Males wipe out the Females at all."

"You wouldn't——" Nara looked at him incredulously. "Do you expect me to believe that?"

"Why not?" said Allan. "I think it would be rather a dippy world with nothing but men in it, don't you? Or nothing but women?"

"You can not deceive me, Thur!" the girl exclaimed. "I know that for years you have been the worst enemy of the Females."

Allan pondered. "Suppose I told you that I wasn't really Thur at all?" he asked. "That I was really another man—a man from the far past—in Thur's body?"

"A man from the far past in Thur's body?" Nara's brow wrinkled. "I do not understand—but I do know that you are Thur."

"Well, let it pass," Allan said. "But even admitting that I'm Thur, you can put it that I've had a change of mind, that I don't want any more to exterminate the Females."

"But why not?" The girl's anger was lost for the moment in sheer puzzlement. "Why shouldn't you want to kill all the Females?"

Allan laughed, his first whole-hearted laugh since his strange awakening. "Well, we men did sometimes feel back in my own time that we'd like to kill all the women. But more often we felt like kissing them."

"Kissing them?" Nara repeated. "You speak in riddles, Thur. What do you mean by kissing them—torturing them?"

"It wasn't exactly torture," Allan grinned. "It seems that kissing's been forgotten in all these sex wars, and no wonder. Wait, I'll show you what I mean——"

His arms went around Nara's slim shoulders and drew her to him. For the moment Nara was too taken with surprize to struggle. Allan kissed her, her lips soft and fragrant against his own, her eyes staring amazed into his.

Then suddenly she was struggling fiercely, quickly, with surprizing strength. She flung Allan from her and backed against the cell wall, staring at him half in astonishment and half in wrath.

"Not bad, considering it's the first kiss the world has seen for eight thousand years," said Allan.

"And Males and Females did—that—back in the past?" Nara said unbelievingly.

"They sure did," Allan said. "And they weren't Males and Females then—but men and women who loved each other."

Nara's face was scornful. "The histories tell of that—the savage times when Females degraded themselves by loving Males."

"What was savage about them?" Allan demanded. "I'd like to see things like that again, instead of this crazy war of sexes you've fought so long."

"You'd like to see Males and Females make peace?" said Nara. "Yet you fought the Females today—took me captive——"

"I did no fighting really today," Allan Rand said, "nor did I mean to make a captive of you. As it was, I kept them from killing you."

"What good was that?" Nara asked. "Better a quick death than a lingering one here in this cell."

"But you're not going to stay here!" Allan exclaimed. "I'm going to let you go, if you'll help me in my efforts to make

peace between the Males and Females."

"Let me go?" Nara said amazedly. "Even you, Thur, could not do that. Durul and the Males would never permit it."

"They won't know anything about it until it's done," Allan told her. "But if I do free you, Nara, will you help me to stop this war?"

Nara considered. "Certainly the war between Males and Females has gone on long," she said. "Though the Males started it——"

"No matter who started it, the thing to do now is to end it," Allan declared. "Will you help me do that?"

Nara hesitated, then suddenly nodded. "Yes, I will help you, Thur—will do all in my power to have the Females make peace."

"Good girl!" Allan's hand closed impulsively on hers. He stood up. "If I get you up to the roof you can get away on one of the flyers?"

Nara nodded quickly. "I can avoid the Male patrols in the darkness without difficulty," she said.

"Then I'll get these two guards out of here and then we'll try it," Allan said. "Wait here."

He went out of the cell into the corridor and approached the two guards, who came to attention.

"You can return to your quarters," he told them. "There's no need for further watch here."

The guards looked surprized but saluted obediently. "The order will be obeyed, lord Thur," they said, and departed.

Allan waited until they were gone and then went back into the corridor. "All clear," he told Nara. "I think we can get to the roof without being seen."

They moved to the door and then he halted her, his hand on her arm.

"Are you sure, Nara, that I made quite clear to you what kissing was, a little while ago?" Allan asked.

Nara nodded puzzledly. "Your demonstration was quite clear, Thur."

"Nevertheless," Allan said unsmilingly, "I think I'd better demonstrate it again. I wouldn't want you going away with any hazy ideas on the subject——"

He drew her slim form close to him again for a moment, his lips again seeking hers, arms about the soft shoulders.

This time Nara did not struggle. It seemed to Allan, indeed, that she kissed him back, and she was white and a little trembling when he released her.

"We'd better get started, or I'll be keeping you here after all," said Allan a little unsteadily. "Come on, Nara."

They went out into the corridor. "If we meet some of your people, Thur, what then?" Nara asked.

Allan shook his head. "They'd probably stop us, for all that I'm their ruler, they hate you Females so. But we'll cross that bridge when we reach it and here's hoping we don't reach it."

They came to the winding white stair that led upward through the palace's levels to the roof. Quickly they climbed, Nara moving as rapidly as Allan could. They passed the landing at the first level, then that at the second, unobserved.

Up through level after level they followed the stair. At the sixth or seventh they stopped suddenly. They glimpsed Males on the landing above.

They waited, Allan searching his brain for an expedient to pass the Males unobserved. He could guess that if he were found helping the Female ruler, Nara, to escape, not even the fact that he was Thur would excuse it. And it might well be that Durul and Krann then would tell the Males that he was *not* really Thur.

But as he paused with Nara in inde-

cision the necessity of an expedient disappeared, the Males on the landing above vanishing as they moved off along the halls of that level. Allan breathed more easily, waited a few moments, and then with Nara's hand in his climbed rapidly up past that landing and past others until they emerged onto the roof.

IN THE darkness of night the roof was a dimly seen flat expanse on which the white shapes of the parked flyers glimmered. Overhead, buzzing craft came and went, Male patrols keeping watch in the darkness for possible Female attackers. The great city of the Males stretched in the distance, a plain of blinking lights.

Allan and Nara moved toward the nearest of the flyers. Nara clambered onto it, hastily examined its controls, then touched some of them and brought from the flyer's mechanism a deep hum.

As she crouched at the flyer's controls, Allan, standing on the roof beside her, leaned toward her.

"You can get past the Male patrols all right, Nara?" he asked, and she nodded.

"It will not be hard, for it will not be the first time that I've slipped between them."

"Then good luck, Nara, and remember that when you get back to the Female cities you must make every effort to get them to agree to peace. I will be doing the same with the Males here."

"I will do it, Thur," she promised. "And will—but look behind you!"

Allan whirled, expecting to see Male guards emerging onto the roof. But no one was there.

He turned quickly back to Nara. In the split-second that he turned he saw Nara's arm raised above his head, one of the flyer's metal control-handles in her grasp. Then the blow descended on Allan's head, his brain seemed to explode in flame, and his senses forsook him.

Only slowly did Allan regain his senses. His first sensation was of a loud droning in his ears, and then he was aware that air was beating on his face. He tried to move and found he could not.

He opened his eyes and looked dazedly around. He was lying on the deck of one of the flyers, bound tightly to one of the stern fire-rods.

The flyer was moving at high speed through hot sunlight. The sun, indeed, was several hours high and disclosed that the craft was flying over a great grassy plain. A girl's slim figure crouched at the controls in the flyer's prow—it was Nara!

Allan remembered now—his setting Nara free, going with her to the palace roof, and then her exclamation, her blow with the control-handle. She had knocked him unconscious, then, and bound him to this gun!

Nara turned, and as she saw that Allan was awake a mocking smile crossed her face.

"Well, lord Thur, awake at last?" she said. "You slept long enough."

"Nara!" muttered Allan. "What does all this mean? You struck me down—bound me——"

Nara laughed, silvery and triumphant laughter. "I did, and I did more than that!" she exclaimed. "I got away in the darkness from the Male city with you, Thur, ruler of the Males, my prisoner!

"The sorrow of the Females for me, their captured ruler, will be changed to rejoicing soon. For not only did I do what no other Female has done, escape the Males when once captured by them, but I also bring the Male ruler with me as *my* captive!"

"Your captive?" Allan's dazed brain could not comprehend. "But you were going to have the Females make peace

with the Males—you said so when I let you go——"

"And you believed me!" Nara mocked. "Surely, lord Thur, you have lost the craft that was yours in years past, when you could believe such an incredible thing as that I would make peace with the Males. No, Thur, you might have known that no matter what I said, neither I nor any Female could every really want peace with those who have been for ages the most bitter enemies of our race."

"But I thought somehow you were different," Allan said, "that you could not hate the Males so. When I kissed you there——"

"When you did what you called kissing," said Nara contemptuously, "I suffered the indignity only because by so doing I was getting you to set me free."

"And you fooled me completely!" That fact beat strongest in Allan's mind. "Fooled me—well, I'll say that women haven't changed much after all in twenty thousand years. They can lie and deceive as well as ever. But what are you going to do with me when you do get me to the Female cities?" he asked. "I take it that I'm not going there just for the ride."

"You will be executed there, of course," said Nara. "Did you think the Females would let Thur, who has long been their worst enemy, continue to live?"

"I didn't and I don't want them to," said Allan bitterly. "I've had more than enough of this crazy damned world and I don't care about living any longer in it."

He sank back, his head throbbing with pain. Nara, at the controls, held the craft's flight steadily onward, southward.

ALLAN'S thoughts were chaotic. Outwitted, fooled, as completely as any man back in his own time had ever been by some smooth-tongued woman! The girl there at the prow had done it as well as though trained for it by a lifetime of association with men. All her female instincts of deception and betrayal had risen to help her, Allan thought.

He could see what a triumph it meant to her, not only to have fooled Thur, the great ruler of the Males, into letting her escape, but bringing Thur with her as a helpless prisoner. Allan could guess what the real Thur, the Thur whose body he was wearing, would think of such a happening, of how he would have raged.

What difference did it make? he asked himself dully. He was better out of such a world, indeed, as this that Doctor Lantin had projected him into. It had repelled him in his first contact with it, this world where between men and women was nothing but rancorous race-hostility, this loveless world with its mechanical production of children.

He had thought for a brief time that he had discovered something warm and human in it in his contact with Nara, her willingness to help him bring peace to Male and Female, her kisses—but he had awakened now to find Nara too a part of that fierce and loveless world, her softness only sham. Better for Allan Rand out of such a world, indeed!

He closed his eyes. When he opened them again Nara was still guiding the flyer steadily southward.

The grassy plain still extended in all directions without a break. There were no signs of human presence on it. Allan guessed that this was an uninhabited no-man's-land beween the northern cities of the Males and the southern Female cities.

For hours they flew on over these uninhabited spaces, the sun swinging across the zenith and bringing an afternoon heat of increasing fierceness. There was no conversation between them, though Nara came back to the flyer's stern at intervals

and inspected Allan's bonds. She was taking no chances of his turning the tables, he thought grimly.

He watched the girl from where he lay. Her slim, clean-lined body crouched at the controls, her keen, eager face beneath the dark hair—certainly there was something fine in her appearance, Allan admitted to himself. But he knew how deceptive this appearance was—all this eagerness of hers was to get him to the Female cities where, as the hated Thur, his shrift would be short.

They flew on, and after a time Nara turned to look back at Allan. "Tired of your bonds, lord Thur?" she said. "We will reach the chief city of my people soon."

"Where I'll be free of bonds and life both in short order," Allan said dryly.

Nara looked at him soberly, her mocking triumph of before no longer on her face. "Well, why not? Why should we Females be merciful to the greatest enemy our race has had among the Males?"

Allan made no answer. Nara looked ahead again, but in a second turned back to him.

"Flyers ahead! They are Female patrols —we are near my city."

Dots in the sky far ahead were all that Allan could see, but these rushed rapidly closer and as they did so grew into white flyers moving in an extended line.

These darted toward their own craft, circled and flew level with it. Nara stood up, making signals, and Allan heard exclamations of joy from the Females on the patrol-flyers as they discerned their ruler.

The patrol-ships grouped around the craft of Nara and Allan and sped on southward with it. Allan watched.

Soon he made out the outline of buildings at the skyline ahead. Tall, rectangular structures they were, a far-flung city much the same in outline as the city of the Males he had seen. But as he drew closer he saw that the buildings were not blue like the Male ones, but green.

Green was apparently as distinctively the Female color as blue the Male. The buildings might have been huge blocks of jade, the streets like rivers of molten emerald. All those Females whom he could see in the streets were clad in green like Nara.

Midway in the city rose a group of tall block-like buildings. Over these buzzed and hummed many flyers, part of the network of patrols that extended over the Female city in every direction. Toward these buildings the flyer of Nara and Allan, and its escort, sped, two of the patrol-flyers going ahead.

By the time the craft of Allan and Nara dipped down to land on the roof of the biggest building, the patrols that had gone ahead had brought a crowd of excited Females out onto the roof. In the midst of this crowd they landed. Nara stepped off the flyer, into the midst of the excited, gesticulating girls and women.

THEY grasped her arms, shouting in joy, for the moment not noticing Allan's bound form. Two tall women came through the crowd to Nara, and from their air of authority Allan guessed them to be the lieutenants of Nara whom Durul had mentioned, Breela and Dulan.

"Nara, you escaped then from the Males!" cried one of them.

"I did, Breela," said Nara. "And I brought one of the Males back with me."

She pointed to Allan. Breela and Dulan and the other Females on the roof stared at him a moment. Then a fierce roar went up.

"Thur!" cried Breela. Thur himself —and you brought him back! The bit-

terest Male enemy we have ever had, in our power!"

"Kill him!" cried one of the Females wildly. "Death to Thur!"

"Yes, death to Thur it shall be!" Breela cried. "You'll have him executed at once, Nara?"

Nara looked at Allan. Allan smiled as he met her eyes, and she turned her gaze from him. "Not yet, Breela," she said. "Put him in one of the cells for the time being."

Breela's brows drew together, and from the Females on the roof came a mutter of dissatisfaction.

"Why not execute him now?" Dulan demanded.

"Because"—Nara hesitated a moment, then went on—"because all the Females in the city should be here to see when their great enemy is killed."

Breela's brow cleared. "It is well thought of, Nara!" she said. "That is a spectacle no Female will want to miss."

"Put him in one of the cells now," she ordered a group of girl guards. "See that there is no possible chance of his escaping."

The guards did not unbind Allan but lifted his helpless form and carried him. As he was borne off he saw Nara led away by Breela and Dulan and the other excited Females.

The girls bore Allan down a stairway and through halls much like those that had been in the palace in the Male city, save that here the dominant motif of green was everywhere present. He was thrust into a small cell, his bonds removed while fire-rods covered him, and then the girl-guards retreated from the cell, locked its door, and took up their station outside.

Allan stretched his stiff, cramped limbs and rubbed his skin where the bonds had chafed it.

He looked about the cell and smiled mirthlessly. The situations were exactly reversed. It was he now who lay prisoner in Nara's palace.

ALLAN lay down, and despite the soreness of his muscles, soon slept heavily. He knew when he awoke that he had slumbered for some hours, and then saw that he had been awakened by the entry of some one into his cell.

It was Nara. She looked at him with an intentness of expression Allan could not fathom. The guards outside were now a little down the corridor, but Nara's fire-rod was in her belt.

Allan smiled. "Well, we seem to have changed places. Your turn now to do a little first-class gloating, Nara."

"I do not wish to gloat over you, Thur," Nara said soberly, "for you did not over me."

"Too bad for me I didn't," said Allan bitterly. "I suppose they're making ready for the general festivities attendant on my execution?"

"They will soon be ready," Nara said. "But I am not going to have you killed, Thur. I am going to let you go."

"You're what?" said Allan, amazed.

"I'm going to let you escape," Nara repeated. "You let me go, when I was in your power. I was wrong to take you captive then as I did, but I will send these guards away and get you out of the city before they kill you."

"And just why are you doing so?" Allan asked.

She looked at him doubtfully, unsurely. "Because you let me go, as I said. I am grateful for that, and——"

"It's only gratitude you feel then?" Allan asked.

Nara's eyes now were even more unsure. "What else could I feel, Thur?"

Allan's arms for a third time grasped

her, drew her unresistingly closer. "It couldn't be love you feel, Nara?"

Nara raised her eyes to his. "A Female could never love any Male, Thur," she whispered. "Yet——"

"Yet?" Allan prompted, his face close to hers.

"Yet I do love you!" she murmured. Their lips met—and then Allan flung Nara back against the cell's wall with all the bitterness that for hours had been growing in him.

"You do, do you?" he exclaimed. "Then you know now what it means to have some one you love deceive and betray you!"

Nara's face was dead-white as she looked at him. Before she could speak, a woman's voice came from the door. "All is ready, Nara. Shall we take the prisoner up now?"

They turned. It was Breela who stood at the door, her face alight with exultation.

"Shall we take him up now?" Breela repeated. "All the city's Females are gathered around this building to see Thur die."

Nara nodded. "Yes, bring him now if all is ready."

She went out of the cell without meeting Allan's eyes. Breela called the guards, and these haled Allan from the cell, their fire-rods constantly covering him. They marched him along the corridor, Nara and Breela going ahead.

Up the stair—Allan's thoughts were whirling—up past level after level until they emerged onto the roof.

Night had come while he slept in the cell, Allan saw, but the darkness over the Female city was dispelled on the roof by brilliant flares. The roof was packed with Females, and down in the wide streets around the building were tens of thousands more, all looking tensely upward.

As Allan looked around, he felt his heart beating faster despite himself. A queer way for him to end, a queer place—this world of twenty thousand years in the future into which Doctor Lantin had flung him. Allan wondered momentarily what Durul and Krann and the rest of the Males would think by now of the disappearance of their ruler.

He saw Nara standing silently, her face still white, with Dulan and Breela and others of the Females. Breela gave an order.

In answer to it girl-guards marched Allan to the edge of the roof. He heard a tremendous roar from below as the Females in the streets glimpsed their hated enemy, Thur.

The girl-guards moved back from him and he was left alone at the roof's edge. He saw the girls raise their fire-rods. Their faces were coldly exultant.

Allan turned his eyes toward Nara. She was looking steadily at him. Breela, beside her, leaned toward her. "It is for you to give the order to fire, Nara," she said.

"I am not going to give that order," said Nara clearly.

Breela frowned. "But one of us must if Thur is to die, and you as ruler——"

"Thur is not going to die," Nara said. "I have decided."

An amazing babble of murmurs went up from the Females on the roof. Unbelieving were the faces turned toward Nara. Breela was staring at her ruler.

"Take Thur back down to the cell," Nara said. "It is my order."

The guards moved to obey, but Breela's outflung hand stopped them. "Have you become traitress to your race, Nara?" she cried.

"I am ruler," Nara returned, "and I say Thur dies not."

"And I say you are no longer ruler of the Females when you try to save the life of the Females' worst foe!" Breela cried.

She turned to the Females on the roof and those in the streets below.

"Say, Females!" she shouted. "Does the Male Thur die now?"

"Kill Thur and the traitress Nara now!" they yelled furiously. "Death to Thur and Nara!"

"It shall be so!" Breela cried. "Guards, you have heard—seize Nara and place her beside Thur!"

A half-moment the guards hesitated, then sprang toward Nara and grasped her. Unresistingly she let them thrust her across the roof toward Allan.

As the girl-guards went back across the roof, Allan caught Nara to him. She was sobbing.

"It is of no use, Thur," she said. "I tried to save you and could not."

"Nara, you've killed yourself trying to save me!" Allan cried. "You shouldn't have done it—I love you in spite of what I said a little while ago, and you shouldn't have done this."

"It does not matter," she said. "I would not want to live now with you dead, Thur. And this ends us together——"

Allan held her close, despairingly. The yells of the furious Females on roof and streets were now like a single hateful bellowing voice in their ears. Across the roof Breela gave an order, and the girl-guards again raised their deadly weapons.

Another moment would see the end for both of them, Allan knew. But before the fire-streaks leapt from the rods, there was a sudden interruption. Down from the upper darkness of the night smote flash on flash of fire, striking across all the Female city!

"A Male attack!" yelled Dulan, pointing to the flyers diving from above as they loosed their fire-flashes.

"It's Durul and Krann!" Allan exclaimed. "They found you'd taken me, Nara, and have come after me!"

"Into the flyers!" Breela was crying. "Quick, before the Males destroy us all!"

Already Females were leaping into the flyers parked on roofs and streets and soaring up into the darkness to meet the fierce Male attack. Swiftly combat was joining above the city, Male and Female flyers diving and circling in the darkness, those struck by fire-flashes cometing downward in bursts of flame.

Breela was running with other Females to the flyers, as were the guards who had been about to execute Allan and Nara. Allan saw that for the moment he and Nara were forgotten, and sudden hope flamed in him.

"Quick, Nara!" he cried. "If we can get away in a flyer now——"

They ran to one of the nearest ones, leapt onto it. Allan fumbled frantically at its controls, Nara's hands guiding his. The flyer hummed, started steeply upward into the air——"

"Thur, look!" screamed Nara suddenly.

Allan glanced downward. On the roof they had just quitted Breela had glimpsed their flight, had shouted a quick order to some of the Females. Their fire-rods were already raised toward the flyer of Allan and Nara. The whole scene seemed frozen for a second.

In that second Allan knew that they could not evade the deadly fire-flashes of those rods. He had just time to reach with his arm for Nara, to hold her tightly to him for an instant. Then as that instant passed, fire leapt from the rods below, fire seemed to flame destroyingly through Allan's whole universe, and then

was succeeded by impenetrable blackness.

BLACKNESS—blackness—could he be awaking from death, the death the fire-rods had sent him and Nara? he asked himself. For he was waking, was conscious again of Nara's soft body held tightly in his arms as he had grasped it in that last instant. And then he heard Nara's voice.

"He's coming to, Dad! Look how he grasped me!"

Then a man's voice, chuckling, somehow familiar. "So I see! He can't be so unconscious when he does that."

Allan opened his eyes, then looked about him, bewildered. He was lying flat, still holding Nara tightly in his arm.

Nara it was, indeed, her clear eyes looking into his, her vivid face anxious, but a changed Nara—she wore now not the green jacket and tunic but a dress strange and yet familiar to Allan's eyes, the dress of a girl of his own time twenty thousand years before.

He looked from Nara to the other figure bending over him, the man. He was tall, bearded, his eyes penetrating but having now an amused twinkle in them. Where had he seen those eyes before, Allan Rand asked himself, this man——

"Lantin!" Allan cried suddenly. "By heaven, Doctor Lantin!"

"None other," Lantin conceded. "But take it easy for a little while, Rand."

"But how did you get here to this time——" Allan Rand began, and then his jaw dropped as his eyes took in the room in which he lay.

It was that same laboratory of Doctor Lantin's in which he had lost consciousness when Lantin had been about to remove his brain!

He was lying on the same table, the same instruments beside it, on the desk in the corner the same photograph of a girl he had noticed on entering the room. But he recognized the girl in the photograph now—it was the girl beside him, was Nara!

"I'm back, then!" Allan whispered. "Back in my own time!"

"Your own time?" the girl asked. "What do you mean?"

"From the time you sent me into, twenty thousand years in the future," Allan explained to Lantin. "I woke there, my brain preserved and transplanted into another body——"

Lantin laughed heartily. "Nonsense!" he said. "You've been lying on this table unconscious for an hour, and that's all. I never did anything with your brain, though my threat to remove it apparently has given you a wild dream in the meantime."

"But it couldn't have been all dream!" Allan Rand protested. "I met Nara here in it——"

"My name isn't Nara—it's Janet Lantin," the girl told him.

"My daughter," Lantin nodded. "You saw her picture on the desk when you came into this laboratory and that's why her image persisted in your dream."

"All a dream!" Allan said dazedly. "But why did you do all this—tell me you were going to take out my brain, and put me under anesthetic?"

"Well," said Lantin, "I told you the exact truth when I said I wanted an assistant for my South American expedition who had strength and a cold-steel nerve. I could see you had the strength, and I used this stratagem to find out if you had the nerve.

"If you'd screamed or whined or wept there when you thought I was about to deal out a horrible fate to you, I wouldn't have blamed you but I'd have known you weren't my man. But instead, even when

you were passing under the anesthetic, you were defiant enough to tell me where to go.

"I meant only to give you a touch of the anesthetic, of course, but the darned thing got out of control for a minute and you got a double portion. It was enough to keep you asleep since then, and I was working to revive you when Janet came in. She lined me out for using such a method to test my assistant, and then helped me. You came back to consciousness and clutched Janet with a death-grasp."

Allan was suddenly aware that he still held the girl in that tight clasp. He dropped his arm quickly.

She smiled at him—Nara's smile—and his heart warmed. "It was an unforgivable thing for Dad to do, Mr. Rand," she said, "but at least you get the position."

"I do?" said Allan. "You're not going on the expedition too by any chance, are you?"

She nodded. "Then I'm mighty glad to take the job," he said.

"But tell me," Janet said to Allan, "what did you mean when you said you met me under another name in your dream?"

Allan reddened. "I'll tell you later," he said. "I'd rather wait until we're a little better acquainted before I tell you how well we know each other."

Ghost Town

By CRISTEL HASTINGS

The hills are quite the same, the mountains, too;
The sun is just as bright, the sky as blue
As hills and suns and skies of other years—
Only the town is not what it appears.

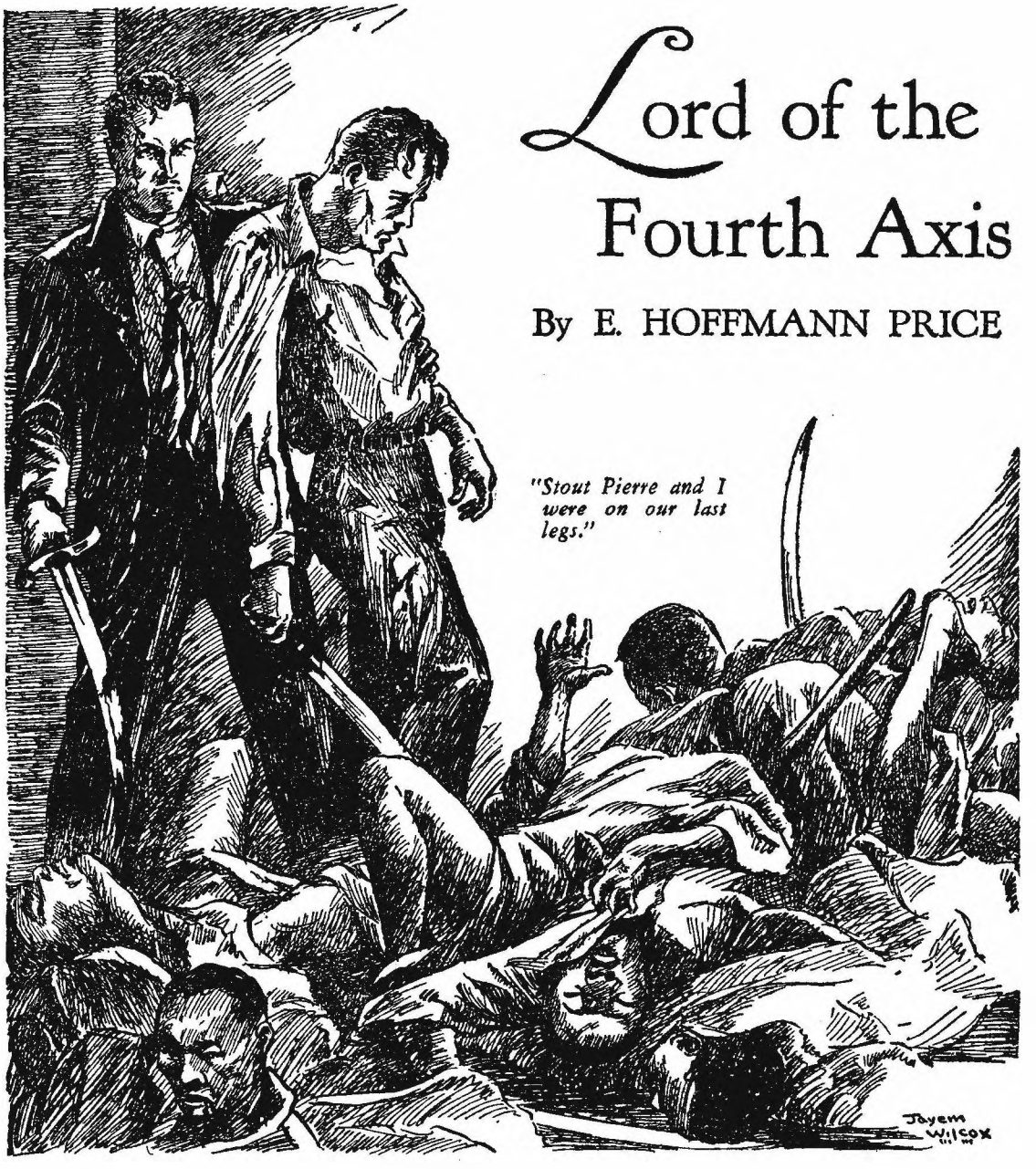
Once laughter sounded here, and dancing feet;
Once miners came with new wealth down the street—
Now there is brooding silence day and night,
And windows stare like eyes bereft of sight.

Doors hang on leather hinges, open wide;
The gloomy rooms are host to ghosts inside—
Here grizzled wraiths of miners wander by
On moonless nights down where the creek-beds lie.

Time made of this one street a weed-grown trail;
No voices here except of winds that wail
Through doorless shanties where the pack-rats run
Through dusty webs some luckless spider spun.

Lord of the Fourth Axis

By E. HOFFMANN PRICE



"Stout Pierre and I were on our last legs."

An utterly strange thrill-tale of a malefic conqueror from the Fourth Dimension, whose plans for world conquest make Genghis Khan and his Mongol horde look like amateurs

". . . till shapes of men that were
Point, weeping, at tremendous dooms to be,
When pillared pomps and thrones supreme shall stir,
Unstable as the foam dreams of the sea."
—George Sterling.

"MY FRIEND," began Pierre d'Artois, "what would you say if I told you that one man could have halted the terrific march of Genghis Khan's Golden Horde, or stopped the relentless sweep of Tamerlane's power?"

"I would say," I replied, certain that d'Artois was proposing one of those paradoxes with which he loves to garnish his speech, "that Jake had mixed too many Sazerac cocktails."

"And you would be wrong!" retorted d'Artois. He struck light to a *Bastos,* several hundred of which villainous cigarettes he had left of the supply that he had brought with him from France. "But I grant that it could not have been accomplished unless that one man had acted in time."

"Certainly," I conceded. "If either of those conquerors had been assassinated at an early age."

"Perhaps," suggested Pierre, "if that excellent servitor of yours would mix you another one of those cocktails, your stunted imagination might be equal to what I am about to explain. Listen then!

"There is another conqueror stirring in Central Asia. And he will make what you call the monkey of Genghis Khan, and lame Timur who limped his way over half the earth, destroying and building as pleased his fancy. And I, Pierre d'Artois, am here to stop him!"

D'Artois, who had arrived in New Orleans not more than an hour before, is the most sane and practical man I have ever known. I had been delighted when I received his unexpected telegram, announcing his proposed arrival on the Crescent Limited, Wednesday; and surprized when he arrived a full day ahead of time, having travelled via air from New York. He had smiled cryptically at my demands for explanation of his haste, and had changed the subject; but now, apparently, he was in his dramatic way startling me into full attention.

I could see from his grim expression as he pronounced the last words of his speech, that he was in earnest, and that the Sazerac cocktails which Jake, my negro handyman, had mixed, were in no wise responsible for Pierre's staggering remarks. Nevertheless, I regarded him with a stare that finally made him smile at my bewilderment.

"But no! It is not that I propose to stop an army, single-handed," he continued. "It is rather that I am here to thwart a psychic menace which is to pave the way for a conqueror who will be more devastating than Genghis Khan, whom they rightly called the Mighty Manslayer. I said psychic; yet perhaps I should have said cosmic, or possibly ultra-cosmic. But decide the word for yourself."

He exhaled a cloud of acrid smoke from his vile cigarette. Pierre would have none of our widely advertised American brands. And then he resumed what already promised to be as strange a discourse as that which had preceded his fight against the Lord Peacock in Bayonne, that devil-haunted, charming city in the foothills of the Pyrenees.

"History has commented on the superhuman genius of Genghis Khan. History offers no comparable figure. Alexander the Great—Iskander Dhoulkarnayn, they call him even to this day in the Asiatic lands he invaded — was what in your idiom is termed a boy wonder, a flash in the pan, which soon burned out, and left an empire that disintegrated before the dead of his last battle. And our Napoléon, that Corsican made his fame by wasting the manhood of France, and to what end? Consider, he abandoned an army in Egypt, lost a larger army in Russia, rode to the fiasco of Waterloo, and died in exile, leaving his infant son heir to a fictitious crown. That sweeps the field clear, except for Genghis Khan, and his successor, Tamerlane. They came from the nowhere of High Asia, and they ravaged the world from end to end. The successors of the Great Khan amused themselves building empires of the fragments of that vast heritage left by an obscure nomad chieftain from the Gobi Desert. History has been baffled at the colossal force of him they called, and rightly, the Master of Thrones and

Crowns, the Perfect Warrior, the Mighty Manslayer, the Scourge of God, that Genghis Khan whose line and whose conquest persisted for generations, cropping out in that brooding, terrible Tamerlane, and Baber, that empire-builder.

"Mark this well: Central Asia is a vortex and a reservoir of power. There was in the old days, *and there is today,* a fountain of energy which at irregular intervals surges forth and sweeps the world with fire and devastating slaughter."

PIERRE sipped from the glass which Jake had filled. I followed suit, but scarcely noted that Jake had poured wine instead of another cocktail. The history that d'Artois had summarized was familiar territory to me; but the voice with which he had recited his epitome gave it a terrible significance that had heretofore escaped me.

"Central Asia is a vortex and a reservoir of power!"

That, and his previous remark about the impending appearance of another invasion which he, Pierre d'Artois, was to halt, left me dazed.

Then he produced a sheaf of papers from his inside coat pocket. They were official documents. Two bore the seals of European powers; and one, I noted, had the spread eagle of the United States to give it authority. I saw how Pierre was accredited, and wondered at the eminence he had attained. And if I had any doubts as to his sanity or sobriety, they were dispelled by the evidence he presented. I knew then that Pierre was actually in New Orleans to halt the impending apparition of some terrific menace, for those whose signatures followed the embossed seals would scarcely accredit one suffering from hallucinations, or delusions of grandeur.

"As you know," he resumed, "before you made my acquaintance in Bayonne, I spent a number of years in High Asia, and in Kurdistan, the land where they worship Satan as Malik Tawus, the Lord Peacock; and in the mighty ruins of Bora Bador, in Java; and in Ankor Wat. I was admitted to the secret circles of adepts in thaumaturgy and occultism of a nature that makes the astonishing feats of Hindoo magic and telepathy seem puerile. And in Tibet I saw things of which I do not care to speak in detail, except to mention that I know that men have the means of becoming gods. Literally, not figuratively.

"Yet beneath this diversity I sensed a unity of effort and purpose: the opening of the Gateway through which the Lord of the Fourth Axis can march to our plane of existence."

"What do you mean, Fourth Axis?" I ventured, as he paused to light another cigarette. "That suggests fourth dimension, and the like."

"You are not entirely out of order," admitted Pierre. "But more of that, shortly. Now, as I hinted, there was an underlying oneness of purpose in all the obscure places I visited, and the rituals I witnessed. And once, I took part in them."

He shuddered just perceptibly as he paused to re-vision the scene that he had mentioned in passing. And then he continued.

"As a result of those studies, I unearthed certain evidence to show that the superhuman power of Genghis Khan arose from his having reached across the Border and made contact with the Fourth Plane. He tapped a reservoir of forces that enabled him to overrun the world, overthrow the finest armies of Europe, not by force of numbers as is commonly supposed, but by a terrific genius that valor and steel could not resist. In their terror, Europeans — your ancestors and mine—called him the Scourge of God, but they were wrong. He was the neo-

phyte, the insignificant servant of Him who is beyond the scope of our God who rules a universe of three dimensions."

"Good Lord, Pierre, that's almost blasphemy!" I protested.

"Blasphemy lies in intent, not in expression," retorted Pierre, solemnly. "If I could explain the thing as a whole, you would see that there is nothing irreverent in that statement.

"But Genghis Khan did not make complete contact, else the very features of the earth would have been everlastingly altered. And his successors retained but a fraction of his inspiration from across the Border. Yet they were gigantic in their way. Consider Tamerlane, sitting at chess while his troops hacked to pieces the army of Bajazet, reputed the greatest captain of his time. Is that the doing of any *man?* I mean, man in the sense that other commanders were men.

"The credentials that you examined show that I am not the only one who holds that opinion. A certain Captain Rankin, of the British Secret Service, years ago, rendered a report of his investigations in High Asia, and among the Yezidees of Kurdistan. Captain Rankin was politely but firmly placed in a sanitarium for observation and treatment. But the successors of his short-sighted superiors were wiser. They know, now, that if the impending disturbance is not halted, all Asia will burst into a mad flame of destruction which will end by sweeping an empire from its already unsteady feet."

"But where does New Orleans come into this picture?" I demanded.

"You suggested, a moment ago, that I had hinted at something mathematical in my expression, Lord of the Fourth Axis. There was more truth in that than you realized. There is a mathematical relation of this earth to our space, and to the ultra-space of more than three dimensions. That relation demands that the Enemy start his operations in the neighborhood of New Orleans.

"New Orleans is but a mathematical point in this colossal scheme. *Point d'appui,* if you comprehend my idiom; taking-off point, I might say . . . occult, rather than geographical.

"And thus you see the reason for the documents which I carry. And finally, the credentials from those United States, they are but the courtesy rendered to other governments. With all respect to your government, they are strangely blind. Their doubts as to our sanity are concealed more politely than effectively.

" 'Most obscure, Mr. d'Artois,' said that one whose signature you see here. 'How can the ghost of Genghis Khan, and forty or fifty Chinese spiritualists, upset the world?' he remarked as he set his hand opposite the seal with its eagle. And vainly I explained that it was not the ghost of the Mighty Manslayer that we fought, and that those were not the Chinese laundrymen he knew, but Mongol adepts from High Asia that we were to thwart — not by force of arms, but by weapons like their own. *À bas!* That one, I fancy, thinks Genghis Khan a cousin of Otto Kahn!"

D'Artois paused, drew a farewell draft of his foul fuming cigarette, and extinguished it against the side of the ashtray.

"Specifically, we will combat them by gaining possession of a certain piece of ritual equipment they require; or failing that, by upsetting the vibration-resonance they must develop in order to break down the barriers, and establish contact with super-space. And this is what I propose to do in order to thwart the successor of Genghis Khan! And now may I look at your telephone directory?"

I handed him the book, which he consulted.

"Ah, here she is," he remarked, after a moment's glance down the page. "Mademoiselle Louise Marigny. Note the address, and drive me there at once, if you please. Immediately, in fact!"

"BUT how does this Miss Marigny come into your plans?" I wondered, as we drove up St. Charles Avenue.

"She has unwittingly come into possession of a unit of that ritual equipment I mentioned," he replied, "a rug of unique design. It is one of three which first appeared in Central Asia. Panopoulos, a Greek, brought the first one into the country. As a courtesy to one of the governments to which I am accredited, he was detained for questioning, but not for long. He was stabbed, and the rug was quite inexplicably stolen from the officials who held it pending further investigation, made at the instigation, let us say, of other governments. Nazar Shekerjian, an Armenian, bringing into the United States what was reputed to be the second of the three rugs, met a like fate when detained for questioning. The officials in whose custody the rug was were placed in an embarrassing position, I assure you. And thus, finally, I was detailed to trace the third rug, which secret agents of a power interested in Asiatic tranquillity knew was on its way to Stamboul, and thence to the United States."

"That accounts for your unexpected arrival, ahead of schedule?" I suggested. "To get ahead of those who are seeking to take the rug?"

"Precisely," admitted Pierre, as we turned down one of the cross-streets not far from Lee Circle, and drew up at one of those old-fashioned houses with tall white pillars that supported a broad gallery on the second story.

THE Marigny's were an old Creole family; *vieille noblesse,* you might say. I had never met the Miss Marigny we sought, but I remembered her as queen of the Mardi Gras several years previous.

An old negro servant took our cards and ushered us into a high-ceiled living-room to await Miss Marigny.

"How do you do, Mr. d'Artois? And you, Mr. Landon? This is an unexpected pleasure."

Her manner was cordial, albeit reserved. But she contrived to convey, in spite of her gracious air, that she was at a loss to know just why she was thus favored.

"I am sure," began d'Artois, with that inimitable bow which always assures him of a favorable reception, "that you will pardon the liberty we take in calling uninvited. Would you be kind enough to show us that rug which you bought in Stamboul, in the course of that Mediterranean cruise from which you have just returned?"

"Why, certainly," assented Louise Marigny. "But how did you know——"

"That I will explain presently," replied d'Artois. "In the meanwhile, I would appreciate your great kindness."

And then, a few moments later, as a servant unrolled the rug and spread its lustrous folds across a table: "*Regardez donc!* It is magnificent, yes?"

It was more than magnificent. It was utterly outlandish. Those rich colors had not come from the dye-pots of Persia or Turkistan; and its pattern was as unique as its dyes. The interlaced and interwoven curves of Moorish architectural adornment were expressed in a textile, giving an effect utterly different from the floral richness of Persian, or the straight-line geometric motifs of Caucasian weaves. The longer I looked at it, the more compelling it became; and in spite of the

closeness of the design, there was an effect of sweeping curves of inexpressible breadth and vigor.

The rug was about four feet wide, and hardly more than seven feet in length. Its upper corners had been clipped, giving it a form similar to the inner panel of a Turkish prayer rug; but the cut had run along the line of a corner piece, so that the unity of the remaining pattern was unmarred.

"Look at it!" Pierre repeated. "It is vibrant and alive, like a beast of prey lying asleep and dreaming of stalking resistlessly to its next slaying."

There was something breath-taking about these incredible arabesques, with their dynamic, fluent curves; and something ominous. I glanced at Louise Marigny, and saw that she was regarding d'Artois curiously as he made his comments on that satanically lovely piece of weaving.

"It seems that we agree on its personality," she said, "except that you perceived its sinister beauty at a glance, whereas it took me several days to get the effect."

"For once, *mademoiselle,*" replied d'Artois, "advance knowledge is superior to feminine intuition. You sensed, in a few days, what I know as the result of years of study, and a definite warning."

"Why, Mr. d'Artois!" she exclaimed. "That sounds alarming! It did make me uneasy, the longer I looked at it, but I didn't suspect that there is anything dangerous about it."

During their exchange of remarks, I noted that it had not been mutilated, as I had at first thought. The remaining vestiges of finishing web and fringe, such as Oriental rugs have at their ends, were present. This added to the utter oddity of the piece, for in my several years of dabbling in rugs, I had never encountered one in the form of a rectangle with the upper corners shaped by the weaver as though they had been clipped.

"It is a sinister thing," I remarked. "It looks as though some master weaver went mad, and played monstrous tricks with all known color schemes, yet achieved beauty in the end."

"But how in the world did you know I had this rug?" wondered Louise Marigny.

PIERRE offered her the document with the seal of the United States.

"This will introduce me, although I am not permitted to go into detail," he replied. "Secret agents of various powers learned that it came from an obscure spot in Central Asia, and found its way to Stamboul. And while I do not know, I have my suspicions as to how you acquired it. Did the person who sold it to you know that you were bound for New Orleans?"

"You're nothing less than a mind-reader, Mr. d'Artois! Or else you are very well informed," she answered. "I was shopping in the bazars of Stamboul, with the intention of selecting something as a souvenir of my cruise. The merchant, an old, white-bearded fellow with unusually keen eyes, was asking the most exorbitant prices for perfectly wretched rugs. But I sat there, drinking tiny cups of coffee, which they serve prospective customers. And in the course of the bargaining, I mentioned being on my way to New Orleans. He then and there dug into a pile, and brought out this rug. At a glance, I knew I couldn't possibly afford such a magnificent thing. It fascinated me at once. But to my great surprize he offered it at a perfectly ridiculous price. I naturally took it at once.

"But on the remainder of the trip I had a feeling of being followed, kept under close surveillance; though to be truthful about it, I can't even remember any one's actually spying on me, or even

staring obviously. And when I landed in New Orleans, and had the rug unpacked, it began to grate on my nerves. I hung it on the wall of my room, and in the early morning light the sweeping bands of color in the pattern seemed to writhe, and twist, and change in hue. I knew it must be the illusion caused by the angle of the light striking the rug, but I couldn't stand seeing it when I awoke in the morning; so I put it on the floor.

"But that was no better. To use your own words, it suggested a beast of prey, sleeping, but ready to awaken and leap."

She shuddered; but before she could continue her remarks, d'Artois began, "That rug was given to you for a purpose, Miss Marigny. You were the unwitting means of getting it into this country. And I venture to state that you will not keep it long."

"Why, what do you mean?" she demanded, arching her brows in amazement.

"I am not permitted to go into detail," replied Pierre. "But glance at this report."

He handed her the report I had seen.

"You will note," he remarked, as she regarded the paper intently, her alarmed expression becoming more intense as she read further, "that Panopoulos, a Greek, and Shekerjian, an Armenian, both encountered serious difficulties. Fatal, as you observe."

"But they were detained at the customs. I passed this rug lawfully," she protested.

"So did they. They were detained for other reasons. And they died because some one did not want them to answer what they would have been asked. The reason that you were allowed to pass the customs without questioning is that after two failures, those I represent decided upon different tactics. I am here to pay any price you care to name. And to assure you that this is bona fide, you may confer with the Federal officials in New Orleans. They do not yet know that I am here, but they will recognize my credentials."

Louise Marigny reflected for a moment before replying. She glanced at the sinister, satanic beauty before us, and shivered.

"Mr. d'Artois, I'll take your offer. That rug has worried me ever since I unpacked it."

Pierre took from his pocket a thick roll of bills.

"Tell me when to stop," he remarked, as he stripped them off, one by one, laying them fanwise on the rug. "It is your property by purchase. I do not want you to feel that I am forcing a deal."

"Oh, Mr. d'Artois!" she gasped, as she noted the denomination of the bills. "One of them would more than pay what it cost me."

"*Tenez!* Never let it be said that Pierre d'Artois drove a sharp bargain," he said as he added another bill to the pile. "The pleasure is mine, Miss Marigny."

We then took leave of Louise Marigny, who, despite her more than moderate circumstances, had reason to feel that it was a fortunate stroke of business to have her casual purchase in Stamboul pay several times over for the entire cruise. And Pierre on his part had made progress in his mysterious mission.

"They planned to relieve her of this rug at their convenience," said d'Artois. "But now they have me to rob, which will not be so simple. But from now on, you and I are in danger of assassination and robbery. This is a dangerous article.

"But now, let us get to work on this devilish rug; although first I must call the excellent Father Martin, of the Society of Jesuits."

"Help yourself," I said, handing him the directory. "And by the way, what has this priest to do with your mission? I

would hardly think him to be an adept at the devil-mongering you suggest."

"Father Martin," replied d'Artois, as he thumbed the directory, "is an outstanding mathematician, and a prominent member of that most learned society. I met him in France, where he served as a chaplain with an artillery regiment during the late war. While our problem is occult, there are mathematical relations to consider. Modern science is finally realizing that chemistry, physics, and the metaphysical sciences are interlinked, and that every manifestation of matter is finally resolved into ultimate force, which has a mathematical expression. We are reverting to alchemy, devoid of its trickery and charlatanism, in a way. But more later. I must ask Father Martin to call on us, at once."

WHILE d'Artois was at the telephone, I turned again to the oddly shaped rug. The workmanship was exquisite, and the knotting was exceptionally close, surpassing that of any museum piece from the looms of Ispahan.

"Pierre," I said, as he returned from the telephone, "how does this thing fit into the picture? It is all scrambled to me."

"Listen, and let me make the unscramblement, so to speak," he replied. "It is thus. Watch!"

He took three slips of paper from a pocket memorandum, clipped the upper corners with a pair of shears, and then set the cut edges together, so that a three-branched figure was formed by the slips of paper, with an equilateral triangle in the center.

"Very much like three prayer rugs placed so as to get their upper edges as close as possible to a common central point," I remarked.

"Precisely. And as I said, there are two similarly shaped rugs," he replied. "They are to be arranged as I have indicated. Then three adepts will take their posts. The figure at the center, formed by the junction of the rugs, is what they call the Triangle of Power, and in that space will be the Gateway that opens into the Marches beyond the Border."

"Interesting, but obscure," I remarked, more puzzled than ever. "What is the point of this ceremony, and what has it to do with the successor to Genghis Khan, whom, by the way, you are to stop in his tracks?"

"Concealed in the intricate arabesques of this rug," explained d'Artois, "are curves which represent mathematical equations relating to ultra-dimensional space. This rug and its companion pieces contain the key to a complex system of vibration harmonies, psychic and physical, which if set in motion will open the Gateway."

The door-bell interrupted his further remarks. Pierre accompanied me to the door.

"Good evening, Father Martin," he said, after I had greeted the priest and invited him in. "My good friend here finds my explanations somewhat difficult. Be pleased to join us, and cast light on the matter."

I led the way to the living-room.

"And this is the rug concerning which you and I have corresponded for some time," said d'Artois, as the priest seated himself at the table. "You doubted its existence, *n'est-ce pas, mon père?* But there she is. And where my elementary mathematics leave off, your learning shall pick up the trail."

"And so this is what you have called Satan's Prayer Rug, eh, Pierre?" remarked Father Martin, as he scrutinized the exquisite border. Then he frowned, and indicated a certain figure in the design.

"This," he said, as he glanced up at d'Artois, "leads me to believe that there

is something in what you hinted. Our missionaries have encountered Asiatic cults that make that symbol the object of mysteries whose outward manifestations——"

Father Martin stopped short, apparently unwilling to start any discussion of that ominous device.

"Suppose," he resumed, "that you let me hear your views. Just to refresh my memory concerning your letters, and to add any new features you have discovered."

I hitched my chair up closer to the table.

D'ARTOIS began by repeating his earlier remarks about the vortex of power that existed in Central Asia, and its historical manifestations in the unbelievable conquests of Genghis Khan and his successors.

"The assault," he concluded, "will probably begin by the enemy's establishing contact with the Fourth Plane. The first move will be made as soon as this one of the three rugs falls into their hands."

"Well, why not destroy it, here and now?" I asked.

"Because until we have studied the rug, we can not be certain whether its presence is vitally necessary, or whether the space equations represented by its curves would suffice the enemy. In a word, we must be prepared to fight them with their own weapons. Thus we delay in order to study. Perhaps its destruction will suffice; perhaps we must in the end track them to their rendezvous and use our knowledge to overthrow them. We know only that they are here, in New Orleans, to make a permanent connection with the Fourth Plane.

"And now, Father Martin, let us get to work on our calculations," said d'Artois as he turned to my desk and took from it paper, pencils, and colored crayons. "And you, *mon ami,* stand guard while we study this accursed thing. We have no right to invite the fate that overtook Panopoulos and Shekerjian."

I loaded my Colt automatic, slipped it into my pocket, and made the rounds of the house, locking doors and windows. Then I posted myself where I could watch both the street, and, from an inside window, the courtyard of the house.

Sitting there and listening to the muttered remarks and occasional exclamations of d'Artois as he and Father Martin paused in their calculations to confer on some intricate bit of integration would have been the height of monotony: but this was no dry discussion of theory. The room was a battlefield. It was pervaded with the tension of actual physical combat. The priest's strong features were set grimly as he hunched over the table; and d'Artois peered fiercely from beneath his shaggy brows at the many sheets of cross-ruled paper before him. They were fighting the master from High Asia: and that magnificent silken rug was mocking them as they sought to tear from its intricate mazes the secret of the Fourth Plane.

I glanced at my watch. Scarcely three hours had passed since we had left the Marigny house. Then I realized that the tense atmosphere of the room had made the time seem much longer.

THE crackle of the radio at the farther end of the room startled me. I leaped to my feet to cut off the power. Then I remembered that I had last set it to tune in on the local police calls, and paused.

"Attention all cars," it began, after the station call. "Three men impersonating Federal Revenue Agents. Driving Packard, Louisiana License number 43376."

The number was twice repeated, then: "Number one: six feet, weight about 180.

Very white skin. Brown eyes. Scar on forehead. Black hair. Age about 40. Broad features. Eyes slightly slanted.

"Number two: at wheel. No description.

"Number three: sat beside driver. No description.

"Last seen in 1400 block Louisiana Avenue heading toward Saint Charles. Wanted at headquarters for questioning. Detain at all costs. Report at once. McGowan."

"Ha! We were just in time!" exclaimed d'Artois as he leaped to his feet. "They were trying to get the rug from *la* Marigny! And she reported them to the police. The slanted eyes betrayed him!"

"Shall I phone her for particulars?" I asked.

"*Mordieu!* Of all things, not that!" exclaimed d'Artois. "*Imbécile!* Will they not be watching her? Tapping her telephone? Tracing calls?"

He glanced at the dial setting of the short wave set, then continued, "Leave it as it is. Its occasional chatter will not disturb us. We know now that they will be making their next move. *Eh bien,* back to your post, and keep that siege-gun ready for visitors!"

Pierre and Father Martin resumed their calculations. Time and again I forced myself to relax from the unconscious tension of my muscles as I watched them in their desperate struggle with the mystery from High Asia. The enemy's setback at the Marigny house had revealed our hand in the counter-attack: and the master would not remain idle. It was urgent that we solve the riddle, and destroy that satanic rug. A doom was even now seeking us. Two men armed with pencils, and one with a .45, striving to halt the march of the Golden Horde! Fantastic, and terrible.

It was dark now. I had drawn the shades. We had moved the table into a corner not commanded by any of the windows. We dared not chance a shot from the outside. We remembered Shekerjian and Panopoulos. The courtyard was a dangerously weak point in our defense. The enemy could approach from the roofs of the buildings whose walls inclosed the patio, and advance through the shadows.

Our hope was that Pierre's movements had been so swift and secret that the enemy would not be able to track him down in time. And once d'Artois succeeded in closing for ever the Gateway that they sought to open wide, that fierce old soldier would take the attack and hunt them down to the last man. The Master, if he but knew it, was himself in peril.

The outcome depended upon strokes of a pencil. Had it but been sword thrusts!

Midnight was approaching.

FATHER MARTIN sighed wearily as he pushed his chair away from the table. Pierre shook his head, and ground a cigarette butt into the floor with his heel. I did not wonder at the gesture of disgust and baffled rage. For the past hour the room had been vibrant with intense concentration. I had begun glancing nervously about me, at times sensing a personal opposition to d'Artois and the priest. I had dismissed it as the result of a highly keyed imagination, until Pierre spoke.

"*Mon père,*" said d'Artois, "did you notice it also?"

The priest started and regarded d'Artois intently for a moment.

"Yes," he admitted. "For the past half-hour *something*—I would almost say, some one, has been fighting me." He stabbed with a red crayon at the paper before him. "And it was not that equation, either. A personal presence in the room has been opposing my efforts to reason this thing out."

"Mordieu!" growled Pierre. "Then it was not my imagination. We outwitted them, and they do not know where we are. That is, their physical bodies do not know," he amended. "So they are projecting themselves, or their mental force, into this very room. For the past hour my mind has been all awry. While the enemy is seeking the rug, and us, he is striving to prevent our learning the secret. Just how much have you deduced? Before this projected force addled our brains?"

"I was very close to the solution," replied Father Martin. He then explained very briefly the mathematical relations he had deduced from the curves. His voice was hurried. He sensed that it would not be long before we would be overwhelmed either in body or mind.

"Magnifique!" exclaimed d'Artois. "Then with what I have done, we are almost through. Forward! Let us hurry before they completely paralyze us!"

His voice rang like a bugle sounding a charge.

They hunched forward once more over the table to renew the fight.

The fate of the world depended upon pencil strokes and integration symbols, and on the significance of strangely spiralling curves that marched across the sheets of paper.

The priest's high forehead was now beaded with sweat. Pierre's lean dark features were drawn. He muttered to himself as he calculated. The tension was heightening. At first I thought that it was the suppressed excitement of realizing that victory was around the corner. I sat clutching the arms of my chair, just as one watching men heaving at a heavy weight will contract his muscles in sympathy. Then I saw my error, and realized that it was not impending victory but the redoubled efforts of the Master that made the room vibrant with energy.

A mist was gathering and thickening the air. It swirled in eddies, and wraith-like wisps emerged from the corners. They were closing slowly in on the table. The lights were dimming. I could now look at the hundred-watt bulb and see its filament very clearly, so much was its incandescence obscured by the density of the air. Along the walls and in the shadows were shapes of spectral gray: vague blots whose quivering and twitching suggested monstrous forms seeking to assume substance.

We were walled in. The table was now an island in a fog-shrouded sea. The forms that lurked in the shadows were becoming more distinct. I could distinguish tall, bearded men with solemn faces. They regarded us menacingly, and rhythmically gestured toward us.

D'Artois, despairing but grim, thrust his chair aside as he rose.

"Look at them!" he cried, as with a sweep of his arm he indicated the ever-shifting, weaving fog wisps and the silent presences that they but half obscured. "They have projected their *selves* into space to seek us, and their thought-force to beat us! We know all but the ultimate secret. And that we can not get. We are lost, unless——"

"Light the gas grate!" he yelled. "Quickly! Destroy this accursed rug. We have waited too long!"

The one-hundred-watt globe over the table was now a sickly, half-hearted glow. The air was so dense that the features of d'Artois and Father Martin seemed to peer at me through veils. I struck a match and could barely see its wan flicker.

"Quick! The grate!" shouted d'Artois. "When their *selves* return to their bodies, they will know and will come to overpower us!"

But where was the gas grate with its imitation logs heaped on andirons? The mist had grown immeasurably denser even during those few moments of dis-

may. The mist about us was viscous as oil. A writhing impenetrable grayness walled us in.

I SEIZED the rug and turned to plunge into the gray horror that surrounded us. But d'Artois seized me by the shoulder.

"*Tenez!*" he cried. "They may be in the shadows waiting for it. They may be materialized enough to grasp it!"

The filament of the bulb was now a dull reddish ember. Breathing was difficult. The density of the atmosphere hampered our movements even as waist-deep water impedes one's wading ashore through the surf.

D'Artois cursed fiercely in a low voice as he paced back and forth, clenching his fists, striving to grasp at some thought that would save us. Father Martin's lips moved soundlessly.

Then we became aware of something that was imperiously demanding our attention. As I glanced up, I saw that both Pierre and Father Martin were staring at the grayness that encircled us.

The presences that hemmed us in were slowly fading into their background. As they lost their identities a vortex of spiralling mist was momentarily becoming more and more dense.

"*Mordieu!*" exclaimed d'Artois. His lean, tanned features had become paper-white. "Did you see the center of that whirlpool?"

The priest nodded, and shuddered.

The vast sweeping spiral was dizzying. Its involute curve extended immeasurably beyond the confines of the room. My senses reeled, and I saw d'Artois and Father Martin clutching the edge of the table for support.

"Good God, Pierre, what is it?" I whispered.

"The bottom of that whirlpool extends beyond space as we know it," replied d'Artois. "It is just as our calculations led us to expect. It is sucking the light out of this room as a centrifugal pump would empty it of water. We are marooned in space."

He shivered. I noted that it was becoming colder in the room.

"*Regardez,*" he continued, "we are now in an island of dimness surrounded by a sea of absolute cold blackness. The rug is safe. We can not destroy it. The master has indeed found us."

"Well, let's *try* to get out!" I yelled. And before d'Artois could restrain me, I leaped toward the encircling grayness, but in vain. That twitching vibrant mistiness was an adamantine wall. I dropped half senseless to the floor, bruised by the shock as though I had dashed myself against the door of a safe.

"The master has found us, and we must await his pleasure," said d'Artois resignedly, as I picked myself from the floor. "There is no power——"

"There is indeed a power!" declared Father Martin solemnly, with a gesture of invocation.

D'Artois nodded, and bowed his head.

"I beg your pardon, Father," he muttered. But I saw that his reply testified to his unfailing courtesy rather than to his faith. I recalled his remarks about the three-dimensional god of a three-dimensional universe, and wondered how that calm priest could still hold to his belief.

The vortex was reversing its spiralling. Even as we watched, it became a vast evolute curve. We instinctively shrank, for its appearance was now as if a waterspout were to emerge from what had been a maelstrom in space. But the mists instead of jetting forth were coalescing. They became denser. We heard a whirring and humming as of monstrous flies buzzing and droning.

Then we saw him.

He was there, the Master.

His head and shoulders filled the room: a solemn presence, but shrouded with mists so that we could get only the impression of awful majesty and brooding omniscience that mortal eyes could not bear to scrutinize without a protecting veil.

"Pierre d'Artois," said the Presence, "you might have thwarted us had you denied your childish curiosity and destroyed the rug. But now that you know, your knowledge will avail you nothing. Neither you nor your two acolytes may use that forbidden knowledge.

"An occultist, a scientist, and a soldier: we will use all three if you will serve us. If not, we will utterly destroy you and your assistants. We remember you from old times when you sought us in High Asia. Now that we have found you, you may profit by your knowledge as no man has ever before, or else you will be annihilated as no mortal has ever been reduced to non-existence."

The voice paused. The mists shrouded the awful features and almost hid them. The room still reverberated with the surging thunder of that declaration, that threat combined with a promise.

D'Artois stared full into the shadows that marked where those all-seeing eyes had burned. His face was strangely exalted: and I knew that he shared with me the compelling charm of that mighty voice and that august, mist-shrouded face.

"Beware, my son," said the priest at his side, "the spoiler and the outlaw is tempting you. The Rebel himself is speaking."

That quiet voice cracked the spell. My exaltation at being included as one of the servants of such a Master was dispelled, and I trembled with fear.

"I will go," said d'Artois. "But my acolytes are not suited——"

The veiling mists thinned, and the features of the Presence became more sharply limned than before. The prodigious voice thundered again, "Your acolytes will go or we will destroy them. You have no present choice. You will choose when you are in our holy of holies, where you will see in full that which we have tonight hinted. We do not request. We command."

We were animalculisms before that lordly head whose tall, many-terraced miter towered in the weaving, dancing grayness. The satanic rug glowed and smoldered and twinkled in the dim light. It mocked us for having spared it.

The Presence was fading. The grayness was now a multitude of fine, wavering tongues that wove an impassable barrier. The awful personality had departed.

I turned to d'Artois. He sensed my question before I spoke.

"The Master and all his adepts were concentrating. That face was either the Master, or a composite of all his hierarchy of adepts. They will be here in physical presence at any moment, now that their projected minds know where we are. They know the secret of this mist they have created, and can penetrate it.

"Think, while you can yet think," he concluded with a gesture of despair, "and picture an enemy who can surround us with a wall of thought-concentration as infrangible as granite!"

The mists were closing in and engulfing us. The doom was settling.

"Good God!" I gasped, as a hand clutched my arm, and another seized my pistol.

D'Artois nodded. I could barely see him.

"They are here," he murmured. "Resistance is vain."

I wondered at the gleam in his eye, and the glance he shot at Father Martin. The priest saw, and nodded almost imperceptibly.

We were drawn into the impenetrable blackness of everlasting night. But the hands that clutched us were human: and that in a degree relieved the horror.

I felt the paving of the courtyard beneath my feet.

"Not a word!" growled a harsh voice at my side. The muzzle of a pistol prodded my ribs.

We were on Saint Peter Street, in front of my house. Our captors were thrusting us into a sedan. The Master, it seemed, had not thus far developed enough power to whisk us through space and into his *sanctum*. The awful grayness ended at the door leading to the court.

As we seated ourselves, with two of our captors facing us, pistols levelled, we saw that they were stalwart fellows with grim, Mongoloid features. Resistance would be futile. And the rug was in the hands of the one who sat next to the driver, commanding the party.

"I wonder why they don't blindfold us?" I asked d'Artois.

His smile was grim and despairing.

"They do not intend for us to leave our next stopping-point," he replied. "What harm if we see?"

Then he slumped back against the upholstery.

PIERRE seemed resigned, but I felt that he had not yet abandoned hope. Father Martin's face was white and stern. Nothing but his faith remained after that terrific demonstration by the Master. As for me, I was numbed by the enormity of it all. The mighty utterance of that awful Presence, the fearful weaving grayness that had overwhelmed us, the throbbing, surging hammer-blows of psychic force that had shattered the concerted attack of d'Artois and Father Martin: these were but preliminaries to what would happen when the Master unleashed the full armory of his powers, rent the veil, and loosed into the world those monsters from beyond the Border, those ultra-dimensional horrors whose existence Pierre had but suggested.

"The neophyte, the insignificant servant of Him who is beyond the scope of our God who rules a universe of three dimensions."

And if this dreadful master were the neophyte, then what would emerge from the Gateway that led from the Fourth Plane?

In the meanwhile, the police were looking for three men who had impersonated Federal Agents! They were seeking to arrest the servants of the Last Scourge for impersonating customs officials: and the Golden Horde was about to swarm over the earth again, slaying and pillaging and spreading ruin as even the Grand Khan had never dreamed when he heaped 70,000 heads into one ghastly pyramid.

The envoys of the Last Conqueror, liable to arrest!

I laughed. The laugh was too terrible and mocking for the despair that one expresses in the face of disasters that men have heretofore faced.

Pierre started, then understood: not my words, for I had not spoken, but rather my mood.

"Mon ami," he whispered, "you are right. Even with what I once saw in High Asia, I am at a loss to predict what will come next, except that we have seen but a vague glimpse of the terror to come. This fog was but a trifle."

We were driving out toward the Chef Menteur Pass that connects Lake Pontchartrain with the Gulf of Mexico. Somewhere in those marshes was the rendezvous of the Master. Somewhere in that maze of swamps and bayous was the *sanctum* of the Last Conqueror. He would rise triumphant from the mud and sweep dazzlingly across the earth, fol-

lowed by his acolytes and those forces from across the Border.

Our captors left the highway as we approached the bridge that spans the Chef, and drew up on the elevated ground near the abandoned fort that years ago commanded this one of the two approaches to New Orleans from the Gulf via Lake Pontchartrain. In the moonlight we could see the brick bastions with their gunports that commanded the surrounding marshes. Dismantled cannon lay on the crumbling gun emplacements.

From the parapet we could look down into the area. It was all overgrown with weeds and shrubbery. Trees had taken root and forced the masonry apart in spots.

"Where are we?" whispered d'Artois.

"Chef Menteur fort," I replied in a low voice, although, as far as I could see, it made little difference where we were.

"Silence!" snapped our escort.

The commander of the party led the way. The two who had faced us in the car fell in behind us. Their pistols were still drawn and ready.

We heard the car starting. The Master, it seemed, had other errands requiring attention.

WE DESCENDED from the parapet into the area, and thence to the entrance that opened into a casemate. Our footsteps rang hollowly in the vaulted passageway. Through the embrasures of the casemate I caught glimpses of the surrounding moat. As we advanced, I saw that we were on the side nearest the Chef.

Sentries at intervals challenged us. Our escort muttered a password, and continued the march. Finally we halted at the end of the casemate.

The leader advanced and tapped. What had seemed in the light of his flash-lamp to be a blank wall of seasoned brick swung silently out, revealing a wall of concrete and a door of steel plates.

He beat a tattoo on that barrier. We heard the whine of an electric motor picking up speed, and a muffled humming of gears. The massive, armored door slid slowly aside. Our captors thrust us forward into a passageway pervaded with a diffused, rosy glow.

From a guard room at the left of the entrance a dignitary in yellow robes and a tall miter emerged to take charge of us. He addressed d'Artois in a language unfamiliar to me. Pierre answered in the same tongue, and without hesitation. Then he turned to me.

"I hope to see you and Father Martin later," he said. "The Master wishes to confer with me. Acolytes, it seems, are not entitled to interview him. In case I do not see you again——"

Instead of completing his speech, he bowed gravely.

Two others in yellow robes escorted Pierre into the guard room. The leader of our captors, carrying the rug in his arms, followed. We were for the moment left alone in the pulsing rosy glow of the passage.

The massive sliding door was firmly sealed behind us.

As I looked about and saw that we were surrounded by walls and a ceiling of reinforced concrete, I began to realize the resourcefulness of the enemy. Most, if not all, of the rendezvous must be underground; and in this marshy country caissons would have to be sunk before excavations could be made. With what infinite patience they must have worked, setting the first course of a caisson, then digging, and moving the excavated earth by night through the casemate embrasures and into fishermen's skiffs, thence to be dumped far out into the lake, lest mounds of earth about the fort betray their presence.

And what of the laborers? Why had not some one of them mentioned the mysterious excavations?

The solution had a dreadful simplicity.

Drifters had been engaged, brought out by night, imprisoned until the job was completed, and then—the waters of the Chef were deep, and the current was swift. There would be none to betray the Master's digging.

All surmise: yet how else could this system of passages have been sunk so secretly?

"Father Martin," I finally said, "do you think that the Master seeks us as allies? Or is this just to give us a secret graveyard?"

"God alone can say," replied the priest, "although it seems that Pierre is known to them, by reputation at least. He seems to have commanded their respect to such a degree that they believe he can be of service. Much of his past is a riddle to me. I know only that he is a very learned and profound student of things which the Church has forbidden."

He paused a moment, then hastened to add, "Understand, I do not personally criticize. His attempt to thwart this menace is indeed worthy. Only——"

I understood his uncompromisingly orthodox view. Mathematical research as such was one thing; the actual dabbling in forbidden mysteries was another.

As we speculated on the outcome of Pierre's conference with the Master, I heard the faint, high-pitched whine of a dynamo picking up its load. Then I heard the humming of transformers being energized.

"We'll soon know," I remarked to Father Martin. "Something is about to happen."

MY OPINION was soon justified. Scarcely half an hour elapsed when a squad of our captors, arrayed in saffron-colored robes and tall cylindrical miters, approached from the guard room.

The leader, a Mongol like his men, addressed us.

"Be pleased to accompany us," he ordered in the impersonal tone of a soldier.

They formed in a hollow square in whose center we were to be escorted. We marched to the end of the long passageway. Its floor sloped at a steeper pitch than we had realized from glancing down its length.

The detachment halted at the end of the long passageway. The steel door that barred further progress slid open in response to the leader's command.

"Let them enter," said a voice.

The Master was speaking. We, Pierre's supposed acolytes, were about to enter the Presence.

The front rank of the square side stepped to the left. The rear rank advanced, so that Father Martin and I were thrust ahead of them and into the blackness beyond the doorway. Then the massive door slipped silently into place, leaving us in a darkness so dense that my first thought was that no natural exclusion of light could possibly result in such an absence of even the faintest suggestion of visibility.

"You are now in the presence of the Last Conqueror," announced that same voice, speaking with the majesty of inexorable doom. "You will witness the opening of the Gateway and see the Lord of the Outer Marches. Then you will serve Him whole-heartedly or else be destroyed in a way inconceivable to your human minds."

Silence. Then from a great distance I could distinguish a scarcely perceptible pin-point of light. It began to expand into a glowing disk of phosphorescence that pulsed like a living thing.

"You have opposed us out of incom-

plete understanding," resumed the voice. "Therefore see, hear, learn."

The disk of light became nebulous, then coalesced to form the head and shoulders of a man whose Mongol features were the very majesty of fate itself: a sage whose contemplation of the vastnesses of space had sublimated every trace of humanity. We saw clearly outlined the awful Presence we had seen limned in weaving mists and spectral grayness. The Master had revealed the august splendor of his presence so that there could remain no lingering doubt that it had indeed been he who had projected his *self* to thwart our meddling with his monstrous plans.

The slightly slanted eyes were profound and inscrutable as those brooding colossi that hold eternal watch over the wastes of Egypt: without pity, without passion, and without prejudice.

And d'Artois, the only man who could contend with this master of doom, was a prisoner somewhere in this vortex of madness, to elect either service with the enemy, or destruction.

Blackness blotted out the Presence.

Then I noted that the darkness was rolling away like a wind-driven mist. Light advanced pace by pace until it occupied the entire vast, vaulted chamber into which we were looking. We were standing in an entrance passageway from which to witness the ritual that would prepare for the apparition of the Lord of the Fourth Axis.

The hemispherical dome of the chamber was supported on walls buttressed with severely straight columns, and recessed with arched niches—entrances, presumably, like the one in which we stood.

Along the wall sat the enemy's dignitaries, each on a throne shaded by a gilded parasol. The thrones of those adepts were arranged according to height, the tallest ones being nearest the lofty dais of the Master, whose position was exactly opposite our niche.

I saw now that some of the arched niches in the wall contained intricate networks of cables, helices, and bulbous glass tubes; a part of the ray and vibration generating devices that Pierre's explanation had led me to expect.

We tiptoed forward, halting in the archway of our niche.

"I wonder where Pierre is," I finally ventured to whisper to Father Martin. He did not answer. A human voice was outlawed in the presence of those impassive faces along the wall. They were devoid of emotion. They were passionless brazen sphinxes crouching in wait, the masters and not the slaves of time. They sat like old gods brooding over the destinies of worlds not yet created. Hatred, fanaticism, thirst for blood; anything would have been a relief from this terrific emotional vacuum.

THE first sound other than our whispered remarks was a single note of exquisite sweetness. As its vibrant richness died, the Master on the central throne made a gesture with his left hand. From one of the arched entrances emerged three figures, gray-robed and wearing cylindrical miters. Each held before him, by the fringe, a rug: Satan's Prayer Rug, and its two companion pieces.

As they stalked statuesquely toward the center of the hall, I noted for the first time their obvious objective: three panels so placed that they joined, leaving a triangular space in the center. Each panel was shaped like the rugs: a rectangle with clipped corners. They were advancing as if in cadence to a rhythm; then, halting, each before his appointed panel, they spread their rugs with ceremonious gestures and genuflections. This done, each stood erect at his post behind his rug.

There was a moment of silence as heavy as that which broods in the lost gulfs between the uttermost stars, and the farthest frontiers of space; and then the resonant, majestic note of a brazen gong rang through the hall, mighty as the greeting to a god stepping from world to world across the vastnesses of unlimited space. It rolled and thundered, and died to a whisper like the rustling of silk, and the hissing of serpents, then swelled full-throated and triumphant in a peal of colossal splendor, its surge and sweep shaking that cyclopean vault and reaching the unplumbed depths of creation.

Then the ultimate note of that tremendous brazen roar blended into a piping, wailing harmony that sighed and moaned and whispered against a background of muttering drums purring in a rhythm that started chills dancing up and down my spine. It was the complex, maddening cadence of elemental spirits chanting sinister invocations as they plucked stars one by one from the face of heaven and mirthfully discarded them.

"That music is a greater blasphemy than the tongue of any man could utter!" exclaimed Father Martin, speaking into my ear. "Resist it, or you will join them!"

He was right. And I clenched my fists, and set my teeth, seeking to fight the compelling wizardry of that diabolical music.

In the niches along the wall I caught the flare and sputter and glow of the bulbous glass tubes. Beams of many-colored lights swept the vault. Some interlaced in dizzying networks; others were deflected into swirling vortices at the center. Tiny tongues and flashes of bluish flame played and leaped along the thrones of the adepts, and hovered in halos about their miters, and glorified their solemn features. The vault was a concentration of vibrant energy, visible and invisible forces that wove, and writhed, and twisted in accord with the harmonies of a law beyond our conception.

Thus far, ours had been the only human voices since the blackness had rolled out of the hall. But as the sweeping bands of light interwove, the transfigured adepts on their thrones began a chanting that rose and fell, sinking to a whisper, and rising full-throated and sonorous in an infinitely rich, obscure tongue. It was with such resonant syllables that Lucifer sang to the morning star, and Shaddad enticed the gardens of Irem to rise from the sands of Arabia.

Above the rolling thunder of the chanting, and the whine and sob of those soul-searing pipes, and the savage clang of mighty gongs, I could hear the three at their posts by the rugs, each in his turn pronouncing a sentence, each syllable as crystal-clear and clean-cut as it was utterly foreign. They were enunciating the inscriptions on the borders of their rugs; reading the poisonous runes woven into those oriflammes of darkness that lay shimmering in sinister beauty before them.

The Master on his dais was nodding, now, and with a tiny baton beating the cadence of his intricate symphony of sound and color and invisible radiations. And sound and color were blending into one! I could now *see* the color of that terrific brazen roar of the gong, and I could *hear* the vibration of those surging waves of light. Every conception of matter and force was running amuck, maddened by the concentration of force directed toward the central point where those solemn hierophants in regular order read their archaic runes, and shook the foundations of all creation with their portentous utterances.

In that weird weaving of heretofore incompatible elements into a harmonious pattern, every belief and certainty was melting away and blending with mad-

ness. If those inscrutable squatting figures beneath their parasols had shown only a trace of human emotion! Some shadow of lingering humanity, some vestige of kinship with flesh-and-blood men! But they sat there, holding in reserve some power as yet unsuggested and unhinted, some awful force yet to be unleashed. And the fear that there could and would be a further rending asunder of all logic and reason froze and terrified me.

I WAS trembling violently, shivering from the immeasurable cold of interplanetary space; but my brain was a glowing ball of incandescence that threatened to burst forth and mingle with the terrific splendor before me.

"Steady, my son," came the voice of Father Martin from the other end of a succession of infinities, "this too is illusion and mockery. We are in the presence of more than seemed possible to this master of unmentionable blasphemies. But High God is witnessing this infamy. And He will speak."

Strange, hearing mention of God in that diabolical mockery of every rational fact and foundation of the universe. I remembered Pierre's solemnly irreverent-seeming words, and believed that we were indeed before the servant of Him who is beyond the scope of our God and His three-dimensional divinity.

The harmonies became even more outrageously baffling. They were now interfering, and the interference beats were weaving even stranger patterns of vibration. This colossal engine of frequency-blending was pouring together not only light and sound, but the higher rays from the bulbous glass tubes, all into one heterodyne whose beats were now upsetting the very geometry of creation.

The circle of the vault was no longer a circle, but a curve that my mind could not name, or even conceive. It is madness to speak of a hemisphere with angles, but angles it had, and they were neither right, nor obtuse, nor acute. There were parallel lines crossing before my very eyes. The insane geometry of that vault was now a defiance of every principle of engineering and architecture. I knew that the dome would have to collapse, and bury us beneath its mass. No substance aggregated into that shape could cohere. I shrank instinctively, to avoid the crash of that impossible structure.

"Hold to your sanity!" shouted Father Martin. "If it must fall, it will fall!"

Sanity! When even he was resigned to the madness of it, and the absence of his God from this maelstrom of perverted space!

Bands of light rang with infinite sweetness in my ears. I could see hyperbolas and parabolas from their origin to their extremities that extended to infinity, and mighty spirals that reached beyond. And there were sounds whose curves swept with inexpressible grace. There was neither forward, backward, sidewise, neither up nor down in that vortex of vibration. I began finally to understand the words of that obscene chanting!

Then came the supreme terror, the uttermost blasphemy; I became aware of a column of greenish haze in the space between the rugs. In that space was the final outrage: the three dimensions of our cosmos, and a fourth axis of direction at right angles to each of the three we know. In that zone of fourth dimension, I could perceive a pathway along which I could walk to escape from the heart of a steel globe without penetrating its walls. And whoever could march along that Fourth Axis could master this and all other worlds with the forces that would follow him from across the Border of our tri-dimensional universe of height and breadth and length.

There was the Gateway, and there were its keepers, reading the equations that defined the pathway, pronouncing tremendous syllables of the master vibration.

"They are doing it!" groaned Father Martin. "The door is open. And look—great God, look!"

I looked. And even in that horror of visible sound and audible color I could still recognize the destruction of the last hope, and the severance of the last link to sanity.

Our world was but the intersection of a plane that cut a fourth-dimensional cosmos. In the incredible geometry of that section of super-space, the small triangular base between the rugs contained enough room to deploy armies and engulf worlds. In our world that triangle covered but a few square feet, but in that diabolical perversion of all sense, it was an abyss that cleft the uttermost depths and frontiers of the universe. The Golden Horde of Genghis Khan, the uncounted hosts of High Asia could march and countermarch, lost in that vastness; Antares and Aldebaran could roam about, lost, hopeless sparks in that terrific gulf. In that green, shimmering haze was a Presence, the Lord of the Fourth Axis marching at right angles to our three dimensions; and in his trace were monstrous entities that transcended all experience and conception. I closed my eyes to the terror, but in vain; for our eyes looked along the Fourth Axis, and through our eyelids!

The edges of the green zone were rolling toward us, engulfing the master hierophants, and reaching toward those on the outer fringe. The Master on his throne saw, and terror swept his god-like features, and the adepts crouched back toward the wall, shrinking from the march of the Lord of the Fourth Axis and his followers. They, the evokers, were stunned by the apparition of that which they had evoked.

At that instant of immeasurable terror, a figure leaped from the niche at our left. Pierre d'Artois! He charged across that anteroom of hell to confront the Presence from across the Border. In his left hand he held, extended, a roughly fashioned *crux ansata* of copper. As he advanced, he chanted, full and clear against the terrible weaving of harmonies of rays and sounds and colors.

Green, crackling flames leaped about the thrones and parasols. We heard the tremendous wrathful murmur of outraged space; and above it, new, strange whisperings and rustlings and chirpings. Pierre's great voice and prodigious utterance was rending and slashing the web of sorcery, and shattering its exquisitely attuned harmonies. The uncannily distorted angles and monstrous spirals and terrifying, nameless involute curves were assuming rationality as the perverted geometry of the vault began to correct itself. And the zone of greenish haze in the center grew vague and unstable; and the clear vistas of spatial vastness grew dim and obscure.

"Look!" I yelled, clutching Father Martin's arm. "He's breaking it up!"

WITH a howl of rage, the dazed adepts emerged from their stupor, and poured from their thrones and their posts. Father Martin and I charged through the dim twilight that remained of the wrenched symphony of blended vibrations, joining Pierre, and seizing the staves of parasols from the vacant thrones. The enemy, still dulled by the rending of their mesh of vibrant power, of which they themselves had for the time been an actual part, could not collect their wits soon enough to prevent d'Artois and the priest and me from

forming, back to back, for our hopeless stand.

We were lost, and the world with us. For having seen, we now *knew,* rather than surmised. They would overwhelm us, and re-establish that awful vortex of power at their leisure, the next time stopping short of the full evocation which had terrified even those bronzed lords of doom. Pierre had for the moment saved the world, but he had surely saved its destroyers also.

We used the parasol staves as quarter-staff or pike. We salvaged blades from those disarmed by Pierre's uncanny adaptation of any arm, however hopeless, to the cunning play of a skilled swordsman trained in the *salles d'armes* of those old French masters among whom he was eminent. It all happened in a moment; and then, steel in hand, we sought to resist the wave that rolled toward us as the adepts got their wits back to the third dimension.

"Here's to a finish!" I shouted to Father Martin above the howling rage of the enemy.

"A good finish!" he roared in return, swinging his salvaged ceremonial blade with unskilled but vigorous strokes.

"Tenez! Hang on! Sock them!" bellowed Pierre, as with deadly skill he wove harmonies of steel as amazing as those vibration harmonies he had just shattered. His blade bit and slashed, lengthwise and athwart, compensating for our cruder, heavier efforts. He was slaying with a dazzling swiftness that was so precise and finely timed as to seem deliberate. "We can hold them!"

Luckily the enemy had only their broad, curved ritual swords. One pistol in the crowd would have wiped us out. The priest had turned into a fighting-man, sturdy but awkward, leaving himself open with every stroke he made. And Pierre, dancing in and out with his flickering steel, found time once and again in that mill of slaughter to deflect with his own blade the cut that would have shorn Father Martin in half. As for me, I held my own; but my arm was becoming numb, and my parries were slower, and my returns less effective.

"We can hold them!" Pierre had shouted, confident in his mastery of steel. But the priest and I were wearing out. It was Pierre's indomitable spirit that spoke, rather than his reason.

The cuts and batterings of the raid were telling. And soon Pierre was favoring me with the protection of his blade. The enemy, wary from our first whirlwind of slashing, was now more subtle. With a great cry, one of them hurdled the wall of slain behind which we resisted their advance, and impaled himself on Father Martin's sword-point; and at the same instant, his companion slashed clear through the priest's lowered guard.

Two of us now. Stout Pierre, and I, on my last legs. Another rush of Mongol swordsmen, and then—— A terrific detonation shook the floor beneath our feet. Then a second and sharper explosion, and a rush of smoke from the passageway leading into the vault.

"Tenez!" roared Pierre. "Hang on! They are here!"

Even as he spoke, I heard the crackle of pistols and the roar of a riot gun. I saw men charging in through the acrid clouds of smoke.

My distracted attention cost me a grazing sweep that parted my hair. But I emerged from my crouch with an upward stroke, felt my blade rip home, and free again. Then through eyes half blinded by blood, I saw the sheriff's posse driving in and closing, hand to hand.

"Those excellent deputies!" exulted d'Artois. *"Imbécile! En garde!* We are not through!"

I followed behind the shelter of his

blade as he hacked his way toward the posse.

IT WAS soon over. In another instant the surviving adepts had been swept back and slugged into submission. We found Father Martin where he had fallen athwart the three satanic rugs. He clutched the fringe of one, as though to guard it as long as life remained.

Pierre knelt at his side.

"Carry on where I left off," he contrived to say between gasps, and coughing of blood. "On your life, destroy those rugs. . . ."

Pierre's fingers closed about the grip of a sword. But as he rose, the priest's hand detained him.

"Those who live by the sword——"

Father Martin could not complete his speech.

"Very well, Father," replied d'Artois as he laid down his blade. And then, with more reverence than I had ever before heard in his voice, *"Grâce à Dieu,* he lived long enough to know that he did not take up the sword in vain. And if I recollect rightly, it was a well-established precedent that he followed."

The posse was returning from the corner where the enemy lay in a heap about the throne of the Master.

"Ho, there, *Monsieur le Shérif!"* he hailed. "Be so good as to have several of your deputies lend us a hand."

He indicated with a gesture the body of Father Martin. The sheriff started in amazement at seeing a priest lying in the tangle of fallen adepts. He lifted his hat, and inclined his head for a moment.

"You do well, *monsieur,"* said d'Artois as he saw that gesture of respect to the cloth. "And you know not how well. That is more than a priest. He is——"

Words failed d'Artois for an instant. Then, to me, and speaking with a hoarse, strained voice, "And do you give me a hand with these accursed rugs before Satan himself snatches them from our grasp. They have cost us too much already!"

WE FOLLOWED the posse to the cars in which they had come to our rescue.

Our adversaries, like most Asiatics, had used the cutting edge instead of the point; and though they had just fallen short of slashing us to bits, they had not vitally damaged us. One good thrust is worth a dozen of all but perfectly directed cuts. And then, they had been occultists and not masters of the sword, else they had hewn us to pieces before the rescuers arrived. Nevertheless, it might be said that when we returned from the emergency hospital, we were so bandaged that we had to be stacked into chairs in the courtyard of that house on Saint Peter Street, which I had not expected to see again.

"Now that we're back in the third dimension," I began, "suppose that you tell me how it happened."

"Skipping details," replied Pierre, "I learned, shortly after I left you and Father Martin in the hallway, that they had a radio sending-set for communication with their other units about the country. They were so sure of themselves that they did not watch me as closely as they might have. They were certain that they would make an ally of me, doubtless. At all events, I bent a wrench over the head of the radio operator and took advantage of the opportunity to put in a few words which most fortunately were picked up by the New Orleans police sets. You see, I remembered the proper wave length from having seen the dial of your set when we heard the general alarm and orders to pick up those agents of the Master who were impersonating Federal men.

"Those explosions?" Pierre grinned.

"Mordieu! I was too busy to inquire! But judging from the smell of the fumes, I should say they used a good quantity of 80 per cent blasting gelatin. Whatever it was, it tore the steel door from its housing. And incidentally, the shock for a moment halted the charge that would have overwhelmed us."

"Whether it was blasting gelatin or TNT," I said, "the sheriff didn't get in a second too soon! But what I wanted to know was what happened just as you popped into the scene. When the Last Conqueror looked flabbergasted, right when space and geometry and time and light and sound were so hopelessly scrambled, and that damnable Thing came marching down—it seems like a pipe-dream, but for a moment I could see It approaching at right angles to height, length, and width, all at the same time. *Four mutually perpendicular axes!"*

D'Artois smiled and shook his head.

"Cochon! He overstepped himself, that one! First, of course, in assuming that I would be tempted by power unheard of, and join him. But as your American aviators put it, he over-controlled, and the Gateway became too wide. It admitted too much. That is a crude expression, but it must suffice. There are no exact words, you comprehend. We were closer to the fourth dimension than I ever wish to be, myself!

"He was momentarily disconcerted at having done more than he had intended, perhaps more than he dreamed possible. I don't know what would have happened if I had not interposed."

"Neither, for that matter, does *he!"* Pierre smiled grimly, then continued, "And he'll never find out, that would-be successor to Genghis Khan, who was a schoolboy compared to what today's enemy would have been had he achieved his purpose."

Then he resumed his explanation.

"At that instant, I ran to the center of the vortex of force and upset the complex harmony, destroying that devil's resonance of light, rays, and sound vibrations which he had created. It was so terrific, yet at the same time so delicately synchronized and balanced that it could be shattered more readily than you would think.

"I pronounced the equations of superdimensional space that I had with Father Martin's aid deduced from studying the rug; although to be frank about it, I'm not sure that it made any difference what I said. For right in the heart of the vortex, even a discordant *thought* might conceivably cause that diabolical heterodyne to skip a beat or ring a false note in its higher harmonies of interfering waves.

"That piece of copper cable I had twisted into the shape of a crude *crux ansata* was to—how do you say it?—buck up my own courage, for I carried with me the moral backing of what it symbolized.

"And you, my friend, were not out of your mind when you thought that you heard colors, and saw sounds, and observed angular circles. That vortex of vibrations all attuned to the conditions demanded by the equations woven into those rug patterns literally upset a portion of what we call space of three dimensions, and did outrageous things to it.

"And that reminds me." D'Artois paused a moment, then resumed in a low, solemn voice, "I made Father Martin a promise. And had it not been for his profound learning——

"Jake, build for us a fire! *Immédiatement!* At once! Here, in the courtyard."

Then, as Jake heaped kindling and touched a match to it, d'Artois resumed, "And God forbid that we delay another moment in carrying out the last wish of that brave priest. Those damnable rugs are unique in containing the secret of

opening the Gateway to the Fourth Plane, of Super-space of which our world may be but a cross-section.

"Jake, throw them into the fire!"

"No, suh, Mistah Peer, no suh! Ah ain't gonna tech *none* of them!" he declared, rolling his eyes and edging away.

"*Mordieu,* and I do not blame the boy," said d'Artois as he painfully emerged from his chair. He flung the rich folds into the hungry flames. Instead of the stench of burning fabric there came a sweetish, pungent odor, and clouds of violet smoke.

"No honest rug would burn that way," I remarked.

"That flame," replied Pierre, "does seem to confirm some statements made by the Master. The *late* Master, I could more accurately put it," he amended. "He claimed that the dyes and yarn came from beyond our three-dimensional cosmos. Whether that was in good faith, or to impress me so that I would join them, I can not say. But you were in that vault, and you saw."

"Which makes it all the more unreal," I answered, "to be sitting here in my own courtyard, looking at the coals that contain all of that vast scheme."

The Holiness of Azédarac

By CLARK ASHTON SMITH

Dark magic sent the soul of Brother Ambrose careering back through time—an exquisite story of the forest of Averoigne

"BY THE Ram with a Thousand Ewes! By the Tail of Dagon and the Horns of Derceto!" said Azédarac, as he fingered the tiny, pot-bellied vial of vermilion liquid on the table before him. "Something will have to be done with this pestilential Brother Ambrose. I have now learned that he was sent to Ximes by the Archbishop of Averoigne for no other purpose than to gather proof of my subterraneous connection with Azazel and the Old Ones. He has spied upon my evocations in the vaults, he has heard the hidden formulæ, and beheld the veritable manifestation of Lilit, and even of Iog-Sotôt and Sodagui, those demons who are more ancient than the world; and this very morning, an hour agone, he has mounted his white ass for the return journey to Vyones. There are two ways—or, in a sense, there is one way—in which I can avoid the pother and inconvenience of a trial for sorcery: the contents of this vial must be administered to Ambrose before he has reached his journey's end—or, failing this, I myself shall be compelled to make use of a similar medicament."

Jehan Mauvaissoir looked at the vial and then at Azédarac. He was not at all horrified, nor even surprized, by the non-episcopal oaths and the somewhat uncanonical statements which he had just heard from the Bishop of Ximes. He had known the Bishop too long and too intimately, and had rendered him too

"The blade was poised above Ambrose's heart, and the monk realized that it would pierce through him before the lapse of another moment."

many services of an unconventional nature, to be surprized at anything. In fact, he had known Azédarac long before the sorcerer had ever dreamt of becoming a prelate, in a phase of his existence that was wholly unsuspected by the people of Ximes; and Azédarac had not troubled to keep many secrets from Jehan at any time.

"I understand," said Jehan. "You can depend upon it that the contents of the vial will be administered. Brother Ambrose will hardly travel post-haste on that ambling white ass; and he will not reach Vyones before tomorrow noon. There is abundant time to overtake him. Of course, he knows me—at least, he knows Jehan Mauvaissoir. . . . But that can easily be remedied."

Azédarac smiled confidentially. "I leave the affair—and the vial—in your hands, Jehan. Of course, no matter what the eventuation, with all the Satanic and pre-Satanic facilities at my disposal, I should be in no great danger from these addle-pated bigots. However, I am very comfortably situated here in Ximes; and the lot of a Christian Bishop who lives in the odor of incense and piety, and maintains in the meanwhile a private understanding with the Adversary, is certainly preferable to the mischancy life of a hedge-sorcerer. I do not care to be annoyed or disturbed, or ousted from my sinecure, if such can be avoided.

"May Moloch devour that sanctimonious little milksop of an Ambrose," he went on. "I must be growing old and dull, not to have suspected him before this. It was the horror-stricken and averted look he has been wearing lately that made me think he had peered through the keyhole on the subterranean rites. Then, when I heard he was leaving, I wisely thought to review my library; and I have found that the Book of Eibon, which contains the oldest incantations, and the secret, man-forgotten lore of Iog-Sotôt and Sodagui, is now missing. As you know, I had replaced the former binding of aboriginal, sub-human skin with the sheep-leather of a Christian missal, and had surrounded the volume with rows of legitimate prayer-books. Am-

brose is carrying it away under his robe as proof conclusive that I am addicted to the Black Arts. No one in Averoigne will be able to read the immemorial Hyperborean script; but the dragon's-blood illuminations and drawings will be enough to damn me."

Master and servant regarded each other for an interval of significant silence. Jehan eyed with profound respect the haughty stature, the grimly lined lineaments, the grizzled tonsure, the odd, ruddy, crescent scar on the pallid brow of Azédarac, and the sultry points of orange-yellow fire that seemed to burn deep down in the chill and liquid ebon of his eyes. Azédarac, in his turn, considered with confidence the vulpine features and discreet, inexpressive air of Jehan, who might have been—and could be, if necessary—anything from a mercer to a cleric.

"It is regrettable," resumed Azédarac, "that any question of my holiness and devotional probity should have been raised among the clergy of Averoigne. But I suppose it was inevitable sooner or later—even though the chief difference between myself and many other ecclesiastics is, that I serve the Devil wittingly and of my own free will, while they do the same in sanctimonious blindness. . . . However, we must do what we can to delay the evil hour of public scandal, and eviction from our neatly feathered nest. Ambrose alone could prove anything to my detriment at present; and you, Jehan, will remove Ambrose to a realm wherein his monkish tattlings will be of small consequence. After that, I shall be doubly vigilant. The next emissary from Vyones, I assure you, will find nothing to report but saintliness and bead-telling."

2

THE thoughts of Brother Ambrose were sorely troubled, and at variance with the tranquil beauty of the sylvan scene, as he rode onward through the forest of Averoigne between Ximes and Vyones. Horror was nesting in his heart like a knot of malignant vipers; and the evil Book of Eibon, that primordial manual of sorcery, seemed to burn beneath his robe like a huge, hot, Satanic sigil pressed against his bosom. Not for the first time, there occurred to him the wish that Clément, the Archbishop, had delegated someone else to investigate the Erebean turpitude of Azédarac. Sojourning for a month in the Bishop's household, Ambrose had learned too much for the peace of mind of any pious cleric, and had seen things that were like a secret blot of shame and terror on the white page of his memory. To find that a Christian prelate could serve the powers of nethermost perdition, could entertain in privity the foulnesses that are older than Asmodai, was abysmally disturbing to his devout soul; and ever since then he had seemed to smell corruption everywhere, and had felt on every side the serpentine encroachment of the dark Adversary.

As he rode on among the somber pines and verdant beeches, he wished also that he were mounted on something swifter than the gentle, milk-white ass appointed for his use by the Archbishop. He was dogged by the shadowy intimation of leering gargoyle faces, of invisible cloven feet, that followed him behind the thronging trees and along the umbrageous meanderings of the road. In the oblique rays, the elongated webs of shadow wrought by the dying afternoon, the forest seemed to attend with bated breath the noisome and furtive passing of innominable things. Nevertheless, Ambrose had met no one for miles; and he had seen neither bird nor beast nor viper in the summer woods.

His thoughts returned with fearful insistence to Azédarac, who appeared to him as a tall, prodigious Antichrist, uprearing

his sable vans and giant figure from out the flaming mire of Abaddon. Again he saw the vaults beneath the Bishop's mansion, wherein he had peered one night on a scene of infernal terror and loathliness, had beheld the Bishop swathed in the gorgeous, coiling fumes of unholy censers, that mingled in midair with the sulfurous and bituminous vapors of the Pit; and through the vapors had seen the lasciviously swaying limbs, the bellying and dissolving features of foul, enormous entities. . . . Recalling them, again he trembled at the pre-Adamite lubriciousness of Lilit, again he shuddered at the trans-galactic horror of the demon Sodagui, and the ultra-dimensional hideousness of that being known as Iog-Sotôt to the sorcerers of Averoigne.

How balefully potent and subversive, he thought, were these immemorial devils, who had placed their servant Azédarac in the very bosom of the Church, in a position of high and holy trust. For nine years the evil prelate had held an unchallenged and unsuspected tenure, had befouled the bishopric of Ximes with infidelities that were worse than those of the Paynims. Then, somehow, through anonymous channels, a rumor had reached Clément—a warning whisper that not even the Archbishop had dared to voice aloud; and Ambrose, a young Benedictine monk, the nephew of Clément, had been dispatched to examine privily the festering foulness that threatened the integrity of the Church. Only at that time did any one recall how little was actually known regarding the antecedents of Azédarac; how tenuous were his claims to ecclesiastical preferment, or even to mere priestship; how veiled and doubtful were the steps by which he had attained his office. It was then realized that a formidable wizardry had been at work.

Uneasily, Ambrose wondered if Azédarac had already discovered the removal of the Book of Eibon from among the missals contaminated by its blasphemous presence. Even more uneasily, he wondered what Azédarac would do in that event, and how long it would take him to connect the absence of the volume with his visitor's departure.

At this point, the meditations of Ambrose were interrupted by the hard clatter of galloping hoofs that approached from behind. The emergence of a centaur from the oldest wood of paganism could scarcely have startled him to a keener panic; and he peered apprehensively over his shoulder at the nearing horseman. This person, mounted on a fine black steed with opulent trappings, was a bushy-bearded man of obvious consequence; for his gay garments were those of a noble or a courtier. He overtook Ambrose and passed on with a polite nod, seeming to be wholly intent on his own affairs. The monk was immensely reassured, though vaguely troubled for some moments by a feeling that he had seen elsewhere, under circumstances which he was now unable to recall, the narrow eyes and sharp profile that contrasted so oddly with the bluff beard of the horseman. However, he was comfortably sure that he had never seen the man in Ximes. The rider soon vanished beyond a leafy turn of the arboreal highway. Ambrose returned to the pious horror and apprehensiveness of his former soliloquy.

As he went on, it seemed to him that the sun had gone down with untimely and appalling swiftness. Though the heavens above were innocent of cloud, and the low-lying air was free from vapors, the woods were embrowned by an inexplicable gloom that gathered visibly on all sides. In this gloom, the trunks of the trees were strangely distorted, and the low masses of foliage assumed un-

natural and disquieting forms. It appeared to Ambrose that the silence around him was a fragile film through which the raucous rumble and mutter of diabolic voices might break at any moment, even as the foul and sunken driftage that rises anon above the surface of a smoothly flowing river.

With much relief, he remembered that he was not far from a wayside tavern, known as the Inn of Bonne Jouissance. Here, since his journey to Vyones was little more than half completed, he resolved to tarry for the night.

A minute more, and he saw the lights of the inn. Before their benign and golden radiance, the equivocal forest shadows that attended him seemed to halt and retire, and he gained the haven of the tavern courtyard with the feeling of one who has barely escaped from an army of goblin perils.

COMMITTING his mount to the care of a stable-servant, Ambrose entered the main room of the inn. Here he was greeted with the deference due to his cloth by the stout and unctuous taverner; and, being assured that the best accommodations of the place were at his disposal, he seated himself at one of several tables where other guests had already gathered to await the evening meal.

Among them, Ambrose recognized the bluff-bearded horseman who had overtaken him in the woods an hour agone. This person was sitting alone, and a little apart. The other guests, a couple of travelling mercers, a notary, and two soldiers, acknowledged the presence of the monk with all due civility; but the horseman arose from his table, and coming over to Ambrose, began immediately to make overtures that were more than those of common courtesy.

"Will you not dine with me, sir monk?" he invited, in a gruff but ingratiating voice that was perplexingly familiar to Ambrose, and yet, like the wolfish profile, was irrecognizable at the time.

"I am the Sieur des Émaux, from Touraine, at your service," the man went on. "It would seem that we are travelling the same road—possibly to the same destination. Mine is the cathedral city of Vyones. And yours?"

Though he was vaguely perturbed, and even a little suspicious, Ambrose found himself unable to decline the invitation. In reply to the last question, he admitted that he also was on his way to Vyones. He did not altogether like the Sieur des Émaux, whose slitted eyes gave back the candle-light of the inn with a covert glitter, and whose manner was somewhat effusive, not to say fulsome. But there seemed to be no ostensible reason for refusing a courtesy that was doubtless well-meant and genuine. He accompanied his host to their separate table.

"You belong to the Benedictine order, I observe," said the Sieur des Émaux, eyeing the monk with an odd smile that was tinged with furtive irony. "It is an order that I have always admired greatly—a most noble and worthy brotherhood. May I not inquire your name?"

Ambrose gave the requested information with a curious reluctance.

"Well, then, Brother Ambrose," said the Sieur des Émaux, "I suggest that we drink to your health and the prosperity of your order in the red wine of Averoigne while we are waiting for supper to be served. Wine is always welcome, following a long journey, and is no less beneficial before a good meal than after."

Ambrose mumbled an unwilling assent. He could not have told why, but the personality of the man was more and more distasteful to him. He seemed to

detect a sinister undertone in the purring voice, to surprize an evil meaning in the low-lidded glance. And all the while his brain was tantalized by intimations of a forgotten memory. Had he seen his interlocutor in Ximes? Was the self-styled Sieur des Émaux a henchman of Azédarac in disguise?

Wine was now ordered by his host, who left the table to confer with the innkeeper for this purpose, and even insisted on paying a visit to the cellar, that he might select a suitable vintage in person. Noting the obeisance paid to the man by the people of the tavern, who addressed him by name, Ambrose felt a certain measure of reassurance. When the taverner, followed by the Sieur des Émaux, returned with two earthen pitchers of wine, he had well-nigh succeeded in dismissing his vague doubts and vaguer fears.

Two large goblets were now placed on the table, and the Sieur des Émaux filled them immediately from one of the pitchers. It seemed to Ambrose that the first of the goblets already contained a small amount of some sanguine fluid, before the wine was poured into it; but he could not have sworn to this in the dim light, and thought that he must have been mistaken.

"Here are two matchless vintages," said the Sieur des Émaux, indicating the pitchers. "Both are so excellent that I was unable to choose between them; but you, Brother Ambrose, are perhaps capable of deciding their merits with a finer palate than mine."

He pushed one of the filled goblets toward Ambrose. "This is the wine of La Frenaie," he said. "Drink, it will verily transport you from the world by virtue of the mighty fire that slumbers in its heart."

Ambrose took the proffered goblet, and raised it to his lips. The Sieur des Émaux was bending forward above his own wine to inhale its bouquet; and something in his posture was terrifyingly familiar to Ambrose. In a chill flash of horror, his memory told him that the thin, pointed features behind the square beard were dubiously similar to those of Jehan Mauvaissoir, whom he had often seen in the household of Azédarac, and who, as he had reason to believe, was implicated in the Bishop's sorceries. He wondered why he had not placed the resemblance before, and what wizardry had drugged his powers of recollection. Even now he was not sure; but the mere suspicion terrified him as if some deadly serpent had reared its head across the table.

"Drink, Brother Ambrose," urged the Sieur des Émaux, draining his own goblet. "To your welfare and that of all good Benedictines."

Ambrose hesitated. The cold, hypnotic eyes of his interlocutor were upon him, and he was powerless to refuse, in spite of all his apprehensions. Shuddering slightly, with the sense of some irresistible compulsion, and feeling that he might drop dead from the virulent working of a sudden poison, he emptied his goblet.

An instant more, and he felt that his worst fears had been justified. The wine burned like the liquid flames of Phlegeton in his throat and on his lips; it seemed to fill his veins with a hot, infernal quicksilver. Then, all at once, an unbearable cold had inundated his being; an icy whirlwind wrapped him round with coils of roaring air, the chair melted beneath him, and he was falling through endless glacial gulfs. The walls of the inn had flown like receding vapors; the lights went out like stars in the black mist of a marish; and the face of the Sieur des Émaux faded with them on the swirling

shadows, even as a bubble that breaks on the milling of midnight waters.

3

IT WAS with some difficulty that Ambrose assured himself that he was not dead. He had seemed to fall eternally, through a gray night that was peopled with ever-changing forms, with blurred unstable masses that dissolved to other masses before they could assume definitude. For a moment, he thought there were walls about him once more; and then he was plunging from terrace to terrace of a world of phantom trees. At whiles, he thought also that there were human faces; but all was doubtful and evanescent, all was drifting smoke and surging shadow.

Abruptly, with no sense of transition or impact, he found that he was no longer falling. The vague fantasmagoria around him had returned to an actual scene—but a scene in which there was no trace of the Inn of Bonne Jouissance, or the Sieur des Émaux.

Ambrose peered about with incredulous eyes on a situation that was truly unbelievable. He was sitting in broad daylight on a large square block of roughly hewn granite. Around him, at a little distance, beyond the open space of a grassy glade, were the lofty pines and spreading beeches of an elder forest, whose boughs were already touched by the gold of the declining sun. Immediately before him, several men were standing.

These men appeared to regard Ambrose with a profound and almost religious amazement. They were bearded and savage of aspect, with white robes of a fashion he had never before seen. Their hair was long and matted, like tangles of black snakes; and their eyes burned with a frenetic fire. Each of them bore in his right hand a rude knife of sharply chiselled stone.

Ambrose wondered if he had died after all, and if these beings were the strange devils of some unlisted hell. In the face of what had happened, and the light of Ambrose's own beliefs, it was a far from unreasonable conjecture. He peered with fearful trepidation at the supposed demons, and began to mumble a prayer to the God who had abandoned him so inexplicably to his spiritual foes. Then he remembered the necromantic powers of Azédarac, and conceived another surmise—that he had been spirited bodily away from the Inn of Bonne Jouissance, and delivered into the hands of those pre-Satanic entities that served the sorcerous Bishop. Becoming convinced of his own physical solidity and integrity, and reflecting that such was scarcely the appropriate condition of a disincarnate soul, and also that the sylvan scene about him was hardly characteristic of the infernal regions, he accepted this as the true explanation. He was still alive, and still on earth, though the circumstances of his situation were more than mysterious, and were fraught with dire, unknowable danger.

The strange beings had maintained an utter silence, as if they were too dumfounded for speech. Hearing the prayerful murmurs of Ambrose, they seemed to recover from their surprize, and became not only articulate but vociferous. Ambrose could make nothing of their harsh vocables, in which sibilants and aspirates and gutturals were often combined in a manner difficult for the normal human tongue to imitate. However, he caught the word *taranit,* several times repeated, and wondered if it were the name of an especially malevolent demon.

The speech of the weird beings began to assume a sort of rude rhythm, like the intonations of some primordial chant,

Two of them stepped forward and seized Ambrose, while the voices of their companions rose in a shrill, triumphant litany.

Scarcely knowing what had happened, and still less what was to follow, Ambrose was flung supine on the granite block, and was held down by one of his captors, while the other raised aloft the keen blade of chiselled flint which he carried. The blade was poised in air above Ambrose's heart, and the monk realized in sudden terror that it would fall with dire velocity and pierce him through before the lapse of another moment.

Then, above the demoniac chanting, which had risen to a mad, malignant frenzy, he heard the sweet and imperious cry of a woman's voice. In the wild confusion of his terror, the words were strange and meaningless to him; but plainly they were understood by his captors, and were taken as an undeniable command. The stone knife was lowered sullenly, and Ambrose was permitted to resume a sitting posture on the flat slab.

His rescuer was standing on the edge of the open glade, in the wide-flung umbrage of an ancient pine. She came forward now; and the white-garmented beings fell back with evident respect before her. She was very tall, with a fearless and regal demeanor, and was gowned in a dark, shimmering blue, like the star-laden blue of nocturnal summer skies. Her hair was knotted in a long golden-brown braid, heavy as the glistening coils of some Eastern serpent. Her eyes were a strange amber, her lips a vermilion touched with the coolness of woodland shadow, and her skin was of alabastrine fairness. Ambrose saw that she was beautiful; but she inspired him with the same awe that he would have felt before a queen, together with something of the fear and consternation which a virtuous young monk would conceive in the perilous presence of an alluring succubus.

"Come with me," she said to Ambrose, in a tongue that his monastic studies enabled him to recognize as an obsolete variant of the French of Averoigne—a tongue that no man had supposedly spoken for many hundred years. Obediently and in great wonder, he arose and followed her, with no hindrance from his glowering and reluctant captors.

THE woman led him to a narrow path that wound sinuously away through the deep forest. In a few moments, the glade, the granite block, and the cluster of white-robed men were lost to sight behind the heavy foliage.

"Who are you?" asked the lady, turning to Ambrose. "You look like one of those crazy missionaries who are beginning to enter Averoigne nowadays. I believe that people call them Christians. The Druids have sacrificed so many of them to Taranit, that I marvel at your temerity in coming here."

Ambrose found it difficult to comprehend the archaic phrasing; and the import of her words was so utterly strange and baffling that he felt sure he must have misunderstood her.

"I am Brother Ambrose," he replied, expressing himself slowly and awkwardly in the long-disused dialect. "Of course, I am a Christian; but I confess that I fail to understand you. I have heard of the pagan Druids; but surely they were all driven from Averoigne many centuries ago."

The woman stared at Ambrose, with open amazement and pity. Her brownish-yellow eyes were bright and clear as a mellowed wine.

"Poor little one," she said. "I fear that your dreadful experiences have served to unsettle you. It was fortunate

that I came along when I did, and decided to intervene. I seldom interfere with the Druids and their sacrifices; but I saw you sitting on their altar a little while agone, and was struck by your youth and comeliness."

Ambrose felt more and more that he had been made the victim of a most peculiar sorcery; but, even yet, he was far from suspecting the true magnitude of this sorcery. Amid his bemusement and consternation, however, he realized that he owed his life to the singular and lovely woman beside him, and began to stammer out his gratitude.

"You need not thank me," said the lady, with a dulcet smile. "I am Moriamis, the enchantress, and the Druids fear my magic, which is more sovereign and more excellent than theirs, though I use it only for the welfare of men and not for their bale or bane."

The monk was dismayed to learn that his fair rescuer was a sorceress, even though her powers were professedly benignant. The knowledge added to his alarm; but he felt that it would be politic to conceal his emotions in this regard.

"Indeed, I am grateful to you," he protested. "And now, if you can tell me the way to the Inn of Bonne Jouissance, which I left not long ago, I shall owe you a further debt."

Moriamis knitted her light brows. "I have never heard of the Inn of Bonne Jouissance. There is no such place in this region."

"But this is the forest of Averoigne, is it not?" inquired the puzzled Ambrose. "And surely we are not far from the road that runs between the town of Ximes and the city of Vyones?"

"I have never heard of Ximes, or Vyones, either," said Moriamis. "Truly, the land is known as Averoigne, and this forest is the great wood of Averoigne, which men have called by that name from primeval years. But there are no towns such as the ones whereof you speak, Brother Ambrose. I fear that you still wander a little in your mind."

Ambrose was aware of a maddening perplexity. "I have been most damnably beguiled," he said, half to himself. "It is all the doing of that abominable sorcerer, Azédarac, I am sure."

The woman started as if she had been stung by a wild bee. There was something both eager and severe in the searching gaze that she turned upon Ambrose.

"Azédarac?" she queried. "What do you know of Azédarac? I was once acquainted with some one by that name; and I wonder if it could be the same person. Is he tall and a little gray, with hot, dark eyes, and a proud, half-angry air, and a crescent scar on the brow?"

Greatly mystified, and more troubled than ever, Ambrose admitted the veracity of her description. Realizing that in some unknown way he had stumbled upon the hidden antecedents of the sorcerer, he confided the story of his adventures to Moriamis, hoping that she would reciprocate with further information concerning Azédarac.

The woman listened with the air of one who is much interested but not at all surprized.

"I understand now," she observed, when he had finished. "Anon I shall explain everything that mystifies and troubles you. I think I know this Jehan Mauvaissoir, also; he has long been the man-servant of Azédarac, though his name was Melchire in other days. These two have always been the underlings of evil, and have served the Old Ones in ways forgotten or never known by the Druids."

"Indeed, I hope you can explain what has happened," said Ambrose. "It is a

fearsome and strange and ungodly thing, to drink a draft of wine in a tavern at eventide, and then find one's self in the heart of the forest by afternoon daylight, among demons such as those from whom you succored me."

"Yea," countered Moriamis, "it is even stranger than you dream. Tell me, Brother Ambrose, what was the year in which you entered the Inn of Bonne Jouissance?"

"Why, it is the year of our Lord, 1175, of course. What other year could it be?"

"The Druids use a different chronology," replied Moriamis, "and their notation would mean nothing to you. But, according to that which the Christian missionaries would now introduce in Averoigne, the present year is 475 A. D. You have been sent back no less than seven hundred years into what the people of your era would regard as the past. The Druid altar on which I found you lying is probably located on the future site of the Inn of Bonne Jouissance."

Ambrose was more than dumfounded. His mind was unable to grasp the entire import of Moriamis' words.

"But how can such things be?" he cried. "How can a man go backward in time, among years and people that have long turned to dust?"

"That, mayhap, is a mystery for Azédarac to unriddle. However, the past and the future co-exist with what we call the present, and are merely the two segments of the circle of time. We see them and name them according to our own position in the circle."

Ambrose felt that he had fallen among necromancies of a most unhallowed and unexampled sort, and had been made the victim of diableries unknown to the Christian catalogues.

Tongue-tied by a consciousness that all comment, all protest or even prayer would prove inadequate to the situation, he saw that a stone tower with small lozenge-shaped windows was now visible above the turrets of pine along the path which he and Moriamis were following.

"This is my home," said Moriamis, as they came forth from beneath the thinning trees at the foot of a little knoll on which the tower was situated. "Brother Ambrose, you must be my guest."

Ambrose was unable to decline the proffered hospitality, in spite of his feeling that Moriamis was hardly the most suitable of chatelaines for a chaste and God-fearing monk. However, the pious misgivings with which she inspired him were not unmingled with fascination. Also, like a lost child, he clung to the only available protection in a land of fearful perils and astounding mysteries.

THE interior of the tower was neat and clean and home-like, though with furniture of a ruder sort than that to which Ambrose was accustomed, and rich but roughly woven arrases. A serving-woman, tall as Moriamis herself, but darker, brought to him a huge bowl of milk and wheaten bread, and the monk was now able to assuage the hunger that had gone unsatisfied in the Inn of Bonne Jouissance.

As he seated himself before the simple fare, he realized that the Book of Eibon was still heavy in the bosom of his gown. He removed the volume, and gave it gingerly to Moriamis. Her eyes widened, but she made no comment until he had finished his meal. Then she said:

"This volume is indeed the property of Azédarac, who was formerly a neighbor of mine. I knew the scoundrel quite well—in fact, I knew him all too well." Her bosom heaved with an obscure emotion as she paused for a moment. "He was the wisest and the mightiest of sor-

cerers, and the most secret withal; for no one knew the time and the manner of his coming into Averoigne, or the fashion in which he had procured the immemorial Book of Eibon, whose runic writings were beyond the lore of all other wizards. He was master of all enchantments and all demons, and likewise a compounder of mighty potions. Among these were certain philtres, blended with potent spells and possessed of unique virtue, that would send the drinker backward or forward in time. One of them, I believe, was administered to you by Melchire, or Jehan Mauvaissoir; and Azédarac himself, together with this manservant, made use of another—perhaps not for the first time—when they went onward from the present age of the Druids into that age of Christian authority to which you belong. There was a blood-red vial for the past, and a green for the future. Behold! I possess one of each—though Azédarac was unaware that I knew of their existence."

She opened a little cupboard, in which were the various charms and medicaments, the sun-dried herbs and moon-compounded essences that a sorceress would employ. From among them she brought out the two vials, one of which contained a sanguine-colored liquid, and the other a fluid of emerald brightness.

"I stole them one day, out of womanly curiosity, from his hidden store of philtres and elixirs and magistrals," continued Moriamis. "I could have followed the rascal when he disappeared into the future, if I had chosen to do so. But I am well enough content with my own age; and moreover, I am not the sort of woman who pursues a wearied and reluctant lover. . . ."

"Then," said Ambrose, more bewildered than ever, but hopeful, "if I were to drink the contents of the green vial, I should return to my own epoch."

"Precisely. And I am sure, from what you have told me, that your return would be a source of much annoyance to Azédarac. It is like the fellow, to have established himself in a fat prelacy. He was ever the master of circumstance, with an eye to his own accommodation and comfort. It would hardly please him, I am sure, if you were to reach the Archbishop. . . . I am not revengeful by nature . . . but on the other hand——"

"It is hard to understand how any one could have wearied of you," said Ambrose, gallantly, as he began to comprehend the situation.

Moriamis smiled. "That is prettily said. And you are really a charming youth, in spite of that dismal-looking robe. I am glad that I rescued you from the Druids, who would have torn your heart out and offered it to their demon, Taranit."

"And now you will send me back?"

Moriamis frowned a little, and then assumed her most seductive air.

"Are you in such a hurry to leave your hostess? Now that you are living in another century than your own, a day, a week or a month will make no difference in the date of your return. I have also retained the formulas of Azédarac; and I know how to graduate the potion, if necessary. The usual period of transportation in time is exactly seven hundred years; but the philtre can be strengthened or weakened a little."

The sun had fallen beyond the pines, and a soft twilight was beginning to invade the tower. The maid-servant had left the room. Moriamis came over and seated herself beside Ambrose on the rough bench he was occupying. Still smiling, she fixed her amber eyes upon him, with a languid flame in their depths

—a flame that seemed to brighten as the dusk grew stronger. Without speaking, she began slowly to unbraid her heavy hair, from which there emanated a perfume that was subtle and delicious as the perfume of grape-flowers.

Ambrose was embarrassed by this delightful proximity. "I am not sure that it would be right for me to remain, after all. What would the Archbishop think?"

"My dear child, the Archbishop will not even be born for at least six hundred and fifty years. And it will be still longer before you are born. And when you return, anything that you have done during your stay with me will have happened no less than seven centuries ago . . . which should be long enough to procure the remission of any sin, no matter how often repeated."

Like a man who has been taken in the toils of some fantastic dream, and finds that the dream is not altogether disagreeable, Ambrose yielded to this feminine and irrefutable reasoning. He hardly knew what was to happen; but, under the exceptional circumstances indicated by Moriamis, the rigors of monastic discipline might well be relaxed to almost any conceivable degree, without entailing spiritual perdition or even a serious breach of vows.

4

A MONTH later, Moriamis and Ambrose were standing beside the Druid altar. It was late in the evening; and a slightly gibbous moon had risen upon the deserted glade and was fringing the tree-tops with wefted silver. The warm breath of the summer night was gentle as the sighing of a woman in slumber.

"Must you go, after all?" said Moriamis, in a pleading and regretful voice.

"It is my duty. I must return to Clément with the Book of Eibon and the other evidence I have collected against Azédarac." The words sounded a little unreal to Ambrose as he uttered them; and he tried very hard, but vainly, to convince himself of the cogency and validity of his arguments. The idyl of his stay with Moriamis, to which he was oddly unable to attach any true conviction of sin, had given to all that preceded it a certain dismal insubstantiality. Free from all responsibility or restraint, in the sheer obliviousness of dreams, he had lived like a happy pagan; and now he must go back to the drear existence of a mediæval monk, beneath the prompting of an obscure sense of duty.

"I shall not try to hold you," Moriamis sighed. "But I shall miss you, and remember you as a worthy lover and a pleasant playmate. Here is the philtre."

The green essence was cold and almost hueless in the moonlight, as Moriamis poured it into a little cup and gave it to Ambrose.

"Are you sure of its precise efficacy?" the monk inquired. "Are you sure that I shall return to the Inn of Bonne Jouissance, at a time not far subsequent to that of my departure therefrom?"

"Yea," said Moriamis, "for the potion is infallible. "But stay, I have also brought along the other vial—the vial of the past. Take it with you—for who knows, you may sometime wish to return and visit me again."

AMBROSE accepted the red vial and placed it in his robe beside the ancient manual of Hyperborean sorcery. Then, after an appropriate farewell to Moriamis, he drained with sudden resolution the contents of the cup.

The moonlit glade, the gray altar, and Moriamis, all vanished in a swirl of flame and shadow. It seemed to Ambrose that he was soaring endlessly through fantas-

magoric gulfs, amid the ceaseless shifting and melting of unstable things, the transient forming and fading of irresoluble worlds.

At the end, he found himself sitting once more in the Inn of Bonne Jouissance, at what he assumed to be the very same table before which he had sat with the Sieur des Émaux. It was daylight, and the room was full of people, among whom he looked in vain for the rubicund face of the innkeeper, or the servants and fellow-guests he had previously seen. All were unfamiliar to him; and the furniture was strangely worn, and was grimier than he remembered it.

Perceiving the presence of Ambrose, the people began to eye him with open curiosity and wonderment. A tall man with dolorous eyes and lantern jaws came hastily forward and bowed before him with an air that was half servile but full of a prying impertinence.

"What do you wish?" he asked.

"Is this the Inn of Bonne Jouissance?"

The innkeeper stared at Ambrose. "Nay, it is the Inn of Haute Espérance, of which I have been the taverner these thirty years. Could you not read the sign? It was called the Inn of Bonne Jouissance in my father's time, but the name was changed after his death."

Ambrose was filled with consternation. "But the inn was differently named, and was kept by another man when I visited it not long ago," he cried in his bewilderment. "The owner was a stout, jovial man, not in the least like you."

"That would answer the description of my father," said the taverner, eyeing Ambrose more dubiously than ever. "He has been dead for the full thirty years of which I speak; and surely you were not even born at the time of his decease."

Ambrose began to realize what had happened. The emerald potion, by some error or excess of potency, had taken him many years beyond his own time into the future!

"I must resume my journey to Vyones," he said in a bewildered voice, without fully comprehending the implications of his situation. "I have a message for the Archbishop Clément—and must not delay longer in delivering it."

"But Clément has been dead even longer than my father," exclaimed the innkeeper. "From whence do you come, that you are ignorant of this?" It was plain from his manner that he had begun to doubt the sanity of Ambrose. Others, overhearing the strange discussion, had begun to crowd about, and were plying the monk with jocular and sometimes ribald questions.

"And what of Azédarac, the Bishop of Ximes? Is he dead, too?" inquired Ambrose, desperately.

"You mean St. Azédarac, no doubt. He outlived Clément, but nevertheless he has been dead and duly canonized for thirty-two years. Some say that he did not die, but was transported to heaven alive, and that his body was never buried in the great mausoleum reared for him at Ximes. But that is probably a mere legend."

Ambrose was overwhelmed with unspeakable desolation and confusion. In the meanwhile, the crowd about him had increased, and in spite of his robe, he was being made the subject of rude remarks and jeers.

"The good Brother has lost his wits," cried some. "The wines of Averoigne are too strong for him," said others.

"What year is this?" demanded Ambrose, in his desperation.

"The year of our Lord, 1230," replied the taverner, breaking into a derisive laugh. "And what year did you think it was?"

"It was the year 1175 when I last visited the Inn of Bonne Jouissance," admitted Ambrose.

His declaration was greeted with fresh jeers and laughter. "Hola, young sir, you were not even conceived at that time," the taverner said. Then, seeming to remember something, he went on in a more thoughtful tone: "When I was a child, my father told me of a young monk, about your age, who came to the Inn of Bonne Jouissance one evening in the summer of 1175, and vanished inexplicably after drinking a draft of red wine. I believe his name was Ambrose. Perhaps you are Ambrose, and have only just returned from a visit to nowhere." He gave a derisory wink, and the new jest was taken up and bandied from mouth to mouth among the frequenters of the tavern.

Ambrose was trying to realize the full import of his predicament. His mission was now useless, through the death or disappearance of Azédarac; and no one would remain in all Averoigne to recognize him or believe his story. He felt the hopelessness of his alienation among unknown years and people.

Suddenly he remembered the red vial given him at parting by Moriamis. The potion, like the green philtre, might prove uncertain in its effect; but he was seized by an all-consuming desire to escape from the weird embarrassment and wilderment of his present position. Also, he longed for Moriamis like a lost child for its mother; and the charm of his sojourn in the past was upon him with an irresistible spell. Ignoring the ribald faces and voices about him, he drew the vial from his bosom, uncorked it, and swallowed the contents. . . .

5

HE WAS back in the forest glade, by the gigantic altar. Moriamis was beside him again, lovely and warm and breathing; and the moon was still rising above the pine-tops. It seemed that no more than a few moments could have elapsed since he had said farewell to the beloved enchantress.

"I thought you might return," said Moriamis. "And I waited a little while."

Ambrose told her of the singular mishap that had attended his journey in time.

Moriamis nodded gravely. "The green philtre was more potent than I had supposed," she remarked. "It is fortunate, though, that the red philtre was equivalently strong, and could bring you back to me through all those added years. You will have to remain with me now, for I possessed only the two vials. I hope you are not sorry."

Ambrose proceeded to prove, in a somewhat unmonastic manner, that her hope was fully justified.

Neither then nor at any other time did Moriamis tell him that she herself had strengthened slightly and equally the two philtres by means of the private formula which she had also stolen from Azédarac.

On Top

By RALPH ALLEN LANG

A short story of the old West, and a man who was shot dead, yet came out "on top"

SWINGLE'S excuse for the shooting of Shorty Baker was exceedingly flimsy, even when the character of the town and the position of the killer were considered. Shorty was sitting in a game of draw across the table from a bull-necked mule-skinner who had hit town early in the afternoon; and Shorty, in a rare streak of luck, was dragging in pot after pot. It was on the square, all right enough; but bad luck and bad whisky, both in excessive quantities, had soured the big fellow's mood; and as his chips continued to dwindle, his growing sullenness was measured by the deepening purple of a jagged scar across his right temple.

It happened just as Swingle, badge glittering on his vest front, stepped through the door. With an oath, the mule-skinner ripped out the old "cold deck" squawk and threw his cards in Shorty's face, getting a stinging backhand slap in payment.

It might have gone no farther than fists if somebody at the end of the table had not sent it careening as he leaped away. In the straining necessity of maintaining balance and protecting themselves at the same time, both men went for their guns. The big fellow took it in the flesh of his left shoulder. Shorty was drilled cleanly through the heart, but the mule-skinner's bullet had never touched him. He had been dropped by a shot from behind; and Swingle, the marshal, was ready with words to back up his action.

"That's giving notice that quick-trigger days are over in Red Dog," he said coolly. "Any gunman who don't savvy that can run, not walk, to the nearest exit—said exit being either by horseflesh or Boot Hill, as they prefer."

He turned a level look upon Steve Craig, Shorty's partner, who had risen from a table in the back of the room. Steve's eyes met the marshal's for a long moment, and it seemed that he was about to speak. Then he turned abruptly and walked to the crumpled form of his dead partner.

THE burying hour at Red Dog was nine a. m., and Steve rose early for the job he had to do, setting out for Boot Hill with a shovel and his thoughts for company. A sleepless night had failed to suggest any other reason for Swingle's action than the one that had leaped into his mind as he faced the marshal across the barroom. The diggings around Red Dog were comparatively worked out, and with a single exception the days of rich pay dirt were over. The single exception was the claim belonging to Shorty and Steve, in which a rich vein had cropped out a week back. Evidently, Swingle wanted that claim, and what he wanted he was accustomed to take by the gun. It had been his means of livelihood through a notorious past, at first on the outer fringe of the law, and later, for a year past, as the official lawman of the hitherto lawless mining town of Red Dog.

Certain things were crystal-clear in Steve's mind as he heaved the yellow

clay out of the deepening grave. One was that Swingle had him marked for the same play that had cleared Shorty out of his way. With both partners dead, the claim would be open to whoever could file on it first—and claims could be filed only through the marshal's office. It was nicely cut and dried for the marshal, and nothing could prevent its successful working except the second item fixed in Steve's mind. This was that he must kill Swingle first, a proposition that presented rather stiff difficulties, considering the fact that the marshal had added to this same Boot Hill a large section containing the remains of some of the best gun-slinging talent in the hills. The chances in an equal fight were not so good; in fact, not much better than the chance Shorty had had with his back turned. Aside from this, the killing of a lawman backed by influential interests in the town might force him out of the country. And the claim was too good to leave. The contemplation of this classic problem was interrupted by the appearance of the marshal himself. Swingle eyed the hole with simulated interest.

"You're crowding six good feet there, Steve," he ejaculated. "Aiming to plant him so he'll stay planted, I suppose. I'll admit Shorty had a way with him of generally coming out on top, but I reckon that ought to hold him down." He indicated with his foot the high-piled mass of yellow clay.

Steve scooped out another shovel of loose gravel before he answered, held silent for a time by a tremendous idea the marshal's words had sparked in his mind. He gazed down the deserted hillside, and along the equally deserted single street of the town. The miners were at their diggings by now, and the store and saloon keepers were not yet astir. It was strange that the marshal had appeared so early, nearly an hour before the time of the funeral. Perhaps he meant to finish the work started the previous night, claiming self-defense in the total absence of witnesses. He was squatting on his heels by the edge of the hole now, evidently planning no action for the immediate present. Grasping his pick-handle near the head, Steve leaned his weight easily upon it as he replied.

"Shorty did have a way of coming out on top," he said slowly, "in nearly everything. I partnered with him for six years, and he's pulled me, as well as himself, out of more than one tight hole. You downed him last night, Marshal, and this is one hole he'll never pull out of. But at that—this sounds queer, I guess—the notion just struck me that he'll still manage to wind up on top."

Swingle's eyes narrowed ever so slightly as he laughed.

"Every dog has his day," he replied, "but once he's been whipped to his kennel——"

With a short swishing movement the pick swung out and down, punctuating the unfinished sentence with a convulsive gasp. Steve recoiled against the side of the trench as the sprawling form fell heavily forward, pressing backward to allow it to slump at full length on the bottom. Then he began the awkward task of moving the body from side to side while he scooped out another foot and a half of earth. When he started back to town the seven-and-a-half-foot grave he had dug was only five feet deep. And the bottom, packed down hard with the shovel, covered even the handle of the buried pick by an inch.

RED DOG turned out for the funeral at nine o'clock, standing silently with Steve as the last shovelful of earth was mounded over his dead. The marshal had

failed to appear at a funeral of his own causing for the first time, and on the way to the hill there had been comment.

"Oh, he'll be there all right," Steve said. They thought it was bitterness.

Now, as they turned away from the new grave, expressions of sympathy were forthcoming. Steve smiled wanly.

"He was a good partner," he said simply. "I've seen old Shorty in many a tight scrape, and he never failed to wind up on top."

Sic Transit Gloria

By BROOKE BYRNE

These formless mounds of earth that lie
Beneath the blue, sun-ridden sky,
Had they but voice, would loudly cry
"We are the walls of Babylon!

"We are the stones that formed the street
Whereon the drums of commerce beat,
And we the stones that felt the feet
Of all the world in Babylon.

"We have been stained with wine and blood
And gold poured down us in a flood
To where Bel's sacred temple stood,
The golden heart of Babylon.

"Such wealth as ours has never been,
Such power and gold and depths of sin;
They were accursed who entered in
The hundred gates of Babylon.

"And yet there thronged through every gate
From every nation, tribe, and state,
The thousands who would laugh at Fate
And pleasure taste in Babylon.

"This heap was once, in ages dim,
The Hanging Gardens, reared by him
Who ruled us all, to please the whim
Of Amytis of Babylon.

"We felt the pulse of power throb,
We heard the tortured captive sob,
And over us the loot-mad mob
Swept howling into Babylon.

"We saw Belshazzar at his play,
O'er us the Persians felt their way,
And we were left at break of day
To see the doom of Babylon."

The Persian swords are heaps of rust,
And glory dies, as all things must,
And crumbled stone and shifting dust
Is all Time leaves of Babylon.

"He pointed a shaking finger at the thing on the sand."

The Accursed Isle

By MARY ELIZABETH COUNSELMAN

A hideous fear clutched the hearts of the seven castaways on that accursed isle as they were slain, one by one

LANDERS drove another sliver of shell into the rotting log. The other six men watched with listless eyes, while Clark counted soundlessly.

"Fifteen," he finished aloud. "Fifteen days since the liner went down. Lord! We've been on this God-forsaken island only two weeks! It seems like fifteen

years at least since I ate a good square meal. Mm . . . I think I'd give my corner lot in hell for a rare steak . . . with onions," he said dreamily. "And a pile of French fried potatoes as high as my head!"

"Shut up!" snapped Ellis savagely, scowling at the speaker. "Don't make it no worse than it is!"

They huddled together on the white sand, seven men who would find nothing in common back there in New York, but who were welded together now to cheat their mutual foe—Death. Seven pairs of eyes stared out across the endless expanse of green-blue water to where the sun was just dipping into the sea. Landers glanced about at the group pensively. He had grown to know them well, these companions of his, during those interminable fifteen days. In that mad chaos when the ship went down, the instinct to live had tumbled them into the little lifeboat and put out from the steamer, wallowing heavily in the angry sea. Many were lost, but the rescue freighter that cabled its nearness must have picked up most of the loaded boats. But one remained unaccounted for, Landers pondered bitterly, a boat containing seven men. They had tossed all that terrible night, with Death snatching at them from every towering billow, and when morning came, the boat thumped against a jutting knoll of reef—a bare twenty feet wide, but land. They had scrambled joyously from their leaky craft to cling to the knoll, and as the sun rose higher, the tide receded to reveal a small island about a square mile in area. Floating timbers and dead fish lay upon the sloping beach, and beyond in the soft mud, they found a supply of food—oysters. So they waited, drinking sparingly from their two meager kegs of water and subsisting on the shell-fish; confidently at first, then hopefully, then desperately at last.

By day a flag made from their shirts flapped from the peak of the knoll to beckon chance passing ships to the rescue. By night a small signal-fire burned, fed cautiously by the driftwood salvaged from the beach when the tide went out. At the tide's lowest ebb, the seven burrowed in the soft mud for shell-fish, which they piled about the signal flag, and when the sea rose to cover all save that little knoll, they clung there together till the tide went out.

But seven men, Landers mused, can not live indefinitely on the water in two small kegs, with shell-fish as their sole item of diet. The strain was telling on them all, and each marveled at the others' efforts not to show it. Landers stared covertly at each familiar face in the fading light. There was Ogden, a bluff and good-natured riveter whose winning of a fabulous sum at the big race in Agua Caliente had sent him abroad to satisfy his longing for travel. There was Ellis, sour and petty and illiterate old Texan, whose tiny farm had miraculously spouted oil one day. There was Anderson, likable but secretive, a boy of nineteen with a hunted look that betrayed something of his reason for leaving America. There was Kenshaw, a quiet and cheerfully courageous man of middle age, a doctor bound for the Orient to experiment with Mongol fevers. There was Ritters, as short of temper as he was of stature, by his own admission "the Big Guy's bodyguard"—the "Big Guy" being the notorious beer-baron who had probably escaped in another lifeboat. There was Clark, placid and unmoved in the face of their creeping peril, a globe-trotter with an unquenchable desire to move on and a large enough inheritance to do so. And there was himself, Martin Landers, sent abroad by his firm to straighten out their Paris branch before he could return to—

or send for, according to the time needed for adjustment—his wife and little son.

Oh, they all had their cherished little plans, Landers pondered bitterly—plans so effectively smashed when that fire in the liner's hold had broken out. He sighed and tossed a used match to the signal-fire, with a glance of revulsion at the heap of oysters about the signal flag.

"THE night cometh . . ." murmured Doctor Kenshaw.

"Yeah," said Ogden. "Another night."

"Time to put on the nose-bag," spoke up the diminutive Ritters bitterly. "Pass the pocket-knife, Landers."

Landers tendered the short blade to the speaker. Ritters took it, muttering, and began to pry open one after another of the oyster shells. He tendered one ironically to the doctor. Kenshaw turned his head away with a grimace of repugnance.

"Oh, come, doctor!" sneered the gunman. "The sea-food at our joint is the best in town!"

Ogden spat disgustedly.

"Better take it, sir," the quiet boy at Kenshaw's left urged. "Have to eat . . . something, you know."

The doctor nodded slowly and forced himself to swallow the mollusk, gagging as he did so.

"None for me!" said Ellis vehemently. "Think I'd rather starve, if it's the same to you." He glowered at Landers sullenly. Landers returned the look with the dislike of a good sport for a squawker.

"I still think we oughta try for it," Ellis grumbled. "We must be just off the track of the steamers, and we're sure to run into one sooner or later. Why stick here on this rotten two-by-four island?"

"You know it would be suicide, Ellis," Landers said without emotion. "The boat sprang a slow leak when we hit the reef. But even if we could plug it up, it would mean leaving our food supply. And how can we know how soon a ship——"

"Well, our water supply is gettin' low," reminded the Texan ominously. "If we ain't picked up soon——"

"Aw, go to sleep!" growled Clark, who was already stretched out on the rocks beyond the tide line. "Who's the sentry tonight?"

"I am," replied Anderson hesitantly. "First half, that is, and Ogden relieves me."

"Well, mind you don't go to sleep on us like you done last time," Ellis turned his ill-feeling on the youth. "Like as not you let a ship pass."

The boy's face in the flickering firelight looked distressed.

"Aw, pipe down!" growled Ogden. "The kid's a bare nineteen—he couldn't help fallin' asleep." He yawned noisily, flopped on the sand, and closed his eyes. In a moment he was asleep like a healthy animal.

At length all of them sprawled about the small fire, far enough away to escape its heat in the sultry night, yet near enough to be out of the water when the tide rose. Only Anderson sat up, staring into the dark. There was no sound save the lapping of the waves on the beach, the intermittent crackle of the fire, the heavy breathing of the sleepers. The boy strained to pierce the blackness ahead, scanned the unseen waters for a glimpse of a passing ship, but only the distant stars met his roving gaze.

The lapping of the waves was infinitely soothing. Anderson nodded, jerked awake, nodded again. He rose once to pile more wood on the dying fire, sat back down and dozed once more. Once a muffled gasping sound started him from sleep, but he reminded himself that it could only be one of his companions having a nightmare. His head sank slowly upon his chest. The next he knew, Og-

den's kindly face bent above him tolerantly, bidding him to lie down and sleep. The youth curled up where he sat and slept at once.

EXCITED voices roused him, and some one shaking him violently. His waking thought was that a ship had seen their signal-fire; but Ogden's face, bent above him, held no elation — rather a fixed horror.

"It's Ellis!" he rasped. "He's dead. Something slipped up on him in the night and . . . and tore out his throat," he finished in a rush of words.

The men were surrounding something that lay just beyond the water's edge in the dim gray light of dawn. Clark whistled soundlessly, looked away. Kenshaw was kneeling, examining the still form for any remaining signs of life.

"He's done for," he reported quietly. Landers was bending over the body also, and as Kenshaw looked up, their eyes met and held significantly.

"Some sea-monster, I guess," the doctor added rapidly. "Anybody know the funeral service?"

No one did.

"Well, we'll have to bury him anyway . . . out here." He gestured toward the open sea. "Some of you bail out the boat so we can row out a piece. . . ."

When they rowed back from the makeshift burial at sea, the little island had grown. They made the boat fast and threw themselves on the wet sand. No one spoke. They merely sat there, silent and shaken, until the tide ebbed. The task of gathering driftwood and delving for oysters broke the spell at last, however, and they spoke again in natural tones.

The day crept by at a maddening pace, and it was night again.

"My watch, isn't it?" Landers spoke, driving another sliver of shell into the log. "Clark, you're my relief." Clark nodded, swallowing an oyster, with a wry face.

They curled up at last and slept. Landers squatted beside the fire, staring out into the dark and praying in his unpractised way for that precious blaze of light that would be a rocket from a passing ship. Once he thought he heard a movement behind him in the darkness. He tried to peer into the engulfing shadow beyond the aura from the fire. A swishing sound came from the other side of the island.

Landers stood up and took a step in that direction, but there was nothing to see, and the sound did not come again. He sat back down heavily, with a shrug of his square shoulders.

"Couldn't have been," he muttered half aloud. "I'm crazy . . . but . . . Kenshaw noticed it too . . . aw, we're both crazy!"

Landers had learned to mark the hour by the creeping of the tide up the sloping beach.

He stood up, yawning, and advanced to the group lying as far as possible from the fire—for the night was stifling. He checked off the sleepers. Kenshaw—Ogden—Anderson—Ritters . . . Ellis? He caught himself glancing out to sea, and laughed nervously. Clark . . . but where was Clark? Landers went over the group again, but Clark was not among them.

"Clark!" Landers called softly. Then, when the call smote upon silence, "Clark!" he called more loudly. There was no answer. He raised his voice to a shout. The sleepers mumbled softly and sat up, one by one.

"What the devil!" grumbled Ogden. "Can't you wake him without gettin' the rest of us up?"

Landers' face in the firelight looked strained. Again he met Kenshaw's eye queerly. "He's not here. I can't make

him hear me. . . . Oh, Clark!" he bellowed loudly. But there was no reply.

"Do you suppose——" breathed Anderson, and stopped. But they knew what he had meant to say.

"I don't know," muttered the doctor. "Landers, light a stick of wood. We'll search the island. . . ."

THEY found him not far from the fire. His glassy eyes gleamed in the torchlight, and his throat was horrible to see.

"It got him, too!" breathed Ritters. "What if it——"

"Has anybody a gun?" asked Kenshaw quietly. Once more his eyes met Landers', but he glanced away quickly. "This simply means that whoever keeps watch will have to be armed . . . and keep close guard on the sleepers."

But no one had a gun. There was no weapon at all, it seemed, except the short pocket-knife they used to open oysters.

They buried Clark as they had done Ellis before him. The round of sentries had to be rearranged now, with those two missing. Ogden and the doctor were chosen after a short dispute, and another night was marked on Landers' log-calendar with a bit of shell.

Ogden huddled beside the fire, armed with the pocket-knife, eyes straining to pierce the darkness beyond the firelight. At every small stir made by the sleepers, he would start violently and glance this way and that in apprehension. Once he started to cry out, for he thought he saw something move among the sleeping forms a few yards away. But it was only one of his companions who had stood up and was moving slowly toward the fire. Ogden turned his head and stared again into the darkness out to sea, begrudging any moment he was not on the lookout for a passing ship. At that moment something tight and strong clutched his throat. The sentry tried to cry out, but only an inarticulate gurgle issued from his mouth. He was thrown violently to the cold sand . . . and then spinning lights and darkness fell upon him.

Kenshaw, rising at dawn, found him limp beside the dead fire, throat hideously mangled as Ellis's and Clark's had been. He woke the remaining three men, face very white, eyes wide with a fixed horror that seemed incongruous in a doctor—who knows all man can know of death.

"Landers," he spoke in a hushed whisper, "no sea-monster killed Ogden. Look! Look at those bruises on his neck!" He pointed a shaking finger at the thing on the sand, and expelled a shuddering sigh.

Landers met his eye sharply, and nodded.

"I noticed it before," he said quietly. "And you did, too. But I thought I must be mad——"

Kenshaw stared at the signal-flag unseeingly. "I should have told him. But . . . I thought . . . unless we were very sure . . . it was a horrible thing to say."

"What? What is it?" chattered the youth Anderson, glancing nervously from the doctor's face to Landers'. "What about the bruises?"

"Fingers," said Landers abruptly. "A man's fingers. And his throat," he brought out with a great effort, "—human teeth."

"Savages?" croaked Anderson, sickly green of face.

"We all know," Landers spoke tonelessly, "that there is no living thing on this island but ourselves." He paused and took a deep breath. *"It was one of us."*

Kenshaw gave a shuddering sigh and turned his eyes out toward the open sea. Anderson could only stare frozenly at the speaker. Ritters snorted.

"You're crazy," he said with vehemence. "One of us? Which one? Me, I

guess." He laughed shortly. "I've knocked off many a guy," he told them grimly after a silence, "but not that way. . . ."

"No, no!" Anderson found his voice at last in a hysterical bleat. "No man could do that . . . it's . . . it's too horrible to think about."

"No man in his right mind, son," the doctor spoke gently. "But hunger—the insatiable longing for food, for meat—and monotony, and death staring him in the face, can do awful things to a man's reason. The ancients called it 'possession'—they'd say a demon entered one of our bodies and forced it to do things we could never in our senses do. We would call it—I hardly know what. Cannibalism . . . homicidal mania, accompanied by lapse of memory. The seizure seems to come on after nightfall—it's a queer case—but whoever it is, doesn't remember anything about it when he . . . after it's over."

"But . . . it's hideous!" Anderson's eyes were dilated with horror. "It may be . . . *me.*" He began to sob suddenly like a terrified child. "What can we do? . . . what can we do?" he wailed.

"Steady, son." Kenshaw laid a gentle hand on the boy's shoulder. "Don't let it get you—don't think about it, or we'll . . . we'll all go mad," he jerked out. "We must just . . . watch each other . . . every minute."

THERE was no dispute as to sentry duty that night. No one thought of sleeping. They sat in a group about the fire, in strained silence, each cold with fear of what one of them might suddenly become—of what he himself might become. Ritters produced a pair of dice, forgotten since the wreck, and they gambled for pebbles in desperation for something to keep them from thinking.

It must have been about midnight that the ship passed. They saw its light, and began yelling wildly, piling more wood on the signal-fire, trying to beat out a code message with two stones. But the ship passed on without heeding them. They ran about the island frantically then, weeping and cursing . . . until Kenshaw's low cry brought them to their senses again. He was pointing to something that lay in the water at the island's far edge.

"Anderson!" he groaned. "Poor kid!" The remaining three men stared at each other woodenly. "Did any one . . . watch me the whole time?" the doctor demanded.

Landers and Ritters shook their heads. In the frenzied excitement over the ship's passing, they had each forgotten the horror that hung over them like a dark cloud. And then suddenly Landers pointed to a dark spot on Ritters' soiled shirt-front. Kenshaw leaped forward and grasped the gunman by the arm. The small man turned deathly white.

"You . . . you mean . . . it was *me?*" choked Ritters. "How . . . how——"

Landers grasped his other arm and indicated the stained shirt in grim triumph. "Blood on your shirt, Ritters. It's the first trace that has been left . . . after. . . . You got it there when you . . . Anderson," he mercifully left the words unsaid.

"Naw!" Ritters whispered desperately. "That ain't how I got it there! Look! I scratched my chest carrying wood to the fire . . . aw, hey, you can't think that I——"

"We can't take the chance, man," said Landers firmly. "We're going to tie you up until a ship comes." Ritters stared at them sickly. "Don't take it so—you didn't know. Couldn't help it. You're a sick man. . . ."

They trussed him hand and foot with their belts and bound him to a jutting bit

of reef despite his pleas. And that night they slept without fear.

But morning brought a torrent of deeper horror than before rushing upon them. Ritters, bound and helpless as a baby, was the fifth victim. Like the rest he stared glassily at the sky, throat mangled as by the fangs of a wolf.

Landers met the doctor's frozen gaze grimly. "Well, Kenshaw," he spoke without inflection, "it's between us now."

Horror blazed in the doctor's eyes. "It's . . . unthinkable," he muttered. "One of us. You . . . *or me.*" His lips twitched violently.

"Steady." Landers gripped his arm hard. "Don't let it get you, doc. There is still another possibility—some one else hidden on the island in some cave we haven't found." But both men knew that when the tide came in, any living creature that might be on the island must crouch with them on the small rise, or drown.

The day seemed winged, so much did they dread the coming of night. As the tide receded, they went about their task of gathering driftwood and digging for oysters. They talked incessantly, as though they feared the silence that swooped upon them when they ceased speaking. And as the sun sank below the horizon, the two survivors began to watch each other with increasing nervousness.

"I'll take this load of wood to the knoll," the doctor spoke with studied calm, squinting at the rim of sun above the sea-line. "Shall I open the oysters?" Landers nodded and handed him the pocket-knife.

WHAT happened next was too quickly done for the eye to follow. With a quick snake-like gesture, Kenshaw slashed his left wrist well to the bone, transferred the blade, and slashed his right wrist in like manner. Landers sprang forward with a cry, but his companion smiled stonily and waved him back. Blood spurted from the gashes over the doctor's muscular hands—hands so skilful at the stanching of blood — and dripped upon the white sand where he stood.

"I couldn't stand it, old man—I'm sorry," he spoke quietly, and as Landers began to rip his soiled handkerchief into strips, "No, no! Don't try to stanch it—it wouldn't do any good. I've severed the arteries. It was the most painless way out."

Landers passed a shaking hand over his moist forehead. "How could you do a thing like that, Kenshaw?" he groaned. "There must be some other way out——"

Doctor Kenshaw shook his head gravely. "This is the only way, Landers. You see that, I know." He was breathing hard as blood pumped from the gashes at every beat of his heart. He sank to the sand weakly, a bitter little smile curving his lips. "I couldn't stand to know," he gasped. "And we'd have found out sooner or later. . . . One of us . . . would know. And"—he sank upon his back, unable to support himself longer — "I couldn't take that knowledge into eternity with me, Landers. I'd rather die . . . not knowing . . . couldn't stand to know . . . I . . . was the . . . last man——" His voice trailed to a weak whisper, died away.

A familiar sound rose suddenly from the silence. Landers stood frozen with incredulity for a moment; then he whipped about and stared out to sea. In the dim twilight the clumsy form of a freighter was passing close to the island. Landers forgot the dying man, forgot everything in that instant of insane joy. He lit the signal-fire quickly and piled it high with wood that the scorching sun had dried. He waved his arms and screamed frantically, snatched up the flag

and waved it aloft, waded waist-deep into the sea in foolish anxiety. But the ship had sighted their white flag, and already a boat was putting out from her toward the island.

Landers stumbled back to the doctor's side, sobbing with relief. He lifted the prone figure and shook Kenshaw violently, shouting the miracle over and over. But Doctor Kenshaw could not hear. The open knife was still clutched in his limp hand.

As the truth became apparent, a slow horror crept over Landers, chilling him to the soul. In that one madly joyous moment of seeing the rescue ship, he had forgotten something — something that swept over him now like an icy tide.

One of them—himself or the dead man at his feet—had hideously murdered five men, had torn out the throats of his five companions like a ravening beast. One of them—but which one? *Which one?*

Landers passed a trembling hand over his eyes. An impulse seized him to shout a warning to that approaching boat, to scream at them to go back and leave him there to die.

But suppose it was Kenshaw, lying now in a pool of his own blood shed in retribution for those five unthinkable crimes? Then he, Landers, had a right to go back and live among men. But . . . suppose it was *not* the doctor? Suppose he, Martin Landers, had sated his craving for meat by hideously slaughtering those five men? He thought of the coming night, on board the rescue freighter. He saw in imagination a stark figure—perhaps even one of those cheerfully waving men in the approaching boat—stretched out on a bloody deck, his throat mangled as by the teeth of a savage beast.

For there was no way he could be sure this madness would leave him—if, indeed, *he* was the man-monster—after he had left this accursed island. And home again, with an open door leading to little Marty's crib, to Helen's bed beside it . . . Landers groaned aloud. And even if those terrible seizures came upon him no more—*there were still Ellis . . . Clark . . . Ogden . . . Anderson . . . Ritters. . . .*

Once more he glanced at the lifeless form at his feet. Yes, Kenshaw had taken the only way out. In any event, the doctor would have been killed or left with the mute evidence of a sixth mangled corpse—and either way, death was the only answer. If only he had stayed the knife-blow a few minutes longer, until the freighter blew her signal of rescue! But no—the fact would still have remained that one of them . . . one of them . . . yet if the madness returned, they would have caught the maniac on the ship, chained him like the wild thing he was, and the other man could have gone free. But now . . .

Landers stared dully at the oncoming boat. He could see the men's faces now, smiling encouragement, could hear their yells of reassurance. A bleak smile twisted his mouth.

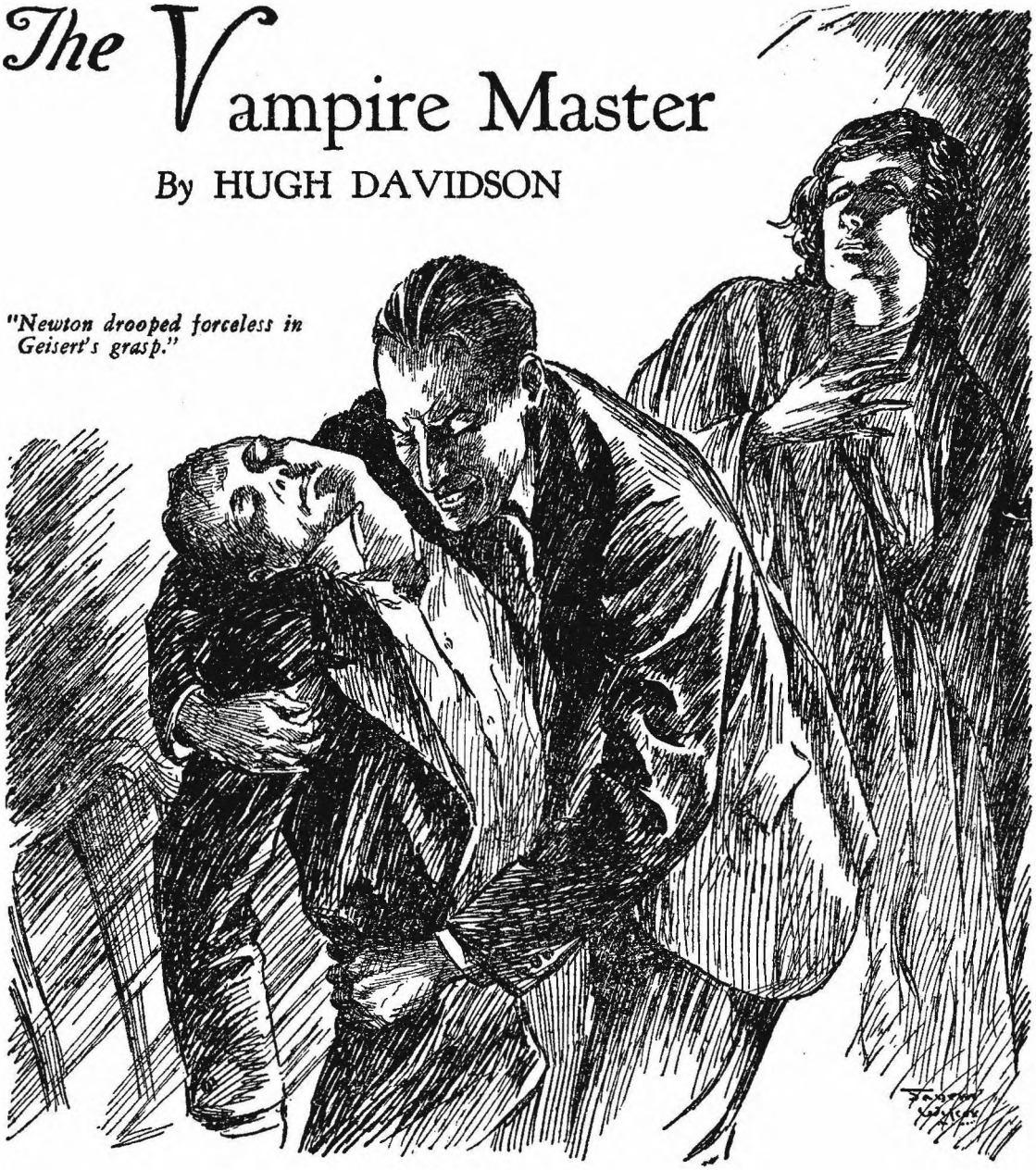
"I'm the last man," he said aloud. "The last of seven." Cowardly of Kenshaw to leave him with that black question hanging over his head! It came to him clearly, like a sentence of death, that he could never know . . . unless at the cost of another poor devil's life. Landers bent slowly, loosened the pocket-knife from Kenshaw's limp fingers.

"Ahoy, mate!" shouted a man standing in the prow of the lifeboat. "We're a-comin'!"

Landers did not return the greeting. He tested the discolored blade in his hand with a calloused thumb. It was not very sharp—but sharp enough. . . .

The Vampire Master

By HUGH DAVIDSON



"Newton drooped forceless in Geisert's grasp."

A thrilling novel of corpses that would not stay dead, and a gruesome horror in the hills of New York

The Story Thus Far

"VAMPIRISM is going on in my village!" So Doctor John Dale, specialist in evil, and his assistant, Harley Owen, who tells the story, were told by Doctor William Henderson of Maysville, a village in the New York Catskills. Doctor Dale had explained to Henderson that vampires were dead men and women reanimated by evil forces at night, sucking the blood of the living and making them vampires also when they die. Then Henderson made his astonishing statement.

He described how one of his patients, Allene Ralton, wife of the wealthy James Ralton of Maysville and mother of Olivia and Virginia Ralton, had died from a

strange continuous loss of blood. Now the oldest daughter, Olivia, is losing blood in the same way and there are vampire-punctures on her throat. Henderson begs Doctor Dale to come to Maysville and combat this black vampire evil.

Doctor Dale, questioning him further, is interested when Henderson mentions a certain Gerritt Geisert recently returned to Maysville and living in one of the long-abandoned Colonial manors in the hills. He agrees to go to Maysville to investigate. And when Henderson has gone he shows to Owen in an old book an account of a Gerritt Geisert who was forced to flee from the Maysville region two hundred years before as a vampire. Now a Gerritt Geisert has returned!

Doctor Dale and Owen reach Maysville and go with Henderson to the Ralton estate between the village and the hills. There after questioning Olivia Ralton, Doctor Dale tells James Ralton, her father, that undoubtedly Olivia is victim of a vampire. Dale, Owen, Ralton, Henderson and Edward Harmon, Olivia's fiancé, wait in Olivia's darkened room that night for the vampire to come, the girl having been given a sleeping-drug.

The vampire does come and proves to be Allene Ralton, Olivia's own dead mother! Dying as a vampire's victim, she has become a vampire herself, and has been returning dead to suck Olivia's blood. She escapes the watchers, repelled by the power of their crosses against the evil forces that animate her dead body.

Hardly has this happened when there calls at the Ralton mansion — Gerritt Geisert! Strange and somewhat sinister in appearance, his age impossible to guess, Geisert is welcomed as a friend by James Ralton and Henderson, but Doctor Dale is on his guard, questions him. He finally charges Geisert with being the same Gerritt Geisert who had vampirized the region two hundred years before, returning to work evil anew, and posing as a descendant of himself! Geisert, unmasked, attacks them, and though ordinary weapons are powerless against the vampire, Doctor Dale's cross repels him. But he escapes into the night, boasting that he had been the one that had vampirized Allene Ralton and that he will have many more victims.

Doctor Dale says that undoubtedly Gerritt Geisert is the master vampire who has unloosed the vampire evil again there, and that his coffin and body must lie in the old Geisert manor back in the hills by day. He says that before dealing with Geisert, though, they must go the next morning to the cemetery where Allene Ralton lies entombed and destroy her vampire-life in the only way possible, by driving a stake through her body and severing her head.

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5. *The Bodies that Walked*

"THERE'S the cemetery ahead," said Edward Harmon. "See the gates? And that's the caretaker's lodge inside them."

Doctor Dale nodded. "Better stop at the lodge a moment," he said.

Harmon was driving the car in which Dale and James Ralton and Doctor Henderson and I had travelled northwestward from Maysville through the bright sunlight of early morning.

In that sunny countryside, so pleasant everywhere to the eye except for the dark hills westward, our encounters of the preceding night with the vampire Allene Ralton and the master vampire Gerritt Geisert seemed more like a dreadful dream than reality. But the green, monument-dotted expanse of the cemetery

through whose gates we now were passing was a reminder of the reality of that and of our mission here.

Harmon stopped the car before the caretaker's stone cottage, and a tall, iron-haired man who was sharpening tools came forward to us.

"We've come to enter my family vault, Farley," James Ralton told him. "Doctor Dale here is working on my late wife's death."

Farley looked queerly at us. "You won't be opening Mrs. Ralton's sepulcher, will you?" he asked anxiously.

"That is our intention," Henderson told him. "Why do you ask?"

"Well, it doesn't seem like a good thing to do," said Farley stumblingly.

"That's for us to say," said Henderson sharply. "Drive on, Edward."

Harmon seemed to know his way through the cemetery's winding drives, for in a few minutes he halted the car at the foot of a green slope at whose crest stood the Ralton tomb. We got out, I carrying the clanking bag of stakes and tools, and climbed silently up the grassy slope toward the vault.

It was a small square structure of gray stone, windowless and with two heavy iron doors closing its front. Over the top in deep-cut letters was the name "Ralton." We stared a moment in silence, James Ralton's face pale and Doctor Henderson more than a little nervous. Then Doctor Dale turned to Ralton.

"It might be best, Ralton," he said gravely, "for you to stay outside. The rest of us can do what is needed to your wife's body."

"No, I'll go with you," James Ralton said. "I'm not afraid to see."

"But it will be rather terrible," Dale told him. "The sight alone of your wife in the dead-alive state would be enough, but when we drive the stake through her heart and sever her head it will be ghastly."

"I know that it's for Allene's own sake we're doing it," said Ralton. "Don't worry, doctor — my courage won't fail me."

"Then let's get started," Dale said.

Ralton nodded wordlessly and with a hand that trembled inserted the big brass key into the heavy lock of the iron doors.

There was a grating click and then the doors swung open. We all hesitated for a moment save Doctor Dale, who stepped confidently inside the vault. I followed with the bag of tools, Ralton and Doctor Henderson and Harmon behind me.

The vault held on each side a tier of four stone shelves or slabs, with a narrow space between them in which we stood. The four shelves on our right held four stone sepulchers, a metal nameplate on the side of each, while in the tier to our left was but one sepulcher, in the lowest shelf.

James Ralton pointed to it and we saw that on its metal plate was engraved the name "Allene Ralton," followed by two dates. Doctor Dale examined the sepulcher, testing the weight of its heavy stone or artificial-stone lid, then nodded to me to produce our tools.

I did so and he selected two metal bars, which we inserted under the edge of the sepulcher's lid. I saw that Ralton was very white, and my own heart was beating faster as Doctor Dale and I pried up with the levers. The heavy lid rose, swung back against the wall. We five gazed tensely into the sepulcher.

Then from all of us came exclamations. The sepulcher was empty! There was in it no sign of Allene Ralton's coffin!

"EMPTY!" Doctor Dale cried. "You're sure that Allene Ralton's coffin was placed in this sepulcher?"

"Of course it was!" said James Ralton dazedly. "I saw it put inside at the funeral! Her coffin—her body—has been stolen!"

"Stolen?" exclaimed Henderson. "You mean that body-snatchers——"

"No!" said Doctor Dale, his eyes snapping. "It was not grave-robbers who took Allene Ralton's body and coffin! It was Gerritt Geisert!"

"Geisert?" cried Edward Harmon. "But why should he——"

"Can't you see?" said Doctor Dale. "Gerritt Geisert had vampirized Allene Ralton and knew she would be vampire and subject to him after she died. He feared that when it was discovered she was vampire some one might come here with stake and steel to end her activities. To prevent that he must have come here and taken her coffin to hide where none could find it!"

"Gerritt Geisert did that?" Henderson cried. "Then what can we do? If we can't find Allene's body we can't——"

"We can't release her from the vampire state!" Dale finished for him. "We *must* find her body if we are to free her of this dreadful bondage and save Olivia from her!"

"Wouldn't Gerritt Geisert have taken her coffin out where his own must lie, out at the old Geisert place in the hills?" I advanced.

"It seems probable," Doctor Dale admitted. "But the first thing to do is to find out how and when he took Allene Ralton's coffin from here."

"Farley!" exclaimed Ralton. "The caretaker! He acted so queer there when we came in about this tomb—he must know something!"

"You must be right," said Dale, alert. "There's nothing we can do here now—we'll go back out and question him."

We locked the vault and drove back out through the cemetery to stop again at the caretaker's lodge. Farley seemed to have been awaiting us, for he jumped up nervously as we got out of the car.

"Farley, there's no reason for wasting words," said Doctor Dale incisively. "You knew Allene Ralton's body was gone. Who took it and when?"

"Doctor, I swear I had no hand in it!" said Farley hoarsely. "If I could have stopped it I would have, but I couldn't!"

"When was Mrs. Ralton's body taken?" Dale asked him keenly.

"The night after the funeral," answered Farley. "And the body wasn't taken—*it walked out of here itself!*"

"What do you mean? Did you see this happen?"

"Yes, doctor, I did," Farley said. "The night after the funeral I was awakened before midnight by a sound outside. I looked out of the window and in the moonlight saw two figures going out the cemetery-gates. One of them was a tall man in black whose strength must have been prodigious, for he carried unaided a coffin that I recognized as Mrs. Ralton's.

"The other figure was Mrs. Ralton herself, dressed in her white shroud, walking out with the man as though obeying him implicitly, her face deathly white in the moonlight and her eyes gleaming red in her white face. They passed out into the road and disappeared from sight.

"I was so stunned that it was morning before I dared go to the Ralton vault. I found it open and the coffin and body of Mrs. Ralton gone from her sepulcher. I was frantic, for I knew no one would believe me if I told them what I had seen; so I closed the sepulcher and vault in the hope that no one would open them and find coffin and body gone."

Doctor Dale thought a moment, then asked Farley, "You didn't recognize the

man who carried the coffin of Mrs. Ralton?"

"No, doctor—he was just a dark, tall shape in the half-darkness, and I only saw him a moment."

"You've not seen him again? There's been nothing else strange happened here since then?"

Farley hesitated and Doctor Dale seized at once on his hesitation. "What happened? You'd best tell everything, Farley, for your own good."

Farley came to a resolution. "Doctor, I *did* see that man again, a week later. *He came back here and went out with another coffin and body!*"

"What?" cried Dale. "Another body besides that of Mrs. Ralton? Whose body was it?"

"Young Arthur Newton's," Farley answered. "He died a week after Mrs. Ralton, and the night after his funeral his body went the same way!"

"Arthur Newton?" repeated Dale. "Who would that be?"

"Why, Arthur was the last of the Newtons, an old family here," Henderson said. "He was well liked and was engaged to marry Alice Wilsey, daughter of Mrs. Wilsey whose estate is not far from the Ralton one. But he died of some illness two or three weeks ago. Doctor Jackson was physician in the case."

"And you saw this Arthur Newton's coffin and body go in the same way as Mrs. Ralton's?" Dale asked Farley.

"Yes, I did. I had not slept well after that first business, as you can imagine, and the night of Newton's funeral I was sure I heard movements outside. I looked from the window, and though the moon wasn't up I could make out in the starlight two shapes again, coming through the cemetery toward the gates here.

"One was the tall, dark man I had seen before. He was carrying another coffin, Newton's coffin, and this time I could see his eyes too were crimson-glowing. And so were Newton's, for the other figure walking with him was Arthur Newton, who had been buried that day! They passed out of the cemetery. In the morning I found Newton's grave had been dug open. I filled it in again and told nobody, for the same reason as before."

Farley's face was deathly pale as he finished. Doctor Dale's features were as grave as ever I had seen them.

"Farley, you did wrong to say nothing," he told the caretaker, "but it's understandable. We'll say nothing at present, and you're to keep these things entirely to yourself. You understand?"

Farley promised silence and we got back into the car. "Drive back in to Maysville, Harmon," said Doctor Dale. "We're going to see this Doctor Jackson who attended young Arthur Newton in his last illness."

DOCTOR JACKSON was just dismissing a patient when we reached his office in Maysville. He was a hearty middle-aged man whose genial manner sobered a little when Dale explained that we desired a little information about Newton's illness.

He could tell us only that it had seemed a sort of acute anemia that had wasted Newton's strength away until he died. He had noticed two punctures on Newton's neck but had thought them insect-bites. He had heard Newton rave of red eyes shining and some dark being he feared, in his last weakness.

"It was tragic for a young fellow like that to die so suddenly," Jackson said as we were leaving. "We all felt badly, and this Alice Wilsey who was his fiancée was terribly broken up over it."

"No doubt," said Doctor Dale. "Well,

thank you a lot for the information, doctor." We went back to the car where Ralton and Harmon waited.

"Well?" asked Ralton anxiously.

"Arthur Newton died as a victim of vampirism, all right," Dale said. "He was one of Gerritt Geisert's victims, without doubt, and after death Geisert came to the cemetery and took his coffin and led Newton, now of the dead-alive, out with him as he did your wife."

"Then that makes two vampires subject to Gerritt Geisert's will!" Henderson whispered. "Allene Ralton and Arthur Newton, besides Geisert, the master vampire himself! Dale, what are we to do?"

"We must act at once," Dale said decisively, "to find out where the bodies of Geisert and his two vampires lie by day, and end their activities."

"What do you mean? That you're going——"

"I mean," said Doctor Dale, "that there is no time to lose. This afternoon Owen and Harmon and I must go out to the Geisert place!"

6. *Geisert Manor*

HENDERSON paled, and James Ralton's eyes widened. "Out to the Geisert place?" he repeated. "Then we'll go with you!"

Dale shook his head. "We three will be enough, if we can find the coffins and bodies of the three vampires, and if we can't find them it would be no better to have two more in our party.

"Besides, there is work for you here. I want you, Henderson, to try to find out through this Doctor Jackson and any others you know whether there are any more cases of supposed anemia around here, any more people who might be victims of vampirism.

"As for you, Ralton, you had best stay at your home and watch over Olivia in case we are not back by tonight."

Harmon nodded. "He's right, Mr. Ralton. I'll feel better if you stay to watch Olivia."

Ralton gave in at that. We let Doctor Henderson out of the car, receiving his tense admonition to be careful, then drove out of Maysville westward to the Ralton estate.

When Ralton had got out there, Harmon headed the car toward the hills westward. It was well into the afternoon by then, and the sun was almost half-way down from the zenith, when Harmon stopped the car at the edge of the hills.

The little-used road had been getting much rougher and that portion ahead that led into the hills was overgrown and impassable to a car. Harmon had driven the car off the road into a nook of trees, and now we started on on foot.

The half-obliterated road led for a mile westward into the hills, then turned southwestward down a long, narrow valley. On either side of this rose steep forested slopes, somber masses of pine and hemlock interspersed with oak and elm.

We glimpsed a clearing, partly overgrown, back up on one of the slopes, and the decayed wooden walls of an ancient, high-roofed building.

"The old Van Broot place," Edward Harmon said. "There are a dozen or more old manors like that along this valley—no one's lived in them for a century or more. The old Geisert place is down near the valley's end."

As we progressed down the valley Harmon pointed out nine or ten more such ancient and decaying manor-houses, perched on the steep sides of the valley and some almost hidden by clinging vines and wild vegetation. The names of their original owners Harmon told us recalled

Colonial days—the Elphin house, the Growder house, the Ten Eltt place and the Salton place and a half-dozen others.

Absolute silence brooded over all of them. I remembered what Doctor Dale had read to me from the old book on wizardry, how after Gerritt Geisert two hundred years before had preyed evilly upon the people of this district, none would live in its houses. These, then, were those houses deserted two hundred years before.

And they had never been inhabited since—the dark shadow Gerritt Geisert had cast across this valley clung to it even during his absence. And now that he had returned, his vampire-life sustained elsewhere in the world during the long interval, that black shadow was reaching out again, out beyond the valley this time.

MY THOUGHTS were interrupted as Harmon stopped. He pointed to a structure half visible in a clearing up on the wooded slope to our right.

"The Geisert place," he whispered.

"All right, let's get up there," said Doctor Dale, his voice low. "We've not too much time—sunset will be here in a few hours."

We left the overgrown road and struggled up the slope, through the underbrush that choked the steep slope's surface under the trees, moving in semi-shadow due to the thickness of the branches overhead.

Scratched and with clothing torn we emerged finally into the hundred-yard circle that long ago had been cleared from the thick forest on the slope, now overgrown with brush and small trees. The site had been selected because there the slope was less steep, a small level ledge on the hillside, in fact.

At the center of this overgrown clearing stood a long, thick-walled manor-house of rotting wood. It was of one and one-half stories in its central portion and of one story at each end, the high, pointed roof decayed but intact.

Rotting shutters closed the window-openings and the massive wooden door was closed. We could glimpse ruins of outbuildings farther back in the clearing but our main interest was in the house. It lay utterly silent in the late-afternoon sunlight as we stared at it.

Doctor Dale led the way across the clearing toward its door, Harmon and I following closely. He turned at the door.

"If Gerritt Geisert and Newton and Allene Ralton are really here," he said, "they will be lying in the death-like state of vampires by day, and we can destroy them. But we must do so before sunset, for with sunset, wherever they are, they'll surely awake."

I looked up at the descending orb. "We've at least two hours," I said. "It ought to be plenty."

Dale pressed on the old-fashioned iron latch and the heavy door swung inward with a harsh creaking of hinges. We stepped inside.

We stood in a long room lit by narrow rays of sunlight that entered through cracks in the window-shutters. There were in it a few ancient-looking pieces of rude wooden furniture, a table and chairs, and nothing else. The place had the musty smell of extreme antiquity.

The room went up to the peak of the roof, unceilinged, save that at one end was a storage-loft of the old-fashioned type made of boards laid across the rafters at that end of the room. There were doors to the extremities of the house at the room's ends.

"Nothing here, anyway," I said. "Where would the coffins of Gerritt Geisert and the others most likely be?"

"Heaven knows," Doctor Dale said.

"We'll have to search the place—that loft first."

Harmon and I hoisted him up and he investigated the loft briefly, then lowered himself again to our side.

"Nothing up there—we'll search the rest of the house."

We went thoroughly through the long room, even peering up into the ancient fireplace, but it was evident the coffins and bodies we sought were not in it. Nor were they in the smaller room of the house's northern end.

We went back and investigated the other small room at the southern end of the structure, but it too held nothing but a few rotting fragments of ancient furniture. Dale, though, found in it a trap-door leading to the cellar, and laid it back on the floor.

A flight of decaying wooden steps led downward into the cellar, which was so dark that instinctively Harmon and I recoiled from it. Not so Doctor Dale. He drew a flashlight from his pocket and sent the beam quivering down into the cellar's darkness.

"The coffins and bodies would be down in this cellar more likely than anywhere else, I think," he said. "Come on."

Gently he descended the rotting steps, and Harmon and I followed him. Once on the cellar's floor he flashed the beam about.

THE cellar extended under the whole main or central portion of the ancient house. Its walls and floor were of massive blocks and slabs of rough-hewn stone. Large square wooden posts still in fair preservation supported the beams of the structure overhead.

Dale flashed his little beam all around the dark place, I standing beside him and Harmon, with the sack of tools still in my grasp. My heart sank as I saw that the cellar was quite empty. Our search was definitely a failure.

"Nothing here, it seems," said Doctor Dale finally.

"What about those ruined outbuildings?" Edward Harmon asked.

Dale nodded. "We'll go out and look through them."

We reascended the stair, closing the trap, and went out to the rotting ruins of the ancient outbuildings. For almost an hour we searched through them, but in them was no sign of the coffins we sought.

We went back into the house, looking helplessly about. The sun was now declining westward, its level rays searching through the shutter-cracks, to illumine the musty room in which we stood.

"The coffins and bodies can't be here," I said. "But God knows where Gerritt Geisert has hidden them."

"Maybe in one of the other old deserted manors in this valley?" Harmon suggested. "The old Van Broot or Elphin place?"

Doctor Dale shook his head. "I still think the coffins and bodies of Geisert and Allene Ralton and young Newton are somewhere here. And there's a way we can find out for sure."

"What is it?" I asked. "We've looked everywhere."

"We can hide here in the house, up in that loft," Doctor Dale said, "and wait until after sunset! If Gerritt Geisert's body and the others are actually hidden somewhere here, they'll wake and come forth after sunset. We can wait until they go back to their hiding-place as they must before sunrise, then go there after sunrise, uncover their bodies and use stake and steel upon them!"

The blood drove from my heart at such a plan. "Dale, what if they discovered us in the loft—if Gerritt Geisert saw us?"

Dale's face was grave. "In that case I

doubt whether any of us could save himself. Even with our crosses to defend us, the three vampires would be too much for us, since they need only to suck a single drop of blood to make us their victims, subject to their will. That is what Geisert tried to do when he attacked you and me last night.

"Nevertheless I think it the best plan for us to follow. There is no reason why they should suspect our presence here or discover us, and it may be that their bodies are not hidden here at all."

"I say to do it!" said Edward Harmon eagerly. "No risk is too great for a chance at that devil Geisert!"

I nodded agreement. "I'm with you too, Dale."

"Remember, though," Doctor Dale warned, "no matter what happens, if the vampires do appear here, you are to make no movement against them. That would lose all for us—only when morning comes can we act."

As we assented he said, "Then let's get up into that loft now. The sun will be setting within a half-hour."

Dale and I lifted Harmon into the loft, and he then helped both of us to scramble up, I taking with me the clanking sack of tools. Once in the loft, we drew as far as possible back into its shadow, crouching back against the room's northern wall.

From there we could see almost all of the big room below without ourselves being seen. Warned by Doctor Dale, we took positions as comfortable as possible to prevent our making any betraying movements later. Then we lay waiting in silence, watching the level shafts of sunlight that entered the shutter-cracks slowly fade and darken as the sun set.

Utter silence held all about us as the room darkened with the setting of the sun. The silence and gathering darkness made unearthly our wait there in the dark loft of the ancient house—a wait for the master vampire who had inhabited this place two hundred years before, and for Allene Ralton and Arthur Newton, whom he had made vampires evil as himself.

As darkness fell outside it was relieved by the light of the moon, already in the sky, and the darkness of the room below us was broken by bright shafts of moonlight that slanted down through gaping apertures in the eastern window-shutters. The moon-shafts were brightening, the contrasting darkness deepening, when we heard a sound.

It came from the cellar below, a grating, clashing sound as of stone scraping against stone! Harmon quivered, half raised, but Doctor Dale's warning hand made him crouch down again with us. We listened with nerves taut. Some one was moving about in the cellar!

There was a momentary silence and then came the sound of slow steps, ascending the rotting stair that led up from the cellar! They paused for an instant, an instant in which we crouched even lower in the dark loft's shadow. Then from the room at the house's southern end came a loud jarring sound as the trap-door into the cellar was thrown back.

7. *The Master of the Dead-Alive*

WE WAITED with hearts beating rapidly. There came steps from the southern room, echoing loudly through the ancient, long-dead house. I felt Doctor Dale and Harmon tense beside me, then felt Harmon move involuntarily as Gerritt Geisert stepped into the moonlit room below us.

His tall dark figure, cloak hanging black around it, paused. His white face was clear in a shaft of the moonlight, with that dread crimson light in his eyes

and the white, gleaming teeth half-visible behind the red lips. He looked around intently, and for a moment his eyes surveyed the shadows of the loft in which we crouched.

But he turned as two other figures stepped into the room after him. One was Allene Ralton, still dressed in her white shroud, her dead-white face still holding its expression of mocking cruelty and evil. The other was a fair-haired young man in dark clothing, who would ordinarily have been handsome but whose face had the same unhuman evil as Allene Ralton's. I knew that this was Arthur Newton, the dead youth who was now as much vampire as Allene Ralton or Geisert himself.

Gerritt Geisert looked from those two around the room again, his brows drawing together. "It comes to me that some one has been here," he said. "I feel the presence here of powers inimical to us."

"Maybe, O master, some of those fools from the village have been here?" said Allene Ralton.

"I do not think they would dare come here," said Geisert frowningly. He laughed silently. "They've learned that it was not for nothing that Gerritt Geisert was feared two centuries ago."

"You will let us go forth tonight, master?" queried Allene Ralton pleadingly, ingratiatingly.

"We can go, can we not, for the blood —the life?" asked Arthur Newton, his manner toward Geisert fawning.

"Yes, you can go, and I go partly with you on business of my own," Gerritt Geisest said. "But beware of entering a trap, Allene, when you visit your daughter. That Dale who almost trapped us last night is dangerous, I think. And you, Newton, be careful too."

"We will, master," they answered eagerly together.

"Then come—we go," said Geisert. "And see that you are not too long in returning here."

He opened the door and passed out into the darkness, the other two following him like hounds following a huntsman. We heard their steps receding outside, and then silence. In that silence we crouched, making no movement, daring not even to whisper to each other, since at any moment Geisert might return.

My thoughts were in a whirl. The coffins and bodies of the three vampires had been hidden in the cellar, after all! That was indisputable now, but the cellar had been empty when we searched it. Had Gerritt Geisert contrived some cunning hiding-place there? It must be—I remembered the clashing of stone we had heard when they emerged.

Where now had they gone? Geisert on some business of his own, as he had said, perhaps to reconnoiter some new victim for himself in the village, perhaps even to spy on our own movements. Allene Ralton was headed toward the Ralton estate, without doubt, to prey upon Olivia Ralton and suck the blood we had interrupted her in taking on the preceding night. I could feel Edward Harmon tense beside me from that knowledge, but remembered the protection we had put at Olivia's windows, and the watch her father had promised to keep upon her.

But where had Arthur Newton gone? Had he then some victim of his own in the village, upon whom he was preying? He was now a vampire like the others, so that too must be. What hapless person in the village was young Newton sucking blood and life from?

THE shafts of moonlight in the room circled slowly in an arc as the hours passed. Time seemed endlessly drawn out. Now the moon-shafts came through

the western windows and I knew the night was fast passing. In a whisper I suggested to Doctor Dale and Harmon that they watch while I descended to the cellar to investigate, but Doctor Dale shook his head. Any moment now might see the vampires' return.

The night would soon be over, indeed, and I was estimating that not more than an hour remained before sunrise, when a step sounded outside and the door opened. Gerritt Geisert entered, alone. He looked about for the other two, then paced back and forth in the room as though awaiting them, a strange black figure in the broken moonlight.

Geisert seemed uneasy and I guessed that somehow he sensed our presence, was still aware of inimical forces near by. I prayed inwardly each time I saw his red eyes glance restlessly this way or that, that no idea of searching the place would come to him. He seemed becoming definitely uneasy, though, when there were other steps outside and Allene Ralton and young Arthur Newton entered.

The woman vampire's face was stormy, hellish. "They were on the watch for me!" she cried. "They had safeguards of garlic about Olivia's room and two of them sat in that room with her!"

"That is this Dale's work," Gerritt Geisert said. "Well, Olivia shall be vampire and one of us yet, despite his foolish safeguards. But you, Newton, how did you fare?"

Newton smiled and with creeping horror I saw that his lips were red-smeared. "I fared well enough," he said.

"You drank your fill of blood?" Geisert demanded.

Newton seemed to hedge. "I did not get very much," he said complainingly. "I was afraid of discovery—I drank but little——"

"You lie!" Gerritt Geisert told him "You drank deep of blood tonight and now you try to cheat me, master of both of you, of my due!"

He was towering in anger and both Arthur Newton and Allene Ralton shrank from him in terror, for with eyes blazing hell-crimson and white face distorted he was truly a terrific spectacle.

Gerritt Geisert stretched out his hand imperiously toward Newton. "Come!" he commanded. "You know well that as master I have my due to take of you!"

Newton came slowly, whiningly. "But I got so little—we are always thirsty because you take it from us—we get so little——"

Geisert silenced him with a look, grasped Newton's neck and tore open his collar, exposing two red marks on his throat. He plunged his head downward, his mouth on the punctures in Newton's throat, and sucked strongly. Newton drooped forceless in his grasp.

A haze of terror held my mind at that awful sight. Geisert, the master vampire, sucking from the vampire Newton the blood that Newton in turn had sucked from his victim! In truth Gerritt Geisert was the vampire master, who needed not to seek victims now for himself but sent these vampires of his forth and when they returned with the blood of their victims, sucked it in turn from them!

The spectacle was terrible. Geisert sucked on and the transient color that had filled Arthur Newton's face faded as the blood that had given it to him was taken from him. Allene Ralton stood by and watched Geisert feed on her fellow with her face an inferno of unholy, frustrated desire.

Geisert at last straightened his hand from Newton's throat, his own face swollen and red while Newton as he staggered loose was again white and waxen.

As Geisert straightened, a few drops of the blood on his lips dripped to the floor. Like a cat Allene Ralton darted down to lick them up! And Newton was after her, the two fighting like snarling beasts for those few ruby drops, while above them towered Gerritt Geisert, gorged with blood, his eyes crimson lights of hellish, satisfied desire.

"Enough of this!" he snarled at the quarrelling two, and Allene Ralton and Newton straightened fearfully. "There will be blood in plenty for you soon."

"But what good does the blood do us when you take almost all of it from us?" complained Newton.

"There will be more of you to go forth for victims soon," Geisert said, "and then I will leave each of you more blood for himself. And as time goes on we will become more and more numerous, will do what I was prevented from doing here two centuries ago, will spread our power over all this region.

"Yes, I will be vampire master of all this region!" There was a strange splendor in Geisert's bearing. "I will have victims by hundreds, thousands — will have vampires going forth in scores and hundreds to bring back to me, their master, the blood of their victims. The blood of thousands—for me!"

His face was so awful that even Dale quivered involuntarily beside Harmon and myself, all else forgotten in the terrible spell of this hell-fiend.

"But enough," said Gerritt Geisert to the two vampires. "Back to your coffins now—it will soon be sunrise."

"You will let us forth again tomorrow night, though?" asked Allene Ralton wheedlingly, and Geisert nodded.

"There will be work for all of us tomorrow night," he said. "And victims in plenty later—blood in plenty. But now to your coffins."

With Allene Ralton and Arthur Newton going ahead of him, Geisert moved out of the room into the room at the house's southern end. We heard them descending the rotten stairs into the cellar, heard Gerritt Geisert closing the trap-door after them.

Then a moment later came the grating clash of stone against stone again. Then there was silence once more, a silence in which Dale and Harmon and I lay still in our loft without daring to move. The moonlight shafts were fading now and we sensed the approach of dawn. At last its pale light began to enter.

In moments more, bright fingers of rosy light were entering through the cracks of the eastward shutters as the sun rose. Then only it was that we moved, stirring our cramped limbs and dropping stiffly down onto the floor from the loft. There was no sound of any kind from below, but outside birds were noisy with the sunrise.

"THEY'RE in the cellar somewhere!" Doctor Dale exclaimed. "They've some secret chamber or hiding-place down there that holds the three coffins and bodies—you heard the stones moving!

"Once we find that hiding-place we have them!" he said. "Come on—bring the tools, Owen."

He opened the trap-door and led the way down into the dark cellar. I confess that my skin crept to enter the dark place into which the three vampires had retreated so short a time before, even though we knew that they must be lying in the death-like state of the dead-alive by day.

Dale flashed his beam around, but the cellar was empty as before. "We must tap the walls and floor to discover where

there is a cavity behind them," Dale said. "We know it's somewhere here."

Taking the short metal levers and the hammer from my sack we started a round of the cellar, Dale and I tapping upon the heavy stone blocks of the wall and Harmon upon the floor-slabs.

We worked without result, the blocks by their dead sound indicating solid earth behind them, until we came to the south wall of the cellar. The central part of that wall rang hollow.

"They're behind here!" Dale exclaimed. "See, this whole section of the stone wall must turn somehow. We don't have the secret of it, though—we'll have to break through it."

With the hammer and our metal levers we began work upon the massive blocks constituting that part of the cellar's wall. We tried to pry out blocks by driving the levers between them. It was hot work in the close cellar, and with only the flashlight-beam to guide us.

Our light implements made hardly any impression on the massive stone blocks, yet we worked on, unheeding the passage of time, for hour after hour, Dale and Harmon and I taking turns at the harder work of hammering. For hours we sweated at our toil, spurred on by our knowledge that behind the thick stone wall must lie Gerritt Geisert and the two other vampires in their coffins.

But we could do no more than chip off the edges of some of the blocks, and our light tools were bent and battered, our hands scratched and bleeding. We straightened, panting, baffled.

"We can do nothing in this way!" Doctor Dale said. "We'll have to have heavier tools—crowbars and sledges."

"But if we go in to the village for them it'll be sunset by the time we get back out here," Harmon said. "We'll have no time to work."

"I know," Dale said. "We'll have to wait until tomorrow morning and come back out then with everything we need. We can break through this wall then and end Geisert and the other two for ever.

"Geisert and they may go forth again tonight," he added, "but we'll be on the watch for them in the village, and tonight will be their last night of activity—tomorrow we'll destroy them."

So, effacing as completely as possible the traces of our attack on the wall, we ascended from the cellar, closing the trapdoor, and left the house. The sun was well up by then. We pushed our way down through the thick brush to the ancient road, and headed back through the long valley and out of the hills.

8. *At the Wilsey House*

WE EMERGED from the hills and reached Harmon's hidden car without mishap, and drove at once eastward. There was no need to stop at the Ralton estate to make sure of Olivia's safety, since we had heard Allene Ralton herself tell Geisert she had been unable to reach Olivia in the night that had just passed.

So Harmon drove Dale and me back into Maysville, leaving us at Henderson's house with a promise to see us later at Ralton's. It was almost noon by then.

Doctor Henderson's face expressed mixed emotions as Dale related to him our terrible experiences at the Geisert house.

"Then there is no doubt that Arthur Newton is as much a vampire as Allene Ralton!" he exclaimed, and Doctor Dale nodded.

"Not the slightest doubt. But tomorrow morning we'll go out there early with tools heavy enough to break through the

wall, and enter that secret space where the bodies of the three lie by day."

Henderson nodded. "Dale, you asked me when you went to try to find out if any one else around here was suffering from supposed anemia or loss of blood, any one else who might be a victim of vampirism."

"Yes. Did you find out anything?" asked Doctor Dale quickly.

"I did," Henderson said. "There's a girl who seems to be showing the same signs of loss of blood that Olivia Ralton exhibits."

"Who is it? Where does she live?"

"Her name is Alice Wilsey. She lives with her mother, a widow, Mrs. Beatrice Wilsey, on an estate near the Raltons'. It was her mother who told me of Alice's condition."

"Alice Wilsey!" Dale exclaimed. "The girl to whom Arthur Newton was engaged when he died?"

"The same," said Henderson. "Do you think Newton is——"

"Newton had no family, you said?" Dale interrupted. "No immediate connections?"

"No, he was the last of the family. But what bearing has that?"

"Didn't I tell you," Doctor Dale reminded, "apropos of Allene Ralton, that one who becomes vampire after death returns always to prey first upon his own family or those closest to him in life?"

Doctor Henderson was white-faced. "Then you think that Arthur Newton is vampirizing his own former fiancée, Alice Wilsey?"

"I think it possible, anyway," Dale said. "We'll have to go and see this Alice Wilsey. But later in the day—Owen and I need a few hours sleep now."

IT IS possible that Doctor Dale slept soundly in the next few hours, but I will admit that I did not. The terrible scenes through which we had passed had so strongly imprinted themselves on my brain as to recur again and again in my troubled dreams.

I felt rested, though, when Dale woke me in the late afternoon. We ate a lunch that seemed more like breakfast, then waited a short time for Doctor Henderson to return from a patient he was visiting. When he did so the three of us headed westward again in his car.

Dale wanted to visit the Ralton place before going to investigate Alice Wilsey, so soon we were driving up to the entrance of the Ralton mansion. James Ralton himself met us at the steps.

"Everything's all right?" Dale asked him. "I mean Miss Olivia."

"Olivia's feeling much better," Ralton said. "She slept well last night and feels a little stronger."

"There was no disturbance that you heard last night?"

Ralton shook his head, his voice lower. "No, I watched Olivia all night, and though the dogs howled once and there were some sounds of movement outside, she—I mean Allene—didn't appear.

"Edward Harmon was here a moment at noon," Ralton continued, "and told me what you three saw out at the old Geisert place. You saw Allene there with Geisert and young Newton, he said."

Doctor Dale nodded. "We did, and tomorrow morning if all goes well we'll be able to get at their bodies," he said. "Courage, Ralton—this horror can not go on for ever."

"And now we'll go up and take a look at Miss Olivia, and then be off," Dale said. We started up the steps.

There came out of the house just then Virginia Ralton, the younger daughter, and a laughing youngster in tennis clothes.

"This is Hugh Rillard, one of Virgin-

ia's ardent admirers," Ralton introduced, with a little smile.

"Sure glad to meet you, Doctor Dale," said young Rillard. "I hear you're curing Olivia already."

"We're trying to, anyway," Dale said. "We're going up to see her now—good morning, Miss Virginia."

As we passed into the house Dale shook his head, almost pityingly. "If those youngsters—or Olivia herself—knew what a hell-spawned evil is preying on Olivia!"

When we entered Olivia's room we found her sitting up in bed. She greeted us cheerfully and seemed to have a little more color in her cheeks.

"Any nightmares last night?" Doctor Dale asked her by way of greeting, and she shook her head smilingly.

"No, I didn't even dream. Oh, yes, I did dream once of dogs howling, but only for a moment.

"I do wish, though, doctor," she continued, "that you'd take down those withered branches you put up all over the room. They smell just like garlic to me, and the smell was so repellent that I was going to take them down myself."

Doctor Dale's face became grave instantly. "Do not think for a moment of taking them down," he warned her. "You do not take me too seriously, Miss Olivia. But it is true the branches have a strong therapeutic effect in your case and must not be removed."

"Of course they'll remain if you say so," Olivia said mildly. "I really don't know why I dislike their smell so much."

Dale examined the twin marks on her throat. "A little healed," he said. "Well, they may be all healed soon if all goes well."

"I don't mind them," Olivia smiled. "They don't really hurt."

"Yet the sooner healed, the better," said Doctor Dale. "Well, I'll be in again tomorrow, Miss Olivia, and expect to find you well. That is a command."

ONCE outside Olivia's room Dale's lightness of manner vanished.

"See that whatever happens the garlic branches are not taken down by Olivia," he told James Ralton.

"But she said she wouldn't——" Ralton began.

Doctor Dale shook his head. "She said so and meant it, but people who are victims of vampires sometimes find their wills not so strong as the vampire's will. Give her no chance to do it."

"Edward Harmon is coming tonight to watch in her room," Ralton said. "I'll tell him what you said about it."

"We'll be back tonight or tomorrow morning," Doctor Dale told Ralton as we left. "Remember to observe every precaution."

We drove out from the Ralton estate and Doctor Henderson headed in a northern direction between the beautiful estates in this region. It was not long before we had turned off the road again and were driving through the grounds of a small estate toward a beautiful Georgian brick house of considerable size, the residence of Mrs. Beatrice Wilsey.

Mrs. Wilsey accepted Doctor Dale and me at once on Doctor Henderson's introduction. She seemed of rather chatty nature, but in her face were lines of worry.

"Doctor Dale is here as a specialist in Olivia Ralton's case," Henderson explained, "and as you said Alice seemed suffering a similar illness I thought you might like him to look at her."

"Why, I'd be very glad to have him do so," Mrs. Wilsey said. "I've really been terribly worried about Alice's condition—she has grown gradually weaker and weaker but she absolutely refuses to allow me to send for a doctor."

"She does?" Dale exclaimed. "Why is she so unwilling to have a physician?"

"I'm sure I don't know," answered Mrs. Wilsey. "I've pointed out to her that she was getting weaker and more bloodless all the time, but she says she is all right. I'm sure she'll be very angry at me for letting you see her, but after all I'm her mother and it's best."

"Miss Alice is upstairs?" Dale asked. "We can see her there?"

"I'll go up first," Mrs. Wilsey said. "She'll probably make a scene, she's so set against having a doctor."

She went, and in a few minutes returned with flushed face. "She was very angry, but I overruled her," she said. "We'll go up now, doctor."

We went upstairs, entering a silken and feminine room furnished with ivory French pieces. Upon a chaise-longue in a negligee reclined a girl who had the same fair hair and blue eyes as her mother.

She was startlingly white and bloodless-looking, but looked at us with a half-angry and half-fearful expression.

"Miss Wilsey, I'm sorry that we intrude on you, but it is only to help you," Doctor Dale told her.

"But I don't need help!" she exclaimed passionately. "I tell you I'm quite all right."

"Now, Alice, any one can see that's not so," her mother reproved. "You've been getting weaker and weaker and you know it."

"Your mother is right," Dale said. "It's evident that you're very ill—why do you hesitate to admit it?"

"There's nothing to admit," the girl said desperately. "I feel all right, no matter what you say."

"Tell me, Miss Wilsey," said Doctor Dale, "have you been troubled by bad dreams lately?"

"Bad dreams?" she said, and he nodded.

"Yes, nightmares as of some one visiting you by night. Did you ever dream that some one came through that window, or that red eyes stared in through it at you?"

The girl's face, already white, became deathly. "No!" she screamed. "I never did! What makes you ask such questions? I never did!"

We looked at her in surprize. She had been absolutely impassioned in her denial.

"You've never dreamed that some one was bending over you, that something had fastened on your throat?" Dale pressed.

"No, of course not. What a silly question!" she said.

Doctor Dale reached to her negligee and before she could prevent uncovered her neck. Two little red punctures stood out against its whiteness! "Where did you get these marks?" he asked her sternly.

Alice Wilsey went crazy with rage. "What business is it of yours?" she cried. "They're pin-pricks I made by accident—why do you torment me about them? I won't have you torturing me with questions, do you hear, I won't have it—won't have it——"

She sank back fainting upon the cushions with strength fled in her access of rage. Her mother hastened to her side.

In next month's thrilling chapters of this story the vampire horror spreads and the doctor and his friends face frightful dangers.

The Man Who Saw Red

By J. WILMER BENJAMIN

A strange tale of murder and an incriminating red necktie

LOCKE'S playful little puppy bounded into the room. Barton sent it yelping as he aimed a kick in its direction. The line of Locke's lips tightened.

"Why can't you play square?" he asked contemptuously. "It was your own idea to sign the confession for security and replace the money as you were able. It was your own mistake when you took it for speculative purposes. And now you're welshing."

All of Barton's long-suppressed hatred for this man welled up within him. He clenched his fist beneath the table.

"You're a weakling, Barton. You never can see anything through."

"Yes, I took it to buy stocks, and I got caught. But I'm not so sure you weren't behind the move that sold me out."

"Your imagination runs in peculiar channels," said Locke evenly. "If it weren't for Bernice, I'd have you thrown into jail."

Barton's fist smashed down on the table with a force which threatened to split the wood.

"You leave Bernice out of this! You stole her from me——"

"You're a fool, Barton. You must have been drinking——"

Barton pushed the heavy table a little to one side. A red mist seemed to swim before his eyes, a red mist which centered on that scarlet cravat Locke always affected.

"I'm going to get you, Locke," he said distinctly.

"Barton! Stop where you are!"

"You, and your mangy little pup, and your damned red tie. Like a red flag in front of a bull. I hate the sight of you, Locke. And I'm going to kill you!"

Locke retreated slightly. He put out an uncertain hand. "Stay where you are, man. You're mad!"

"Mad, am I? Maybe so. I've wanted to —now I will!"

"One step more, Barton, and I'll shoot you dead!"

Barton laughed at that.

"You're unarmed, and we're alone," he said, advancing slowly.

Locke dived suddenly for the table drawer. Barton smashed his jaw with a hard right and clutched his neck with strong fingers.

They crashed to the davenport, rolled to the floor. Barton's grip tightened. Locke's tongue protruded. He gurgled, struggled fiercely. His body stiffened, then went limp.

Barton still held that bulldog grip. After a long time, he released it. Locke's body was limp and heavy. It slipped from against him, lay grotesquely on the floor.

Barton sat and stared at it. For a moment the room swam before his eyes. Then things became normal again. Not

quite normal. He was breathing easier now, but he seemed to be sitting in the air, and the furniture was floating in space. He felt completely detached from everything.

But he knew that he wasn't. He jerked himself back to reality. He knew that he was in Locke's library, in the deserted house. He knew that he had murdered Locke.

He stared at the vivid red cravat, hanging awry where his clutching fingers had pulled its flaming length out of the vest. He recalled that he had once bought one himself in an effort to rival the handsome Locke. But he had never even worn it. What was that saying about seeing red? Well, he had seen red, all right—literally, and once too often.

Locke was out of the way. Locke, with his Puritanical carping on honesty and fair play, with his hints of advice and references to gambling.

He snapped back from the stupid torpor into which he felt himself slipping. That confession was still in Locke's private safe. But the safe was open. . . .

No need to slave for freedom now!

He stepped across Locke's body. No need to fear it now. He smiled at the thought, kicked it contemptuously, as one kicks an old rug over which he has stumbled.

He turned as a low growl came from the adjoining room. The stupid little puppy stood there. He shouted an oath, and the dog retreated with angry, ineffectual growls.

At once he pulled out the contents of the safe. There were many papers, a few bonds. The typed "contract" in which he had confessed his theft and promised to repay it to the firm was on top, where Locke had placed it midway of their talk.

BARTON pocketed the paper, scattered others on the floor. The bonds he burned carefully, watching to see that no telltale pieces remained and scattering the ashes so that they would not be noticed. It would look like a funny kind of robbery if nothing was missing, and a routine check-up of Locke's affairs would lead to the discovery that the bonds were gone.

He turned over a table, upset a chair. The big clock struck nine. He remembered stories he had read. Stopped clocks weren't always accepted as proof of time, but it would help. So he moved the hands ahead to indicate seven minutes before ten, sent the clock crashing to the floor, and grinned as it stopped running.

He had wasted no time, although he felt perfectly safe in this deserted old house set back in its yard. No one would find Locke until the housekeeper came in the morning. He took a last look at the body as he stood beside the door and sneered as his eyes were drawn to the torn red tie. He straightened his own tie, brushed his coat sleeves fastidiously, opened the door, turned off the light, and walked out—a free man for the first time in months.

Barton saw to it that he was in his club talking to Billingsley by half past nine. He flattered himself that his hand was steady as they played billiards for a half-hour. From ten until ten-thirty he read the evening paper. And it was then, when he first had time to think over what he had done, that he began to be afraid.

It was utterly foolish, he knew. Locke was dead, definitely out of the way. They had both been single, with no family responsibilities, when they had begun their partnership, and Locke, in spite of his intended marriage, had made no change in the partnership papers. The entire assets of the firm were now his. His alibi was

airtight. No one had seen him go to Locke's house. On the contrary, he had been in the club ever since half past nine. And the clock in Locke's study indicated nine fifty-three. Yet he was afraid.

He took out his handkerchief and wiped his damp forehead. He felt suddenly conspicuous, and glanced around to make sure that he had not been observed. He had a feeling that someone was standing just behind his chair.

He hurried to his locker and mixed a stiff highball. He followed it with another. And when he clicked shut the locker door he almost jumped at the sound.

He decided that the place for him was in his apartment, asleep. Everything would be all right as soon as he stopped this alibi-manufacturing and went to bed. It was the fact that his presence in the club was part of his plot that was working havoc with his nerves. Once in his apartment, he would be through with the whole matter.

But it did not end that easily. Barton felt as if someone were following him in another taxi. He caught himself stealing surreptitious glances through the rear window.

He paid the driver hurriedly, looking down the street they had traveled. No other car was in sight, but he hustled into the apartment hotel as if he had an appointment.

When he left the elevator on the fifth floor and the cage descended, he felt horribly alone. He cursed himself for a fool, but he could not get rid of that fear. His mind's eye was looking at that red cravat, twisted awry, on the dead Locke. He stood before the door to his bachelor suite and hesitated to open it. He had a premonition that there was someone waiting for him behind that wooden barrier. He tried to persuade himself that it was the cocktails.

With a muttered oath, he inserted his key and swung open the door. Swiftly his hand found the wall switch, and the room was flooded with light. Everything was as he had left it. He closed and locked the door, threw his hat into a chair.

It was when he turned toward the windows that he first saw Locke.

"HELLO," said Locke with a grim smile, "I've been waiting for you."

Barton stood rigid, moving not a muscle, waiting for Locke to vanish.

"Late, aren't you? Have a busy evening?"

Locke spoke quite casually, as if his presence there were the most normal thing in the world. And somehow, with Locke's voice, Barton's senses took the cold plunge into rationality again. He actually experienced a kind of relief.

He even started forward. He had expected this. He had fought against the thought, out there in the hall, but he had known all along that Locke would be waiting for him.

Locke put out a restraining hand.

"Stop where you are," he ordered in his confident voice. And Barton obeyed as of old.

In the silence, he was afraid again. His heart hammered against his ribs. The blood rushed through his veins and his head was hot and heavy. There was a roaring in his ears. His voice, when he spoke, was high and shrill.

"What are you doing here?" he cried.

Locke laughed. His face seemed gray and drawn. He was immaculately dressed, except for his red cravat, which was hanging loosely around his neck.

"I'm not," said Locke. "You just think so."

"I just think so!" sneered Barton.

"Don't be an ass, Locke. You came to after I left. You got up, somehow, and came here to wait for me. I'm not crazy!"

Locke fingered his red necktie. "But you will be," he said calmly. "You won't be able to get away from me. *You* know very well I'm here. You will always know. But people won't believe you, Barton. They won't see me. Because I'm *not* here—except to you. I don't exist. You let me into your mind, you fool, and so I'm real to you. I'll always be real to you!"

"No! No!" cried Barton wildly. "You're trying to drive me mad, Barton. You can't do that to me!"

But he was afraid—terribly afraid. Sledge-hammer blows were pounding within him. He felt weak, nauseated.

"You can't get by with it, Locke!"

He meant to speak calmly, sneeringly. He heard only a wild shrieking, and realized that it was his voice. He shivered, cringed back against the wall.

Locke fingered that red necktie. He smiled, and took a step toward Barton.

Barton's hand slid down the wall, found support against the writing-desk. He backed hastily away, knocked over the telephone.

Locke took another step forward.

Barton's nerve broke completely. He clutched his hair, hid his face in his arms.

"Help!—murder!—help!" he screamed wildly. "Locke—get away! For God's sake, stay away from me!"

When he looked up, Locke was again standing beside the dresser near the windows.

"You're acting like an awful ass, Barton," he said. "You can't get rid of me that way. You must stop thinking about me—*and you can't!*"

Someone was hammering on the door. "What's all the trouble in there? Open up. I'm the house officer."

"There's no trouble, Cunningham," said Barton.

The pounding continued. "Open up! Hurry it up!"

Barton turned the key. Cunningham came in. He motioned with his head and another man entered.

"Just happened to have detective Burns with me in the pool room, Mr. Barton," he explained. "Operator swears she heard you yelling murder, and your phone's signaling. What's the row?"

He replaced the telephone instrument and glanced around suspiciously. He paid no attention to Locke, but centered his interest on Barton.

"No trouble here, officer—it was in my library," said Locke.

Barton silenced him with a desperate gesture.

"He's a liar, Cunningham!" He pointed an accusing finger at Locke. "Keep quiet!" he bellowed. "You're just drunk, Locke. We don't care about your library. You let me handle this."

"Who's a liar?" asked Burns curiously.

"Locke," explained Barton. He invented rapidly. "My partner and I both had a couple too many drinks. You know how it is. He passed out, and I guess the girl must have heard him scream when he came to just now. There isn't any trouble in his library."

Locke merely fingered his tie and smiled. "Only murder," he said quietly.

Barton shrieked and started toward him.

"I'll kill you!" he screamed. "I'll choke you to death!"

Locke put out a hand, and Barton stopped. The two officers watched him closely.

"You're a consummate ass, as usual, Barton," taunted Locke suavely. "These men don't believe I'm here. I told you

people wouldn't see me. You're acting just like a crazy man. You *are* crazy!"

"I'll show you who's crazy!" threatened Barton. He sprang forward.

Cunningham grabbed him around the waist. Barton tried to twist loose, but Burns held his arm behind his back.

"Who'll you kill?" asked Cunningham. He spoke aside to Burns. "Crazy as a loon, Dan. Don't let him plunge through the window. Looks like a bad case of D. T's."

Barton relaxed in their grasp. Maybe he could throw them off guard. Locke had not moved. Now he spoke again. His voice was clear, triumphant. Barton wondered that the others did not seem to hear.

"Now you've done it!" Locke gibed. "You let me sneak into your mind, and now—you're crazy!"

Barton hurled an oath at him. "You came here to make a fool of me! I'll get you, Locke, if it's the last thing I do!"

He broke loose from his captors, started toward Locke again, a snarl of rage twisting his lips, his fingers clutching convulsively.

"Let him alone," said Cunningham. "Watch what he does."

Locke did not move. He stood there and smiled. It was then that Barton saw himself in the dresser mirror. Locke stood in front of the glass, but his reflection was not visible. Barton saw only his own image, his own distorted face—and one other thing. A red cravat!

Fear laid heavy hands on his heart, but his rage kept him going. He crouched low, moved slowly, purposefully, toward Locke. His hands crept out after that gray throat. Locke still smiled, placed a hand on his tie.

"Don't tear this, Barton," he said. "I'm quite fond of this red cravat."

With a maniacal snarl, Barton grabbed for his throat. As he sprang forward, Locke's figure eluded his grasp, faded slowly into the wall. He heard only a faint mocking laugh.

Barton was pulling and tearing at a red tie hanging on his tie-rack beside the dresser—the red tie which he had bought but never worn. His nervous fingers tore it to shreds. And as he tore it he swore horribly in a dreadful senseless monotone.

HE CAME out of it in a few minutes. Cunningham had led him to a chair and Burns was bathing his face with cold water. His mind made a valiant effort to work normally.

He gave an uncertain laugh.

"Sorry, gentlemen," he explained with a sheepish smile. "Too much dissipation lately, I guess. Anyway, how about a little drink?"

He procured glasses, mixed cocktails. The officers smacked their lips appreciatively. But Burns was not convinced.

"What was that about your partner, Mr. Barton?" he asked bluntly.

"My partner? Did I mention Locke, Cunningham? I must have been off balance!"

"You mentioned him, all right," agreed Cunningham dryly. "You said you were going to kill him!"

"Kill him!" Barton didn't have to force his nervous start. "Kill Locke? Why, you must be crazy."

He took a long drink. He must think fast. They would suspect him now, of course, but he had nothing to worry about.

"It was a nightmare," he said, refilling his glass. "There was a man—he was after Locke and me—and I tried to stop him——"

His voice rose in horror at the memory, a horror which was not entirely simulated as he remembered Locke's figure fading into the wall.

"I'll just call Mr. Locke and see if everything's all right," decided Burns. "Maybe you've got second sight or something, sir. Funny things happen sometimes." His tone was apologetic, but his glance was shrewd. "You don't mind?"

"Go right ahead," offered Barton cordially. "Good idea. It's Vanderbilt—one-one-five."

While Burns was calling, he sipped his drink and threw his mind into high gear. He could see it all now. His damned imagination had got the better of him. Hadn't Locke—hadn't that figure—*told* him that it existed only in his mind? What an ass he had been, truly enough! They couldn't prove a thing.

He put a hand into his inside coat pocket to draw out his cigar case. His fingers encountered a folded paper. That confession! He must get rid of that somehow.

"No one answers," reported Burns. "What say we run out there, Cunningham?" He shot a keen glance at Barton. "Would you drive us around, sir?" he asked. "Save lots of time."

He mustn't muff it now. Be nonchalant. "Glad to," he replied, cursing to himself. No chance to get rid of that revealing document now. But what of it?

On the way to Locke's home, he took hold of his nerves. So Locke had said he couldn't see anything through, eh? And Locke had been almost right. But he was safe enough now. He was seeing this through, all right. He could brazen it out. That clock, with the hands at nine fifty-three, would be sufficient. Billings would swear to billiards at the club from nine-thirty on. And there were other witnesses. This fellow Burns was clever, and suspicious. He might surmise that the clock was a plant. But let him try to prove it.

Of course, plenty of people knew that he and Locke had disagreed over Bernice, that they had been none too friendly lately even in a business way. But the whole affair would easily stand up as an amazing coincidence. With a shrewd lawyer——

They were at the door. Cunningham pushed the bell button.

Barton knew he could play his part perfectly now. He would even enjoy it. He remembered how Locke's hated body had looked as he had kicked it on his way to the safe. He remembered the vivid red cravat, twisted and crumpled. He knew just what he would do and say.

"Let's go on in," he suggested, taking the initiative.

THEY entered the quiet hallway. No sound came from the rooms beyond. Cunningham groped with the knob of the first door on the right. As his fumbling fingers found a wall switch, the library sprang into view.

"It's true," said Cunningham instantly. "Murder!"

Burns drew his gun and turned to cover Barton.

"I'll have to arrest you on suspicion, Mr. Barton," he said matter-of-factly.

Barton opened his mouth to speak his carefully thought-out words of surprize and protest. His eyes were fixed on the body sprawled on the floor.

Suddenly his pose deserted him. He covered his face with his hands, looked again.

"It's gone!" he whispered hoarsely. "It's gone! It's gone!"

"Off his nut again," said Cunningham. "Keep your gun on him, Burns."

But Barton didn't care about the gun now.

"It's gone!"

Over and over he screeched it, his voice

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The Premature Burial

By EDGAR ALLAN POE

THERE are certain themes of which the interest is all-absorbing, but which are too entirely horrible for the purposes of legitimate fiction. These the mere romanticist must eschew, if he do not wish to offend, or to disgust. They are with propriety handled only when the severity and majesty of truth sanctify and sustain them. We thrill, for example, with the most intense of "pleasurable pain" over the accounts of the Passage of the Beresina, of the Earthquake at Lisbon, of the Plague at London, of the Massacre of St. Bartholomew, or of the stifling of the hundred and twenty-three prisoners in the Black Hole at Calcutta. But, in these accounts, it is the fact—it is the reality—it is the history which excites. As inventions, we should regard them with simple abhorrence.

I have mentioned some few of the more prominent and august calamities on record; but in these it is the extent, not less than the character of the calamity, which so vividly impresses the fancy. I need not remind the reader that, from the long and weird catalogue of human miseries, I might have selected many individual instances more replete with essential suffering than any of these vast generalities of disaster. The true wretchedness, indeed,—the ultimate wo,—is particular, not diffuse. That the ghastly extremes of agony are endured by man the unit, and never by man the mass—for this let us thank a merciful God.

To be buried while alive is, beyond question, the most terrific of these extremes which has ever fallen to the lot of mere mortality. That it has frequently, very frequently, so fallen will scarcely be denied by those who think. The boundaries which divide Life from Death are at best shadowy and vague. Who shall say where the one ends, and where the other begins? We know that there are diseases in which occur total cessations of all the apparent functions of vitality, and yet in which these cessations are merely suspensions, properly so called. They are only temporary pauses in the incomprehensible mechanism. A certain period elapses, and some unseen mysterious principle again sets in motion the magic pinions and the wizard wheels. The silver cord was not for ever loosed, nor the

golden bowl irreparably broken. But where, meantime, was the soul?

Apart, however, from the inevitable conclusion, *a priori,* that such causes must produce such effects,—that the well-known occurrence of such cases of suspended animation must naturally give rise, now and then, to premature interments,—apart from this consideration, we have the direct testimony of medical and ordinary experience to prove that a vast number of such interments have actually taken place. I might refer at once, if necessary, to a hundred well-authenticated instances. One of very remarkable character, and of which the circumstances may be fresh in the memory of some of my readers, occurred, not very long ago, in the neighboring city of Baltimore, where it occasioned a painful, intense, and widely extended excitement. The wife of one of the most respectable citizens—a lawyer of eminence and a member of Congress—was seized with a sudden and unaccountable illness, which completely baffled the skill of her physicians. After much suffering she died, or was supposed to die. No one suspected, indeed, or had reason to suspect, that she was not actually dead. She presented all the ordinary appearances of death. The face assumed the usual pinched and sunken outline. The lips were of the usual marble pallor. The eyes were lusterless. There was no warmth. Pulsation had ceased. For three days the body was preserved unburied, during which it had acquired a stony rigidity. The funeral, in short, was hastened, on account of the rapid advance of what was supposed to be decomposition.

The lady was deposited in her family vault, which, for three subsequent years, was undisturbed. At the expiration of this term it was opened for the reception of a sarcophagus;—but, alas! how fearful a shock awaited the husband, who, personally, threw open the door! As its portals swung outwardly back, some white-apparelled object fell rattling within his arms. It was the skeleton of his wife in her yet unmolded shroud.

A careful investigation rendered it evident that she had revived within two days after her entombment; that her struggles within the coffin had caused it to fall from a ledge, or shelf, to the floor, where it was so broken as to permit her escape. A lamp which had been accidentally left, full of oil, within the tomb, was found empty; it might have been exhausted, however, by evaporation. On the uppermost of the steps which led down into the dread chamber was a large fragment of the coffin, with which, it seemed, she had endeavored to arrest attention by striking the iron door. While thus occupied, she probably swooned, or possibly died, through sheer terror; and, in falling, her shroud became entangled in some iron-work which projected interiorly. Thus she remained, and thus she rotted, erect.

IN THE year 1810, a case of living inhumation happened in France, attended with circumstances which go far to warrant the assertion that truth is, indeed, stranger than fiction. The heroine of the story was a Mademoiselle Victorine Lafourcade, a young girl of illustrious family, of wealth, and of great personal beauty. Among her numerous suitors was Julien Bossuet, a poor *litterateur,* or journalist, of Paris. His talents and general amiability had recommended him to the notice of the heiress, by whom he seems to have been truly beloved; but her pride of birth decided her, finally, to reject him, and to wed a Monsieur Renelle, a banker and a diplomatist of some eminence. After marriage, however, this gentleman neglected, and, perhaps, even more positively ill-treated her. Having passed with

him some wretched years, she died—at least her condition so closely resembled death as to deceive every one who saw her. She was buried—not in a vault, but in an ordinary grave in the village of her nativity. Filled with despair, and still inflamed by the memory of a profound attachment, the lover journeys from the capital to the remote province in which the village lies, with the romantic purpose of disinterring the corpse, and possessing himself of its luxuriant tresses. He reaches the grave. At midnight he unearths the coffin, opens it, and is in the act of detaching the hair, when he is arrested by the unclosing of the beloved eyes. In fact, the lady had been buried alive. Vitality had not altogether departed, and she was aroused by the caresses of her lover from the lethargy which had been mistaken for death. He bore her frantically to his lodgings in the village. He employed certain powerful restoratives suggested by no little medical learning. In fine, she revived. She recognized her preserver. She remained with him until, by slow degrees, she fully recovered her original health. Her woman's heart was not adamant, and this last lesson of love sufficed to soften it. She bestowed it upon Bossuet. She returned no more to her husband, but, concealing from him her resurrection, fled with her lover to America. Twenty years afterward, the two returned to France, in the persuasion that time had so greatly altered the lady's appearance that her friends would be unable to recognize her. They were mistaken, however; for, at the first meeting, Monsieur Renelle did actually recognize and make claim to his wife. This claim she resisted, and a judicial tribunal sustained her in her resistance, deciding that the peculiar circumstances, with the long lapse of years, had extinguished, not only equitably, but legally, the authority of the husband.

The *Chirurgical Journal* of Leipsic, a periodical of high authority and merit, which some American book-seller would do well to translate and republish, records in a late number a very distressing event of the character in question.

An officer of artillery, a man of gigantic stature and of robust health, being thrown from an unmanageable horse, received a severe contusion upon the head, which rendered him insensible at once; the skull was slightly fractured, but no immediate danger was apprehended. Trepanning was accomplished successfully. He was bled, and many other of the ordinary means of relief were adopted. Gradually, however, he fell into a more and more hopeless state of stupor, and, finally, it was thought that he died.

The weather was warm, and he was buried with indecent haste in one of the public cemeteries. His funeral took place on Thursday. On the Sunday following, the grounds of the cemetery were, as usual, much thronged with visitors, and about noon an intense excitement was created by the declaration of a peasant that, while sitting upon the grave of the officer, he had distinctly felt a commotion of the earth, as if occasioned by some one struggling beneath. At first little attention was paid to the man's asseveration; but his evident terror, and the dogged obstinacy with which he persisted in his story, had at length their natural effect upon the crowd. Spades were hurriedly procured, and the grave, which was shamefully shallow, was in a few minutes so far thrown open that the head of its occupant appeared. He was then seemingly dead; but he sat nearly erect within his coffin, the lid of which, in his furious struggles, he had partially uplifted.

He was forthwith conveyed to the nearest hospital, and there pronounced to be still living, authough in an asphyctic condition. After some hours he revived, recognized individuals of his acquaintance, and, in broken sentences, spoke of his agonies in the grave.

From what he related, it was clear that he must have been conscious of life for more than an hour, while inhumed, before lapsing into insensibility. The grave was carelessly and loosely filled with an exceedingly porous soil; and thus some air was necessarily admitted. He heard the footsteps of the crowd overhead, and endeavored to make himself heard in turn. It was the tumult within the grounds of the cemetery, he said, which appeared to awaken him from a deep sleep, but no sooner was he awake than he became fully aware of the awful horrors of his position.

This patient, it is recorded, was doing well, and seemed to be in a fair way of ultimate recovery, but fell a victim to the quackeries of medical experiment. The galvanic battery was applied, and he suddenly expired in one of those ecstatic paroxysms which, occasionally, it superinduces.

THE mention of the galvanic battery, nevertheless, recalls to my memory a well-known and very extraordinary case in point, where its action proved the means of restoring to animation a young attorney of London, who had been interred for two days. This occurred in 1831, and created, at the time, a very profound sensation wherever it was made the subject of converse.

The patient, Mr. Edward Stapleton, had died, apparently, of typhus fever, accompanied with some anomalous symptoms which had excited the curiosity of his medical attendants. Upon his seeming decease, his friends were requested to sanction a post-mortem examination, but declined to permit it. As often happens when such refusals are made, the practitioners resolve to disinter the body and dissect it at leisure, in private. Arrangements were easily effected with some of the numerous corps of body-snatchers with which London abounds; and, upon the third night after the funeral, the supposed corpse was unearthed from a grave eight feet deep, and deposited in the operating-chamber of one of the private hospitals.

An incision of some extent had been actually made in the abdomen, when the fresh and undecayed appearance of the subject suggested an application of the battery. One experiment succeeded another, and the customary effects supervened, with nothing to characterize them in any respect, except, upon one or two occasions, a more than ordinary degree of life-likeness in the convulsive action.

It grew late. The day was about to dawn; and it was thought expedient, at length, to proceed at once to the dissection. A student, however, was especially desirous of testing a theory of his own, and insisted upon applying the battery to one of the pectoral muscles. A rough gash was made, and a wire hastily brought in contact; when the patient, with a hurried but quite unconvulsive movement, arose from the table, stepped into the middle of the floor, gazed about him uneasily for a few seconds, and then—spoke. What he said was unintelligible, but words were uttered; the syllabification was distinct. Having spoken, he fell heavily to the floor.

For some moments all were paralyzed with awe—but the urgency of the case soon restored them their presence of mind. It was seen that Mr. Stapleton was alive, although in a swoon. Upon ex-

hibition of ether he revived and was rapidly restored to health, and to the society of his friends—from whom, however, all knowledge of his resuscitation was withheld, until a relapse was no longer to be apprehended. Their wonder—their rapturous astonishment — may be conceived.

The most thrilling peculiarity of this incident, nevertheless, is involved in what Mr. S. himself asserts. He declares that at no period was he altogether insensible —that, dully and confusedly, he was aware of everything which happened to him, from the moment in which he was pronounced dead by his physicians, to that in which he fell swooning to the floor of the hospital. "I am alive," were the uncomprehended words which, upon recognizing the locality of the dissecting-room, he had endeavored, in his extremity, to utter.

IT WERE an easy matter to multiply such histories as these—but I forbear—for, indeed, we have no need of such to establish the fact that premature interments occur. When we reflect how very rarely, from the nature of the case, we have it in our power to detect them, we must admit that they may frequently occur without our cognizance. Scarcely, in truth, is a graveyard ever encroached upon, for any purpose, to any great extent, that skeletons are not found in postures which suggest the most fearful of suspicions.

Fearful indeed the suspicion—but more fearful the doom! It may be asserted, without hesitation, that no event is so terribly well adapted to inspire the supremeness of bodily and of mental distress, as is burial before death. The unendurable oppression of the lungs—the stifling fumes of the damp earth—the clinging to the death garments—the rigid embrace of the narrow house—the blackness of the absolute Night—the silence like a sea that overwhelms—the unseen but palpable presence of the Conqueror Worm—these things, with the thoughts of the air and grass above, with memory of dear friends who would fly to save us if but informed of our fate, and with consciousness that of this fate they can never be informed—that our hopeless portion is that of the really dead—these considerations, I say, carry into the heart, which still palpitates, a degree of appalling and intolerable horror from which the most daring imagination must recoil. We know of nothing so agonizing upon Earth —we can dream of nothing half so hideous in the realms of the nethermost Hell. And thus all narratives upon this topic have an interest profound; an interest, nevertheless, which, through the sacred awe of the topic itself, very properly and very peculiarly depends upon our conviction of the truth of the matter narrated. What I have now to tell is of my own actual knowledge—of my own positive and personal experience.

For several years I had been subject to attacks of the singular disorder which physicians have agreed to term catalepsy, in default of a more definitive title. Although both the immediate and the predisposing causes, and even the actual diagnosis, of this disease are still mysterious, its obvious and apparent character is sufficiently well understood. Its variations seem to be chiefly of degree. Sometimes the patient lies, for a day only, or even for a shorter period, in a species of exaggerated lethargy. He is senseless and externally motionless; but the pulsation of the heart is still faintly perceptible; some traces of warmth remain; a slight color lingers within the center of the cheek; and, upon application of a mirror to the lips, we can detect a torpid, unequal and vacillating action of the lungs.

Then again the duration of the trance is for weeks—even for months; while the closest scrutiny, and the most rigorous medical tests, fail to establish any material distinction between the state of the sufferer and what we conceive of absolute death. Very usually he is saved from premature interment solely by the knowledge of his friends that he has been previously subject to catalepsy, by the consequent suspicion excited, and, above all, by the non-appearance of decay. The advances of the malady are, luckily, gradual. The first manifestations, although marked, are unequivocal. The fits grow successively more and more distinctive, and endure each for a longer term than the preceding. In this lies the principal security from inhumation. The unfortunate whose *first* attack should be of the extreme character which is occasionally seen, would almost inevitably be consigned alive to the tomb.

MY OWN case differed in no important particular from those mentioned in medical books. Sometimes, without any apparent cause, I sank, little by little, into a condition of semi-syncope, or half swoon; and, in this condition, without pain, without ability to stir, or strictly speaking, to think, but with a dull lethargic consciousness of life and of the presence of those who surrounded my bed, I remained, until the crisis of the disease restored me, suddenly, to perfect sensation. At other times I was quickly and impetuously smitten. I grew sick, and numb, and chilly, and dizzy, and so fell prostrate at once. Then, for weeks, all was void, and black, and silent, and Nothing became the universe. Total annihilation could be no more. From these latter attacks I awoke, however, with a gradation slow in proportion to the suddenness of the seizure. Just as the day dawns to the friendless and houseless beggar who roams the streets throughout the long desolate winter night—just so tardily—just so wearily—just so cheerily came back the light of the Soul to me.

Apart from the tendency to trance, however, my general health appeared to be good; nor could I perceive that it was at all affected by the one prevalent malady —unless, indeed, an idiosyncrasy in my ordinary *sleep* may be looked upon as superinduced. Upon awaking from slumber, I could never gain, at once, thorough possession of my senses, and always remained, for many minutes, in much bewilderment and perplexity—the mental faculties in general, but the memory in especial, being in a condition of absolute abeyance.

In all that I endured there was no physical suffering, but of moral distress an infinitude. My fancy grew charnel. I talked "of worms, of tombs, and epitaphs." I was lost in reveries of death, and the idea of premature burial held continual possession of my brain. The ghastly danger to which I was subjected haunted me day and night. In the former, the torture of meditation was excessive; in the latter, supreme. When the grim Darkness overspread the Earth, then, with every horror of thought, I shook—shook as the quivering plumes upon the hearse. When Nature could endure wakefulness no longer, it was with a struggle that I consented to sleep—for I shuddered to reflect that, upon awaking, I might find myself the tenant of a grave. And when, finally, I sank into slumber, it was only to rush at once into a world of fantasms, above which, with vast, sable, overshadowing wings, hovered, predominant, the one sepulchral Idea.

From the innumerable images of gloom which thus oppressed me in dreams, I

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THE discussion as to whether we should use pictures of nude women on the covers of WEIRD TALES waxes hot and furious. We have not room to print all the letters protesting or upholding the artistic use of nudes, but we will quote from a few.

"May I register my protest, among others, against the pictures of nude women on the magazine?" writes Gertrude Gordon, of New York City. "In no way do they carry out the real purpose of the magazine, nor its ideals. They are very beautiful and artistically done, but are terribly out of place—as out of place, as Abe Martin the humorist once said, 'as bean soup on a velvet dress.' I have been getting WEIRD TALES only about five years, and I would like to see reprints of the best stories of ten years ago. There are objections to interplanetary stories, but I like them in this magazine if they carry a weird angle, such as *The Horror on the Asteroid* by Edmond Hamilton. I think that was a very fine, unusual story."

Writes Frank R. Moore, of Detroit: "Your September issue cover was a masterpiece. Who could resist buying a copy after seeing that? I have an insatiable appetite for Robert E. Howard's tales of Conan the Cimmerian. *The Slithering Shadow* was a gem. May I also toss an orchid to Seabury Quinn for his inimitable, lovable Jules de Grandin? There's a sentient fiction-character, if ever there was one! Occasionally one finds a story that's 'not so hot,' but all told, WEIRD TALES is *the* magazine that satisfies."

Edwin Beard, of St. Louis, who writes to protest against the over-use of nude women on our covers, has also another complaint to make. He writes: "I don't like the aggravatingly inane habit of referring to your various authors as 'a second Poe', 'a second Haggard'; or, 'worthy of Blackwood', etc. It is true, Lovecraft and Smith and several others *would* be 'a second Poe' or 'a second Haggard', and they *might* be said to write things 'worthy of Blackwood', except for the fact that they exceed for beauty, ability and sheer weirdness, Poe, Haggard, Blackwood and whom-have-you. Poe is boring with his endless italics, continuous interpolations of paragraphs, sentences and phrases in French, Italian, Greek and German, and his attempts to impress the reader with the horror of a situation where little or no horror exists. Haggard is impossibly verbose, giving minute descriptions of absolutely meaningless incidents. But most people are so convinced that these men are great masters that their one expression of praise consists in referring to some author as a 'second' something-or-other, or having produced something 'worthy' of somebody long dead. Your writers are none of them duplicates of anyone; they are entirely original."

"Allow me to pan you for your charmingly sadistic cover illustrating *The Slithering Shadow,*" writes Henry Kuttner, of Hollywood, California. "I haven't the slightest objection to the female nude in art, but it seems rather a pity that it is possible to find such pictures in any sex magazine, while WEIRD TALES is about the only publication of a type which can run fantastic and weird cover illustrations, and doesn't. You have had some delightful covers in the past, such as the one illustrating Smith's *Monster of the Prophecy* and the misty and fantastic cover for *The Woman of the Wood;* and, by the way, both of these covers bore a nude figure. While we are still in the past, let me nominate for a reprint Howard Rockey's *The Fine Art of Suicide,* from your March 1924 issue. The novel method of suicide and the story's fascinating and ironic denouement are sufficient recommendations for its publication again, I think. My vote for the best story in the September issue goes to *The Watcher in the Green Room,* by Hugh B. Cave. Perhaps not so gruesomely novel as Quinn's *penanggalans* with their pendent digestive organs, nor as striking and dramatic as the attack of the serpents in the Belknap Long reprint, it stands supreme, I think, for the singular ability of Cave to bring home the horror to the reader. Certainly the plot of the murderer who meets his doom is a moldy one, but Cave does not depend on the obvious plot. He manages to make the characters live and act naturally, and when the horror materializes, it is doubly real and triply terrifying. For Cave has made the reader believe in the bureau's transformation by his disturbingly convincing thesis of thought creating life—not a new idea, either, as, for instance, in Williamson's *The Wand of Doom.* But while Williamson used pseudo-science, Cave brings to cold print the secret trend of thought often held over from childhood when we lay awake in the dark and changed tables and chairs into looming, watching horrors whose frightful details grew unbelievably clear, fascinating cringing minds. The reader identifies himself with the murderer as Bellini looks at the bureau, and looks away, and tries to escape the dreadful spell, and can not. And the reader, who has always managed to escape phobia personally by actually feeling the object and realizing its true commonplace nature, approaches the moment of high tension when Bellini must prove to himself that he is hallucinated, and frantically leaps for the door, only to hear the sucking sound—and all the unrealized terror and frightful fear of the dark comes true in utter plausibility. Cave is a damned good writer—if you will pardon my explosive Dutch."

E. P. Pitcher, Jr., of Hoboken, New Jersey, writes to the Eyrie: "After six years of avidly reading WEIRD TALES without missing a single issue, I've got to send along my 'two cents' in ink, or bust. The main reason for the explosion lies in the fine current issue of September, and what is sadder, our idol of weird fiction, Seabury Quinn, is the cause of it. Out of all the stories about Doctors de Grandin and Trowbridge, never to my knowledge has Quinn stretched our credulity to the breaking-point as he has done in *Malay Horror.* His outré anecdotes of Jules de Grandin's occult adventures have always been coupled with intimate details of workaday medicine and surgery with such finesse as to satisfy entirely the need for logic in an illogical tale. But *Malay Horror* contains a shocking lack of that cohesive quality of connecting the supernatural with the natural which is Quinn's special glory. Doctor de Grandin no longer performs natural operations of rare kind but actually illustrates his real

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Coming Next Month

"WHAT matter now?" Warren reflected bitterly. "It's too late. My time is up. I have no weapon—no chance of using one if I had it. Ibn Sa'ud must be lying dead somewhere in that cursed desert. Yes, he is dead . . . and in a few minutes I shall be——"

The courtyard darkened. Warren looked up and saw a shadow pass between the arches. He rose to meet Abd Dhulma, who came forward, his tall red-clad figure vivid and dangerous as a pillar of fire.

Warren faced him, his mind racing back over all he had learned since last he looked into the healer's eyes, those fathomless wells, where points of light flickered like marsh-fires over a black morass.

Abd Dhulma lifted a dark slender hand, motioning him to approach. Warren felt the solid floor sway beneath his feet, and a thousand compelling impulses urged him forward to that waiting figure. He felt his breath coming deep and slow and rhythmic in response to Abd Dhulma's compulsion, and moving abruptly he fought to break through the web of illusion which was closing in about him.

Abd Dhulma gestured again, the slightest, most imperceptible of movements; yet Warren's body, traitor to his will, stepped stiffly forward in obedience to the command. His thoughts broke up into a thousand swimming stars. He had the sensation of diving into incalculable space, of falling—turning as he fell—swinging in vast giddy circles in an immense void. . . .

The motion ceased with a jolt that brought a sharp cry to his lips. He found himself standing firmly on the tessellated pavement. At that moment he saw Ibn Sa'ud fling himself across the courtyard, a dagger in his thin, shaking hand.

"Allah! I am in time! In his heart, Warren, in his heart!" . . .

You can not afford to miss this weird and shivery story of an evil Arab who contrived to postpone death for many centuries. It will be printed complete in the December WEIRD TALES:

ABD DHULMA, LORD OF FIRE

By G. G. PENDARVES

—ALSO—

THE OX-CART
By Frank Owen

A bizarre fantasy about an aged Chinaman who went back hundreds of years in the past to find love.

RED GAUNTLETS OF CZERNI
By Seabury Quinn

A smashing, breath-taking story of the little French occultist and ghost-breaker, Jules de Grandin.

KING COBRA
By Joseph O. Kesselring

A fascinating, horrifying story of the East Indies, and two white men imprisoned with scores of venomous cobras. You will long remember this vivid and powerful tale.

OLD GARFIELD'S HEART
By Robert E. Howard

A strange occult story of a heart that would not stop beating and a weird bargain that failed to gain immortality for the old Texan.

MONKEYS
By E. F. Benson

A strange, fantastic tale of a great English surgeon and the curse that attended the rifling of an Egyptian tomb.

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character by sewing a young lady's head and stomach back where they belong without a word being said about that most necessary of all anatomical parts—the spinal column and its contents! Was the young lady spineless and nerveless? It is the first unreal act of Jules that I remember of in six years of him! If only Seabury Quinn had applied his usual powers in this case, he might have actually had the French doctor do the trick of placing the young lady's head back, in a manner which would satisfy the demands for that rationality in the midst of the irrational so necessary in the type of story he writes. Perhaps Quinn will make us forget that only bad slip by giving us even more astounding tales in which the unreasonable is so expertly explained away, as is his wont."

"I have read over fourteen de Grandin stories," writes Lionel Dilbeck, of Wichita, Kansas, "and *Malay Horror* is the best yet. How can Quinn think up so many different plots for one character? Please eliminate the sexy covers. I wish to cast my vote for an author's page in WEIRD TALES. Please start with Lovecraft and F. B. Long, Jr."

Robert Nelson, of St. Charles, Illinois, writes to the Eyrie: "*Golden Blood* ends gloriously in the September issue and is a fine achievement for its author, Jack Williamson. Significantly, Howard's *The Slithering Shadow* glides across the other stories and overshadows them all. And Smith's *A Vintage From Atlantis* is an unfinished symphony in word-painting. One can not get enough of his beauty."

Readers, what is your favorite story in this issue of our magazine? Your favorite tale in the September number, as shown by your votes and letters, was *The Slithering Shadow,* by Robert E. Howard, with the concluding chapters of Jack Williamson's serial, *Golden Blood,* a close second.

My favorite stories in the November WEIRD TALES are:

Story	Remarks
(1)----------	----------
(2)----------	----------
(3)----------	----------

I do not like the following stories:

(1)----------	Why?----------
(2)----------	----------

It will help us to know what kind of stories you want in Weird Tales if you will fill out this coupon and mail it to The Eyrie, Weird Tales, 840 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Reader's name and address:

The Man Who Saw Red

(Continued from page 640)

rising to a wild scream. "It was you, Locke, damn you! I didn't imagine it! You came and got it, Locke, damn you—*that red tie's gone!*"

He swayed for an instant, pitched headlong to the floor, groveled there gibbering to himself.

Cunningham bent over Locke's body. Burns watched while he examined the bruised and swollen throat. Burns pointed to the soft white shirt, open at the collar.

"No tie there," he said. "Something phony about all this, Cunningham. Better frisk this bird for a gun—he may be acting."

Cunningham didn't find a gun, but he took out the folded paper which Barton had removed from the safe. He was holding it in his hand when they heard a slight noise in the adjoining room.

Both men turned instantly.

"Just his mutt," said Burns.

Into the library bounded an awkward, friendly little puppy, stubby tail wagging excited greeting. It dropped its plaything at the feet of Burns, who stooped to pick it up. Then, with an air of having happily finished that particular game, it turned to stiffen and growl in ludicrous anger at the sight of Barton.

Barton sat on the floor, the light of understanding struggling slowly back to his eyes. He was staring in fascination at officer Burns, who held in his hand the tattered well-chewed remnant of a once vivid red cravat.

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select for record but a solitary vision. Methought I was immersed in a cataleptic trance of more than usual duration and profundity. Suddenly there came an icy hand upon my forehead, and an impatient, gibbering voice whispered the word "Arise!" within my ear.

I sat erect. The darkness was total. I could not see the figure of him who had aroused me. I could call to mind neither the period at which I had fallen into the trance, nor the locality in which I then lay. While I remained motionless, and busied in endeavors to collect my thought, the cold hand grasped me fiercely by the wrist, shaking it petulantly, while the gibbering voice said again:

"Arise! did I not bid thee arise?"

"And who," I demanded, "art thou?"

"I have no name in the regions which I inhabit," replied the voice, mournfully; "I was mortal, but am fiend. I was merciless, but am pitiful. Thou dost feel that I shudder. My teeth chatter as I speak; yet it is not with the chilliness of the night—of the night without end. But this hideousness is insufferable. How canst *thou* tranquilly sleep? I can not rest for the cry of these great agonies. These sights are more than I can bear. Get thee up! Come with me into the outer Night, and let me unfold to thee the graves. Is not this a spectacle of wo?—Behold!"

I looked; and the unseen figure, which still grasped me by the wrist, had caused to be thrown open the graves of all mankind; and from each issued the faint phosphoric radiance of decay; so that I could see into the innermost recesses, and there view the shrouded bodies in their sad and solemn slumbers with the worm. But alas! the real sleepers were fewer, by many millions, than those who slumbered not at all; and there was a feeble struggling; and there was a general and sad unrest; and from out the depths of the countless pits there came a melancholy rustling from the garments of the buried. And of those who seemed tranquilly to repose, I saw that a vast number had changed, in a greater or less degree, the rigid and uneasy position in which they had originally been entombed. And the voice again said to me as I gazed:

"Is it not—oh! is it not a pitiful sight?" But, before I could find words to reply, the figure had ceased to grasp my wrist, the phosphoric lights expired, and the graves were closed with a sudden violence, while from out them arose a tumult of despairing cries, saying again:

"Is it not—O God, is it not a very pitiful sight?"

Fantasies such as these, presenting themselves at night, extended their terrific influence far into my waking hours. My nerves became thoroughly unstrung, and I fell a prey to perpetual horror. I hesitated to ride, or to walk, or to indulge in any exercise that would carry me from home. In fact, I no longer dared trust myself out of the immediate presence of those who were aware of my proneness to catalepsy, lest, falling into one of my usual fits, I should be buried before my real condition could be ascertained. I doubted the care, the fidelity of my dearest friends. I dreaded that, in some trance of more than customary duration, they might be prevailed upon to regard me as irrecoverable. I even went so far as to fear that, as I occasioned much trouble, they might be glad to consider any very protracted attack as sufficient excuse for getting rid of me altogether.

It was in vain they endeavored to reassure me by the most solemn promises. I exacted the most sacred oaths, that under no circumstances they would bury me until decomposition had so materially advanced as to render further preservation

impossible. And, even then, my mortal terrors would listen to no reason—would accept no consolation. I entered into a series of elaborate precautions. Among other things, I had the family vault so remodeled as to admit of being readily opened from within. The slightest pressure upon a long lever that extended far into the tomb would cause the iron portals to fly back. There were arrangements also for the free admission of air and light, and convenient receptacles for food and water, within immediate reach of the coffin intended for my reception. This coffin was warmly and softly padded, and was provided with a lid, fashioned upon the principle of the vault-door, with the addition of springs so contrived that the feeblest movement of the body would be sufficient to set it at liberty. Besides all this, there was suspended from the roof of the tomb, a large bell, the rope of which, it was designed, should extend through a hole in the coffin, and so be fastened to one of the hands of the corpse. But, alas! what avails the vigilance against the Destiny of man? Not even these well-contrived securities sufficed to save from the uttermost agonies of living inhumation, a wretch to these agonies foredoomed!

THERE arrived an epoch—as often before there had arrived—in which I found myself emerging from total unconsciousness into the first feeble and indefinite sense of existence. Slowly—with a tortoise gradation—approached the faint gray dawn of the psychal day. A torpid uneasiness. An apathetic endurance of dull pain. No care—no hope—no effort. Then, after a long interval, a ringing in the ears; then, after a lapse still longer, a prickling or tingling sensation in the extremities; then a seemingly eternal period of pleasurable quiescence, dur-

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ing which the awakening feelings are struggling into thought; then a brief resinking into nonentity; then a sudden recovery. At length the slight quivering of an eyelid, and immediately thereupon, an electric shock of a terror, deadly and indefinite, which sends the blood in torrents from the temples to the heart. And now the first positive effort to think. And now the first endeavor to remember. And now a partial and evanescent success. And now the memory has so far regained its dominion, that, in some measure, I am cognizant of my state. I feel that I am not awaking from ordinary sleep. I recollect that I have been subject to catalepsy. And now, at last, as if by the rush of an ocean, my shuddering spirit is overwhelmed by the one grim danger—by the one spectral and ever-prevalent idea.

For some minutes after this fancy possessed me, I remained without motion. And why? I could not summon courage to move. I dared not make the effort which was to satisfy me of my fate—and yet there was something at my heart which whispered me *it was sure.* Despair—such as no other species of wretchedness ever calls into being — despair alone urged me, after long irresolution, to uplift the heavy lids of my eyes. I uplifted them. It was dark—all dark. I knew that the fit was over. I knew that the crisis of my disorder had long passed. I knew that I had now fully recovered the use of my visual faculties—and yet it was dark—all dark—the intense and utter raylessness of the Night that endureth for evermore.

I endeavored to shriek; and my lips and my parched tongue moved convulsively together in the attempt—but no voice issued from the cavernous lungs, which, oppressed as if by the weight of some incumbent mountain, gasped and palpitated, with the heart, at every elaborate and struggling inspiration.

The movement of the jaws, in this effort to cry aloud, showed me that they were bound up, as is usual with the dead. I felt, too, that I lay upon some hard substance; and by something similar my sides were, also, closely compressed. So far, I had not ventured to stir any of my limbs—but now I violently threw up my arms, which had been lying at length, with the wrists crossed. They struck a solid wooden substance, which extended above my person at an elevation of not more than six inches from my face. I could no longer doubt that I reposed within a coffin at last.

And now, amid all my infinite miseries, came sweetly the cherub Hope—for I thought of my precautions. I writhed, and made spasmodic exertions to force open the lid: it would not move. I felt my wrists for the bell-rope: it was not to be found. And now the Comforter fled for ever, and a still sterner Despair reigned triumphant; for I could not help perceiving the absence of the paddings which I had so carefully prepared—and then, too, there came suddenly to my nostrils the strong peculiar odor of moist earth. The conclusion was irresistible. I was *not* within the vault. I had fallen into a trance while absent from home—while among strangers—when, or how, I could not remember—and it was they who had buried me as a dog—nailed up in some common coffin—and thrust, deep, deep, and for ever, into some ordinary and nameless *grave.*

As this awful conviction forced itself, thus, into the innermost chambers of my soul, I once again struggled to cry aloud. And in this second endeavor I succeeded. A long, wild, and continuous shriek, or yell, of agony, resounded through the realms of the subterranean Night.

"Hillo, hillo, there!" said a gruff voice, in reply.

"What the devil's the matter now?" said a second.

"Get out o' that!" said a third.

"What do you mean by yowling in that 'ere kind of style, like a cattymount?" said a fourth; and thereupon I was seized and shaken without ceremony, for several minutes, by a junto of very rough-looking individuals. They did not arouse me from my slumber—for I was wide-awake when I screamed—but they restored me to the full possession of my memory.

This adventure occurred near Richmond, in Virginia. Accompanied by a friend, I had proceeded, upon a gunning expedition, some miles down the banks of the James River. Night approached, and we were overtaken by a storm. The cabin of a small sloop lying at anchor in the stream, and laden with garden mold, afforded us the only available shelter. We made the best of it, and passed the night on board. I slept in one of the only two berths in the vessel—and the berths of a sloop of sixty or seventy tons need scarcely be described. That which I occupied had no bedding of any kind. Its extreme width was eighteen inches. The distance of its bottom from the deck overhead was precisely the same. I found it a matter of exceeding difficulty to squeeze myself in. Nevertheless, I slept soundly; and the whole of my vision—for it was no dream, and no nightmare — arose naturally from the circumstances of my position — from my ordinary bias of thought — and from the difficulty, to which I have alluded, of collecting my senses, and especially of regaining my memory, for a long time after awaking from slumber. The men who shook me were the crew of the sloop, and some laborers engaged to unload it. From the

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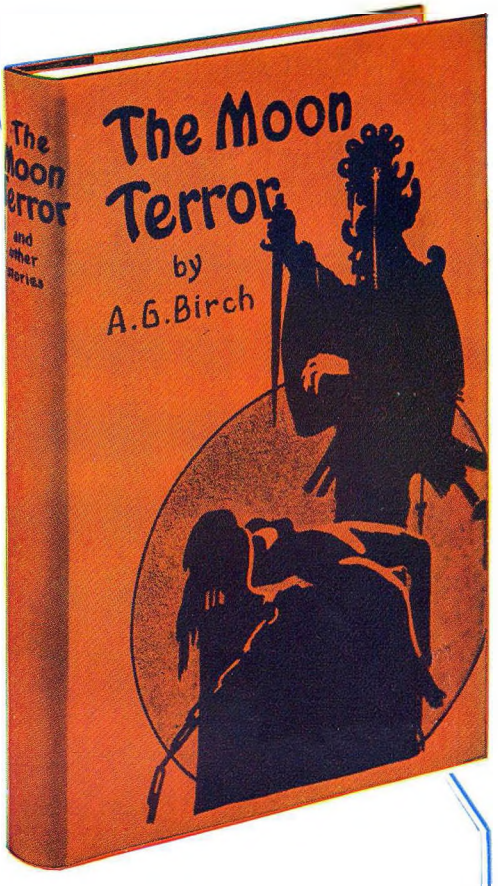
load itself came the earthy smell. The bandage about the jaws was a silk handkerchief in which I had bound up my head, in default of my usual night-cap.

The tortures endured, however, were indubitably quite equal, for the time, to those of actual sepulture. They were fearfully—they were inconceivably hideous; but out of Evil proceeded Good; for their very excess wrought in my spirit an inevitable revulsion. My soul acquired tone—acquired temper. I went abroad. I took vigorous exercise. I breathed the free air of Heaven. I discarded my medical books. *Buchan* I burned. I read no *Night Thoughts*—no fustian about churchyards—no bugaboo tales—*such as this*. In short, I became a new man, and lived a man's life. From that memorable night, I dismissed for ever my charnel apprehensions, and with them vanished the cataleptic disorder, of which, perhaps, they had been less the consequence than the cause.

There are moments when, even to the sober eye of Reason, the world of our sad humanity may assume the semblance of a Hell—but the imagination of man is no Carathis, to explore with impunity its every cavern. Alas! the grim legion of sepulchral terrors can not be regarded as altogether fanciful—but, like the Demons in whose company Afrasiab made his voyage down the Oxus, they must sleep, or they will devour us—they must be suffered to slumber, or we perish.

THE PHANTOM OF THE ETHER

THE first warning of the stupendous cataclysm that befell the earth in the fourth decade of the Twentieth Century was recorded simultaneously in several parts of America. At twelve minutes past 3 o'clock a. m., during a lull in the night's aerial business, several of the larger stations of the Western hemisphere began picking up strange signals out of the ether. They were faint and ghostly, as if coming from a vast distance. As far as anyone could learn, the signals originated nowhere upon the earth. *It was as if some phantom were whispering through the ether in the language of another planet.*



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