Weird Tales

MAR. 1932

The Unique Magazine

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The Dragoman's Jest

By
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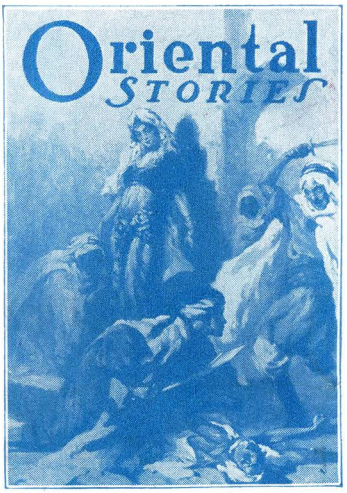

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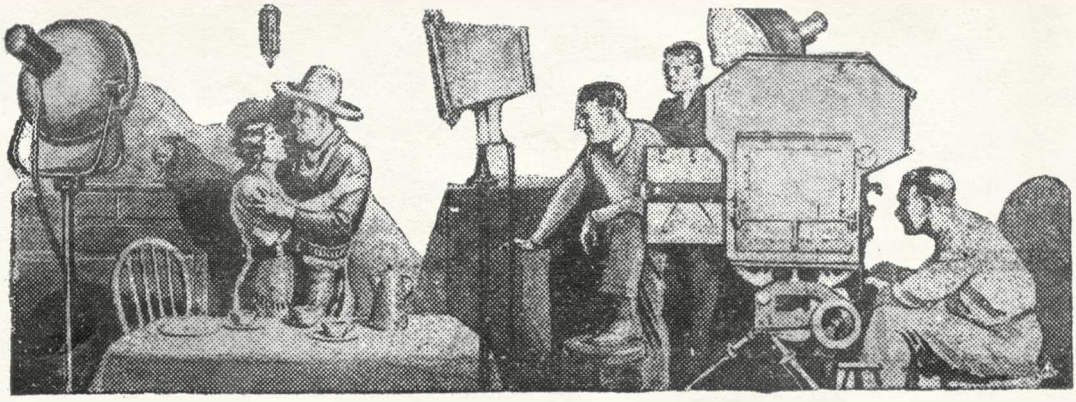

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Weird Tales

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A MAGAZINE of the BIZARRE and UNUSUAL

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FARNSWORTH WRIGHT, Editor.

Contents for March, 1932

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THE true function of a magazine like WEIRD TALES is expressed in a letter that comes to the Eyrie from C. H. Osborn, of Fulton, New York: It provides escape from the humdrum realities of everyday life. Mr. Osborn writes: "The bored indifferent worker is hurrying home from another day's quota of labor, and stops in at the corner drug-store to purchase his after-dinner cigar, and is glancing over the latest issues in the magazine rack when his eye comes to rest on a copy of a magazine with an unusual sort of cover. Idly he picks it up and glances through its contents. His curiosity aroused, he buys it and takes it home. After dinner he settles down in a comfortable chair, lights his perfecto, and while the missus is doing up the dinner dishes, becomes so engrossed in the magazine that he reads it from cover to cover. Next day he sends a check for a two years' subscription to WEIRD TALES. Meanwhile his wife has been wondering how John, who isn't much of a reader, came to be so interested in that magazine last night; she picks it up, and after an involuntary shudder at its title, conquers her apprehensions sufficiently to read a story by Seabury Quinn. Total results—two confirmed WEIRD TALES fans who have found the magic road to escape from monotony. And so it goes in many homes throughout the country. The stranger the tale the more fascinating. Stories which deal with unknown or forgotten things; stories which carry us out into the uttermost voids of space where even the imagination of man has failed to penetrate, past hurtling galaxies, glorious universes with strange laws, and stranger gods, into breath-taking adventures among fearful inhabitants of eldritch worlds, are extremely absorbing. Stories of strange races who lived and fought with gargantuan monsters, behemoths and elementals and worshipped forgotten gods, when the earth was young, arouse some primordial instinct within us. Lovecraft is a master of this type of story; so also is Howard. May I offer just a bit of advice without seeming too presumptuous? Keep the element of mystery and wonder always foremost, for herein lies the weird tale's greatest charm. Keep the reader guessing right up to the end of the story, and you will have won his gratitude and approbation, and keep the stories unique, weird and original. Beyond that, one can ask no more."

"I am only a lumberman," writes Arthur Timpson, of Gleason, Wisconsin, "but I think I know a good magazine when I see one. WEIRD TALES is not only unique in its field but educational as well. Stories of the supernatural should interest every one, for the realm of spirits has barely been touched. Back in 1911, in Esthonia, a demon came to a farmhouse, stayed for three months, was ordered under arrest by

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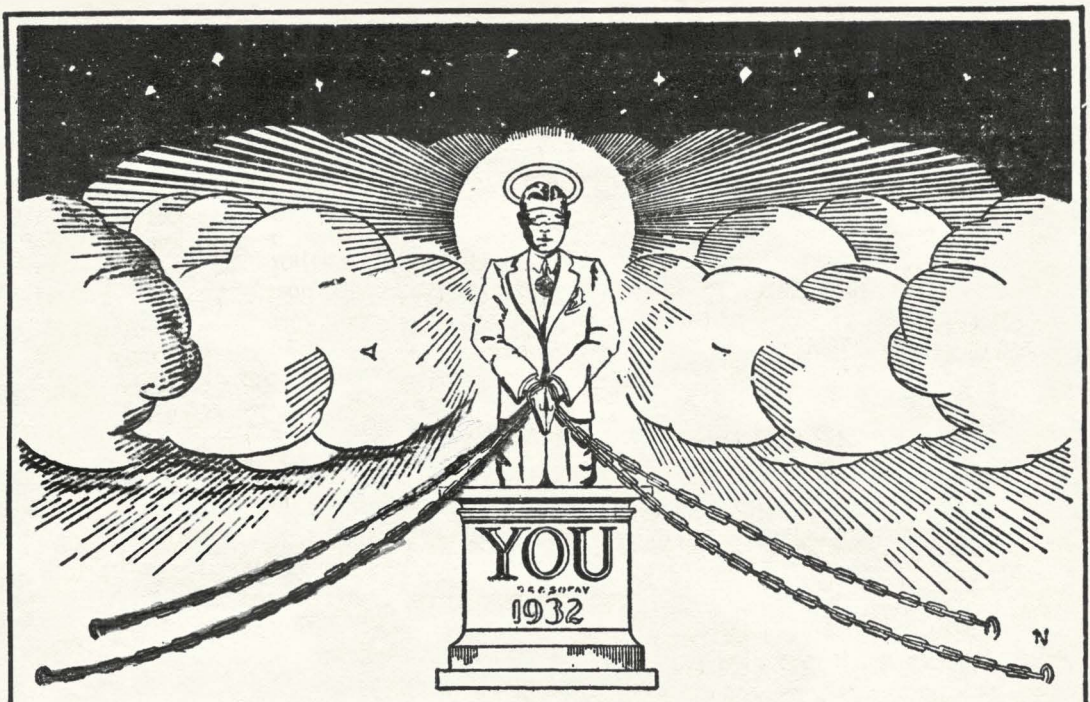

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(Continued from page 292)

the authorities and generally held the neighborhood under a spell of terror. Invisible to all but one person, he set the entire country aflame with excitement. I myself visited the place during this time. I saw the Tsarist police stand puzzled and fearful, and I saw the peasants shiver."

Mrs. Esther Pierce of Washington, Kansas, writes to the Eyrie: "I have read WEIRD TALES for a long while and am very fond of them. I expect to read them as long as I can scrape twenty-five pennies together. I love to read stories of witchery, tombs, graveyards, something that makes you feel creepy, something that makes you wake up in the night and feel cold and wet. Give us more of Quinn's stories. He is the best writer you have, and H. P. Lovecraft comes next."

From Aguadulce, Republic of Panama, comes a letter from William Weber: "One of the officials of the company for which I work loaned me a copy of the November issue of your magazine, and I was so impressed with the leading story, *Placide's Wife,* that I want to write in and tell you how I enjoyed it. I am a Louisianian myself, and so I am able to appreciate the manner in which the dialect of the story is handled. Managing a sugar plantation a hundred miles from nowhere is a lonesome affair and about all I have in the way of recreation is reading. Your November issue was my introduction to WEIRD TALES, but I have made arrangements with the news dealer here to forward it to me regularly. Best of luck to you, and please publish more stories like *Placide's Wife.*"

A letter from Paul O'Brian, of New York City, says: "It is with extreme pleasure that I read that our good friend Jules de Grandin will be back with us again next month. Just as a matter of form I'll make it unanimous in saying that Seabury Quinn is undoubtedly the best contributor to WEIRD TALES. Although Mr. Quinn is my favorite writer, credit must go where credit is due, and the greatest, the weirdest story I ever read was Frank Belknap Long's *The Space-Eaters.* I've read that story over and over and believe I can almost repeat it word for word from memory. Permit me to make a few suggestions. While the new Jules de Grandin story is running, why not have Mr. Senf (I believe that's the name) put his conception of the little Frenchman on the outside cover of WEIRD TALES?" [Jules de Grandin's face has appeared in illustrations on the cover several times.—THE EDITORS.]

"From the Dark Halls of Hell is a fine little tale and possesses much originality," writes E. Irvine Haines of New York. *"Those Who Seek* is your best story from a weird standpoint, and is well told. *The Head* particularly appealed to me, as it not only touched upon a topic of considerable interest (I am the author of *Was Shakespeare the Author of His Plays?)* but there is a graphic horror and description in the way the story is treated that holds the interest and thrills at the same time. Mr. Hurst is to be congratulated."

Writes Rodna Seawert, of Grosse Pointe, Michigan: "Although I am a veteran reader of WEIRD TALES this is the first time I have written to the Eyrie. I wonder what would happen if we should lose our beloved Jules de Grandin. Somehow, WEIRD TALES would not seem quite right without our Jules de Grandin and his inseparable friend Doctor Trowbridge. There is something decidedly lacking when they fail to

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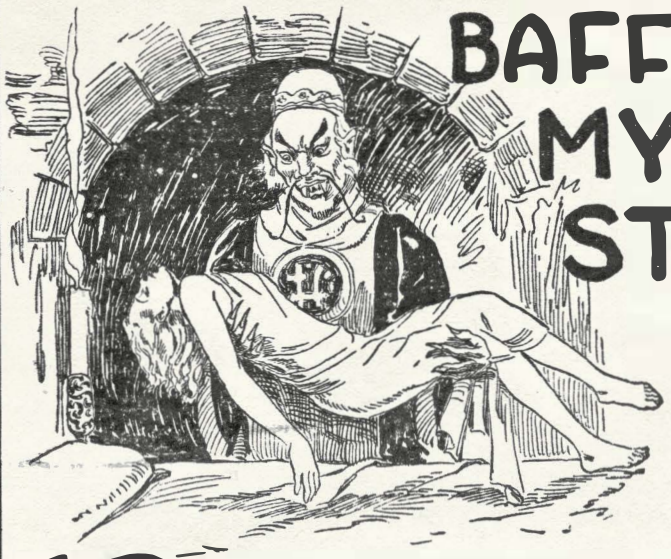

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The Vengeance of Ixmal

By KIRK MASHBURN

An eery story of a vampire-haunted village, and living human sacrifices on an Aztec altar

BEFORE the fury of the Spaniard the might of proud Tapalapan crumbled. Her fate was even more direful than that of her sister cities in the ravished valley of Anahauc; her walls were broken and her people led away into bondage. Desolation sat upon her gates until they, too, crumbled and oblivion followed destruction and decay. Of the glory that was Tapalapan's there remained, in time, only the earth-covered mounds of stone that were once her palaces and temples.

The bitter years trickled through the fingers of forgotten gods, until Tapalapan became no more than a vague and obscure name, even to the lowly dwellers in the few mean villages that were her

"There upon the mound with them, red-faced and fierce-eyed, Ixmal stood, his face a livid mask of passion."

legacy. To the simple villagers who knew of them, the mounds and hillocks that marked the site of the ancient city were cursed with silence and with death; and with the curse that fell upon Tascala, who had been the daughter of a king in old Tapalapan.

In the fullness of time, scholars athirst for knowledge revived interest in the vanished glory of Anahauc. Learned men labored among the ruins of the valley; and eventually a great museum in the North dispatched an expedition to unearth what traces of Tapalapan the hand of time and the vengeance of her conquerors had spared.

The directors of the northern museum chose carefully those who should conduct the expedition, although, it may be, the pointing finger of fate guided their choice in at least one instance. Three men met the final tests of the directorate,

and were dispatched upon the mission for which they qualified.

Doctor Perry Whitaker, the archeologist who had blazed the trail of exploration among the Mayan ruins of Yucatan and Quintana Roo, was the nominal head of the party. Greely, the photographer, who was a veteran globe-trotter and explorer incidentally to his passion for pictures of strange new scenes, came along with his insatiable camera. The last of the trio—he to whom the circling hand of destiny had pointed—was Walter Pembrooke, ethnologist, traveler, scholarly adventurer. Because of his knowledge of the customs and language of the people with whom the party would come in contact, and because the vigor of his thirty-odd years weighed less heavily upon his shoulders than the nearly three score of Doctor Whitaker, Pembrooke's was the tacitly accorded leadership in their venture.

The explorers, their equipment loaded upon the backs of diminutive but sturdy burros, and accompanied only by two Mexicans who had been employed in the railhead town of Celayos, marched more than three full days' journey across desolate, broken country. In this manner they arrived at the modern village of Santa Rosalia—modern, that is, solely in the chronological sense — which previously had been selected as a base of operations, due to its nearness to the ruins.

THE map of Mexico is not adorned with the name of the village of Santa Rosalia. The tiny *pueblo* boasted a church that was its one building of any pretensions, and about which clustered, haphazardly, a score or so of adobe hovels. There was no inn, and the houses of the villagers were shared with their beasts and fowls. Choice, as much as necessity, moved the Americans to pitch their tents for shelter while they rested and completed preparations for the work ahead.

Pembrooke set about recruiting a force of laborers. Many of the shiftless *Indios* of the village were willing to use a pick and shovel in sporadic fashion, until the prospective scene of their labor was divulged. With one accord, the men of Santa Rosalia crossed themselves and refused to invade the ruins. Pressed for explanation, their swarthy faces assumed blank expressions; they shrugged their shoulders, pursed their lips, and muttered vaguely of a curse upon the ruins. More than that they would say nothing.

"There's a 'curse' that makes the ruins taboo to these Indians," Pembrooke angrily informed Doctor Whitaker. "Here we are, with only Juan and Pablo, the two Mexicans we brought along from Celayos, and not a worthless *Indio* in this mud village can be bribed to wield a shovel."

Doctor Whitaker looked up, inquiringly.

"A curse?" he questioned. Pembrooke nodded.

"That is as much as I can get from them." He made a gesture of disgust, running his fingers abstractedly through crisp, dark hair that had the bare suggestion of a wave. His wide-spaced eyes were likewise dark; and with his straight, thin-bridged nose and a skin tanned to swarthiness by the sun, Pembrooke caused his elderly companion to make whimsical comparison to some young chieftain out of the past of Anahauc, returned to find no liking for this squalid hamlet of the present valley.

"If there is a curse," Pembrooke contemptuously declared, "it's the curse of ultimate laziness on this *pueblo*—I don't blame Juan and Pablo for treating their local countrymen with such lofty disdain! Here, practically at the ruins, the source of the labor I had counted on proves nonexistent."

He broke off to stare out over the

wasted broken plain to where, a scant five or six miles distant, lay their objective —the humbled remnants of the once great city of the Aztec empire.

"It is too bad," Doctor Whitaker regretted, "that the village priest is absent. It may be that we could enlist his aid, and he would at least tell us what is wrong."

"It must be something special," Pembrooke opined, "to make them so fearful of the ruins that they won't even talk about it. I'll have to try and discover just what their pet superstition is, and then perhaps we can exorcise their devils in some way."

"Yes," agreed the doctor, "the time lost and the expense of importing laborers would be too great. Besides, if we brought in Indians from another village, they probably would only succumb to the obsessions and fears of these natives."

"The half-breed *jefe politico* has more intelligence than the rest," Pembrooke speculated; "a little beating around the conversational bush may induce him to tell us what is the matter. He might even be persuaded to help us out of our difficulty."

AS PEMBROOKE said, the village magistrate was possessed of considerably more character and intelligence than most of the Santa Rosalians, but he was none too high a type of citizen, at that. However, the expedition's stores included a number of bottles of brandy and fiery tequila, and the mayor saw no reason for the unfriendly reception of a guest who brought such gifts. The half of his blood that was white responded warmly to the flattering equality of Pembrooke's manner. After all, he reflected, why not? Was he not chief in Santa Rosalia, and a really very superior person, as this new friend so evidently perceived?

A few drinks of tequila, and it seemed the most natural thing in the world for the *señor* to address him, the mayor, as *Don* Tomás. Again, why not?

Pembrooke casually led up to the real object of his visit. An uneasy look appeared in the mayor's eyes.

"Of course, Don Tomás, such things appear childish to such men as *we,* but it is very annoying, nevertheless."

The *jefe politico* squirmed uneasily. Pembrooke poured another drink, adding:

"They will not even say why it is they fear so to disturb the ruins (which, after all, are only mounds of earth and stone), even in the light of day."

The mayor had no wish to incur the ridicule of this excellent *gringo.* Yet he felt that courtesy such as he had been shown deserved a timely warning of the fearsome secret of the ruins. Well, the best way was to tell what *los Indios* believed—and he need not say that he, *Don* Tomás Molero, believed with them! Which proved the astuteness of his guest.

Yes, a thousand thanks: Don Tomás would have another drink of the excellent liquor. Much fortified, he took a deep breath and told Pembrooke the legend of the Princess Tascala, of the curse of Prince Hautepec, and of the fearful beings that were the horror of Tapalapan's sprawled ruins.

Pembrooke heard him quietly to the end. He well knew the necessity of suppressing any sign of scorn or amusement. There was nothing, however, to prohibit him pouring out another drink for "Don" Tomás. . . .

"Is it not told that vampires, such as are said to infest the ruins, lie dead between sunup and sunset, Don Tomás?" The question was gravely put.

"*Si,*" confirmed the magistrate of Santa Rosalia—that fact was well known to all men, as witness even the practical *señor* from the North.

"Then why," the *señor* from the North

wanted to know, "why will your villagers not assist us? It is only in the broad light of the full day that we would ask their labor."

"Ah!" explained the mayor, emphasizing his point with a raised forefinger, "those who go to the ruins and return, by so doing make a clear trail to themselves for *los vampiros* to follow." He hesitated before adding, "All those who have gone we have later buried—when they were drained of their blood upon succeeding nights—*with stakes driven through their hearts!*"

"Don" Tomás sensed the incredulity behind Pembrooke's polite mask.

"The priest buries them, *Señor,* and he consents to the act which is the only way to prevent the vampires' victims from becoming even as are they. Our *padre* is a Jesuit—an educated man—but he permits what I have told you. . . . *He knows!*"

"Only those who go to the ruins fall prey to the vampires?" Pembrooke inquired.

"No, *Señor,*" was the sad denial. "It is only that those who do go establish a —what do you call it: *contact?*—with the host of Tascala-the-damned. They are sure quarry, who may be commanded in their sleep to admit the vampires to their accursed feasting."

"Do the vampires come at other times than when the ruins are visited?" Pembrooke, the ethnologist, had an added scientific interest in the folk-lore underlying the mestizo functionary's tale.

"Don" Tomás nodded gloomy affirmative.

"Aye," he said, "the accursed ones come often! Every village in this region pays them tribute. We nail strings of garlic—which the vampires detest—over our windows and drape it across our doors at night. Sometimes one is careless—and later, perhaps, we bury that one with a stake in his heart."

Pembrooke could not restrain an obvious comment:

"I should think you would abandon this village for some other place."

The mayor blinked in naïve and slightly alcoholic wonder at this observation. He spread his hands in a gesture of futility.

"Where would we go, *Señor?* We have always lived here, and our fathers lived here, and their fathers in their time. Is any place upon this earth free of the shadow of evil?"

Pembrooke saw that he could expect no help from this quarter. The mayor believed his tale as thoroughly as any of his villagers. It would be useless to antagonize him by scoffing at his superstition, however, even while abandoning hope of assistance from the inhabitants of Santa Rosalia.

"Since we can get none of your people to assist us," the American decided, "it seems that we must send back to Celayos for men to take their places."

"Don" Tomás shrugged his shoulders. That, he intimated, was none of his affair; and it might be that *los vampiros,* being furnished with so many fresh victims, would leave his people in peace that much longer. Pembrooke secured his ready promise that the villagers would refrain from discussing, with whatever laborers might be brought in from elsewhere, their own fear of the ruins.

PEMBROOKE sought Doctor Whitaker and Greely, who, after they had listened to the account of his talk with the *jefe politico,* agreed with him as to the necessity of obtaining laborers, white if possible, from Celayos or some other likely place.

In the meantime, it was decided that they themselves would make a prelimi-

nary survey of the ruins, preparatory to the speedy commencement of work, once help was sent for and obtained. Their plans made, and the evening meal disposed of, the trio of Americans yielded to the drowsiness that assailed them with the coming of night.

Pembrooke had scarcely stretched himself upon his camp bed, when it seemed that his eyes were weighted with lead, and an irresistible somnolence bore upon him. As he was about to lose consciousness in sleep, soft footsteps sounded from without, and there was a stirring of the tent flap.

Fully awake upon the instant, like the seasoned campaigner that he was, Pembrooke raised upon one elbow, his other hand reaching for the pistol beneath his pillow. Despite his ordinarily iron nerves, the lingering memory of the half-breed mayor's tale, told with such sincerity, caused a momentary tingling along his spine, and he could feel a prickling of the short hairs at the base of his neck.

The eery feeling lasted but a moment, however. Sharply he called:

"Who is it?" repeating the challenge in Spanish: *"Quien vive?"*

"So you are awake, my son?"

The answering voice, also in Spanish, was seasoned with the burden of years, but calm and clear. The voice added:

"This is Father Sebastiano—may I enter?"

"Assuredly, *Padre,"* Pembrooke welcomed, lighting a lantern.

Father Sebastiano parted the flap and came into the tent. The lantern's yellow light revealed him as a tall, spare man, his thin face limned by not less than three-score years, but keen and intelligent. The hair upon his uncovered head was sparse and snow-white. Despite his all apparent age, there was vigor in his bearing, curiously combined with an air of patient resignation. Certain telltale evidence of his features, and his darkly sallow skin, bespoke his mestizo origin.

"Do I intrude?" the priest inquired. "I am but shortly returned to the village, coming at this hour because I received word of your arrival, with information of your purpose. My people are but simple children, and I feared you might have encountered a rough welcome, coming with such intent." He finished, simply, "So I returned. I saw the light in your tent before you put it out, and thought perhaps to find you still awake."

"There has been no trouble from the villagers," Pembrooke assured, proffering a camp stool. "And there seems to be no objection to our explorations. Only, there is a concerted refusal to aid us—based, it seems, wholly upon superstitious fear of the ruins."

Father Sebastiano listened in silence, somewhat sadly, Pembrooke thought, as the American told him of his talk with the *jefe politico.*

"They are children, as I said before," sighed the priest when Pembrooke had finished. "It is true," he continued, "that there are numerous deaths among the people of this and neighboring villages, where the corpses seem dessicated, drained of blood. Whether the weakness preceding their deaths is caused by a form of anemia, or some other disease of which I am ignorant, I do not know. Although we are so few actual miles from the capital of our country, we are a primitive community, without even a competent man of medicine."

"Is it also true that they drive wooden stakes through the breasts of those who die in the manner you have described?" Pembrooke asked, curious.

"Yes," sadly answered the Jesuit. "It is one of the things I can not prevent, although I do not condone. In this poor country of ours, all who serve Holy Church know that the Indians defile the

true faith with the superstitions of their barbarous heritage."

"You believe it superstition, then—these legends of the vampires of the ruins? The mayor gave me to understand that you sympathized with the local beliefs."

"I am a servant of God!" sternly rebuked the priest. "How then should I believe in the possibility, much less the potency, of the foul curse of a never-existent demon-god of a heathen, blasphemous theology?"

A shade passed across Father Sebastiano's face. Hesitantly, almost fearfully, and speaking more to himself than to Pembrooke, he startled the latter by adding:

"And yet . . . there are things, as fearsome as this, spoken of in Holy Writ: there are things that God, in his wisdom, has not vouchsafed to me. Sometimes . . . I do not know——"

He rose abruptly, repudiating his words with a vehement gesture.

"I am getting into my dotage! I assess penances to others, who need them less than I." He passed a thin hand wearily across his brow. "I am tired. . . . I should not have disturbed you, but I wished to know that strangers in our midst were well, before I slept. Rest well, my son, and God be with you."

With his parting benediction, Father Sebastiano lifted the tent flap, and stepped into the night.

"For all his priestly training, the good *padre* is, after all, half Indian," Pembrooke mused, as he again extinguished his lantern. He slept undisturbed through the remaining hours until dawn.

THE following morning, Pembrooke suggested moving camp to within the confines of the ruins, and the experiment of beginning work with only the assistance of Pablo and Juan. Doctor Whitaker, eager to begin the enterprise, readily assented, and further agreed to a slight bonus in addition to the regular wages of the two Mexicans.

Once their decision was reached, the party was soon on its way across the rough country between the village and the ruins. They left Santa Rosalia to the accompaniment of silent, gloomy stares from the villagers, who obviously considered them fools marching deliberately to their doom.

Noon found their tents pitched within a stone's throw of the largest of the mounds comprising the ruins, which Doctor Whitaker surmised had probably been the great temple of the ancient city.

A supply of water had been their greatest concern, as they were able to bring with them from Santa Rosalia only two five-gallon casks of the precious fluid, strapped with other gear upon a burro. Pembrooke, however, disposed of this worry by discovering a small natural reservoir, fed with fresh water from a clear little spring.

After the heat of early afternoon had in a measure abated, Doctor Whitaker set Juan and Pablo to clearing away the surface growth and rubble from what were clearly the ruins of a small building.

Many traces of other structures were more clearly exposed than had been expected, and Greely was busily at work with his camera. Pembrooke and Doctor Whitaker spent the afternoon in beginning a survey to mark the sites promising the most profit to their limited means of examination.

Sunset found the party, Americans and Mexicans alike, weary from the exertions of the day. After the evening repast, it was not long until the camp lay wrapped in silence, the drab khaki tents standing starkly outlined against their uneven background, bathed in the silvery clear Mexican moonlight.

As the night wore on, clouds obscured the moon. Afar off, a coyote howled dis-

mally to the heedless stars. To one watching, it would have become apparent that dim forms moved among the canvas shelters in the ruins.

At the open entrance to the tent where Pembrooke slept, a slightly built figure peered inside with panting eagerness. The figure glided into the shelter, bent low over the recumbent form of the heavily sleeping American, and paused, like a hunting cheetah who sensed the slipping of its leash.

The moon broke, momentarily, from behind the clouds that, all unnaturally in that arid sky, hung balefully about her face. The pale light, struggling through the open front of the tent, weirdly revealed the scene within. There seemed, also, to be an added ghostly radiance, emanating from no apparent source and confined to the enclosing canvas.

Above the sleeping Pembrooke, her slender tapering fingers hooked into the semblance of poised talons, there bent the slender form of a strange, weird girl, who quivered as if with eagerness. The bending girl was beautiful, with an unholy beauty that was more repellent than mere ugliness, marred as it was with the obscene lust that distorted her perfect features. Her eyes, wide and faintly luminous, glared with cruel gloating, like those of a sleek and hungry leopardess about to seize her prey. Lips that, in their intended sweet repose, looked as if they might have been sculptured from coral by the loving hand of genius, writhed back from sharp white teeth like sentient things endowed with separate life and volition of their own.

The girl—if girl she was!—stooped yet lower, and in stooping, changed her screening posture so that the moon shone from behind her cloak, full upon Pembrooke's face. With a low, choking cry, she drew back. For a moment she stood tense; then a name escaped the carmine lips. It was a sound wrenched from the depths of anguish:

"Hautepec!"

Pembrooke (as if he had lain heavily under a spell of slumber, and the cry was the charm that broke his enchantment) roused instantly, alert and reaching for his gun.

"Who is it?" he challenged, pistol leveled in his hand. Then he was aware that it was a woman who confronted him in the dimness of the tent's interior—a woman who stood as if stricken, shielding her face with her hands. A second strangled cry escaped from behind the screening fingers.

"Hautepec!"

Pembrooke sprang from his cot, discarding his weapon in consideration of the intruder's sex. Swiftly he lit the lantern hanging from the ridgepole of the tent.

"What do you want?" he demanded roughly, turning again to his uninvited visitor. Slowly, as he looked, the frown of annoyance left his face; the grim lines about his mouth softened. There came into the eyes a look of bewilderment, surprize, and something that betokened, so it seemed, the groping of elusive memory. The girl—she could have counted hardly more than twenty years—had dropped her hands, and stood regarding him with wide, beseeching eyes.

"Who are you?" Pembrooke again questioned. His eyes took in the girl's beauty, which had somehow lost its erstwhile underlying horror. He noted the soft rounding of her chin, the seductive turn of her throat and neck. Her hair, ebon as the wings of night, and so sleek that the lantern's light glanced off it like a nimbus about her head, was parted and drawn back over little ears, of which only the tips peeped shyly forth. A simple golden fillet held one great green stone above her forehead. Her skin was richly,

warmly golden, with an effect of clear transparency that heightened its loveliness. A nose, straight, but thin-bridged and delicately chiseled, proclaimed with pride, rather than betrayed, the ancient blood of Mexico.

The girl's garments were perhaps the strangest part of her strange self. A simple slip of what looked like soft white cotton fabric covered her slender body, from shoulders to half-way between knees and shapely ankles. The simplicity of the dress was relieved at neck and hem by rich and exquisite embroidery in green thread, in which were sewn, profusely, what might have been pearls and gems of green and red and turquoise blue. Sandals, that were little more than gilded soles, were bound with colored cord to tiny, high-arched bare feet.

All this Pembrooke noted in one appraising glance. He felt a strange stirring, deep within himself, as of the awakening of tender but long-forgotten memories. There was something about this woman that, in the length of his swift appraisal, made his blood course faster—as there was also something that chilled him, even as his pulses leaped.

The girl spoke. Her voice, silvery clear and musical, flowed forth in a cascade of words. From her tones, it seemed that she entreated, and was by turns hopeful and despairing. Mostly, she was desperately imploring.

So Pembrooke thought, understanding no part of what she said. The girl spoke in a language that was like none he knew; indeed, her words were akin to those of no tongue he had ever heard before. He shook his head to indicate his lack of understanding.

A LOOK of anguish swept into the girl's dark eyes at Pembrooke's negative gesture, which gave way to bewilderment and, finally, to relieved comprehension. She glided swiftly forward and, before he was aware of her intention, drew Pembrooke's head down with her hands, so that she could look deep into his eyes.

The American shuddered at her touch: there was a repellent coldness to the flesh that seemed so warm and golden. Ere he could draw back, the feeling passed. Instead, it seemed that the tent and all its fixtures were becoming dim and indistinct. They stood in the open, in the midst of the barren ruins.

There was no sign of the other tents, of his companions: he was alone with this strange and yet curiously familiar princess—it did not occur to him to wonder how he knew she was a princess, or aught else concerning her.

The girl, still gazing deeply into Pembrooke's eyes, spoke again. This time her words fell upon understanding ears. Dimly, Pembrooke was aware that the princess spoke in some strange tongue with which he had no prior acquaintance; yet he understood, as clearly as if her words were English.

"Hautepec," murmured the beautiful lips, "beloved, you have come at last!"

"Hautepec? Beloved?" Pembrooke struggled with the haunting whispers of ghostly recollection.

"Do you not remember Tascala—have the passing cycles effaced even the memory from your heart?"

"Tascala?" Pembrooke hoarsely echoed. There was an active familiarity about the name. It struck chords of fond remembrance; and at the same time it roused a surge of bitterness that caused Pembrooke, involuntarily, to force the small, cold hands roughly from his face.

"Then you do remember?" whispered she who called herself Tascala, flinching at her repulse. "You remember—and will not forgive?"

"There is something that prompts me

to hate you . . . Tascala." Pembrooke brushed a hand wearily across his eyes. "Yet, I know I want to quench in your arms the fire that burns me at your nearness—to hold you close, and press your lips with mine until I bruise them—Tascala!"

There was a low, joyous cry from Tascala. She seized Pembrooke's hand in both her own, so that once again he shuddered at the icy coldness of her fingers, even as her touch thrilled him.

"Come!" Tascala urged. "Let me show you once again those things you have forgotten. You must know to understand, and understanding, you will forgive—you *must* forgive!"

Pembrooke followed as she, one hand holding fast to his, led toward the mound that Doctor Whitaker thought had been the great temple. It seemed they climbed the massive pile; at least, Pembrooke found himself atop it with the princess.

Strangely enough (and yet it seemed quite natural, too), he discovered that he really was not upon the summit of what had been the temple, after all, but within its base. Rather, he seemed to see within a room without actually being there: it was as if he were present in that part of him that saw, and heard, and understood, while he, embodied, was absent elsewhere. He knew, too, that these were the quarters of Ixmal, high priest of the temple.

The high priest sat upon a bench over which a costly feather mantle was carelessly draped. To Pembrooke, whose senses only recorded the meaning of what he saw and heard, without emotion or analysis, it occasioned no surprize that the hawk-nosed, fierce-eyed Ixmal was perfectly familiar. *Had he not known him since infancy? Were they not, indeed, princes of the same great house?*

The high priest addressed an underling, who bent an attentive and obsequious ear. This under-priest was old; or it may have been that his face was seamed and lined and burnt with the sins that fired his sunken, evil eyes. The high priest spoke:

"You are skilled in such matters: Is there a drug to bend her will to mine?"

"The simplest of them all, Lord Ixmal," leered the under-priest. "There is the plant which, smoked and inhaled deeply into the lungs like ordinary *tabac*, both inspires the smoker with false courage or ferocity and, at the same time, subjects him—or *her!*—to the hypnotic influence of a stronger personality."

"Ah!" breathed the high priest. "Is it readily obtainable?"

"I have sufficient, and more than sufficient, Lord——"

"Popotchla," Ixmal interrupted his underling, "as is known to you, I have, with the aid of the Emperor Montezuma, forced our King Cacomac to enroll his daughter, the Princess Tascala, as a priestess in the temple."

The priest, Popotchla, inclined his head.

"It is well known, Lord Ixmal," he smugly affirmed, "that the princess serves in the temple as a sign to the people that the royal family serves the gods with true devotion."

"Aye!" fiercely spoke the high priest. "The king secretly longs for a return to the unenlightened faith of our fathers: he would like to see our altars once more decked with flowers and laden with offerings of fruits, as in the days before the coming of the Aztecs brought us the true faith. The gods demand human sacrifices, not the fruits of the field!"

"And the spirits of the gods enter the sacrifices," smoothly supplemented Popotchla, "and partaking thereof imparts the attributes of gods to men."

"It is so!" Fanaticism burned in the high priest's angry eyes. "Partaking of

the consecrated food is mandatory, a necessary ceremony—and the king likes it not. The Princess Tascala, aided and encouraged by the Prince Hautepec, her suitor and my own kinsman, wholly refuses the sacred sustenance of our ritual."

"The people hold in great esteem the Princess Tascala—and the Lord Hautepec," Popotchla maliciously observed.

"True!" agreed Ixmal. "It is for that very reason that the princess must, by precept and example, encourage the people in the strict reverence of our gods. A man may not say of his worship: 'I will do *this,* because it seems good to me; but I will not do *that,* as it is contrary to my liking.' That is heresy, and presumption to the sacred function of the priesthood —it is blasphemy to the gods!

"Aye! The princess must yield, even if we drive the devils from her mind with drugs!"

"And the Prince Hautepec?" slyly prompted Popotchla.

"Ah!" The exclamation was a snarl. "Hautepec dies upon the rock of sacrifice!" Higher leaped the flame of fanaticism in Ixmal's burning eyes. "The royal family and the nobles have bred heresy among the people, and they must atone with the sacrifice of one of their number —perhaps more!

"I would see a strong Tapalapan, a Tapalapan in her rightful place at the head of the confederacy of Anahauc, instead of yielding that place to Mexico and acknowledging Montezuma's overlordship. . . . Yet how may that be, if the gods withhold favor, to punish a weak state for the heresy of her weak king? The gods must be served, and Tapalapan wax strong through their subvention."

The high priest fell silent; with a gesture he dismissed Popotchla. After the vulpine under-priest had slipped away, Ixmal sat wrapped in revery, brooding and absorbed in his scheming.

"Yea," he soliloquized, rousing after a moment, "Hautepec dies upon the altar! He is nephew to the king, and therefore eligible for election by the Council of Great Nobles which now openly favors him, to succeed his royal uncle. Never will a weakling among the puppet sons of Cacomac be chosen to follow after his impotent sire. And I, who must otherwise stand aside for Hautepec, could force my own election were he but removed! . . . If Ixmal serve the gods, and also serve himself thereby, shall blame attach to him for that?

"Montezuma—himself a priest before he was called to be an emperor—will eagerly confirm the sentence of death by sacrifice, which my unanswerable charge of heresy shall force the courts to pass upon my rival. The emperor's policy, no less than his honest orthodoxy, must move him so. Montezuma rightly fears that Hautepec would prove a restive and ambitious vassal—nor suspects that I, to whom he lends support, will incline far less to vassalage!"

THE picture changed. It was almost midday, and the fierce sun of Anahauc beat down upon the summit of the temple, as the temple stood in its time of pride and arrogance.

Slowly, inexorably, the Lord of the Day climbed to his zenith. Golden rays, like searching fingers, crept toward a slit in the stone canopy upon the topmost platform of the great pyramidal *teocali* of sanguinary Mexitl, dread God of War. Tensely impatient, the red-robed and fanatical-eyed high priest waited, the sacrificial knife of polished obsidian half raised in eager readiness.

Between the twin square towers, fifty feet in height, that rose from the flat top of the temple and housed the grotesque images of its major deities, Cacomac, Lord of Tapalapan, sat in the midst of the re-

splendent nobles—and not a few of the ladies—of his court. Far below, close-packed about the pyramid's base, the expectant populace awaited the climax of the ghastly tableau poised above them.

Waited, also, the doomed figure—*that Pembrooke knew to be himself!*—stretched upon his back across the war god's altar. A pair of black-robed priests, wild-eyed and with loose matted hair falling over their shoulders, each bore down upon an ankle of their victim. A similar pair held his arms spread wide and downward over the sides of the altar; while the fifth of the gruesome team cupped hands beneath his chin, pulling his head backward. The sacrifice was ready, his body arched over the convex stone, his heaved-up chest a taut offering to the high priest's office.

The man upon the altar, with a sudden mighty wrench of his arms, broke free of the restraining priests and sat upright upon the stone. He made no further move to escape, but sat with one arm outstretched, pointing accusingly at the red-robed priestess who had handed Ixmal the *itzli,* and who now stood behind the high priest, waiting with avid eyes in which there was yet a dulled but haunting horror. The priestess was Tascala—but a Tascala whose face was blank and void of feeling, with only her wild, drugged eyes alight. Before he could be borne down again, the prince upon the altar spoke, and there was something in his bearing that caused the priests to halt.

"I, Hautepec, Prince of Tapalapan and once a chief of the king's armies, do curse you with these last words of mine—Tascala!" His bitter face turned to the sky, he called:

"Hear me, a warrior, dread Mexitl! Take me as sacrifice, but seal my curse upon this woman: May her foul appetite become an ever greater lust! May she find no peace from her ravening, even in the halls of the dead—may her unnatural hunger outlast Tapalapan and cheat her of the rest she shall long for in her tomb! Let her live through the cycles of eternity, a slave to her lust for the flesh and blood of mankind. May she be a thing of horror, and those upon whom she preys become as she, so that her name shall be a curse in the mouths of men!

"And as for Ixmal, who has never made false pretense to be my friend, nor disavowed his enmity for me as one who stood athwart the path of his ambition—him I leave to the doom of his own contriving. . . .

"A sign, O God of Warriors—a sign, and I will be your willing sacrifice!"

Strangely, while the company upon the platform of the temple stood rooted in their tracks, and the populace below murmured with awe and terror—a cloud overspread the fierce countenance of the sun. The heavens darkened, and a blanket of thicker, almost tangible blackness enveloped the summit of the *teocali.* Lightning played evilly between the towers of the temple; there were rustlings and movements within the sable murk about the altar—the sense and feel of a grim, terrible, amorphous Presence. A Voice, that was yet voiceless, beat upon the consciousness of those who were enveloped in the bank of darkness.

"I hear!" The formless words of the Presence smote with the thunder of silence. "I hear! And cursed be the Princess Tascala, with the curse of this man whom men name Hautepec."

"Forever, O Mexitl?" demanded the voice of the inflexible prince.

"The cycles of time turn within themselves—there is no Beginning, no Ending, no Forever," replied the wordless Voice. "Cursed be Tascala—*until Hautepec forgive her!*"

"It is forever!" fiercely, exultantly, cried the prince who sat upright upon the

altar. "Traitress to me, her affianced lover, abetter of false Ixmal who is traitor to her king and father! Forgive her? Never!"

"The sacrifice is acceptable," abruptly and grimly the Voice announced.

The black mists swirled and eddied, dissolved as abruptly as they had gathered. The burning, blinding light of day again bathed the temple. The priests upon the sacrificial platform recovered from their terror.

"The God accepts the sacrifice!" shouted Ixmal. Once more, the doomed Hautepec lay pinioned on the altar.

Now, at long last, the sunlight pierced the slit in the stone canopy, signaling the commencement of the sacrifices. A warm golden spot settled softly, caressingly, over the heart of the prince. The high priest's arm rose: there was a flash of light to mark the upward arc of the *itzli* in his hand. . . .

AGAIN the scene shifted. With weird insight and the eye of reincarnated memory, Pembrooke watched as fragments of the past were re-enacted in swift, kaleidoscopic succession.

He saw Tascala, half crazed with the drug introduced into her tobacco, which she used as did most of the women of her class and nation—saw Tascala fiercely spurn Ixmal's lewd advances. Yet again, in another fragmentary picture, there was Tascala at the altar upon the temple's flat apex, violating all the set and rigorous ceremony of sacrifice and the limitations placed upon her sex, brushing Ixmal aside after the priest had plunged his knife into a victim and torn out his heart. He saw Tascala bend over the ensanguined orifice in the breast of the still quivering wretch upon the altar, while the company upon the *teocali* grew sick with horror. Her lips . . . writhed. . . .

In the flash of another picture, Tascala, the light of sanity in her haunted and sunken eyes, drained a measure of what Pembrooke instinctively knew was deadly venom. He saw her body later buried whole, instead of being cremated as was often done.

One final, fleeting picture: Tascala—though Tascala had been dead!—leaned in the night, gloating and vengeful, above the sleeping form of the high priest, Ixmal. . . .

After that, although how long afterward he did not know, Pembrooke found himself once more upon the top of the great mound that was the ruined temple. Tascala was still there before him, and he fancied, dully, that she had just passed her cold hands across his brow. The yet clouded noon had now swung low across the sky.

"Have you seen, beloved? And seeing, have you understood? Have you understood how foul Ixmal drugged away my will—my very sanity—and sowed with his own will that dreadful seed that grew beyond what even he intended?" Tascala's voice trembled, broke.

"And you, Hautepec, you laid upon me the curse that made of me a thing of fear and horror. Ah, Hautepec! Have I not atoned? You have made me suffer ten thousand times ten thousandfold, tortures worse than all the Pits of Evil could offer. I suffer thus, and have suffered the anguish of your love lost to my poor drugged heart and mind, because you asked it of great Mexitl—I suffer thus, *until you forgive!*"

Her eyes burning with anguish and entreaty, Tascala held out her slim, rounded arms to Pembrooke. He gazed at her with lurking horror in the depths of his own eyes; but there was pity, too—and something vastly more. He wanted, more than he had ever wanted anything, to feel this woman, soft and *warm*, held close in his arms. It seemed he had wanted her

for centuries: it explained, perhaps, why he had never loved another.

After all, he reasoned, swift thoughts surging in his brain that was once more and strangely clear: after all, was not he—if he had once been Hautepec—more responsible for her final evil fate than had been Ixmal? If his forgiveness could cleanse her, give her peace—*give her to him*——

"I forgive you!" The hoarse voice sounded to him like another's. "I—love —you, still!"

"Beloved!" Tascala sobbed with rapture, her arms opened wide to Pembrooke. She took one impulsive step toward him, then paused, lifting her unearthly beautiful, radiant face to the night sky.

"Great Mexitl," cried the princess, in a voice that rang like the peal of an imperious silver bell, "dread God, hear thou this man! He forgives: lift thou the curse!"

Upon the heels of her words, great clouds of blackness swooped around and enveloped the summit of the mound, as they had cloaked the *teocali* on that day of ancient time. The dark mists seethed and billowed angrily; lightning flashes slithered uneasily about within their disturbed folds. Again there was the seeming of a dread Presence brooding in the caliginous dark.

"Dost thou hear, great Mexitl?" the clear, undaunted voice of the princess demanded.

"I hear," replied the voice of the Presence, speaking soundlessly as of yore. "I hear! But lift thou thine own curse—if thou canst! Take him in thy cold arms, and see if his forgiveness and thy love be stronger than his curse. The task is thine!" There was an evil, hidden humor in the monstrous, voiceless utterance.

As abruptly as it had come, the sable cloak of mist was gone. The moon had sunk but little lower.

Tascala raised her arms again to Pembrooke.

"You have heard, beloved! Can you take me, as I am, in your arms and warm my cold body with your love? Then indeed shall the curse be lifted."

"Yes, Tascala!" Pembrooke swept her into her arms; and so great was his hunger for her that her deathly coldness caused him no revulsion. And she was soft. He felt her exquisite body, her rounded breasts, melt against him as he drew her close. Her arms stole upward to his neck.

Then, from aside, a snarling voice spoke; and it seemed as if the words were thrown, so violently did they smite upon the ears of the pair who stood entwined.

"Stop, Tascala—fool!"

There upon the mound with them, red-robed and fierce-eyed, Ixmal stood, his face a livid mask of passion.

"Stop!" he repeated.

"Begone, Ixmal!" the princess commanded. "With the lifting of the curse, you shall be no more than dust. It is only through me, and through the curse that came to me of your evilness, that you have your foul life-in-death. You belong to the dust of Tapalapan!"

Ixmal laughed, but there was no mirth in the sound.

"And you?" he jeered. "Do you not belong with that same dust?"

Pembrooke felt Tascala flinch within his arms. She lifted fearful, startled eyes to his, in which apprehension matched her own. Her arms paused in their travel to his shoulders. Then all at once her face grew calm and quietly serene.

"I think not, Ixmal! I do not believe the gods jest with their promises, nor punish twice the same offense. If I forfeit this unreal survival of myself when I was called Tascala—it will but end one long

(Please turn to page 415)

The House of the Living Dead

By HAROLD WARD

An amazing goose-flesh story of disinterred corpses that breathed, lived and loved again—a tale of stark horror

1. John Harper

"LIVING corpses! Men and women, filched from the grave, festering in their moldering cerements, talking, laughing, dancing, breathing, holding hellish jubilee! All this have I seen—and more. Yet who will believe me—I who am an inmate of the House of the Living Dead? Even as I pen this screed I look down and see the rotting cloth dropping from my mildewed framework with every move and feel the maggots bore their tortuous way through my decaying carcass. Ugh! Even I, living dead man that I am, inured to the horror of it all, shudder as I write.

"I am helpless. Would that I had the power to free myself from the foul grasp of Lessman, the master of us all! Across the room lies the body of Carter Cope. Soon, but not until Lessman commands, I will return to occupy it. My body belongs to him—to Doctor Lessman. But my soul is my own, even though Lessman holds it in his clutches. For the soul does not die. Ah, a wonderful man is Darius Lessman—able as he is to throw off his temporal body and assume that of another. He is a superman — or a devil. I——"

Asa Rider, private investigator, laid the manuscript on the table before him with a snort of disgust.

"What twaddle is this?" he demanded angrily. "My time is too valuable, Mr. Harper, to devote to such drivel. It is nothing but the maniacal gibberings of a diseased brain. I——"

His visitor stopped him with a little gesture.

"But is it?" he questioned gravely. "Do I look like the sort of man to be stampeded? As I told you at the commencement of our interview, I am an attorney of twenty-five years' standing. I know Carter Cope. Only a few months ago he was in my office. He came in response to my request. I, as attorney for Priestly Ogden, retained him to institute a search for that unfortunate young man. I can honestly say that he is no more insane than you are. He disappeared that night. His car was found, a battered pile of junk, in an abandoned stone quarry many miles north of here. His body has never been found.

"I never believed that he was dead. Then, yesterday, this weird manuscript reached me by mail. It was in a sealed envelope placed within another envelope, both addressed to me. With it was a brief note from a man who signs himself Fred Rolfe stating that he had picked it up alongside the road close to Oakwood cemetery. The handwriting, both in the body of the manuscript and on the envelope, is that of Carter Cope.

"Briefly, sir, I believe that Carter Cope is the victim of some terrible misfortune. Possibly, as you have suggested, it may

"We picked up the body of Priestly Ogden and put it in the coffin."

be mental. But, at any rate, he still lives. I want you to seek him out and save him from this—this thing, whatever it is. I sent Carter Cope into it, just as I am seeking to send you. I feel a moral responsibility and John Harper is not the man to shirk his responsibilities. My private fortune—and I am not a poor man by any means—is at your command. Incidentally, in seeking him, you may run across a clue to the whereabouts of Priestly Ogden. I ask you this favor, Mr. Rider: Read the manuscript to the end. Diagnose it with an open mind. Having finished it, if you do not care to accept the commission, I will seek some other detective. Otherwise——"

"Why did you come to me?" Rider interrupted bluntly. "I am a stranger to you. My reputation is not so great that you would seek me out without some good reason."

John Harper shrugged his shoulders.

"Perhaps you are not unknown to me," he responded quickly. "And I know you to be a single man, your closest relative a distant cousin. I am sending you into danger. And, frankly, you will not be greatly missed should you meet the same fate that seems to have overtaken Carter Cope and Priestly Ogden. I say with equal frankness that I doubt whether you will come out of the affair alive. I have a feeling—call it a hunch, if you choose—to that effect. The man who accepts my commission can not be a coward."

"Your talk of danger intrigues me," Rider said hotly. "Leave the manuscript here. Let me read it through. I will give you my answer in the morning."

John Harper rose to his feet.

"I will be at the Lincoln Tavern until noon tomorrow," he responded, extending his hand. "I will expect an acceptance by that time or the return of the manuscript. Meanwhile"—his hand moved toward his pocket—"what about a retaining fee? It is customary, I believe."

Rider shook his head.

"Should I accept your commission, I will render my bill when I have finished my work," he answered. "And I warn you in advance, Mr. Harper, that it will not be a small one."

"Bring me the solution of the puzzle and there will be no quibbling over your fee," Harper asserted. "I want to know the truth regardless of the cost."

He moved toward the door. Even before it closed behind him, Rider knew that he would accept the lawyer's tender. He filled and lighted his brier and gathered the sheaf of papers together. They were in pencil, somewhat in the form of a diary, although undated. With them was a clipping from some newspaper, it, like the manuscript, being without date.

They are given here verbatim:

2. *The Strange Story of Carter Cope*

I AM writing this in the House of the Living Dead. I know it by no other name. Perhaps, some time, some one will find this manuscript and explain my strange fate to the world. Now——

But I digress. Let me start at the beginning, hard though it is to tell the story.

There was something sinister and foreboding about the rambling old place that caused me to shudder in spite of myself. On either side was a clump of evergreens through which each breath of vagrant wind soughed and moaned like a lost soul in purgatory. A scant hundred yards away to the right was a tiny, vine-covered ruin of a church, its spire rotting and drooping, its windows broken. Surrounding it was a tangle of underbrush and weeds through which I caught a glimpse of sunken graves and fallen tombstones.

The house was a huge pile of brick and stone and wood. It sprawled against the side of the little hill like some squat, ungainly monster in the midst of a fetid jungle. The weed-grown burying-ground extended through the evergreens almost to the flagstone path which wound, twisting and snake-like, through the mass of creepers and lilac bushes and stunted arborvitæ trees with which the front yard was filled. There was something eery and unreal about the place—something that gave me a feeling that if I investigated closer I would find a layer of fungus over everything.

Surrounding the unsightly ensemble was a high, iron fence, the pickets sharpened at the top.

I swung open the creaking gate and entered, only to leap back with an exclamation of fright as the head and shoulders of a man suddenly appeared out of a little clump of bushes. He was a huge lump of a fellow, loutish and uncouth, his beard black and tangled, the hair—which hung low over his retreating forehead—long and matted and filled with sand burs. For an instant he gazed at me, an idiotic grin on his dough-like face, while I stared blankly back. Then I recovered myself and plunged into speech.

"I am looking for Doctor Darius Lessman," I informed him civilly. "Does he live here?"

The man made neither sound nor comment. Not a gleam of comprehension flitted over his ox-like face. I repeated the question again. For what seemed ages he stood there gazing dumbly at me. Then, with a queer, gurgling, throaty

sound, he turned and disappeared back into the tangle of underbrush.

I was tempted to turn and retreat to my car, which stood beside the road a dozen rods away. Again the boding of disaster swept over me. In spite of the fact that the day had been hot and sultry, I felt the chills chase themselves up and down my spinal column. Would to God I had yielded to that feeling and left the accursed place then and there. Instead, cursing myself for a fool, I squared my shoulders and continued my way up the stone-paved path.

The door before which I found myself was of nail-studded oak, blackened with age and flanked on either side by narrow panes of dark-colored glass. There was no sign of bell or knocker. Doubling my fist, I pounded a lusty tattoo.

There was no answer. I rapped again, cursing under my breath. I had a feeling that there was somebody on the other side of the panels, although I heard nothing. I raised my knuckles to rap again, when the door opened a tiny crack and an eye peered out at me. I opened my mouth to speak, when the eye was suddenly withdrawn. A chain rattled. Then the door was slowly opened and I found myself staring into the face of a young woman attired in the conventional garb of a nurse.

"Pardon the delay in answering your summons," she said in a rich, throaty contralto. "In a place like this we, naturally, are forced to be careful."

She waited for me to answer. She was tall—taller than the average—and dark with the clear, white skin of the Eurasian. Her hair was drawn back under her pert little cap; it was as black as the darkness of a moonless night, while the eyes which gazed inquiringly into mine were as deep and unfathomable as limpid pools.

"Doctor Lessman," I managed to articulate.

"What is your business with him?" she demanded pleasantly, although firmly. "Doctor Lessman is, as you are no doubt aware, a very busy man. I am his secretary."

I nodded and presented my credentials.

"Carter Cope," she said, gazing down at the card in the leather-covered case I held in front of her eyes. "You are a detective?"

"In search of a young man named Priestly Ogden," I hastened to explain. "I have been retained by his relatives—or rather, by his lawyer for them."

"And where does Doctor Lessman fit into the picture?" she inquired.

"I hardly know myself," I smiled back at her. "The fact is that in searching through the young man's effects I chanced upon a scrap of paper on which the doctor's name was written. Investigation showed that he is licensed to operate a sanitarium for the treatment of mental disorders. Resolved to run down every possible clue, I came here in the hope that some quirk in the young man's brain prompted him to place himself under the doctor's care in the belief that he was temporarily deranged."

She nodded her comprehension.

"I can recall no patient by that name," she said thoughtfully. "However, it would be best for you to talk to the doctor. Step into the office, please, and I will call him."

THE room in which I found myself was out of keeping with the gloomy exterior of the house. It was gorgeously furnished, its columns of lapis-lazuli, the great fireplace across the end of onyx and marble. The walls were panelled and covered with silken curtains; the rugs were Persian and almost priceless. Here and there hung rare paintings; scattered about were exquisite marbles in keeping with the remainder of the great room.

I dropped into a large Louis XV chair and looked about me.

"Doctor Lessman is busy just now," the girl informed me as she glided into the room. "I have informed him of your presence, however, and he will be with you inside of a few minutes."

She left the room again, closing the door behind her. I heard the click of a bolt and knew that I had been locked inside. My dealings with hospitals for the insane had been negligible, however, and I solaced myself with the thought that this, perhaps, was the customary procedure in places such as this.

For a moment I busied myself in making a mental survey of the room and its treasures. Then the thought suddenly flashed through my mind that, even though the sun was shining brightly outside, the place was artificially lighted. I glanced toward the windows. What I discovered there gave me a start.

The rich tapestry curtains covered thick steel shutters, tightly padlocked.

"YOU wished to see me, sir?"

I woke from my revery. The man who stood before me was tall and thin almost to the point of emaciation. He was clad in a surgeon's white smock, his coal-black hair brushed straight back. His nose was thin and hooked slightly, his dark beard trimmed to a needle-point. It was his eyes, however, which attracted me most. They were black and beady, deeply sunken in their sockets and thatched by heavy brows, giving his countenance an appearance at once saturnine and satanic.

I leaped to my feet with an apology.

"You are Doctor Lessman?"

He nodded. Then:

"My secretary tells me that you are seeking a young man—Ogden, I believe she said the name was?"

While he was speaking he motioned me back to my chair, at the same time seating himself on the opposite side of the table. From one of the drawers he drew forth a sack of smoking-tobacco and a book of papers and, taking a leaf therefrom, deftly rolled himself a cigarette.

"Smoke?" he inquired, pushing a humidor of cigars across to me.

I nodded and accepted one of the weeds. He waited until I had lighted it, then plunged into a mass of questions which almost left me breathless with the answering. The man was a brilliant talker, examining me so deftly that inside of five minutes he had milked me dry in spite of myself, learning almost as much of my past life as I knew myself.

"A bachelor, eh?" he said reflectively. "Quite the thing, I would imagine, for one whose occupation is as dangerous as yours. Criminology has always been a hobby of mine; I regret that I have not had the time to study it more. Take the present instance—psychologically, I mean. I would like to know what reasoning led you to believe that your man, Ogden, was here?"

We are all more or less susceptible to flattery. I am no different from the average man. I told him of my search for the missing young man and the finding of the slip of paper among his effects with Lessman's name written on it.

"It was my belief," I said, taking the bit of paper from my pocket and passing it across the table to the physician, "that the young man might be suffering from a belief that he was off mentally and that he had, therefore, placed himself under your care."

Lessman slowly shook his head as he examined the paper I had handed him.

"Not my writing," he said. Then: "In other words, Mr. Cope, your visit here is merely one of the thousand little details connected with your profession?"

I nodded.

"By running down each tiny clue we eventually hit upon something which leads us to the solution of the puzzle we are working on," I answered somewhat grandiloquently.

"Your man Watson?" he inquired with a twinkle in his deep-set eyes. "I presume you have one—some admirer who takes notes of your triumphs and mistakes in the hope of some day handing your exploits down to posterity?"

I shook my head.

"I work entirely alone," I replied. "My trip here will, like thousands of my other mistakes, never be chronicled for the simple reason that no one will ever know of it. No one knows that I am here and I am not fool enough to tell of my blunder. It is only my successes that I report."

I realized too late that my answer was what he had been seeking for. His face changed. The look of dignity was wiped out in an instant and in its place came a peculiar, evil stare.

I started to leap to my feet. Something held me in my chair as in a vise. What was it? I do not know. Nor do I understand it to this day. I struggled against it with all the power at my command, but in vain. I tried to talk. My tongue clove to the roof of my mouth. My head was as clear as a bell. I could think and reason, but I could not co-ordinate my muscles. I was paralyzed.

LESSMAN bent over me for an instant. Then he stepped across the floor and opened the door.

"Meta!" he called sharply.

The girl entered. She gave a single look at me, then dropped into a chair and covered her face with her hands.

"Another?" she wailed. "Oh, God! No more—no more! This—this horrible —this awful thing has gone far enough!"

Lessman stretched his hand toward her. She rose, half crouching, and approached my side. Then she sprang back again, a look of revulsion spreading over her beautiful face.

"Some other time. Some other time," she wailed. "I can not go through with it today."

A dog-whip was lying on one of the chairs. Lessman seized it and brought it down across her beautiful shoulders. With the first blow her attitude changed. For an instant she cowered in the corner. Then, as he struck her again, he hissed a word of command. She tore her gown open in the front and allowed its folds to drop around her, baring her beautiful body to the lash. Across the white flesh the cruel whip raised a dozen red welts. She took a step closer to her tormentor. Again and again he struck her with all the force at his command.

The expression on her face was not one of pain, but of sensual enjoyment. She uttered no sound as she stood there, her lips parted slightly in a smile that showed her gleaming teeth, a look of almost dog-like devotion in her wonderful eyes. With a snarl, the doctor finally hurled the whip upon the floor. She leaped forward and dropped to her knees at his feet, her arms raised in an attitude of supplication.

"You are my master!" she exclaimed proudly. "My body is yours to command. My soul belongs to God, but you are its keeper."

He smiled triumphantly. Slowly he turned on the balls of his feet and pointed to me. Her eyes brightened. For an instant she crouched like a panther about to spring. Then she turned to him again.

"Something tells me that somewhere another holds my heart like a burning pearl between his hands, Master," she wailed.

"This is he," Lessman asserted.

Her face changed. She moved toward

me slowly, her rounded arms extended. I prayed. God, how I prayed! The world danced before my eyes. Something was happening. My very soul was being torn from its moorings. She pressed her lips to mine. I attempted to push her from me—to shriek for help. I was unable to move, to utter a sound.

Before me the burning eyes of Lessman seared into my brain. Something seemed to tell me that I was not myself—that I was some one else—some one who had known and loved this girl in the dim past. . . . Then consciousness left me.

3. The Awakening

I RETURNED to consciousness with a start. I was lying on a cot in a bleak, unfurnished room. The sun was shining through the uncurtained window. The beetle-browed man I had seen in the garden at the time of my entrance was sitting on a broken chair close to the foot of the bed regarding me with an idiotic grin.

For an instant I lay there trying to collect my thoughts. Then recollection swept over me. The remembrance of that meeting in the doctor's office—everything—came to me with a rush. I swung my feet to the floor and rose unsteadily. The man with the beetle brow gave a peculiar, guttural cry and took to his heels, slamming the door behind him.

Unconsciously I swept my hand across my chin. My face was covered with a day's growth of stubble. Yet I had visited the barber just before driving to Lessman's. I glanced down at my wrist watch. It had stopped. The thought flashed across my mind that I had slept the clock around. I felt groggy and tired. My brain declined to function. For an instant the room swam before my eyes. Was I dreaming? No.

I wondered if I was a prisoner. Summoning all of my will-power I staggered to the door through which the shaggy-haired man had retreated. It was unlocked. I stepped out into the hallway.

Unlike the lavishly furnished room where I had met Doctor Lessman, the hall was unfurnished and bare. Cobwebs hung from the ceiling; the corners were festooned with them. The floor was covered with dust. The paper was mildewed and torn. On either side the doors were open. I noted that none of the apartments were furnished. All bore the same evidence of desertion that the hall showed.

I was on the second floor. That much was apparent. I dragged my weary body around the corner and came upon a stairway leading downward. I descended, finally emerging upon the lower level almost in front of Lessman's office. The door was open. I entered.

The saturnine physician was seated beside the table smoking, a book between his fingers. He turned slowly at my approach, his eyes gazing into vacancy. Then recognition swept over him and he gave me a slight nod.

"You are—yes, you are Cope," he said slowly. "Sit down. What do you want?"

"My freedom," I answered bitterly.

He raised his arched eyebrows questioningly.

"My dear man, you are free to go whenever you choose," he answered almost irritably. "You came here as a voluntary patient and asked for treatment. I——"

"Patient? Treatment?" I ejaculated. "What do you mean?"

"Just what I say," he responded. "Your bill is paid a month in advance. Naturally, I will not refund your money, although I do not care to hold you against your will."

Again the room swam before my eyes. Was I insane? Was the whole horrible affair only the hallucination of a disordered mind? Had I dreamed of the beat-

ing he had inflicted upon the girl, Meta? Was the episode following my entrance only a part of my delirium? I turned to him appealingly.

My face must have reflected the condition of my mind. He pointed to the door. I strode forward and, turning the knob, looked out. Something—some strange power—held me back. I tried to break it. Impossible. Like a whipped puppy, I turned back into the room once more. My mind was as clear as a crystal. I swear it. I realized that I was free to go—that it was my duty to leave the hellish place as soon as possible—that I should bring the proper officers back with me and search it from cellar to garret. Yet I could not move. I could no more cross that threshold than I could fly.

The sweat burst out on my brow in great beads. I turned to a chair and dropped into it wearily. Lessman gazed at me mockingly, a cynical smile hovering over his diabolic face. Opening a drawer, he brought forth a printed blank and passed it over to me.

"You must understand, Mr. Cope, that even though your commitment is voluntary, I must have something to show in case of inquiry," he said quietly. "Kindly sign your name on the dotted line at the bottom of the page."

I picked up the pen he offered me. Something seemed to grip my fingers. I struggled against signing, but in vain. In spite of myself I affixed my signature to the document.

SEVERAL days have passed since I wrote the above. I am like an animal now. My hair is matted and unkempt, my beard tangled and uncombed. I spend most of my waking hours in a sort of trance in my bleak, unfurnished room which, it appears, I share with the beetle-browed man. He sleeps on the floor, curled up like a dog. Sometimes I wonder if he is Priestly Ogden. I have asked him several times, but he does not answer me. He seems to be without the power of understanding. He is an automaton. He brings the food to our room and we wolf it down like ravenous beasts without regard for the common decencies. I am almost as wild and unkempt as he is. . . .

I have tried several times to leave this accursed place. I am allowed the run of the yard and there does not appear to be any guard over me. But whenever I approach the gate something seems to drag me back. I am bound here by invisible chains.

I see little of Lessman and less of Meta. I do not seem to be a prisoner, yet, as I said before, I have not the will-power to leave. . . . The other day I found this tablet of paper in one of the rooms. Luckily my pencil was still in my pocket. Lessman, passing by, noticed me writing and gazed over my shoulder. He chuckled, half to himself, but said nothing. Since he made no objection, I will continue.

OF LATE I have been subject to dreams—weird, horrible nightmares. They frighten me. Let me explain. Yesterday there was a funeral in the little cemetery I have already described just at the edge of this uncanny place. I watched them from the window as they tenderly lowered the coffin into its final resting-place.

Final resting-place! God, what a mockery! I wonder if it really was. I dreamed about it last night. Ugh! How realistic that dream was! I was in the burying-ground with the beetle-browed man. We were armed with spades. Lessman stood close by and directed operations while Meta held the lantern by which we worked. We opened the grave and removed the body from the casket—a young and good-looking man—then we refilled

the grave and carried the cold form to the house. It all seemed horribly real.

This morning when I woke up I was tired and every muscle in my body ached as if from some unaccustomed exercise. I scarcely stirred from my bed all day. I am beginning to wonder. . . .

No, I am not insane. Yet Lessman says that I came here and asked him to treat me. I must have been suffering from amnesia, for I have no recollection of anything save what I have written here. I know that I am as sane as I ever was except for the hallucinations and the inability to obey my own will. But if I continue to dream as I have been dreaming I shall be a raving maniac before long. . . .

I HAD another dream last night. God, it was diabolical! I will try and describe it. Lessman seemed to be calling me. I leaped from my couch and hurried through the darkened corridors to a huge room at the rear of the house. The door was open and the place was brilliantly lighted. Lessman, clad in surgeon's smock, was waiting for me. Meta in her trim nurse's garb stood a little way back. She smiled as I entered and gave me a friendly nod.

The room was fitted up like the interior of a hospital. In the center was an operating-table. There were vials and retorts and shelves filled with bottles and boxes and several cases of bright instruments. To one side was a door. Lessman commanded me to open it. His will was mine. A draft of cold air greeted me as I stepped inside. It was like an ice-house, only the air was dead and moldy. Once I was inside a morgue. It was the same—there was a feeling of deadness even in the atmosphere.

He turned on an electric light. It *was* a morgue. On marble slabs lay several bodies in their grave clothes. Nearest the door was the young man I had dreamed of stealing from the grave the night before. At Lessman's command I picked the cold form up in my arms and carried it to the outer room and laid it on a leather-covered couch.

As I straightened up I caught a glimpse of Lessman's eyes. They gazed through me like twin X-Rays. I heard his voice calling to me as from a great distance, telling me to separate myself from my body. Then came a feeling of dissolution. Time after time I seemed to be falling through space—falling—falling—falling. I would catch myself with a jerk, standing in another part of the room, but my body was in front of Lessman. I was puzzled. Always, as I have said, just as my soul seemed to be leaving my body, something would snap and I would find myself gazing into Lessman's eyes.

"I can't do it tonight," I heard him mutter to Meta. "It is not the subject's fault, however, but my own. For some reason I am unable to concentrate. It will have to be you again."

My last recollection was of hearing Meta sobbing.

I awoke again with the same feeling of lassitude and inertia.

GREAT God above! It was not a dream. Everything is clear to me now. I have the satisfaction of knowing, however, that I am not insane. In prowling through the house today I chanced to find the door of the operating-room, or laboratory, open. I entered. The place was unoccupied. The interior was just as it had appeared to me in my vision, dream, or whatever it was. Across the room was the door opening into the little morgue. I knew that inside lay the bodies of the dead. I moved toward it and had my hand on the knob when I heard the voices of Lessman and Meta

in the office. I darted out and was halfway up the stairs when they appeared.

What is this charnel-house? What is the ghastly plot in which I appear to be one of the central figures?

4. A Night of Horror

MY MIND is in a haze as I write these lines. Something has happened to me—something so weird, so unbelievable that I can scarce believe it myself. I am not myself! I am some one else! I am the dead man who was buried in the little cemetery adjoining this foul place and whose cold, cold clay Jake—Lessman and Meta call the beetle-browed man Jake—and I disinterred. And yet I am—I must be—Carter Cope. I think as Carter Cope. My actions are those of Carter Cope. . . . God! It is awful! There is no one to whom I can talk. I must write or my already tottering mind will break entirely.

I say that I am Carter Cope and yet that I am some one else. The body of Carter Cope lies in the little morgue in the rear of Doctor Lessman's laboratory. I have seen it with my own eyes. Yet I am Carter Cope. I am here. But is this I? Where will I commence on this chapter?

Last night I heard the voice of Lessman calling me again. Yet there was no voice save in my own mind. It must have been the thought waves from his marvellous brain beating against my subconsciousness. I rose from my lowly cot and obeyed his command. He and Meta—curse their foul souls!—were in the laboratory. She was clad in some sort of thin, transparent material through which every curve of her beautiful, sensuous body showed. As I entered she gazed at me with a look of indescribable longing. Her blood-red lips were half parted over her pearly teeth; her wonderful eyes were filled with languorous passion. She took a step toward me, her soft, white hands extended beguilingly, her rounded breasts rising and falling with each breath. Lessman turned and waved her back to the couch on which she had been half reclining. Lessman owns me. . . . He owns me body and soul. I am his to command. I know this now. I desired this woman, yet I made no movement toward her because he willed otherwise. At his command I turned away from this rare creature of flesh and blood to the door of the little morgue and staggered forth with the stiff, frozen body of the young man whom I have already mentioned. I placed it on the operating-table, then looked at my master—at Lessman—inquiringly.

"My experiments with you have not been altogether successful," he told me in his calm, low voice. "Somewhere, deep in your sub-conscious mind, your will is battling against that which I am striving to do. In order to make my experiment a success you must be complaisant.

"I am, my friend, attempting to change the law laid down by the Creator of all things. I am attempting the transference of the soul. Think of it! For those who know my secret there will be no such thing as death—only a moving on from one shape to another. When man's body wears out he need only discard it and assume another and so continue on and on to the end of time.

"Science, my friend, has shown us that life—the soul—the essence of being—weighs only the infinitesimal part of an ounce. Yet without it we cease to be. The young man whose carnal shell lies before you weighs practically as much as he ever did. The same framework of bones supports his flesh. Yet he is nothing—a mere clod. Why? Because the thing we call life is missing. It is that spark which, with your help, I propose to give him for the time being.

"Time after time I have succeeded with the assistance of Meta, but never with another. Look at her, my friend. Is she not beautiful? She is yours if you but give me your aid. Allow your sub-conscious mind to lie dormant for an instant until I catch your soul. Will you do it? The prize is well worth winning."

Fool! Fool that I was! Did I not know that his long harangue was merely to compose my soul so that it would be more pliable in his hands? Did I not know that Meta was but the bait to draw me into the trap? I caught a little glimpse of her. She smiled at me. Something within me snapped. . . .

I was a vapor—a thin, transparent, fog-like vapor. My body—the body of Carter Cope—lay sprawled on the floor in the middle of the room while I—that is, my aura—floated, wraith-like, above it. Lessman bent forward, his eyes glittering like twin fires of hell, his arms outstretched toward me.

I could think. My brain was clear. I realized everything that was going on, yet I was powerless to resist my master's call. His voice was calling to me, ordering me to enter the body of the dead man on the operating-table. I made no struggle now. I was too far gone to fight his commands.

Blackness . . . Egyptian darkness . . . the darkness of the infernal regions. And cold—the chill iciness of death . . . the arctic cold of dead, frozen flesh. . . .

I felt a thrill of life pound through my veins. Then came a sensation of delightful warmth. I pulled myself erect.

As true as there is a God in Heaven, I was the dead man. Yet I was not dead. I was alive.

My own discarded body, the body of Carter Cope, lay like a cast-off garment before me. I almost smiled as I noted a tiny rent in the leg of the trousers where I had torn it on a bramble the day before. The clothes I now wore were new—the grave clothes of the boy who had just been buried.

Lessman turned to Meta. His voice trembled with excitement as he addressed her.

"Success! Success at last!" he exclaimed triumphantly. "This, then, is the beginning of the end of my long years of labor."

He leaned forward and whispered something in her ear. She drew back with a little gesture of disgust. He jerked the whip from beneath his smock and struck her across the shoulders. With the first blow she dropped on her knees before him, her arms extended, her face upturned. In her eyes was a look of esthetic bliss.

The wraith-like garment dropped from her rounded shoulders, across which the cruel whip raised a criss-cross of welts. The red blood trickled from them in tiny streams over the smooth, white flesh.

"More! More!" she begged in a soft, low voice. "I am Laela, priestess of Isis. Was I wrong when I loved, even though I had taken the vow of celibacy? Tell me, oh High Priest, ere you scourge me again."

He hurled her from him as if she was unclean. She rose slowly to her feet and drew her garment over her bleeding shoulders. She took a step toward him, her arms outstretched.

"Scourge me, my master," she wailed. "But take me not away from my beloved."

He struck her again. She turned to me. Something—I know not what it was—passed over me. She was calling me. Yet she made no sound. I advanced toward her. She met me. For an instant we stood there facing each other. I looked into her wonderful eyes. Then our lips met in one long, long kiss.

A feeling of bliss swept over me. Words can not describe it. I glanced

over Meta's shoulder. Lessman's eyes were upon me. They bored through me. My temporal body seemed to disappear, leaving my soul alone to meet that of Meta. . . .

Again a feeling of nothingness swept over me. Then came a strange buoyancy. . . .

I was Meta Vanetta!

Before me stood the dead man—not dead, but pulsating with life. His arms were about me. He clasped me to him, drawing me so close that my face was pressed against his shoulder.

I was two beings—myself and Meta.

How can I explain it? I was Meta Vanetta. But was Meta Carter Cope? Impossible! I was still Carter Cope. Yet the body of Carter Cope lay on the floor where I had left it when I entered the shell of the man who stood before me. Upon his hands was blood—blood from the reeking gashes made by the whip on the shoulders of Meta.

Lessman's eyes! Again that feeling of oblivion—or nothingness—swept over me. I was drifting . . . drifting through space . . . drifting. . . .

I awoke. I was leaning against the wall swaying dizzily. Meta stood on the other side of the room. She was leaning forward, her eyes gazing hungrily at me, her white arms extended toward me beseechingly.

"Beloved!" I heard her call.

Then nothingness again.

Great God! I can not understand it.

When I awoke I was lying on my bed of straw. Jake, the beetle-browed man, sat up when he heard me stir and gazed at me, frightened. Then he ran from the room. His eyes were wide with terror.

There is no mirror by which I can confirm my thoughts. *But I know that I am not Carter Cope! I am the dead man we took from the grave!* Jake knows it. That is why he runs away from me.

My hands are covered with blood—Meta's blood!

5. *Dance of the Dead*

Two days have passed since I made my last entry in this account of my life here in this diabolical House of the Living Dead. The House of the Living Dead! What a title that would be for a story! But the author would be locked up for the remainder of his life in some asylum. No one would believe that it was anything but the wanderings of a diseased mind.

Lessman is treating me better now since his experiment with me proved a success. I have been taken away from the room which I shared jointly with Jake and I am now lodged in an apartment on the first floor. Here there are all of the conveniences of modern life save one—a razor. There is a bathtub. I can keep myself clean. And, too, I have been given fresh linen. Lessman insists, however, that I allow my beard to grow and that my hair remain uncut. He probably figures that a tangled mass of whiskers and long, dark hair will prove an effectual disguise should any one who knows me see me from the road. And he is right. There is a mirror in the room I now occupy. I looked into it yesterday and almost failed to recognize myself in the tall, gaunt, bewhiskered man who gazed out at me.

I see a great deal of Meta now. Lessman is a devil incarnate. I believe that he has sold himself to the ruler of Hell. He knows that I love Meta and that I can not oppose his will as long as he allows us to mingle together. And I—I, poor fool—I know that Meta is but his tool. She knows it, too. She loves me, but yet she obeys his every command. Daily, hourly, I feel my will-power growing weaker and weaker. The brain of Doctor

Darius Lessman is my brain. I can not think for myself when he wills otherwise. That is why this screed is so rambling and incoherent. It is only when he wills it that I have the inclination to bestir myself. Time passes and I do not know it. I do not even know what day of the month this is. I do not care.

I wonder why Lessman allows me to continue my writing? Some one is liable to find this scrawl. He does not seem to worry about it, however. Meta believes that he knows that this outpouring of my soul is the link which binds me to sanity —the safety valve which keeps me from growing totally demented. Perhaps she is right. Lessman is a wonderful man. I am growing to like him more and more, devil though he is.

I have had several long talks with Meta. She is one woman in a million. She is more—much more—subservient to Lessman's will than I am. For some reason when we are together he withdraws his power over us and allows us to think for ourselves. . . . But does he? Or do we just think that such is the case? Her mind is a blank on many things which have happened. She has no recollection of her constant assertions when under the influence of Lessman's whip that she is the reincarnation of some one—some long-dead priestess of some strange Egyptian cult. Yet she says that she always comes out of such spells feeling buoyant and light-hearted. She says that she suffers no pain when the cruel lash cuts into her flesh, but, on the contrary, each blow fills her with a strange, uncontrollable love for her tormenter. Not a sexual passion, but, rather, the love of a neophyte for the Creator of all things. As a matter of experiment, she has asked me to beat her; on several occasions I have tried to inflict bodily pain upon her, but the effect is different from when Lessman strikes her. Even a faint blow from my hand hurts her and causes her to shrink away from me.

She has no recollection of any other life than that with Lessman. She has been with him so long that she is almost a part of him. She does not know how old she is, nor has she any memory of a childhood. She reads and writes with ease and is an accomplished musician. Yet she says that she never attended school and does not know where she gained her accomplishments.

She believes that Lessman is two beings—that he has divided his soul and that half of it occupies her body. She believes that she is very old. Sometimes, she says, she has hazy recollections of a distant country—of another life in the midst of lotus flowers and robed priests and priestesses. She has never been in Egypt, yet she is certain that it is of Egypt that she dreams. She believes that she is occupying the temporal body of some one else, but that her soul is as old as time itself.

Who is Darius Lessman? Meta does not know. Within his skull is concentrated the wisdom of the ages. His most cherished possessions, she says, are two mummy-cases; in one of them is the mummified body of a priestess of Isis and in the other that of a priest of that strange Egyptian cult of a bygone day. He keeps them under lock and key in a vault. Meta believes that he is the reincarnation of that priest and that she is the priestess. Who knows?

META and I have twice attempted to escape from this weird and unholy place. On both occasions we have gotten as far as the gate, yet we could not pass through it. Lessman's spell is too strong for us to break.

Lessman rarely shows himself by day. He is a denizen of the darkness. I picture him in my mind's eye as consorting

with the bats and owls and other inhabitants of the night. It is only at night that we see him, save on rare occasions. Meta says that he can work his hellish incantations better after sundown. . . .

This afternoon we searched the house for him. He was neither within nor on the grounds. We even peered into the little morgue. The palatial office was unoccupied. The door to the little vault was open and I looked within. The two sarcophagi leaned against the wall. I turned away and, an instant later, Lessman stepped through the door. Yet I am willing to swear that, save for the two mummy-cases, the vault was bare. I was too much astounded for words. Nor did he make any explanation.

Later I discussed the matter with Meta. She believes that Lessman has the power to project himself into the body of the mummy and that he takes such rest as he may need in that manner. If so, where does he leave his mortal body? Yet she can not be wrong. We have searched the house and have found no bedchamber for him. Meta says that she has no recollection of ever seeing him asleep. Where does he disappear to during the day unless it is within the mummy-case? . . .

MORE horror! A dance of the dead! Lessman is succeeding far beyond his wildest dreams. He says that I was the turning-point in his experiments.

Last night he ordered Jake and me to bring from the morgue the three bodies that it contained. There was the young man whose shape I had assumed before and a young and beautiful girl. There was also a young, fair-haired man with throat cut from ear to ear. Into these shells he transferred the souls of Meta, Jake and myself. Then to the music of a radio—to the music of a dance orchestra playing in the dining-room of one of New York's finest hotels—we, the dead, held hellish jubilee. For hours we danced and cavorted while our own bodies lay sprawled, like discarded garments, on the floor before us. God! It is horrible to think of it now in the clear, bright light of noonday. Last night it was different.

Meta assumed the body of the girl, I that of the young man we had stolen from the cemetery, while Jake took on the temporal form of the man with the slashed throat.

It is of Jake and the other that I would write. That Jake is Priestly Ogden is now a certainty. He told me so himself while the orchestra rested between dances in that far-away station in New York. Yet his story is so strange, so unbelievable, that I scarce know how to tell it.

Lessman killed him. The slash across his throat was made by a razor which tore through windpipe and jugular. Think of it! A man with his throat cut from ear to ear dancing, cavorting, gamboling to the strains of a modern orchestra playing "Betty Coed." An orchestra whose music was brought to us through the air on the invisible waves of sound.

Lessman enticed him to this place. The girl was here—the girl whose form Meta had assumed. In driving past the house Ogden noticed her in the yard and, stopping, engaged her in conversation. He had fallen in love at sight. Lessman, appearing from nowhere, had invited him to return. That is how he came by the slip of paper bearing Lessman's name. He had returned the next day. Later when he was under Lessman's spell he had found that he was in love with a dead woman—a girl who had been filched from the grave six months before and whose shell sheltered the soul of Meta.

Within the morgue lay the body of Jake. Night after night Lessman worked with Ogden in an effort to force his soul into the cold clay but without success. In a fit of anger he had killed his victim.

Then, as Ogden's soul was leaving its shell, Lessman had captured it and confined it inside the body of Jake, the half-wit. All this he told me, and more, as we stood there waiting for the orchestra to strike up another tune. Yes, it is horrible—too horrible to mention—now that I am temporarily out from under the spell of the master mind. But last night it was different.

LESSMAN was pleased with the success of last night's experiment. He has a treat in store for us tonight, he says. He told us that last night after we had shed the bodies of the dead and had assumed our own shapes—told us after we had carried the cold, stark bodies back into the gloomy morgue.

A CREW of workmen erected a tombstone over the grave of the young man whose body we stole from the cemetery. His name is John Reid. He is twenty-six years of age. It is graven on the marble slab.

If they only knew the truth! . . .

6. *The Stolen Soul*

I MUST write. If I do not I shall go mad. Already I feel my reason tottering. Last night I helped Lessman steal a soul. In the eyes of God and man I am as much a criminal as he is. Yet am I? What I did was at his dictation. I have no will of my own. It would make a pretty case for the courts—something for the learned judges and lawyers to spout and rave about until doomsday.

How can I describe what we did? I know so little of psychology, of philosophy, of theology. It is hard for me to write intelligently. Suffice to say that it is Lessman's theory—this much do I understand—that the doctrine of reincarnation is correct. Souls, he says, never die, but go on and on, changing the old bodies for new as speedily as the ancient shell is worn out. He believes that there are just as many people in the world now as there were in the beginning—no more and no less. He says that there is no such thing as nothingness. Matter dies, decays and returns to the earth from which it came. The globe on which we live weighs just as much as it did when it was created. A single ounce more would throw it out of balance; a single ounce less would do the same thing. Just as water evaporates, congeals and returns to the earth in the form of hail and snow and rain, so, he believes, do souls leave one shell and return to occupy another while the body returns to dust.

He would change the process laid down by the Creator. It is his idea that the soul can go on and on in a different way—by changing its abiding-place before that strange thing called death occurs. He can extract the soul and mold it to his own needs, but in his opinion it must always have a dwelling-place. Until such a dwelling-place is found the soul is doomed to wander through space, a wraith, or, as we term it, a gho

LAST night we took a holiday—the holiday of the dead. From some unknown source Lessman obtained an automobile. Into it he loaded all of us. But was it we who occupied the seats? I do not know. My own soul occupied the shell of John Reid. Jake was in his own form, but I know, now, that he is Priestly Ogden. Meta's ego was transferred into the body of Ogden's sweetheart. The dead girl's name was Nona Metzgar, she has told us. Why did he not allow us to use our own earthly shapes? I mustered up courage enough to ask him. He said that it was to insure our safety in case we were seen. In other words, Jake and Nona and young Reid were all known to

be dead. Who, then, would believe the story of any one who claimed to have seen this array of occupants of the grave in the act of performing their ghoulish work?

He laid before us new clothing in which we arrayed our bodies. He himself assumed the shell of Priestly Ogden and took the wheel. The horrible gash in his throat showed just above the collar of his shirt. Ugh! I shudder even now as I think about it. Imagine a man with throat cut from ear to ear driving a car filled with living dead men and women!

At the edge of a town a dozen or more miles away was a burying-ground. Here we stopped. Lessman, who had evidently posted himself in advance, led the way through the darkness straight to the newly-made grave. Jake and I followed with the shovels while Meta brought up in the rear with a lantern. The rain was falling in a steady drizzle; had we not been numbered among the dead ourselves the work of disinterring the coffin would have been a dismal one.

We had gotten little more than started when a sound in the bushes brought us to a sudden halt. An instant later half a dozen men dashed out of the undergrowth. At Lessman's command we took to our heels. They shouted an order at us. Then, when we did not stop, they fired a volley. The range was close and they could not miss. A dozen bullets went through our dead flesh. But of what avail is it to shoot leaden bullets into the carcass of a man who is already dead? We laughed at the thought of it. The hellishness of our mirth caused them to stop. One of them was nearly atop of us. At the sound of our laughter he turned the beam of his flashlight upon us. It struck Lessman fairly in the face. They got one look at the grisly gash in his throat. They dropped their arms and took to their heels while we returned to our car and made our escape.

We drove through the rain another dozen miles or more, finally coming to another large cemetery. This time, however, Lessman did not stop at the edge of the grounds, but drove straight through the gate and up one of the graveled roads which curved through the trees and neatly trimmed foliage. Five minutes later we were in front of a large mausoleum. For an instant he probed at the lock; then the barred doors opened and we entered.

There were a dozen coffins in the niches. He turned to the nearest of them and commanded Jake to pry it open with his spade. The half-wit obeyed. An instant later we were gazing down at the still, cold face of a man of middle age.

Dawn was not far away, so we were forced to work fast. It took Lessman but an instant to project his soul—or ego, if you wish—from the form of the murdered Priestly Ogden to that of the man in the coffin. An instant later the latter climbed from his narrow cot, the life-blood flowing through his veins.

At Lessman's command we picked up the body of Priestly Ogden and placed it in the coffin. Then we stole forth into the clean outside air again.

Once more we were fated to be interrupted. We were about to enter the car when the watchman came hurrying around the corner of the huge vault. He caught a glimpse of the car and, at the same time, the open doors of the mausoleum, and shouted a command to us to halt.

We paid no attention to his order. He turned the beam of his lantern on us just as the man in the other cemetery had done.

As the light struck Lessman squarely in the face the startled watchman uttered a cry of horror. What must have been his astonishment at seeing a man whom he

had assisted in placing in the tomb only a few days before sitting at the wheel of a car in front of his last resting-place! Lessman laughed—a hellish, diabolical chuckle. The man turned and fled. We heard him scrambling through the bushes and undergrowth, howling in terror. Lessman switched on the ignition and, an hour later, we were back inside our own bodies again.

IN THE beginning of this chapter I stated that I had helped Lessman steal a soul. Let me explain.

Dawn was just breaking when we arrived at the place we called home—the House of the Living Dead. Lessman sent Jake somewhere with the car and, a moment later, assumed his own shape.

It was shortly before eight o'clock when a man appeared at the door—a tall, heavy-set individual, well dressed and prosperous-looking. Lessman had evidently been expecting the visitor; he hastily told me what to do, and now I, in the role of butler, answered the knock and ushered the man into the office.

I did not see what passed between the doctor and his visitor. I only know that, fifteen minutes after he had entered the house, Lessman summoned me again to assist him, this time in carrying the stranger into the laboratory. The poor devil was not dead. His brain was apparently normal, but every faculty was paralyzed just as mine had been that first time I met Lessman. There was a look of appeal in his eyes as I entered the room. Evidently he thought that he might expect some help from me. But so strong is the power of Darius Lessman over me that I paid no heed to him.

Once in the laboratory Lessman worked fast. For an instant only he confronted the other. Slowly the spirit left the body and, hovering for an instant in midair, entered the shell of the middle-aged man we had stolen from the mausoleum.

Lessman turned to me, a look of triumph on his saturnine countenance.

"You can see, now, why I wanted the body," he said with the air of a professor demonstrating to his class. "The soul, my friend, must have a resting-place or else be doomed to wander forever over the face of the earth. Now, I want to borrow the body of this man for a day or two. Why? Because I must make a trip to the city. I need money with which to carry on my work here—money and other things. This man is wealthy. Perhaps, while I am occupying his shell, I will do things without the law. He has influence. Later, when I am through with it, I will transfer his soul back to its rightful resting-place, and allow him to answer for the things that I have done—for the liberties I have taken. But, first, I will make his mind a blank insofar as the happenings here are concerned. Now do you understand?"

I shook my head dumbly, still not understanding.

As one sheds an old coat, so did Lessman shed his own form and enter the shell of the stranger. He stood erect and drew a great breath into his lungs.

"Eureka! The world is mine!" he exclaimed.

LESSMAN has just spoken to me as I wrote the above.

"Write *'Finis'* to your screed," he commanded. "Do you think that I have thus allowed you to put your thoughts on paper without having a definite purpose in mind? I am in a hurry. So hasten your work."

This, then, is my last line. I hastily subscribe myself,

CARTER COPE.

7. *Rider Meets Lessman*

RIDER'S face wore a strange, far-away look as he laid the weird manuscript on the desk. Again he slowly filled and lighted his pipe, so absorbed in his thoughts that the match flame singed his fingers before he noticed what he was doing. He dropped the burning taper with an oath and picked up the newspaper clipping which had accompanied Carter Cope's communication.

MYSTERIOUS HAPPENINGS
IN OAKWOOD CEMETERY!

Body of Prominent Man Stolen From Tomb—Body of Suicide Is Substituted—Caretaker Tells of Seeing Dead Man in Car

The body of Amos Hoskins, prominent philanthropist, was stolen from the mausoleum at Oakwood cemetery Monday night and in its place was substituted the body of a young man named Priestly Ogden, who has been missing from home for the past several months and who now, judging from the condition of the body, has been found to have committed suicide.

Jabez Heckwood, the cemetery caretaker, who lives in a small house just inside the grounds, was aroused from his slumber about 3 o'clock in the morning by the sound of a car driven into the grounds. Hastily dressing, he armed himself with a revolver and flashlight and hurried to the mausoleum in front of which, he noted, the car had stopped.

He was just in time to see four persons—three men and one woman—hurrying from the mausoleum to the car. He shouted at them to halt, at the same time pointing his flashlight in their direction.

The leader of the party of four, according to Caretaker Heckwood, was Amos Hoskins.

In view of the fact that Mr. Heckwood had, only two days earlier, assisted in placing the body of Mr. Hoskins—who died Thursday at his home, 1739 South Masfield St.—in the tomb, it is needless to state that he was badly frightened. Dropping flashlight and gun, he hurried to his home, where he telephoned to cemetery officials and members of the Hoskins family.

Upon arrival at the cemetery, the party found that the lock of the mausoleum had been picked and the body of Mr. Hoskins removed. In the casket lay the body of a young man whose throat was cut from ear to ear. From official descriptions, the police identified him as Priestly Ogden, 4519 Lenroot Ave., who disappeared from home several months ago. Identification was later completed by distant relatives.

Ogden was, without doubt, a suicide.

The police are investigating. The family of Mr. Hoskins has offered a reward of $5,000 for information leading to the recovery of the body and conviction of the ghouls.

For an instant Rider sat in silence. Then he reached for the telephone, lifted the receiver and gave a number.

"Lincoln Tavern?" he inquired. Then: "I would like to speak to Mr. John Harper."

An instant later the connection was made. As the voice of Harper came booming over the wire, Rider spoke again.

"Rider speaking," he said tersely. "I am accepting your commission. I visit Lessman tomorrow morning."

He replaced the receiver on the hook, his face again wearing the strange, far-away expression.

DAWN was still two hours away when Rider, his car parked a quarter of a mile away, broke through the tangle of underbrush which surrounded the House of the Living Dead and, dodging furtively from shadow to shadow, finally reached his objective.

There was a light in one of the rooms in the rear of the house. He crept closer to the windows and attempted to listen. Only silence greeted his ears. The shades were tightly drawn, leaving not a crack through which he could peer.

Why had he told John Harper a falsehood? Why had he told the attorney that he would visit Lessman in the morning, only to hasten his trip by a dozen hours? He scarcely knew, himself. Asa Rider was a man who believed in hunches. Something — some vague, indescribable sixth sense—had warned him of danger. He had made hasty inquiries.

John Harper had disappeared from his home twenty-four hours before. He had left no word where he was going, nor had cautious inquiries at the lawyer's office elicited any information.

Were John Harper and Doctor Darius Lessman one and the same? Was John Harper the man who had appeared at Lessman's house of horror in the early

hours of the morning? Was it his soul which now reposed in the dead body of Amos Hoskins while Lessman masqueraded in his stolen body? Had Lessman given him the weird, unbelievable manuscript written by Carter Cope in an effort to trap him? Rider believed that he had. But why? The pseudo-lawyer had answered the question himself when he had told Rider that he had selected him for the dangerous task of seeking Carter Cope because there was none to mourn him should he, like Cope, disappear from the haunts of men.

In the rear of the house was a tiny lean-to. Above it a window. Cope had stated that the upper floor was untenanted save for the man, Jake, and he was, in all probability, with the others in the lighted room.

Removing his shoes, Rider climbed the latticework to the roof of the little outbuilding. The window was unlocked. He raised it slightly and allowed the beam of his flashlight to play over the bare, untenanted room. An instant later he was inside.

He could hear the subdued sound of conversation now. He reached for his revolver. Then he recalled the statement made by Carter Cope. Leaden bullets had no effect on men and women who were already dead. With a shrug of his shoulders, he replaced the weapon in his pocket and, cautiously opening the door, entered the long, unlighted hall.

The door of the room in the rear of the house was open. He dodged down the stairs, halting for an instant in front of the office Carter Cope had described. The door was ajar, the room in darkness. He dodged inside and turned the beam of his flashlight here and there over the palatial interior. A second door to the left attracted his attention. It, too, was unlocked. He pulled it open and allowed the ray from his lamp to dissipate the darkness.

The little room was vacant save for two Egyptian mummy-cases leaning against the wall.

He heard the sound of a footstep behind him. He turned but too late. A dozen electric lights flashed into life as some one pressed the switch.

John Harper stood before him.

FOR an instant the attorney said nothing. Then he took a step forward, a smile of recognition upon his face.

"Ah, I see that you outguessed me," he chuckled. "You are right, Mr. Rider, I am Lessman—Lessman in the shell of John Harper. Luckily something—some sixth sense—called me into this room; else you might have escaped."

He motioned to a chair, seating himself on the opposite side of the table. For an instant Rider hesitated. Then he, too, seated himself.

Lessman rolled a cigarette.

"As you deduced, Rider—you see I am able to read your mind to a certain extent—I needed another man to experiment with. I wanted a clean-cut, healthy specimen—a man whose habits were such that he appeared and disappeared frequently and whose relatives would make no great fuss if he never returned."

He chuckled.

"John Harper wrote several checks today. In fact, practically all of his available cash is now in my hands. I have money enough now to complete my experiments. Tomorrow Harper will return to his usual haunts. The past forty-eight hours will be a blank to him. He will put it down to temporary amnesia, pocket his loss and say nothing. Meanwhile——"

He leaned forward. A feeling of inertia swept over the detective. He struggled against it in vain. He was paralyzed.

His muscles refused to co-ordinate. The eyes of the man on the opposite side of the table were boring holes through him, it seemed. His brain was clear, missing not a single detail. He summoned all of his will-power in an effort to resist the other. . . .

In spite of the fact that he knew bullets would have no effect on the man who sat before him, Rider had, as the strange feeling of nothingness swept over him, involuntarily reached for the revolver which reposed in its leather holster beneath his left arm. Now, as his hand dropped, nerveless, his fingers accidentally touched the tiny crucifix which hung, suspended from a thin golden chain, about his neck.

For an instant the hypnotic influence of the master mind ceased. Rider felt the lifeblood surge through his veins once more. He leaped to his feet, his gnawing fingers tearing at the buttons of his shirt as he jerked the little cross from its resting-place above his heart and held it aloft.

Lessman screamed. He leaped to his feet. The match which he had just lighted and was about to apply to the end of his cigarette dropped from his nerveless fingers.

"The Cross! The Cross!" he screamed hoarsely, staggering backward.

There was a flash. The lighted match, falling into the wastepaper basket, had ignited it. Now, while the two men stood facing each other, the flames crept to the window hangings. An instant later the room was an inferno.

Rider, fighting his way through the smoke and fire, the tiny cross still held aloft, fell in a little heap in the middle of the yard. For five minutes he lay there sucking the fresh night air into his tortured lungs.

From inside the house he heard screams. Then silence.

The door opened. Lessman, staggering under the weight of two mummy-cases, dashed through the flame-encircled doorway.

He hurled the cases from him. Then he fell. He dragged himself to his feet and, turning, re-entered the burning building.

Through the smoke which poured out of the roaring inferno drifted two white, mist-like forms. For a moment they were wafted here and there by the suction of the flames. Then, fog-like, they settled over the two mummy-cases. Lower and lower they hovered until they covered the cases like dew. Then, even as Rider, his teeth chattering as if from the ague, watched, the vapor disappeared within the cases.

"Lessman and Meta," he muttered in an awed whisper. "Carter Cope was right. Within the mummified forms of that long-dead priest and priestess the souls of those two fiends make their home."

Rider darted forward to drag the cases farther away from the burning building, but he was too late, for the roof crumbled, and the blazing wall fell out onto the mummy-cases, enveloping them in a sheet of flame.

WITH the coming of morning near-by residents, hurrying from the four quarters of the landscape, raked through the smoldering ruins. The remains of six bodies were found, burned beyond recognition.

Of the House of the Living Dead not even the two mummy-cases remained.

The Man Who Played With Time

By A. W. BERNAL

A strange weird-scientific tale of the fourth dimension and a tragic journey into the past

PERHAPS you recall the disappearance of Austin J. Brammas? Yes, the scientist, the inventor. Remember? It was on the evening of April 19, 1930, that he encountered his most unbelievable fate, his incredible doom.

They say *I* killed him, murdered him in cold blood. But I never. I never! But they say I killed him and they put me here because of it. How could I murder him? He was my friend! We had known each other since childhood, went to school together. That is, we did until we graduated from high school. He went on through college while I worked here in town. But after leaving college Austin had his laboratory built just three short blocks from my shop, and we renewed our friendship. I suppose I was the only real friend he had. He was a little eccentric in his ways, and people usually avoid eccentric folks that aren't famous, don't they?

Anyhow, Austin used to leave it to me to make all the parts for any new invention of his. And his inventions *were* new, too! Why, the things he turned out would have surprized the patent office officials, and they've seen some mighty queer machines.

Austin's head was always full of strange ideas. He'd develop some fantastic idea in his mind until it would result in the creation of a bizarre theory. Then he'd construct a machine to test the theory.

But allow me to tell you my story, won't you? Let me convince you of my innocence, please.

Listen to me and I'll tell you the *true* story of the death of Austin J. Brammas—tell you how he was mortally wounded by the arrow of an unknown savage, in the year of our Lord 1492.

For nearly a year before Austin's death he had been working on a new idea which kept me busy making the odds and ends he required. After I had finished the last of the pieces for him he went into seclusion for some time. Then one day, the day on which he was to meet his death, he asked me to drop in at his laboratory to see what he had been working on. As soon as I could manage it, which was immediately, I closed shop and rushed over to Austin's place. Curiosity has always been a failing of mine.

He was waiting for me in his little living-room, a small cubicle containing a gas-plate, three chairs, a couple of tiny tables, and a bed; adjoining this place was his laboratory, a vast room filled with every type of apparatus a scientist needs. As I closed the massive front door behind me Austin greeted me with: "What in the world kept you? You've been at least five minutes." His voice was jubilant; he was in excellent spirits.

"His fist caught the savage squarely in the center of his sinister face."

As I wrung his hands, I noticed with increasing apprehension that my friend's usually boyish face was a bit thin and drawn. His broad shoulders sagged as though carrying a load. He rubbed a greasy hand on his massive laboratory apron, then vainly strove to brush his long chestnut-colored hair away from his eyes. All the while I eyed his six-foot form in silent disapproval.

"Oh, I suppose I do look sort of all in," Austin declared, noting the expression on my face. "But how can I eat or sleep when I'm on the track of something really big? Listen, my boy——"

"Whoa! First we have a bite to eat and a little rest," I interrupted. I knew that when he began by boying me, he was about to explain something to me. But I wanted him to eat first. He worried me, looking so pale and fatigued.

"All right," he agreed, "I am a bit hungry. I haven't eaten since yesterday."

While he relaxed in the one easy-chair the room contained, I busied myself preparing a hasty meal. During the repast I avoided all subjects scientific, for fear Austin would forget he was eating and commence a discussion about some topic relating to his latest creation.

After eating, while I cleared the table, Brammas began with: "Tell me, what is time?"

I laughed. "Well," I replied, "I know it's what clocks tell, but, outside of that, I can't exactly explain what it is."

"Nor can any one else! Professors may use any amount of six-syllable words, but when it comes to stating just what time really is they'll just sputter and say nothing. They can't explain time because there is no such thing as time."

"Surely, though," I put in, "time *is* existent. It—it—well, it just is, it has to be!"

"Ah, there you are wrong, my boy. Time is merely a name man has invented to denote different phases of his life. You say there is past, present and future, do you not?"

"Yes."

"I say there is the present, and nothing but the present."

"You'll have to explain," I said, lighting a cigarette.

"Time, we'll call it time for want of a better word, time is like—well, like a series of three rooms, all adjoining each other, but the doors connecting them are locked. In the center room are the things, the creatures which make up our modern age. This room is Today. The room on the right is Yesterday; it contains the past. The room on the left of Today is Tomorrow. In it lies the future. We are in the room of Today. We are moving, we live. But the contents of the other two rooms are also alive. Have we any right, then, to say that because the other rooms are behind and ahead of us they are not existent? Just because we are unable to open the doors and step into these rooms, why is that sufficient reason to declare them non-existent? We live in this room, dinosaurs dwell in the other. Merely because they are not in this room is no proof that they are in the dead, forgotten past, now is it? We live simultaneously, the dinosaurs and you and I; but on account of the locked doors between us we think that there are no such creatures alive today, do we not? Bah! For proof to substantiate their statements, the fools will say: 'Well, where are these things you speak of; can you point out a few?' Those doubting idiots forget that their pitifully incompetent senses are not to be relied upon, and that they do not know quite everything!

"I have studied the problem and have reached a conclusion. By mathematics, you understand, not by my eyes, I have proved that the future and the past are existing at this moment!"

2

I BELIEVED I saw a fallacy in his theory —for theory I could only believe it was; not able to believe that he had actually proved such an incredible hypothesis. "But," I said, "you are assuming that there are three rooms where there is only one. We are here on the identical spot where a million years ago some long-necked what-you-may-call-it wallowed in a patch of mud. According to your theory, both of us are here at the same moment, which is, of course, quite impossible. You know very well that two solids can not occupy the same space at the same time. Therefore——"

My friend, whose face was once more calm, interrupted me with: "And how do you know we are solid, my boy?" He laughed at the expression on my face and continued. "You know, even we, with our poor weak brains, can create a person in our minds—one who seems to be a perfectly rational being—by concentration. And mightn't this being think for himself, although it is through the direction of his creator's brain? That is, when we think of this fellow, we think of him as doing something; say, for example, rowing a boat. Now, perhaps this imaginary entity thinks he is rowing around the lake of his own accord, has a reason for doing so that appears to be logical to him; yet it is our thought all the time that is directing him to do so."

"But," I put in, "when we cease thinking of this fellow, why, he disappears. Then, again, while this man is rowing his boat, suppose we suddenly change our thought. In a flash, he will probably be

walking down the street, or doing some such thing that is in no way connected with rowing. I never see humans act that way."

"You forget that the Brain which creates us is infinitely more powerful than our brains. And have you never heard that if a group of strong minds concentrate long and hard enough they can materialize a living being? Of course that is merely a theory, but mightn't it have its origin in actual fact? Many East Indians would swear that such a thing could be done.

"But the point is, maybe the imaginary man is just as solid as we are. If that be true, then while he is in our brains, the tissues do not give way for him. And there you'd have a case of two things being in the same spot at the same time, would you not?"

As I stood staring dumbly at him, Austin continued. "Another thing: we see a baby on the floor, playing. We rapidly think of his future life—think of what he will experience when he grows up. We outline his life for him. We can actually picture him a man, working, say, in an office. Yet there he is, still a baby on the floor. We have gone into the future for twenty years—yet we are in the present all the time."

Here I managed to put in a few words. "Nonsense, Austin, that isn't going into the future at all. Why, the baby may even die or be killed long before he reaches manhood."

"I admit that the baby would probably never follow the life we pictured for him. But, and here's the most important point, the marvelous Mind which created our universe, and all the others in the great void of space, would surely be able to foresee and direct the lives of the inhabitants of these universes. That wouldn't be so hard as it seems for a vastly powerful mind. You see that there are a number of types, in each and every city, which are duplicated and reduplicated, and these types lead similar lives; so thinking for one, this Mind would think for all that are classified in a certain type.

"Now, of course, by giving each creature a brain of its own, these creations, while following generally the life-plan for certain types, can also think for themselves and so change their planned lives a bit—just as if you invented a game, determining the moves of the pieces and then letting each piece play itself.

"It seems as if I had wandered from my subject, but I merely wished to demonstate the possible correctness of my theory. As for the baby—accepting my theory, you will see that his life is, in a sense, mapped out for him. Now, if we have a machine which travels in the dimension of Time, we can see into the future as readily as into the past. At least we may see the future as it will be, or rather is being, enacted at the present moment."

I looked at my friend. He was not smiling, but deeply in earnest. Had he been working too hard and was his mind unbalanced? I laughed at this thought. My laugh sounded harsh and out of place, so I immediately stifled it. The silence was growing uncomfortable to me, so I spoke.

"By the way, Austin, what was it you had to show me, now that you're through propounding theories?" I lighted the cigarette I had just taken from the pack in my hand. "Surely, you haven't invented a machine or something, that will take you voyaging through time, or perhaps the fourth dimension?" I added with a smile.

Austin pierced me with his gaze. "Yes," he stated slowly, "I have! Those things which I had you make were for just such a purpose. With them I have constructed a—time-traveler!"

"You *what?*" I shrieked, and stepping backward upset a small table, sending it crashing to the floor. Flushing a little at my awkwardness, I hastily righted the table while my friend laughed good-naturedly.

"Arthur, if smoking affects you in that manner, you must stop it," scolded Austin with sham seriousness. "But honestly, now, time-traveling doesn't really stun you, does it? Surely, you've heard me speak of its probability hundreds of times. But come. See for yourself."

3

HE ENTERED his laboratory, returning in a few moments wheeling a strange contrivance before him. In response to my questioning gaze he stated that he wished to show me something humorous that it would be impossible to see in the laboratory.

As I stared at the complicated mass of machinery before me, a peculiar feeling stole over me, a feeling that, somehow, there was something queer about this contraption. In a moment I saw what it was, and I gasped. Parts of the apparatus faded into thin air! Here, a solid, tangible rod would become gradually transparent, finally to vanish utterly. There, seemingly suspended in midair, was a round piece of brass; yet it could not be doubted that the invisible part of the shiny rod supported the yellow object.

Wheels—rods—cones—balls, all colors of the rainbow, gleamed at me coldly. Used though I was to machinery of all kinds, I was bewildered by this intricate mechanism.

Supported on all this was a stone platform of some sort. Pearly white in the center, streaks of rose tinged the rounded edges. From the middle of the stone rose a steel pedestal ending in a flat, black surface. On it were two dials and a small switch. Arranged in a complete circle around each dial-controlled pointer were a series of tiny numerals. The numbers around the larger of the two dials ran by thousands, from one to two millions. The pointer stood at one million. Grouped about the smaller dial were the numerals from one to one thousand, with a space of ten between the figures. Close to the pedestal was a lever which was so situated that it could be shoved into one of ten slots, at will. I immediately understood these things to be the controlling apparatus for the traveler. By merely setting the dials, adjusting the lever, and pressing the switch, one could send the machine into either the past or the future.

"Naturally, this, the first model, is rather crude and faulty, although perfectly safe to travel in." As I began to edge away: "I see, Art, that you have not outgrown your cautiousness, even after all these years. But as I was saying, there are many trifling mechanical discrepancies to be overcome. Probably the most obvious of these is that the finest adjustment of this model is in years."

"I see," said I. "The first stop possible is exactly one year in the past or future, as the case may be. And the next would be one year from that." As my friend nodded his acquiescence, I asked, "How is this contraption made, and what makes it go?"

"Ah, that is *my* secret," responded Austin. "But you have only to think of time as a road, extending into infinity, to grasp the fundamental idea of the thing. If you are in an automobile, you step on the accelerator and immediately you travel over the asphalt until you reach an entirely different place than that from which you started. Right? Well, in this case a person has merely to set the dials, throw the switch, and a different place on the road of time is reached."

"I don't quite understand," I remarked. "You tell me to imagine time as a road. One moves forward or backward on a road, in order to reach a new place. But time——?"

Austin smiled. "Arthur, have you ever heard of the fourth dimension? Well, by using the fourth dimension as a direction, and with a machine suitable for traveling into this dimension, one may move up and down on the road of time as easily as one travels on any other road."

"Yes, but where, in the name of everything under the sun, *is* this fourth dimension? What other direction is there, but forward, backward, up, or down?"

"I admit that it *is* rather difficult for you to accept the fact that there is a dimension in existence, at right angles with the other three, which can neither be seen nor pictured in the mind. Even I, after having built a vehicle that travels in this dimension, can not completely comprehend it. But then there are so many things in this world that are utterly impossible for us to understand. Life, for instance. Why are we here? Why were we created in the first place? Why, my boy, have we——"

Here I interrupted my friend, for I knew that if he once got started on his pet problem, nothing could stop him; not even the demonstration of his time-traveler. "Austin, weren't you explaining the fourth dimension to me?" I put in gently. He ceased speaking, and as he realized how he had strayed from his subject, his cheeks grew red. Then we both laughed. He again took up the original theme of conversation.

"As I said before, it is impossible to explain or describe the fourth dimension to a person who has never in his life known more than three. It is the same proposition as explaining and describing the third dimension to a two-dimensional being. The best, in fact the only method of explanation, in either case, is demonstration. Come, and I shall show you what it is to travel through time in the fourth dimension."

"WAIT," I faltered. "Are you sure that there is no danger? You know, I——"

"Yes, I know. You are still the old cautious John of school days, aren't you?" Then as I stepped reluctantly onto the platform beside the young inventor, he added, "But I see that your curiosity even yet gets the better of your caution."

"Then I am to understand that what is known as Time is the fourth dimension?" I queried, as Brammas made a few trifling adjustments to the mechanism of his machine.

"By no means," my friend replied. "The fourth dimension is merely the means by which we may have access to the road of time; it is merely the direction in which we travel to gain the future or regain the past. A good illustration of my point is giving the means of traveling in the third dimension to a two-dimensional creature. But enough of this confusing talk; let's take a little voyage. Which would you rather see first, the past or the future?"

"Well, I think the past would be good enough for a starter. The future might prove to be too much of a shock to one who is unused to playing around with time," I responded.

"All right, how far back would you care to go?"

"Um-m-m-m—how about 1917—the World War?"

Brammas scratched his chin. "I can't show you any battle scenes, because we're in America. To see the actual fighting, it would, of course, be necessary to go to

Europe. But we'll take a look at what was—or rather, is—happening here on the evening of April 19, 1917."

To say that I felt nervous would be far understating the facts. If anything should happen to us—supposing we should be marooned in the primeval past! But Austin had assured me that it was perfectly safe, and he would not have said so if it weren't. Besides, he had probably made several voyages himself, with perfect security. And it would be gratifying to one's curiosity to see the actual past being relived before one's eyes. So I let him set the dials, and slip the lever into the proper notch, without saying anything. Oh, if I had only known what was to happen! If I had only persuaded my friend to give up his playing with time! Now—now, it is too late. But I mustn't go on like this; that is all past, now. I'll go on with my tale, if you so desire.

"See," Austin was saying, "the year 1917 is thirteen past, isn't it? Now, to reach that year, it is necessary to turn this small dial until it points to ten, leaving the larger dial untouched. Then, after inserting the lever into the third slot, we are ready to close the switch by throwing it to the left, so, and commence our journey."

When Austin clicked the switch over, a sound of well-oiled machinery whirred softly in my ears. The platform on which we stood began vibrating gently beneath us. Faster and faster it vibrated, while a queer feeling stole over me; I felt almost as though I were in a swiftly descending elevator. Then I seemed to see Austin and myself regarding a duplicate of the machine on which we now stood. Suddenly, the scene became obscured by several huge bubbles of azure hue, revolving easily with a circular motion. Without a sound they burst before my fascinated eyes, sending lazy, tinted streamers floating, swaying to the floor, darkening my view of the laboratory.

However, before the colored clouds obliterated the room and its contents, my counterpart backed toward a small table, turned, disarranged the things thereon, clutched it firmly in both hands, then sank to the floor with the table still held tightly in his grasp.

Austin's chuckle reached my ears. I looked at him, smiling myself, at the antics my double had gone through. The shimmering azure blurred my friend's visage somewhat, but I could see that he was wearing a broad grin. He spoke: "Boy! you sure looked funny, then. I wouldn't have missed that for a thousand."

He had scarcely finished when he became totally invisible to me, because of the hovering blanket of blue.

In a short time, a tiny fleck of white appeared in the center of the pall. Soon, by degrees, the hole grew larger. It seemed as though we were speeding down a tube of living color, a tube which began where we had started, and ended in the constantly enlarging hole of white. As this opening increased in size, bits of scenery could be observed, growing steadily clearer.

When I noticed this, I began wondering what the people of the past would think of us, and where we would come to rest. I begged my friend to stop for only a minute or two, for I knew it would be embarrassing to me to be exposed to the public gaze, while I stood on this infernal contraption. The second problem was easily solved. Before Brammas had built his laboratory in 1928, there had never been anything on the site, as far back as I could remember. It had never been more than a vacant lot since my childhood, anyway.

I had scarcely ceased my musings, when we emerged from the tube of color, and

stood gazing at the village of Flintsville as it was in the year 1917, a few weeks after the United States had declared war against Germany.

5

ON THE side of the street opposite us was a long line of young men pressing forward toward a door, over which was a crudely painted red, white, and blue sign that read, "Enlist Here." Before our eyes were living, breathing men. Men who, perhaps, were later on to give their lives for their country, stood before our gaze—recalled from the dead to live again a brief scene of the past for us. It was uncanny.

On all the corners were little groups, talking, arguing, and gesticulating. Beneath an American flag stood an army officer, haranguing a crowd gathered about him, on patriotism. A truck, loaded with the recently enlisted, rumbled down the street, followed by a host of shouting youngsters and barking dogs.

"What do you say to a good, old-fashioned, five-cent schooner of beer?" I asked Brammas, pointing across the street. My friend's gaze followed my finger, which indicated an old building, whose stained glass window bore the words: "Jake's Place, Good Beer and Lunch."

"I'm afraid not," spoke he. "You see, I shouldn't like to leave the machine, for if anything should happen to it, we'd never be able to get back to the future."

"Future?"

"Of course. This surely isn't the past any more, now that we're here, is it? And what was the present to us a minute or two ago, is now the future. It just goes to show how non-existent is time. One instant the present is called the future; in another, it is called the present; another second elapses, and it is called the past. How idiotic!"

"Say, don't you think we had better be getting along? Let's go back farther, shall we?" I put in. "I'm certainly curious to see something real old." My fear was entirely gone, now, and I was thrilled with the prospect of another voyage.

"All right. What do you say to a visit to America as it was in 1492, a few months before the landing of Columbus?" and he bent over the instrument board. "Um-m-m, let's see. Four hundred and twenty-five years ago," he mused. "Four hundred and twenty for the small dial, and the fifth notch for the lever. All set? Let's go." He pressed the switch, and the machinery whirred.

During all the time we had been in the lot we escaped notice, probably because the tall grasses hid the time-eliminator from view, and it looked as though we were standing on the ground. But just as the first bubble of blue burst and sent its streamers of living color drifting before our eyes, a newsboy of about fifteen years espied us. His mouth was open; evidently he was trying to sell Brammas and me a paper with the latest war news in it. In a moment he had backed away and was lost to view in the pall of blue. I guess he was mighty surprized to see his prospective buyers fade away into thin air before his startled eyes, for all the world like a couple of stage magicians.

As we hurtled through the whirling tube of azure hue with ever-increasing speed, I remarked, "Say, Austin, didn't that newsboy seem familiar to you?"

"Indeed he did! Do you know who he was?" I shook my head. "That boy's name is Austin Brammas—Austin J. Brammas, to be exact. He was a bit over sixteen in that last scene."

I was dumfounded. "What!" I demanded. "Now, don't try to kid me; you know as well as I do that that's utterly impossible. How could that boy have been you? Granted that we can make the

past live again, as we have been doing, how is it that we can change the past? When you were sixteen—the very first time, I mean—you know right well that you never saw two men standing in a lot dissolve into nothingness, did you?"

"Well, my boy," replied Austin, his eyes twinkling with merriment, "for one thing, that wasn't the past. It was the present, even as it is now the future. But that is not the point. I maintain that time, or, rather, the scenes which compose time, remain intact forever. Don't ask me how or why, because I haven't the slightest conception. Nevertheless, it remains so. And if a person is in some way returned to the past, I believe—I know—that he may, to a certain extent—mind: I say, *to a certain extent*—change that past without in any way affecting the events to come—or, I had better say, the events ahead; they are already here. We, in our eternal, snail-pacing, never-ceasing creep into the fourth dimension, have merely not overtaken them, yet."

By this time I was becoming too bewildered to think; accordingly I changed the subject. What on earth, I wanted to know, did a mass of blue bubbles and a peculiar pulling sensation have to do with traveling, whether it be in the fourth or any other dimension? My young friend hastily assured me that the tube of color and all attending sensations were the product of our own minds.

"For instance," Brammas explained, "that young relative of mine, the newsboy, saw no color phenomenon—we simply faded from his sight, I imagine. Like yourself, I see no possible connection between our motion in the fourth dimension, and color; therefore, old son, our senses are tricking us. Probably our terrific speed causes some disturbance or distortion of the light-waves reaching our eyes, affecting the optic nerves in such a manner that the bursting balloon effect is produced. On the other hand, the feeling you describe as 'pulling' is due, no doubt, to our actual rapid motion in the fourth dimension."

And thus we conversed as we raced back over the centuries on the most remarkable and diabolical invention ever to spring from the mind of man. It took only four or five minutes to land us at Flintsville, April 19, 1492. There was a slight jar, and the machine stopped.

6

We stood on a small, flat-topped, stony rise, in the center of a broad expanse of boulder-covered ground that evidently had at one time been a river of considerable size. Now, though, the arroyo was devoid of any moisture.

"Say, my boy," I mocked Austin's peculiar habit; "lucky for us this contraption didn't stop on a hillside and roll to a spot where, when we materialized in your room again, we'd be on the exterior of the bed, or something."

"I hadn't thought of that," he responded seriously. "It would be a dangerous thing to have our position altered; for, now that you mention it, I doubt whether we could step off this platform to move the machine and remain alive. If I had accepted your invitation to leave the machine and cross the street to that saloon a little while ago, we would undoubtedly both be dead now."

"Why?" I demanded.

I don't recall exactly what he answered now, but it was to the effect that we were part of the past only while we were under the influence of the time-eliminator. There would be no telling what would happen should one of us step from the platform, he told me. Perhaps the careless person would even be thrown into a new—a fifth—dimension. His concluding sentence was:

"But if some one from the past should step on the platform, I can forsee no possible danger to him, since he would still be in his own plane, or world; for, you understand, it is we who are influenced by the fourth dimension, not the scene before us."

All thoughts of this perplexing situation faded from my mind for the moment, because, glancing toward the edge of the forest to the rear and to the right, I beheld a human figure step forth from the shadow of the trees into the rosy, if somewhat pale, light of the setting sun. I nudged Austin and pointed.

The figure was that of an Indian, outfitted with bow and arrow, and he was followed by a score or more of others, some with burdens, some empty-handed. A hunting-party returning to their village with the spoils of the day, was my guess. Manifestly we were not seen, for the group struck out straight across the river-bed some distance below us without so much as a glance in our direction. We watched the little company in motionless silence as it trooped along over the rough ground at a steady, tireless pace.

Then suddenly, as the sun sank still lower and shadows lengthened, a ray of sunlight found an answering flash in the polished mechanism beneath us. The silhouette of the leading Indian stiffened and tensed, stopping instantly. Turning his back to the sun, he scanned the landscape in our direction intently. He easily discerned the form of our machine with us on it, situated as we were on the tiny plateau in the midst of the arroyo.

Waving his hand aloft he shouted some unintelligible sound and made off in our direction at a fast trot, the string of followers tagging along at his heels.

"Austin!" I exclaimed in a sharp bark. "What do they intend to do? Kill us?"

"No, of course not"—calmly. "Why should they want to murder us? We are total strangers to them—they've never seen a white man before in their lives. But to please you, I'll play safe and set the dials for our return; then all that I'll need to do, in case danger threatens, is to throw over the switch, and we'll be off for the future."

I kept my eyes on the rapidly nearing band, while Austin fumbled with the controls. I almost hopped off the platform when my friend ejaculated, "Ouch!" so absorbed was I in staring at the approaching savages, who, by all sane reasoning, had been dead for over four centuries. Brammas turned a scowling face toward me. "Say," he growled, "that mosquito certainly had a nerve to bite a distinguished visitor like me."

"Why, how is that?" I questioned. "Thought you said that we were under the protection of this contraption of yours. Didn't I understand you to say, a few moments ago, that it would be death for a creature of the past to step aboard this platform?"

"No. I said *we* are under the influence of my invention only while we stand on this platform. The instant we step off, heaven only knows what would happen. But since the landscape before us (and consequently everything in or above it) is untouched by our fourth-dimensional stimulator, that confounded mosquito could and did land on my neck without any harm to himself. You see, he still remained in his own sphere. Understand?"

I nodded in a dazed, bewildered manner.

"The thing is a little difficult to explain," he continued, "but maybe—ah-h, I've got it! Comparing my invention to an airplane, the identical results are obtained. Listen."

He cleared his throat slightly, then went on. "Supposing you take a ride in a plane. While you are in the air you

daren't jump—without a parachute—for you are suspended among the clouds only through the power of your machine. On the other hand, a bird may alight on your ship without danger of sinking (disregarding, of course, all hazards from wind, propeller, et cetera) by reason of his already being suspended in the sky without mechanical aid. You can not leave your plane and expect your body to be supported by the air. The bird, however, *can* rely on your ship to support him. Of course, the bird really required energy to remain aloft, while the mosquito needed no effort to remain at this fourth dimensional height, if I may call it that. However, we mustn't neglect our friends here." He swung toward the Indians, who had arrived by this time and were engaged in examining us, at a distance of about ten feet. Their faces showed that they were filled with curiosity not unmixed with considerable awe.

7

As an opening gesture of ambassadorship, Austin waved a friendly arm in their direction. At this, the leader, who was much older than the rest, and manifestly of a higher standing than any present, conferred with a haughty individual standing at his side. The latter was conspicuous by reason of a good deal of ornaments or charms he wore, and by reason of the evil, arrogant leer on his scarred, unlovely visage.

The two talked in a monotone, using a vast amount of pointing and gesticulating to help out. Once the older man gestured toward us, then touched his cheek, meanwhile shaking his head. He had noticed our white skins even in the half-light of dusk. The malevolent one—who appeared to be some sort of a medicine man—seemed to grow angry, his countenance darkening and becoming more malicious every instant. Then when the leader designated us with one hand and swung the other in an arc as if to include the heavens above us, the medicine man, if that's what he was, gave the impression he was about to burst. He stamped his moccasined foot, snapped his head back and forth with almost inconceivable rapidity, then poured a perfect deluge of sounds into the older man's ears. His listener remained passive throughout the blustering speech. The one-sided conversation ceased abruptly and the elderly one stepped close to where we stood, disregarding angry protests from the wrathful one.

After a somewhat humble bow, he directed a few concise statements to us in a manner that was nothing if not respectful. Even in the darkness I could see what a splendid physique he possessed. Tall, straight, firm and strong he was, with a noble posture that would have been the envy of many a king. His followers were not a whit less splendidly built, although they were scarcely more than lads. The speaker finished with a polite beckoning for us to get down off the platform and fall in behind him.

"Sorry, old man," Austin shook his head and smiled. "We don't speak your lingo." At this reply in an unfamiliar tongue, the Indian started back a step, eyes wide, surprize in every feature—he was clearly taken aback.

During the performance, the evil one had been peering intently in our direction, drinking in every detail of the scene. Now he sprang quickly forward, his adorning trinkets rattling noisily, and commenced another torrent of guttural remarks addressed to the leader, all the while glaring at us with malignant distrust.

Taking in the pernicious, leering face of the medicine man, the hesitating, puzzled look of the elderly one, and the

ready-for-peace-or-war attitude of the followers who stood not far off, expectantly watching, I became fidgety, nervous. I whispered an anxious plea to Brammas, but he paid no heed. His whole person was absorbed in deep fascination at the debating pair.

Finally, with an impatient thrust, the glaring one pushed the leader aside, strode up to Brammas and me, giving an order in a decidedly overbearing tone, at the same time bestowing upon us a withering glance, and motioning us imperiously to descend from the machine.

"I don't like him," declared Austin to me, giving a vigorous shake of the head to inform the Indian of our intention of staying where we were. Again the medicine man snapped out his command. He was answered by another defiant toss of the head from Austin.

With an angry, inarticulate snarl, the Indian reached out, seizing my inventor friend's arm tightly, roughly attempting to pull him to the ground.

"Stop that," uttered Austin fiercely, his pale blue eyes flashing with the glint of hard steel, and his face growing white, as it always did when he became angry. My friend always disliked any one who tried to enforce a disagreeable order by bodily strength, and now I could see his temper getting out of all control.

With a jerk, Austin yanked his arm free and ordered the menacing savage away. My friend was breathing heavily and his face was aflame as he whipped his hand in a half-circle to disperse the band of Redmen. Then turning on his heel, Austin stepped over to the controlling switch, stretching forth a hand to flip it over.

But the persistent medicine man was not thus to be thwarted. With a lunge he scrambled onto the platform with us, reaching out to clutch Brammas and drag him backward off the machine. Even before I could cry out a warning, Brammas had turned instinctively to face his tormenter.

What then occurred will be forever imprinted on my mind. I hadn't taken part in this vivid drama of the clash of modern and primitive man so far, and now each was oblivious of all save his opponent. In dumfounded amazement I stared, petrified—even as were the rest of the spectators opposite me. Like an invisible and unseen observer I watched, breathlessly.

The two stood facing each other—Austin with clenched fists and squared jaw, the savage with twitching open hands and heaving chest. Austin feinted; then as the Indian's hands thrust at the laboratory apron he wore, my friend, eyes blazing as with fire, struck out with all the power in his far from feeble right arm, putting all his weight behind the blow. His fist caught the insolent savage squarely in the center of his sinister face with a loud smack. The Indian was lifted clear off his feet and hurled backward off the platform, landing heavily on his back in the dirt. He lay there, silent and motionless, blood spurting from nose and mouth in a crimson flood. Not a groan, not a twitching muscle betrayed any sign of consciousness in the recumbent form.

Brammas stood nursing a red, stinging fist while I awoke to action and sidled over to the control panel, reached out, turned the switch with a loud click. Before the mechanism began its smooth whirring, a sharp *twang!* penetrated to my ears; then the vibrating platform beneath me sent a thrill of joy surging through every fiber of my body.

In silence we sped through the time-dimension, Brammas not speaking, and I glad of the quiet that enabled me to compose my excited feelings. My heart was filled with rejoicing at the queer sen-

sation denoting our tremendous velocity down the time-tube. In an amazingly short time, I thought, the machine slowed down, the platform ceased vibrating. I breathed a profound sigh of relief and glanced around for the familiar white plaster walls of Austin's tiny room.

8

THE next instant I swallowed at a lump that suddenly swelled in my throat, and the back of my neck felt clammy and prickly. *The machine had stopped and we were not in Austin's room!* The scene before me was almost identical with the one we had just left! There was the same wild, untamed vegetation at the edge of the arid, stony, dry river-bed in which we were, and the same wild, dark forest silhouetted in the pale light of the moon, off to my right. The one salient feature —one that made me thankful from the bottom of my heart—that marked the variance of the view before me and that era left behind was that nowhere was a sign of life, animal or Indian, apparent.

But in a flash the horror of the thing became vividly clear, striking home with a force that left me breathless. Marooned in the heart of a savage, primitive land where no white men would appear for perhaps hundreds of years! I could feel my whole body sag; I felt weakly limp. A choking gasp from the region of my ankles caused me to look down.

There lay Austin at my feet, eyes closed, face white and drawn, his bosom splashed with red, and an *arrow protruding from the region of his heart!* I was absolutely crushed at this development. Austin, my friend—the only person in the entire universe who could get us out of this awful predicament—at my feet, dead or dying! Fate had cast me away in a lost land, and not satisfied with this, was taking my only hope of rescue beyond my reach.

Then the fact became clear to me that it was my friend who was at my feet, my school chum dying. I was thoroughly humiliated at the idea that I had been thinking about my own safety when Austin lay so still on the platform, needing aid and needing it quickly. Of course, these thoughts were only vague, half defined, as they flitted through my mind in one fleeting instant. I mustered every ounce of energy I had in my sagging form so that I might be of aid to Austin with rapid but composed action.

I dropped to my knees, and, hoping against hope, made feverish attempts to revive my injured friend. My efforts were at last rewarded by an almost inaudible utterance: "Are—we—home?"

I strove to make my voice sound soothing and even as I answered. But when my gaze roamed involuntarily to the dismal scene about me, my voice wavered weakly as I forced the words from my dry, hot throat. "Uh—yes. Just lie still —until you feel better. Everything is all right."

At my feebly spoken words Austin glanced out of the corner of his eye at his surroundings. At first he tensed, then his eyes widened. He made a queer noise I judged to be a pitiful attempt at a chuckle. He was not successful; the try ended in his clutching at his breast with both hands, gritting his teeth noisily as he did so. In a moment he seemed to gain strength. Shortly afterward he sat up, wheezingly, and spoke.

"There," he rasped, after he had rested a bit; "I feel better now. That infernal mosquito—made me forget to—*set one of the dials.*"

At his speech, I almost yelled with joy. A second ago we had been stranded forever in an unthinkable country whose only inhabitants were wild animals and wilder savages. Austin had lain at my feet with his lifeblood slowly seeping

from a vicious arrow-wound in his chest. Now, returning to the future was a pleasant certainty, while I couldn't help believing my friend would not succumb before I had him placed in the hands of a capable Twentieth Century physician.

"Tell me how to set that dial, quick!" I breathed in exuberant spirits. "When we get home, I'll rush you off to a specialist, first thing!"

"No, no," he wheezed. "First get this awful thing out of my chest. It may be poisoned."

I dissented, arguing that I might make his already critical condition even more serious. However, he was insistent. So, by the beam of a small but powerful electric torch I habitually carried, I set myself to the task of disengaging the slender shaft from Austin's body. I had terrible difficulty in drawing the thing out because it was barbed and stuck tenaciously. At last, through the insistence of the wounded man, I gave one quick wrench and literally tore it from his body. In horror and revulsion I flung the thing from me. There was a sharp crackling, and it vanished in midair as it cleared the platform. Subconsciously, as I wiped my bloody hands on my trousers and jacket for want of a handkerchief, I remembered that the arrow had traveled into the future with us; hence it too had been under the control of the time machine until a moment before.

While Austin lay resting quietly, I tried to set the correct dialing of the unfamiliar apparatus, as I had been directed to do. I had it at last and was about to throw the switch when Austin startled me by hoarsely yelling: "Wait!" I glanced inquiringly at him, but the darkness screened his face from me. A low, moaning murmur reached me and I knelt beside my poor friend, asking him what the matter was, though I thought I knew well enough.

"We *are* marooned!" he gasped. My whole body felt chilled when he said that. "We have spent—some hours in—the past. If we go back—to 1930, it will be nearly—eight o'clock at night; and we left at seventeen minutes to six." He sank back, exhausted.

For awhile I couldn't see light. Then it flashed upon me in a burst of memory. That arrow! Something had happened to it when I cast it away. What was it Brammas had said? "We are under the influence of the machine *only* while we stand on this platform. The moment we step off, heaven only knows what would happen." Bit by bit I unraveled the knot.

This is how I sized up the situation. We had spent two or three hours in the past. Now, unless we waited for a whole year, we would be unable to get off the machine should we reach our rightful time. The eliminator would carry us a few hours into the future that we had never actually lived. Hence, to be able to resume our natural life, and to be able to leave the machine without ill effects, we would have to stop the time-eater at the exact moment we had originally left our world. I sobbed aloud in hopeless despondency.

9

"THERE'S one chance in a mi—a million," Austin breathed falteringly. "But we'll have to take it. I know the speed—of my machine, and if—if I can figure out the time—accurately enough, we *may* be able—to get through all—all right. I'm praying that a min—minute or two off won't seriously injure—us, but you must expect a—a violent jolt or perhaps—unconsciousness." A long pause, then the halting speech continued with, "Here's a pencil—work this out f—for me." The speaker extended toward me

a stub of a pencil, taken from his pocket. He lay back wearily, eyes closed.

Placing my pocket flash on the control pedestal so that its rays illuminated a small space at my feet, I knelt, waiting for the dictation of my wounded friend. Then for fifteen minutes I scribbled away, checking every step thrice; I couldn't afford to make a single mistake now, with our lives depending on the preciseness of the scrawling array of calculations on the luminous stone area.

When I had finished I placed my trembling fingers on the switch near the two rows of almost microscopic numerals, eyes fixed in thrilled expectancy on the second-hand of my watch. Numbly my hand twitched and the time-switch clicked over at the exact instant, leaving me taut and cold with apprehension.

As the fateful second drew nigh, I forced a smile to my dry lips, bending close to the spot where I judged Austin's head to be. He was quietly awaiting the crucial moment. Grasping his limp hand in mine, I murmured: "If we don't make it—good-bye, old fellow."

He sighed in answer and muttered restlessly, "Forgive me—Arthur. Forgive! If you are killed, your—life will be on—my hands."

"Nonsense!" I retorted. "If anything disastrous happens to me now, it will be my fault entirely." Then springing to my feet, I exclaimed: "It's time!" and flipped over the control-switch. At the click of the switch, I plunged my left arm deep into the mechanism, and with my right gave a terrific wrench at the year-lever, exerting every bit of strength I possessed.

A flare of light, a gnashing of cogs, then—blackness! Every ligament of my body was stretched, strained. I felt as though I was being torn apart on the rack. My left arm, entwined among the machinery, suddenly came free, running blood from the place where a steel fragment had bitten deeply. In a moment the pain in my cut member merged into an endless, racking throb of torture that doubled me into a writhing, convulsed spasm of suffering. I seemed to be plunging through eternity—an eternity of pulsing torture.

10

I DREW a long, gasping breath into lungs that seemed dead. With utmost difficulty I managed to sit up. Soon a great amount of the nausea and pain left me; except for the dull, throbbing ache in my left arm I suffered from no undue strain. Then I thought of Austin.

By the glare of the street-lamp that poured in through the high, narrow window I made out a vague, indistinct something lying near the old easy-chair my friend had loved so well. I staggered to my feet, crossed the floor unsteadily (I was very weak and tired), and felt for the electric light button with my right hand, while the other hung limp and useless at my side. As the lights flashed on I moaned aloud. Austin lay on his back, eyes distended, mouth agape, staring at the white ceiling; a horrible expression on his upturned face. Stooping beside him, I gave a quick glance around the room for the time-eliminator. It was nowhere to be seen; more than likely its ruined mechanism lay some hours behind us. At this I was glad. I fervently hoped that no one would ever find and repair it.

I prodded my friend gently, softly calling his name. He was dead! The fourth-dimensional fall—if that's the correct term—had been too much for him in his weakened condition.

"*Austin!*" I shrieked. "Austin, get up! Get up quick! Quick! Can't you hear me? Don't you understand?" Suddenly the little room seemed to sway—began whirling around and around at dizzying

speed. Some one shouted in a muffled voice; a pounding at the door reached me faintly. I collapsed against the table, insensible.

The events that followed are all fantastically unreal to me; they are jumbled like a half-forgotten nightmare.

I awoke from a black emptiness to find myself being roughly dragged to my feet and shaken like a rag. A uniformed giant was yelling bewildering questions in harsh tones. "I don't know," was all I could mumble in answer; "I don't know."

In court they said I had told them a wild tale about a machine that couldn't be found, and of terrible encounters with ferocious savages who shot my companion with arrows. "Clearly the ravings of a demented being," they declared in formal accents. A policeman told of how he had rushed into Austin's laboratory in answer to a shriek, and found me, hands and clothes stained with another's blood, hysterical and incoherent beside the body of my victim. Accusing voices demanded what I had done with the knife, and when I answered that I never owned one, derisive laughs echoed my reply. Lawyers pondered over the reason why I had committed the murder, and answered themselves by saying that an insane man needs no motive. Of course I protested the accusations; but what could I do when my own lawyers wouldn't listen to the truth?

And so I was convicted and sent here —here in this awful place, where the utterances of madmen fill the day, and fitful sleep is interrupted at night by screams of poor unfortunate creatures.

All I've said has been actual truth. If you believe me, then by all that's holy, get me out! *Get me out!* GET ME OUT!

The Last Day

By ROBERT E. HOWARD

Hinged in the brooding west a black sun hung,
And Titan shadows barred the dying world.
The blind black oceans groped—their tendrils curled,
And writhed and fell in feathered spray and clung,
Climbing the granite ladders, rung by rung,
Which held them from the tribes whose death-cries skirled.
Above unholy fires red wings unfurled—
Gray ashes floated down from where they swung.

A demon crouched, chin propped on brutish fist,
Gripping a crystal ball between his knees.
His skull-mouth gaped and icy shone his eye.
Down crashed the crystal globe—a fire-shot mist
Masked the dark lands which sank below the seas—
A painted sun hung in the starless sky.

The Answer of the Dead

By J. PAUL SUTER

The protecting arms of the dead man reached back from the grave to shield the woman he loved

MY FIRST memory of that night brings up the sound of running footsteps in the hall, and the face of my mother, wide-eyed and tearful, as she snapped on my wall-light.

I was only fourteen then, yet I seem to hear the anguish of her voice as sharply as on that summer night.

"Arthur!" she sobbed. "Come quick, my child, if you wish to see your father alive!"

Her arm was around me through the shadowy hall. The soft, comforting support of it, while my world was slipping away beneath me, is more vivid in memory than the sight of the livid, pain-racked face on the pillow.

My uncle—the famous doctor—stood by my father's bedside. His face was stern. I thought nothing of that—he was always stern. My mother and I were both afraid of him. He bent over the bed, hiding my father's face from me for an instant, then stood erect with an abrupt gesture.

"You are too late, Dora," he said.

My mother ran to the bed and threw her arms around the still figure. She sobbed inconsolably. Of course I cried, too. My uncle stood aloof for a little, looking at us both; then he laid a firm hand on her arm.

"You will have to control yourself," he chided. "This sort of thing won't bring him back. Come, Dora! Don't let yourself go!"

My mother straightened and faced him. She seemed very slender and girlish. Somehow, her sobs had ceased. Perhaps his harsh words had had their effect.

"You think I shall not see him again, Herbert?" she demanded, quietly.

"See him again? He is dead!"

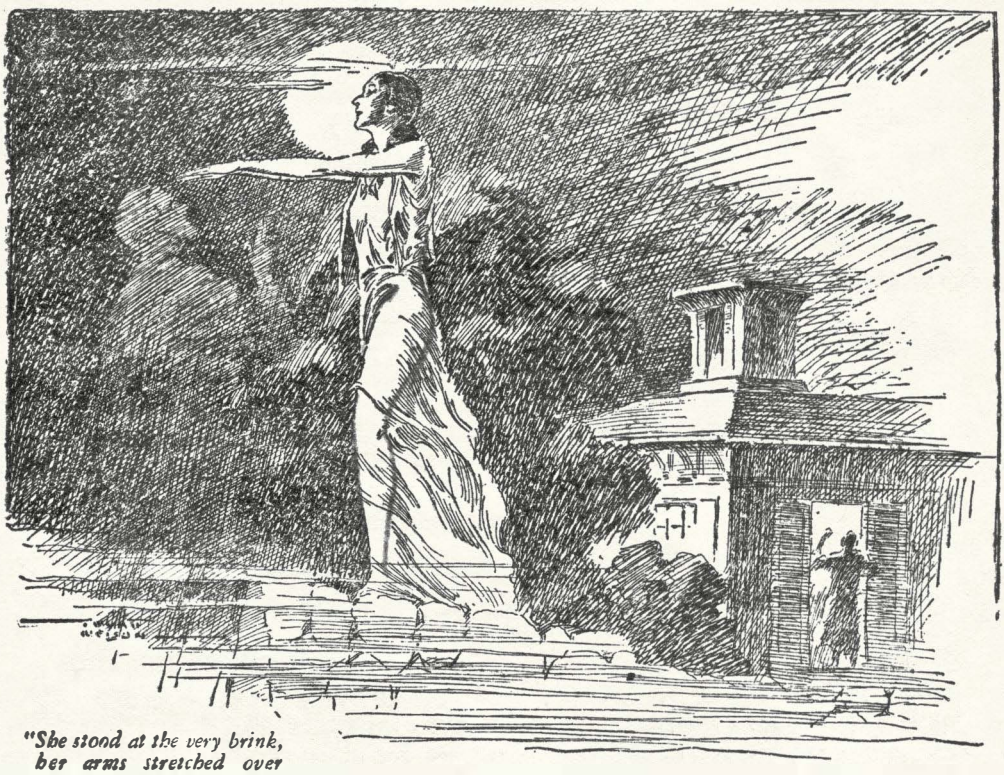
"Dead?" She met his eyes, a strange high defiance in her face. "Yes . . . I know. But I shall see him again. Soon!"

He talked at length after that—words which even to me, a young boy, seemed queerly unsympathetic. But they did not remain in my mind as did the quiet yet solemn prediction my mother had made. Through the weeks which followed I was to remember that more and more distinctly.

For this was the beginning of what I think of now as the nightmare period of my boyhood. The crowds who came to look at my father's body were part of it. He, too, had been a doctor, equally distinguished with my uncle, but better liked. My mother's intense and silent grief was part of it. So was my uncle's self-contained suavity. I hated him.

The worst of it came after the funeral. I shiver yet at the memory of the men who were waiting when we returned from the grave. They took my mother away. I clung to her until old Mrs. Ross, the housekeeper, gently disengaged my hands. When I asked why they had taken my mother, she only sobbed. I was not to know until the first day of the trial.

On the evening of that day, with the trial continued until morning, I begged Mrs. Ross to tell me what it all meant.



"She stood at the very brink, her arms stretched over vacancy."

We were back in the upper hall of our big house—back without my mother.

Poor Mrs. Ross! Her own knowledge of the terrible thing that had come upon us was by no means exact. But it was enough. She had been a witness, on my mother's behalf, at the trial, and she was an intelligent woman, even though she was old and rather deaf.

"Your mother used to be a nurse, dearie," she said.

"Nurses help to make people well. They don't kill!" I retorted.

"Of course they don't, Arthur. Don't let no one tell you that they do. Not your mother, anyway—poor lamb! But, being a nurse as she is, she knows more than lots of folks. They say she gave your father disease germs with a"—she stumbled on the word—"a hypodermic."

"She didn't! Of course she didn't! Why should she?"

The old woman stroked my hair.

"Your father was a rich man, Arthur. He left everything to her. All her life she's to have it. Then when she dies the property is to go to you and Doctor Forbes."

Doctor Forbes was my uncle. I can not be sure—one can be sure of so few things after twenty years—but I think that at that moment the first germ of suspicion against him entered my boyish mind. Before the nightmare was over, that suspicion was to grow into hideous certainty. That instant, when the sun of late afternoon, reflecting from the ruined stone wall at the rear of our beautiful old house, cast long, glancing beams on the ceiling of the hall, and I stood with my arms around old Mrs. Ross—that moment,

long ago, may have been its first, faint beginning.

"Mrs. Ross!" I gasped. "Uncle doesn't think she did it? Uncle doesn't think so, does he?"

Through the tears on her old-fashioned, oval glasses, her eyes seemed oddly large to me. I wondered why she did not answer at once. At last, she did answer.

"Why, no, child. No, Arthur. Of course, your uncle doesn't think so. How could he think such a monstrous thing? Unless——"

She stopped, then suddenly blurted it out:

"Unless she did it in her sleep! There, child! I mustn't say another word. I've said too much now!"

She released herself from my forlorn clutch and hurried away. But her last words had brought something back to my mind. One night, months before, I had been restless and wakeful. Tossing in my bed, I had heard footsteps in the hall. I had rushed to the door.

My mother was in the hall. Bright moonlight streamed through the window at its farther end. As she walked in its clear radiance, I saw her distinctly—her hair blown back by some vagrant breeze, her eyes fixed, her hands stretched gropingly before her like a blind man walking.

She had seemed not to hear my frightened cry, but had walked past me as if I had not been there. I had seen her reach her room. The door had closed behind her.

If my mother roamed the house in her sleep—if she did not know even me—might she not, perhaps, do something—something dreadful—and not know it, either?

THE day came when I had my mother back. Juries are sometimes dense, but these men had shown intelligence. They had acquitted her.

But somehow, somewhere, I heard a whisper which tempered my triumph. There was the suspicion that would not down—the suggestion that perhaps she had given the fatal hypodermic in her sleep.

These things came obscurely to my boyish mind, and in the years since that time I have never cared to go into the records of the trial. It was enough to me then to have my mother once more.

Yet something in my uncle's attitude toward her made me vaguely uneasy. He was a harsh man. His eminence in the profession had come from sheer ability, not in the least from any personal liking for him on the part of his patients.

Why should he change now? Why should he begin to seem kindly and sympathetic toward my mother and me? I distrusted him.

One evening, I heard his deep tones behind the closed door of his study, and my mother's voice, replying. Something was wrong; I did not know what—but it was not her voice as I usually heard it. I opened the door.

My mother was seated in the operating-chair. Her head was thrown back. Her eyes were closed. Standing beside her, his gaze fixed on her face, his huge shoulders hunched forward, was my uncle. He had not heard me come in.

He spoke. My brain was too confused to catch his words, but I heard her obedient reply.

"Remember what you have done!" he continued, with heavy emphasis.

"I will remember!" she returned.

Her voice was pitiful—like that of a beaten, conquered thing. All my revulsion to the man at her side surged up into my soul. I seem still to hear the frightened tremolo of my own voice as I rushed past him and clasped my mother. "You mustn't remember!" I screamed, frantically. "You mustn't remember,

mother! He is trying to hurt you! I know it, mother—I know it!"

A powerful grip seized me. My uncle's huge, bearded face shut out the world. His dark eyes bored into mine. Yet he was smiling.

"What mustn't she remember?" he demanded.

"Anything!" I cried, defiantly. "She mustn't remember anything you want her to!"

"So that's it!" He looked down at me, thoughtfully. "Do you know that your mother is very ill, Arthur?"

I shook my head. As I gazed up at him, held firmly in his grip, his eyes seemed hard like agates, in spite of his smile. But what he had said worried me.

"She's not ill!" I contradicted.

There was no conviction in my voice, and he knew it.

"I fear you must let me be the judge of that. After all, my boy, I am a mental specialist. And your mother's illness is of the mind. Do you want to help her get well?"

There could be only one answer to such a question. I nodded.

"Then you must not interfere when I am treating her. Now, I tell you what we will do. We will go to the door—so. And into the hall—so. And you will never come into my study again unless I bid you."

The door shut. I was in the hall. I heard the bolt slip into place.

Then I realized that, through it all, my mother had not spoken to me. She had remained in the chair, motionless and silent.

What he had been doing—why he had done it—were to me all a blur of horrible mystery; too horrible for a boy of fourteen to understand. Yet it was all to become much worse.

WHETHER I deliberately managed to stay up later I can not be sure, but on several nights at intervals following that unforgettable scene in the study I met my mother wandering through the old house. I gave up trying to talk with her. She was walking in her sleep—I knew the meaning of those fixed eyes and groping hands. But once she herself spoke and I heard the words.

That night, I rushed sobbing down the hall and ran squarely into Mrs. Ross's soothing arms.

"Did you hear her?" I sobbed. "She said——"

But the old woman clapped a kindly hand over my mouth.

"Don't repeat it, child. She doesn't know what she is saying. I have heard her more than once."

I was silent, but my mind was made up: I would talk to my mother, herself—in the daylight, when she was awake.

The opportunity came soon afterward, on a sunny day when we were walking together, she and I, in the garden back of the house. Old John, the gardener, was planting pansies along the foot of the ruined wall, patting the brown earth lovingly about their roots as if he had been putting children to bed. The wall was all that a fire had left of an ancient stone building, burned some years before my birth. Ivy-clad and built of solid masonry, it was a picturesque ruin. As an ornament to the garden, it justified my father's wisdom in leaving it there.

While my mother and I walked between the rows of red and pink peonies in the middle of the garden, my sharp young senses noted the busy life of insects at the base of the wall, and the calls of nesting birds higher among the ivy. Some of the nests were very high. The top of the old wall, at right angles to the rear of the house, ran nearly level with the eaves. It kept its altitude for a dozen

feet or so, then sloped downward toward the house by a series of irregular steps until it reached the level of our second story. I had been known to stride from the window at the rear of the upper hall to the lowest of these steps, and to climb thence to the ultimate dizzy height; but never with my mother's approval.

"I hope you haven't climbed the wall lately, Arthur?" she asked, as we walked together.

I shook my head.

"You must be very, very careful," she went on. "You are all I have now."

Abruptly I spoke what was on my mind.

"Mother!" I said. "After father died you said you were going to see him again soon. I heard you. Did you mean that—that you were going to die, too?"

"No, dear," she answered, gently.

I smiled up at her. That assurance had lifted a load from me. But I wished to know something more.

"Then you must have meant you were going to see him without dying. *Have* you seen him, mother?"

Her eyes filled with tears, and she shook her head.

"Not yet, Arthur."

"Then how did you know——"

"I just knew, dear. Let's not talk about it any more now."

But there was still something else. I had to know about this, too. My opportunities to talk with my mother alone were not many, now.

"Did father leave his money to you, mother?" I demanded.

"Why—yes, child."

"Then you are richer than Uncle Herbert?"

"Herbert used to have just as much as your father. Your grandfather divided his property between them. But your uncle lost practically everything in some unwise investments; so I fear he hasn't much except what comes from his practise." Her gray eyes twinkled. When they did that, she was like what my mother used to be before her tragedy came upon her. "You're asking some curious questions this morning, Arthur."

"Who owns the house?" I persisted.

"Why—I do, I suppose."

I stopped, and faced her squarely. We were well out of earshot of the gardener. The breeze whispered in the ivy, there was the fragrant smell of upturned earth and freshly mown grass, but my heart was filled with blind rage at the unreasonableness of things. My mother—who had never harmed any one—was in danger. I knew it. I determined that she should know, too.

"You own the house, mother! You're rich!" I clenched my fists by my sides. "Why do you let uncle do those things to you?"

"What things?"

"He puts you to sleep. You know he does!"

"It is part of the treatment for my nerves," she said, gently. "Don't forget, Arthur—your Uncle Herbert is a great nerve specialist."

"Does he tell you what to do in your sleep at night?" I demanded, hotly.

"Why, Arthur—I don't understand."

"He does!" I declared, bitterly. Hot tears flooded my eyes. My voice was breaking. But I was determined she should be told the horrid thing that I knew.

"He makes you walk about the house at night in your sleep. He makes you say that you killed father, and call for him to come back. Mrs. Ross and I have both heard you!"

For an instant she stood silent. Her face was like stone. Suddenly she buried it, with a little moan, in her hands.

"I did kill him!" she said, in a stifled voice. "I did! I did! I did!"

Before I could say a word to stop her, weighed down as I was with horror, she ran, sobbing and stumbling, to the house.

THAT night I could not sleep. Something brooded over the house. Lying in my narrow bed I felt its presence, and when I threw down the covers at last and crept to the broad-silled, open window to look out at the moonlight, it seemed that the wind which blew on my face was charged with ominous whispering. A boy's fancy, no doubt; but to a boy such fancies are real.

I could see the distant end of the ruined wall in the rear garden, and the rustling ivy. A mist was rising from the ground. It curled over the wall, hid the ancient stones from sight one moment, the next untwisted again and revealed them to the moon, then once more covered their scarred surface with a gray blanket.

At length the swirling motion made me drowsy. I yawned and started back to bed; only to be awake and alert in an instant, before I had taken five steps.

I had heard my mother's voice.

It floated in to me through the open window, and, over and over, it was calling my name:

"Arthur! Arthur!"

There was nothing of fright in the call. I had heard her when she had thought I was in danger—for instance, when I had been clambering up the ruined wall—and her tone had been altogether different. She had been filled then with acute uneasiness on my behalf. Now she was calling lightly, almost gayly. I had no doubt she had gone out into the garden, and that for some reason she wished me to walk there with her.

By merely looking out of the window, I might have corrected that mistake. The truth would have been apparent in a flash. But I did not look out. I ran into the hall, instead, clad only in my thin nightrobe, and rushed to the broad staircase. If my mother was calling, I would go to her.

The stairs were at the front of the old house. My room was at the rear. I passed three other doors in the moon-diluted darkness, the first, that of Mrs. Ross, then my mother's, then my uncle's. Strange how the memory seems to ignore, yet retains! I could hardly have glanced at those doors, but I recall, with certainty, that the first I passed was shut, and that the other two were ajar. There was death itself in that fact. Yet how could I have known?

Another recollection comes to my mind —one that at a different time and place would have counted for nothing, but which that night was filled with deadly meaning: the door of my own room had slammed shut as I left, yet through the upper hall and down the stairs my light garment wrapped around me, blown by a steady wind. The wind followed me through the long lower hall, till I reached the garden door.

It was bolted. I pulled desperately at the stiff bolt, which was a little high for me to reach, and at last it yielded. With its loosening, the door swung open. The mist-laden breath of the garden met me.

I ran out, and down the steps. At once I found myself wading breast-high through a pool of fog, which flowed along the ground and hid the grass and the familiar flowers. To the left the rugged wall lifted itself clear in the moonlight, but my eyes were not for it. I scanned the rippling surface of the fog. She was not there.

"Mother!" I called.

When there was no reply, I ran to the corner of the house, where the side garden would be visible. The fog gulf was here, too. In the brief space since I had gazed from my bedroom window, it seemed to have flooded the earth.

"Arthur! I am coming, Arthur!"

She must be in the rear garden, after all! I rushed back. My bare feet blundered through a flower bed, but I hardly knew. There was something in her voice now that drove a chill to my heart—that brought back the dreadful moment, hours before, on the sunlit garden walk, when she had accused herself of——

I put the thought away from me. My mother was here. She wanted me. I must go to her. She had called me.

The moon, hidden for a moment behind filmy clouds, rode clear, and silvered the shimmering fog. The ancient wall was before me, as distinct in that reflected light as if bathed in sunshine. I stopped short, and stared at it. In the midst of my bewildered search it appeared to have something of menace in its grim outlines.

While I looked numbly, my mother's voice came again:

"Arthur! Arthur, dear! I am coming to you!"

I saw her.

Her white night-dress, against the silvery background of moonlight and fog, had cloaked her with invisibility. But I saw her now!

She was walking on the top of the wall.

She would take a step or two at a time. She would stop then, and seem to listen; her hand would go to her forehead—she was trying to see something in the moonlit night. Then she would venture another step, listen again, and call.

"I am coming, Arthur!" she said, once more.

SUDDENLY I understood. My father's name, too, had been Arthur. She was calling to the dead. Why had I not realized that?

Along with the cold horror which froze my brain was a keen knowledge of her danger. The top of the wall was narrow. In spots the stone had flaked away until only an inch or two of breadth remained. Even that scant surface was scarred and treacherous. Part of the thrill of my forbidden trips on the wall had been the zest of risking my life.

But I had taken my risks awake and in the daytime. My mother walked by the uncertain light of the moon. And she was asleep. Some subtle quality in her voice made me sure of that.

I started to scream a frantic warning—and stopped myself. To wake her now might mean her death. The haze of the mind between sleeping and waking—a step aside—a slip—I was old enough to sense that danger. Yet even in my instant of hesitation, she cut down the short distance between herself and the sheer drop at the end of the wall.

I might get help—my uncle. But no. Too late for that. If I called him from where I stood, it might wake her. If I ran back into the house—but why consider that? There was no time—no time. I must reach her, myself.

The hall window in the second story was open. That was how she had reached the top of the wall. That was why the wind had followed me down the stairs. But I could not spare the precious seconds to go that way. I must climb.

Perhaps by the ivy—I flung into the thick growth and began to pull myself up.

First, I tried near the house. Though the vines there were not quite so closely matted as farther down, the climb was shorter. A third of the way up, something broke. I clutched, desperately. Another section tore loose, and I fell backward, into the pool of fog.

This was no time to pause for bruises. I bounced to my feet. The long climb was best, after all—the climb at the high end, where the ivy grew thickly. I swayed a little, pulling my wits together after the hard fall, and looked up at my mother.

She was near the end. As I looked, she

sobbed the one word, "Arthur!" and broke into a little, stumbling run, with outstretched hands and staring eyes.

"Mother!" I cried, in terror.

I could not possibly reach her in time. Another half-dozen steps, and she would be over the brink. I *had* to wake her.

I screamed to her over and over, putting all my desperate fear into the call. Still she ran on jerkily toward death, her hands extended, her clear, high voice calling!

And then I saw my uncle.

He stood at the window. He was quite calm. More than that—he was triumphant. How could I tell, with only the bright moonlight to show me his tall figure standing there? I can not say. But I knew. In my soul, I knew. I was certain, too, that he had been standing there all the while, waiting for the tragedy. I felt that, when he had thrown her into those strange sleeps, he had commanded this thing, over and over, until at last she was obeying him. He wanted her death!

I had perceived him with one swift glance, and—so strangely does the mind even of a boy work at the supreme moment—I had instantly dismissed the thought of appealing to him. My eyes turned again to my mother.

She stood at the very brink. Her arms were stretched over vacancy. She called my father's name again. Longing and love were in that call, and the moonlight showed me the happiness of her face.

The end was at hand; the moment when the fog-enshrouded stones far below would receive her. I shut my eyes and waited dumbly for the crash.

But, instead of that expected sound, I heard a cry.

It was not from her lips. It was my uncle.

I opened my eyes again. He stood at the window, gibbering and pointing. His voice rose to a scream of terror; a prolonged, inhuman cry of mortal fear. I looked where he pointed.

At first I saw only my mother. She was at the brink—the very brink. Yet she had not fallen. Then I saw something else. Another figure stood beside her on that narrow ledge, where there barely was room for one.

It was my father.

My breath came and went in shuddering sobs. I stared, with no power of movement except to follow the two figures with my eyes, as they slowly retraced the way she had come. She was still asleep; she trod with the soft yet sure footing of the sleep-walker. Sometimes her steps faltered, but her companion led her by the hand. She had called the dead. The dead had answered.

When they reached the open window, my uncle was not there. They passed through—she and the shadowy figure beside her. They were gone. Not till then did I break from the spell that had bound me, and race into the house.

I reached the broad staircase—and suddenly stopped. A terrific roar had reverberated through the hall.

There were hurrying footsteps; a scream. Mrs. Ross's voice, high and hysterical, was crying something over and over. At last I caught the words:

"The doctor! The doctor! He's shot himself!"

But it was to my mother's side that I ran. She was standing awake and very still, in the upper hall. As I caught her hand, she seemed to recognize me with a start, and threw her arms around me.

"He came, Arthur!" she whispered. "And now I know. I shall never think again that I . . . that I——"

She had no need to finish. I understood. And I knew, too, why the wretched man who lay dead in a near-by room had been unable to confront his brother's spirit.

Island of Doom

By BASSETT MORGAN

A thrill-tale of flesh-eating orchids, and a surgical horror that was consummated on a little island in the South Pacific

WHEN Tom Mansey's schooner dropped anchor in the pretty lagoon and he set out in a small boat for shore, he saw the color of a woman's dress as Nell Evans ran down the path to meet him, followed a moment later by her tall husband.

As his boat, sculled by a Tonga boy of his crew, slipped over the clear water and tinted coral gardens below, he had time to see the amazing improvements that Evans had made in a year on the island foreshore, hedges of flowering shrubs, crushed coral path leading to a pretty bungalow built of coral blocks and chunks of lava rock brought from the slope of that extinct volcano cone which reared its brown crest like the cowled head of a monk brooding in the distance.

Then Mansey was startled to see Nell Evans emerge from the hedge leading by one paw a young orang-outang which shrank closer to her side at the sight of strangers. In the enthusiastic warmth of greetings from Evans and his wife, who had not seen a white man since Mansey dropped them and their belongings on the island a year ago, the orang-outang broke away and scuttled to the house. Mansey was no sooner settled in a porch chair and answering the hundreds of questions fired at him in wistful hunger of exiles marooned at the back of beyond, than the orang-outang came from the house carrying a tray with glasses and a bottle.

Bill Evans roared with laughter at Mansey's dumfounded expression.

"I caught him the week after you left us and Nell has trained him as a housemaid," he said.

"Bill is away so much of the time fussing with his experiments that I was lonely," Nell said defensively. "I always spoiled our cats and dogs at home. I trained gold-fish to swim through my fingers. Our canaries could put on a very good entertainment of tricks I taught them. And I couldn't resist Little Willie."

The ape stood patiently while Evans uncorked the bottle and poured drinks; then he carried the tray to Nell and Bill and Mansey.

"Making a henpeck and sissy of Little Willie saved her teaching me to jump when she spoke," laughed Evans.

Mansey did not like the idea of the great ape being a companion for Nell Evans, but then he would never have brought a pretty and intelligent young wife to this far-away tip of a submerged mountain peak far out of the track of cargo boats or even native craft which will go anywhere for a price. For undisturbed quiet in which Bill Evans could pursue his biological and anatomical studies it was ideal, fair as a garden of the Lord and lacking none of the potentialities of hell. Evans had inherited wealth enough to make him independent, had been a successful surgeon who resented catering to the usual neurotic crowd among a physician's patients, and broke away to experiment with anatomy in the raw.

The company for which Mansey was a valued free-lance scout, flying squadron and riot officer, gave the Evanses into his

"He was met by a backward-swinging paw that fastened on his throat."

charge, and he made a thorough job of finding a place where they could pursue Evans' hobby unmolested.

An hour after he landed Mansey realized it was not too lonely a place. Bill Evans took him to a crocodile pool he had made and furnished with baby muggers, surrounded by ferns and rock walls that protected a shallow beach.

Small snouts rested on floating logs or shore roots. But on shore three little crocs humped their backs and began to pick at grain which Evans scattered, then tried to scratch, for all the world like hens in a barnyard, making odd noises in their leathery throats. Mansey laughed and asked what ailed them, then stared.

"Neither bird nor beast nor good red herring," said Bill Evans. "I've given a fowl's brains to crawling reptiles. It's a fact," he added as Mansey looked incredulous. "I'd like to try that experiment on a snake and see it try to stand on its tail and crow at the rising sun."

"Kidding me?" Mansey asked.

"Absolutely not. I transplanted hen brains in those muggers' heads. Birds and reptiles are closely related, you know. I only wish I could live long enough to set the strain."

"Bill, you'd better come outside again. This sort of thing will send you bugs," commented Mansey, but Evans smiled.

"Think what surgery could do with this sort of thing," he said. "Dink Forster, an old college mate of mine, and I used to try it with various small animals until we managed to have them survive our surgical clumsiness of early days. I've got ideas. Think of planting the brain of a mongoose in the head of a tiger and lowering the cobra deaths of India, for

instance. Only the discrepancy in size must be overcome, smaller tigers or larger mongooses. Come and see my workshop. I built it away from the house because Nell has all a woman's shrinking from the surgical art although she is for all I try to do."

THEY left the pool by a path which led toward a blazing wall of crimson bloom where Little Willie, the young orang-outang, stood with a basket containing chunks of meat from wild pigs.

"Fly-trap orchids," said Evans, "cultivated and bred for size and ferocity. Nell trained Little Willie to feed them."

A stout wall of bamboo supported the trunks of two vines, but their branches had swarmed to trees which were smothered by the parasitic growth. The flowers were prodigious monstrosities with a petal spread of three feet like curved scarlet leather, black throats from which came a lethal stench that Mansey felt in sudden dizziness despite the sea wind blowing briskly that morning. The horrible flowers swayed like the wobbling heads of dromedaries or inflated hoods of cobras in the direction of the ape and his basket of meat, which his paw tossed in bits to a black throat. Instantly the petals closed on the meat with a creak like rubbed leather, and a dozen other heads snatched toward that closed maw, their scarlet petals quivering like the jaw of a cat stalking a bird. They even darted at the ape, which moved nimbly from that touch.

"They can draw blood," commented Evans, "as Little Willie found out long ago. I don't dare let these things propagate or they'd kill all animal life on the island in time. I keep two roots and burn the branches I cut off. Look at that ape!"

Little Willie was tormenting a cluster of giant blooms by waving a larger chunk of meat just beyond their reach. A mass of flowers shot out and the massive bamboo creaked with the strain before the ape tossed it and they writhed in horrible combat close to the parent stem. Little Willie's jaws opened in a weird grin and cackle of monkey mirth. Mansey saw the stems, thick as a man's leg, pulsing between closed blooms that hung like yellow gourds, as the flesh was absorbed.

"It's beastly, and I don't see what it proves," said Mansey.

"Every man to his own hobby," said Evans. "The orchids are just a whim of mine. My interest is in animal experiments and a new outlet for surgery. For instance, Dink Forster is back there studying cancer and salvaging a few more months of life for its victims, prolonging misery for people afflicted in various ways and balled because it isn't half the job a junkman could do with old automobiles by taking the good parts and assembling one workable machine. Think, if we could take human wrecks and use the best bits! That's what my surgery is for."

He started away and Mansey was glad to leave the vicinity of the monstrous vampire flowers to which Little Willie rapidly tossed the last scraps and left one neglected bud foraging in the empty basket he dropped. He swung after Evans and Mansey, flying through trees of which great branches dropped with his weight, then crashed back when released.

Moist heat on the jungle trail wrapped their faces like warm wet gauze. Mansey dripped sweat before they came to the crater slope on the foot of which stood a coral block building with glass walls on two sides, surrounded by a high fence of bamboo. In the well-equipped operating-theater were heavy cot beds smoothly padded and fitted with many binding straps, cases of instruments, all the paraphernalia of a small hospital surgery, and two white-coated Chinese bowed politely as Evans introduced his assistants.

"They attended college in my time," he

said, "and shared the brain transplantations with Dink Forster and me. Come and see my latest stunts." But Mansey shook his head.

"I don't like it," he said frankly.

BACK at the house he bathed and changed his clothes, then sat on the porch with Nell Evans until dinner was prepared by the native servants they had brought with them to the island. Little Willie sat puffing a cigarette, apparently enjoying a smoke. Then his fingers began pleating the hem of Nell's dress. Mansey remembered his own mother and other women picking up an apron to pleat the hem. He noticed after that that every dress Nell wore had those pleat marks from the fingers of the ape, which was devoted to its mistress. He saw Little Willie sweep and wash dishes, dust a room, even straighten a framed picture of Dink Forster which hung on the house wall.

"You've made a girl of Little Willie," he commented as the ape laid his head on Nell's lap and sighed almost humanly. "But you should be petting your own son instead of that creature. And he should be swinging through trees, frightening smaller monkeys and picking his own fleas."

Nell laughed, but it sounded wistful.

"I daren't risk a baby here. And I can't turn Little Willie loose now. You know, of course, that wild apes kill one that has been tamed."

"Go outside and have a family while Bill is experimenting," said Mansey brutally. "Dance and play, for fear the fate of tamed monkeys might be imitated among humans when you do go out."

"Stop it!" she cried suddenly, passionately. "Don't you imagine I have heartaches enough without you reminding me? Bill will never leave the island. But we need company. I'm tempted to write Dink Forster and tell him what Bill is doing. He'd be wild to come. Only——"

"The very thing," cried Mansey. "His opinion would be worth something if he told Bill to cut out this crazy experimenting and take you outside."

"No," she said quietly, lowering her voice. "Poor Dink! You see, I was once engaged to Dink. I'm not boasting when I say he was pretty wild about me. I eloped with Bill. And if you knew Dink you'd realize I'm afraid to have them meet. Dink is the kind that never forgets or forgives. Look!" She led Mansey to his picture on the wall, across which was written 'Till death. Dink.' A handsome, clever-looking face, yet passionate and sensual. Recalling Bill Evans' lank, rugged profile, Mansey decided Nell had been wise to choose Bill and keep the two men apart.

"Nevertheless I'm so proud of what Bill's doing that I've written Dink a bulky letter telling him about it. You'll post it for me from Port Moresby, please."

MANSEY left the island with a feeling of escape from smoldering peril gathering for a holocaust, a crawling fury due to Evans' tampering with natural forces, a vengeance of beast life hovering ready to pounce. He would rather have dropped Nell's letter in the sea. Some day he would be bringing out Evans' widow, and he hoped to God it would not be too late to save her reason.

For five consecutive years he called with supplies and came away still more repulsed with the miracles of Evans' surgery; then he saw the shadow lower. Evans wasn't well. Confidentially he gave Mansey a letter to Dink Forster, asking him to come and see what might be done to ward off inroads of an organic trouble, and see for himself Evans' experiments.

Perhaps Dink would be enough interested to stay and work with him, in cases. . . .

"Come outside to a hospital," urged Mansey.

"And let this work waste? Not while I live. But don't tell Nell. Dink wanted to marry her, and I won out. She thinks Dink will have it in for me. But that was long ago. We outgrow that kind of disappointments."

Mansey again mailed a letter, with forebodings of trouble. Months later when he reported to company headquarters, they told him a man had been waiting five weeks for his return to take passage on his schooner for the Evanses' island. And when Mansey met Richard Forster, who could write half the alphabet after his name, he knew Nell Evans' instinct had been intuitive.

"So you're the man who has kept me waiting," he began. "Well, I'll be on your boat in an hour."

"I'll send word when I'm sailing," said Mansey curtly and turned away. Not even the company dictated in that tone to Tom Mansey, who knew weather, natives and perils of that stretch of tropic seas. What could be done Mansey leaped to do. If he shook his head the matter dropped. Perhaps men died, but they would have died anyway. God seemed far away from some horrors down there.

In three days he sent his Tonga mate for Doctor Forster. The schooner would sail in an hour. When the hour was up Forster had not come. Mansey breathed easier and gave orders to lift the mudhooks; there was trade along the north shore he very much wanted to pick up and delay might give Nell Evans a chance to marry again outside and dance as a pretty woman should. Damn these cocksure high-falutin' nabobs of civilization, telling Tom Mansey what to do and when! Let Forster hire a native craft and swelter in broiling suns at sea, stew under a low thatch by night and find Evans if they could.

His vessel was swinging for outer sea when Forster sauntered to the wharf, grew excited, waved white duck arms and long slender hands, then hired a fuzzy-haired Papuan with a proa to deliver him on Mansey's outgoing schooner. It made intercourse strained, but Mansey was not a talker. He nursed his pipe, and his glance told the Tonga boys what to do. His silence got on Forster's nerves.

"I've been summoned by Evans for professional services."

"Naturally," stated Mansey. Red crept up Forster's cheeks.

"You know the Evanses well?"

"Slightly. I call there once a year with supplies."

"Ever see their tame orang-outang?"

"The yit is full of monkeys," said Mansey and he went below to change into pajamas, damning Dink Forster. Cold, calloused exterior. Boiling lava beneath. Like a volcano oozing a thread of vapor to show what lay beneath ready to rouse and blow up everything. Later Forster said:

"Mansey, I began wrong with you. I didn't know you, and I'd waited——"

"Six or seven years," Mansey finished amazingly.

"It seemed that long," Forster laughed harshly, but it was his last attempt to iron out the spiked and bristling wall of suspicion between them.

The weather was fine, the sea by day a shimmering plane on which wind blew so gently that it carried spiced land scents. In the schooner's shadow they could see coral and fish. The nights were purple gauze entangled with low stars. The engine throb was a thudding heart burdened with tragedy. Mansey wished he need not find that tiny dot of an island among the fly-specks of green earth mot-

tling those seas. But Nell Evans loved Bill, and she had been such a gamester. . . .

His boat arrived in the night, and they went ashore to where lanterns hung on the tiny lagoon wharf, and found Little Willie carrying a light as he stood beside Nell Evans. She greeted Forster with a cry that held an eery broken note; then hunger for sight of some other white person crowded down her woman's instinct.

Evans' face had changed with the strides of pain stalking him night and day, and Forster's gaze lingered on him with professional appraisal. Mansey went to the guest room early and left them talking of old days, but he was wakened at the break of silver dawn to see Forster in pajamas standing beside his bed.

"Mansey, I've a favor to ask. Start away with me now."

Mansey considered silently, then shook his head in refusal. He hated cowards. Forster had evidently found he still loved Nell Evans. Let him prove it by saving Bill's life for her.

"Persuade Bill and his wife to go outside with us and I'll do it," he countered.

"Honestly, I tried that. They won't go."

"Then I don't see how you can refuse to help Evans. Isn't it sort of ethical to do what you can professionally?"

Forster turned on his heel and left the room. Nell Evans did not take anything at breakfast but clear coffee, and she was forcing her gayety, relating college escapades gallantly, leading their laughter. After breakfast Bill and Forster started for the surgery and Nell sat with Mansey on the porch, looking like a stricken woman, with Little Willie pleating her dress hem until it got on her nerves and she sent him to feed the vampire orchids with meat.

Mansey followed the ape, watching the horrid feast of flowers on flesh, hearing Little Willie's cackling mirth as he tormented the blooms which writhed to reach the tidbit, their stems twisting like pythons, and those of the fed bulbs closed on their prey, throbbing in repletion.

Then the ape began cutting upthrust stem buds from the earth, tuberous and blanched. He smoothed the earth and filled his basket with the cuttings, then swung through the trees toward the hill. He performed as much work as any three of the lazy native servants; his body was full-grown, immensely powerful and his trained intelligence amazing. Mansey heard the voices of Evans and Forster at the crocodile pool, and he joined them, listening quietly to Forster's enthusiastic comments on Evans' experiments.

For days the two surgeons were together in the surgery and at the pool, and Forster was going even further in brain transplantations than Evans. Little Willie brought small monkeys for their experiments, and Nell Evans shuddered when at last she spoke of it to Mansey.

"Tom, I want a trip outside while this is going on. I haven't told Bill yet, because he hasn't been well lately, but something has happened which makes me want to go outside for a time. Perhaps Dink Forster will be interested enough to stay and go on with this work and Bill will follow me if I make a home somewhere else, Sidney or Hongkong. You see, I'm expecting a baby."

"Why not tell Bill and take him outside with you?" Mansey suggested. He was glad of her decision and this new interest in her life.

"No. Not yet. Wait till Dink is fascinated enough to take over the work, and I have our home ready. Then Bill will come contentedly, and I won't feel I've torn him away."

Mansey thought another reason drove

Nell Evans away. Even he could see plainly the smoldering passion of Forster for the girl who had once jilted him. Even the ape sensed it and crouched near her, growling at Forster and refusing to make friends, always at his habit of pleating the hem of her dress until it got on Nell's nerves, and in desperation she hung one of her dresses on a bamboo rack that stood on the porch, so that the ape could pleat the fabric of that garment instead of the one she was wearing.

When Nell spoke of wanting a trip outside Bill Evans was enthusiastic about the plan.

"You need a change, Nell. You can dance and play around."

"Suppose I liked it so well I didn't return, would you come and visit me sometimes?" she asked, laughingly.

"Don't tempt me. I never could resist you," he teased and pressed his hand to her cheek. Forster smoked a cigar vehemently. Then Evans strolled off under the moon and Forster began:

"Nell mustn't know, but Bill is a sick man. I'm glad she is going outside for her confinement. I'll try to do something for Bill while she is gone. She knows about our experiments and it horrifies her, so she is better away just now. I don't think she should be so much in the power of that ape. Suppose it turned savage."

Mansey agreed about the ape. And two days later when Nell was starting away with him, the ape seemed to sense a separation; for he went beside Nell to the wharf, and when she got into the small boat to start for the anchored schooner it flew into a rage, leaping up and down grotesquely, screeching its anger, raced along shore, baffled by the water it would not enter.

Nell ran below to her cabin, but Mansey stayed on deck watching as Evans tried to calm the beast. He saw the ape finally fly toward Forster, who was near the porch and leaped for a gun standing against the house wall. The schooner was too far away for the report of the gun to sound more than a dull "plup," but the succeeding shots from Evans' heavy revolver, always at his hip, carried clearly. Mansey could not see the end of the tragedy. He was glad Nell Evans need not know what happened.

FOUR months later he was startled to find Nell Evans waiting at Port Moresby for his return. She had established a home in Sidney and was impatient to see her husband and coax him away. Mansey begged her not to go to the island, in vain. She had new and pretty dresses and looked younger, happier, handsomer. He crowded his schooner for speed and anchored in the island lagoon just after dawn one morning, taking Nell ashore at once.

The boat scarcely touched the sand beach when the great ape swung down through the trees and stood staring at Nell Evans, who called a happy greeting, then said to Mansey:

"Little Willie has been hurt. Look at that scar on his head."

Circling the ape's skull was a puckered wound, well healed but visible through the reddish-brown hair. But the actions of the animal alarmed Mansey. In a moment Nell Evans was seized in its long arms, held against its great chest, and one paw tried to stroke her fair hair. She screamed with terror and Mansey leaped forward and was met by a backward-swinging paw that fastened on his throat, squeezing until Mansey's eyes and tongue protruded, then flinging him half conscious against a tree bole, where he lay recovering his breath and watching something worse than the strangling grip of that huge paw on his neck.

The ape was not vicious with Nell Evans. It held her helpless, its face was

close to hers, its lips moved, and soft yet uncouth sounds frighteningly like speech came from deep in its throat in a piteously pleading way as again it tried to stroke her hair. She was too frightened to struggle, but at its crooning and coaxing sounds, she closed her eyes, half fainting. Then the ape got queerly on its knees, pressed her hand to its cheek and gazed at her with pathetic agony in its eyes. Nell tried to regain her control of the animal:

"Good Little Willie. Go and sweep the floor. Go and feed the orchids. Good boy, Willie."

The ape chattered with desperate intensity, then dejectedly let her go and disappeared among the trees. Mansey ran to Mrs. Evans.

"He frightened me. He never acted that way before. I've been away too long. Bill and Dink Forster must be at the surgery and I must see them."

"Let me go first. The trip is too long and hot for you," he begged, and coaxed her back to the house. He hated to leave her alone there, and as the morning sun smote quivering heat about the place and she saw the neglected condition of her once pretty home, she consented to go to the schooner and wait.

MANSEY set out through stabbing heat and glare for the surgery, staring in amazement, as he went, at a stretch of scarlet banding the island below the hill where the ape had doubtless dropped the cuttings and they had grown amazingly, blazoning their red trail like blood from wounds, rooting again and again as they crept far and wide toward the sea. Already trees in their paths were dying. He saw a bird try to alight and petal jaws close over it. He saw butterflies engulfed, and as he stood watching he felt a tug at his foot and saw the yellow backs of petals clapped about his boot. As he jerked it away a snake wriggled within reach of one flower that darted at it and caught the luckless serpent by the middle. Its head and tail lashed in the deadly trap. Mansey was already reeling from the lethal emanations of the flowers and hurried on to where the white building stood, its gate latched.

The ape had scattered red doom that would devour all animal life, smother foliage, denude the island of all living things and leave only sun-baked earth on which lascivious and obscene stems writhed nakedly as pallid serpents among the devouring crests of doom. He was thinking of that when he reached the surgery door and a Chinese met him, then called Forster.

"You here again, Mansey?" he said in evident surprize.

"Mrs. Evans insisted on seeing her husband," said Mansey. "She is waiting on the schooner."

"Nell here! . . . Then keep her on the schooner. Bill isn't able to see any one yet, though he's recovering nicely."

Something strengthened Mansey's feeling of peril.

"Let me see him anyway," he said in a voice that carried command, and shoved past Forster.

In a shaded room the sick man lay on a cot, chattering queerly to himself. As the white-robed Chinese attendant came near he grabbed at the hem of his surgical robe and began pleating it. Mansey's flesh crawled. At sight of him Evans was off the cot bandy-legged, though he had been a man who walked very erect, jumping up and down grotesquely, peering into Mansey's face, chattering horridly like an ape!

An exclamation broke from Mansey and he stared at Forster, who met his gaze with dangerous boldness.

"You knew Evans was a sick man, Mansey. Well, I operated. I arrested

his disease awhile. But he isn't the same man he was before, as you can see."

"Yes, I can see. But I can't believe what I see," said Mansey, trying to control an impulse to dash from the place, up anchor and sail far away and never return. For around the head of the man leaping and prancing at his side was the same sort of puckered wound as that on the head of the ape.

Horror tapped at Mansey's brain. He turned from Evans to Forster, and Evans slyly bolted for the door and was gone, with both Chinese after him. Forster followed, and Mansey overtook him. He was watching Evans' attempt to catch tree branches and swing himself aloft. He fell, uttering queer ape noises, tripped on vines and brush, but managed to elude his pursuers on the trail to the house, where they finally found him lying exhausted on the mat in the kitchen where the ape used to sleep!

Mansey reached the house and was in the kitchen when Forster arrived, but Forster quailed before the outraged emotions glaring from the eyes of Tom Mansey.

"I'm glad Mrs. Evans stayed on my ship," he said. "You've let all hell loose on this island, but your punishment will be certain. I'm leaving here with Mrs. Evans. I'll tell her Bill is dead."

"Oh no, you won't take Nell Evans away," yelled Forster, and the names he called Mansey interested even that port-hardened sea captain. "You had your chance to horn into this affair. I asked you to take me out the first morning I came here and you wouldn't. You knew why I didn't want to stay, damn you. You said as much. Said I'd waited six years. And I had. But Bill Evans didn't wait. He brought my girl to the ends of the earth and hid her here. He was afraid of me. He thought he wasn't and he went under the ether for his operation still persuading himself he wasn't afraid of me. But he knew his body was doomed anyway. But I've prolonged his span of life. He'll have time to realize the hell I've endured thinking of Nell with him. He'll have a chance to know how I felt, separated from her. Only with Nell and me the separation was geographical. With Nell and Bill it's biological!" Forster's laughter began in a wicked chuckle that gathered noise and evil and rose in a gusty frenzy of demoniac triumphant sound.

"Stop it!" yelled Mansey. "You're crazy. You're losing your mind here on this island."

Then he stared as the door opened and out came the body that had been Evans'. A silly grin slit its mouth, its hands carried a tray with bottle and glasses in a slovenly fashion which he rescued from crashing. Then it sat on the porch and plucked at the faded dress belonging to Nell and still hanging there. Mansey gaped, as its fingers began to pleat the hem of the dress.

He was so fascinated watching that ape trick of hands that had belonged to a man he liked and respected that he saw nothing as Forster slipped a revolver from his pocket, gripped the nose and swung the butt on Mansey's head. Mansey dropped like a felled ox.

HE AWAKENED on a cot of the surgery, bound tightly to the bed from ankles to breast, unable to move hands or feet. Exceeding bright lights illumined the place, though the windows were dark except for low-burning tropic stars. Forster and the two Chinese moved about, clad in their white surgical gowns, faces masked with gauze, fussing with instruments.

Mansey's head throbbed. He tried to turn it and found it adhering to the cot by dried blood where the gun-butt cracked

the skin. Forster came and stood beside the cot.

"Awake now, Mansey? That's good. It's ethical to get the patient's consent before operating."

"Let me out of this. I don't need an operation, though you would if I get my hands on you."

"Brain injured, beyond a doubt." Forster laughed wickedly. His slender fingers were working a hypodermic in a glass of liquid. "But the success we made exchanging the brains of Bill Evans and the ape tempts me to go further. As you know, Mansey, it was Evans' pet theory that surgery would some day make possible the assembling of the best parts of several humans otherwise ready to be junked, and make one workable man. I agree with Bill that it was a noble idea. His body is doomed. I've put his brain in the stalwart chassis of the great ape, or as you sailors call it, Bill's engine occupies another hull. He's out there now, swinging through the trees as his ancient forebears did, and we may come back here some day and see an orang-outang operating on littler monkeys in this well-equipped little surgery. But in the body of Evans, Little Willie is doomed, and he was a well-trained beast. Now your skull-pan is all right, but you must admit you are only a casual type. The world is full of roaming sailors, and you haven't even a wife waiting for you. No one will mind what happens. And I'll prove that Little Willie's brain in your skull will do his tricks and sail a ship as well as you do, so even your company won't know the difference."

Mansey strained at his bonds. He cursed the sneering smile of Forster. The solidly built cot creaked with his writhing.

"Easy now, Mansey, while I give you a shot."

He came with the hypodermic needle. Mansey turned agonized eyes to the window, and then his struggles subsided. In the outer darkness were stars, and lower down against the glass a face looked in at a cot where a Chinese was fitting an ether cone over the face of what had been Bill Evans. Mansey caught the ether fumes as the other Chinese dripped it into the cone. He heard a roar from the ape's throat, and Mansey yelled at the top of his lungs:

"Bill, Bill, help!"

There was a crash of glass as the ape with the man's brain swung a cudgel on the window, battering it in, scattering broken glass. The two Chinese left their victim and fled screeching to the door. A yell of terror broke from Forster's throat as the huge form of an orang-outang broke into the room and caught him in one hand around his throat while the other ripped the heavy linen bands holding Mansey to the cot.

Mansey's arms were free. The ape creature tossed him a surgical knife, and he was slashing at the remaining bonds, hearing the terrible cries of Forster as the orang-outang lifted him to the operating-table and bound him fast, then caught up a knife.

Mansey fled, hearing the cries of agonized terror from the surgery as he darted into the darkness. Screech after screech of agony filled his ears, and as he passed the window he saw the ape hand wielding a knife that made a shambles of table and floor and the body of Forster. But Mansey was running as he never ran before, making for the wharf, panting for breath. He fell into the small boat on the beach and somehow pulled it to the schooner just as the first streaks of pearl dawn light flowed over the sea.

On deck he wakened the sleeping native crew and gave orders to lift the anchor, and as the ship slowly swung about and made for the reef jaws, he saw coming down the path the hunched and

sorrowful figure of the orang-outang. It came to the wharf and looked after his ship with its body a slumping and hopeless travesty of strength and brute force.

Nell Evans was wakened by the clank of anchor chains and came on deck.

"Bill is dead," Mansey said in answer to her startled cry.

He knew Bill Evans would want her to believe he died, and when she turned away in sudden grief and went to her cabin to be alone in that first hour of utter bereavement, Mansey saw the ape wave his hand in a human gesture of farewell, then walk to the end of the narrow plank wharf and plunge over and down to the coral gardens and waiting tridacna jaws that close at a touch and hold their prey. He knew that the soul of Bill Evans had escaped from the ape's body, just as he knew this island of horror would soon be overgrown with sinister orchids, and presently be a sun-baked lifeless rock, dreary as craters of the moon.

The Planet of the Dead

By CLARK ASHTON SMITH

A unique story of star-gazing—a bizarre tale of life in two planets and the splendors of a far world

1

BY PROFESSION, Francis Melchior was a dealer in antiques; by avocation, he was an astronomer. Thus he contrived to placate, if not to satisfy, two needs of a somewhat complex and unusual temperament. Through his occupation, he gratified in a measure his craving for all things that have been steeped in the mortuary shadows of dead ages, in the dusky amber flames of long-sunken suns; all things that have about them the irresoluble mystery of departed time. And through his avocation, he found a ready path to exotic realms in further space, to the only spheres where his fancy could dwell in freedom and his dreams could know contentment. For Melchior was one of those who are born with an immedicable distaste for all that is present or near at hand; one of those who have drunk too lightly of oblivion and have not wholly forgotten the transcendent glories of other eons, and the worlds from which they were exiled into human birth; so that their furtive, restless thoughts and dim, unquenchable longings return obscurely toward the vanishing shores of a lost heritage. The earth is too narrow for such, and the compass of mortal time is too brief; and paucity and barrenness are everywhere; and in all places their lot is a never-ending weariness.

With a predisposition ordinarily so fatal to the acquisitive faculties, it was indeed remarkable that Melchior should have prospered at all in his business. His love of ancient things, of rare vases, paintings, furniture, jewels, idols and statues, made him readier to buy than to sell; and his sales were too often a source

"The sun was overtaken at high noon by the doom the astronomers had foretold."

of secret heart-ache and regret. But somehow, in spite of all this, he had managed to attain a degree of financial comfort. By nature, he was something of a solitary, and was generally looked upon as eccentric. He had never cared to marry; he had made no intimate friends; and he lacked many of the interests, which, in the eyes of the average person, are supposed to characterize a normal human being.

Melchior's passion for antiquities and his devotion to the stars, both dated from his childhood days. Now, in his thirty-first year, with increasing leisure and prosperity, he had turned an upper balcony of his suburban hill-top house into an amateur observatory. Here, with a new and powerful telescope, he studied the summer heavens night after night. He possessed little talent and less inclination for those recondite mathematical calculations which form so large a part of orthodox astronomy; but he had an intuitional grasp of the heavenly immensitudes, a mystic sensitivity toward all that is far off in space. His imagination roamed and adventured among the suns and nebulæ; and for him, each tiny gleam of telescopic light appeared to tell its own story and invite him toward its own unique realm of ultramundane fantasy. He was not greatly concerned with the names which astronomers have given to particular stars and constellations; but nevertheless, each of them possessed for

him a separate individuality not to be mistaken for that of any other.

In especial, Melchior was drawn by one minute star in a wide-flung constellation south of the Milky Way. It was barely discernible to the naked eye; and even through his telescope, it gave an impression of cosmic solitude and remoteness such as he had never felt in any other orb. It allured him more than the moon-surrounded planets or the first-magnitude stars with their flaming spectra; and he returned to it again and again, forsaking for its lonely point of light the marvelous manifold rings of Saturn and the cloudy zone of Venus and the intricate coils of the great nebula of Andromeda.

Musing through many midnights on the attraction the star held for him, Melchior reasoned that in its narrow ray was the whole emanation of a sun and perhaps of a planetary system; that the secret of foreign worlds and even something of their history was implicit in that light, if one could only read the tale. And he longed to understand, and to know the far-woven thread of affinity which drew his attention so perennially to this particular orb. On each occasion when he looked, his brain was tantalized by obscure intimations of loveliness and wonder that were still a little beyond the reach of his boldest reveries, of his wildest dreams. And each time, they seemed a trifle nearer, and more attainable than before. And a strange, indeterminate expectancy began to mingle with the eagerness that prompted his evening visits to the balcony.

One midnight, when he was peering through the telescope, he fancied that the star looked a little larger and brighter than usual. Unable to account for this, in a mounting excitement he stared more intently than ever; and was suddenly seized by the unnatural idea that he was peering downward into a vast, vertiginous abyss, rather than toward the zenithal heavens. He felt that the balcony was no longer beneath his feet, but had somehow become inverted; and then, all at once, he was falling from it into the headlong ether, with a million thunders and flames about and behind him. For a brief while, he still seemed to see the star he had been watching, far down in the terrible Cimmerian void; and then he forgot, and could find it no more. There was the sickness of incalculable descent, an ever-swiftening torrent of vertigo not to be borne; and after moments or eons (he could not tell which) the thunders and flames died out in ultimate darkness, in utmost silence; and he no longer knew that he was falling, and no longer retained any sort of sentiency.

2

WHEN Melchior returned to consciousness, his first impulse was to clutch the arm of the chair in which he had been sitting beneath the telescope. It was the involuntary movement of one who has fallen in a dream. In a moment he realized the absurdity of this impulse; for he was not sitting in a chair at all; and his surroundings bore no manner of resemblance to the nocturnal balcony on which he had been seized by a strange vertigo, and from which he had seemed to fall and lose himself.

He was standing on a road paven with cyclopean blocks of gray stone—a road that ran interminably before him into the vague, tremendous vistas of an inconceivable world. There were low, funereal, drooping trees along the road, with sad-colored foliage and fruits of a deathly violet; and beyond the trees were range on range of monumental obelisks, of terraces and domes, of colossal multiform piles, that reached away in endless, countless perspectives toward an indistinct horizon. Over all, from an ebon-purple zenith, there fell in rich, unlustrous rays the

illumination of a blood-red sun. The forms and proportions of the labyrinthin mass of buildings were unlike anything that has been designed in terrestrial architecture; and, for an instant, Melchior was overwhelmed by their number and magnitude, by their monstrosity and bizarrerie. Then, as he looked once more, they were no longer monstrous, no longer bizarre; and he knew them for what they were, and knew the world upon whose road his feet were set, and the destination he was to seek, and the part he was fated to play. It all came back to him as inevitably as the actual deeds and impulses of life return to one who has thrown himself obliviously for a while into some dramatic rôle that is foreign to his real personality. The incidents of his existence as Francis Melchior, though he still recalled them, had become obscure and meaningless and grotesque in the reawakening of a fuller state of entity, with all its train of recovered reminiscences, of revived emotions and sensations. There was no strangeness, only the familiarity of a homecoming, in the fact that he had stepped into another condition of being, with its own environment, with its own past, present and future, all of which would have been incognizably alien to the amateur astronomer who had peered a few moments before at a tiny star remote in sidereal space.

"Of course, I am Antarion," he mused. "Who else could I be?" The language of his thoughts was not English, nor any earthly tongue; but he was not surprized by his knowledge of this language; nor was he surprized when he looked down and saw that he was attired in a costume of somber moth-like red, of a style unknown to any human people or epoch. This costume, and certain differences in his physical personality that would have appeared rather odd a little previously, were quite as he expected them to be. He gave them only a cursory glance, as he reviewed in his mind the circumstances of the life he had now resumed.

He, Antarion, a renowned poet of the land of Charmalos, in the elder world that was known to its living peoples by the name of Phandiom, had gone on a brief journey to a neighboring realm. In the course of this journey, a distressing dream had befallen him—the dream of a tedious, unprofitable life as one Francis Melchior, in a quite unpleasant and peculiar sort of planet, lying somewhere on the further side of the universe. He was unable to recall exactly when and where he had been beset by this dream; and he had no idea how long it had lasted: but at any rate, he was glad to be rid of it, and glad that he was now approaching his native city of Saddoth, where dwelt in her dark and splendid palace of past eons the beautiful Thameera, whom he loved. Now, once more, after the obscure clouding of that dream, his mind was full of the wisdom of Saddoth; and his heart was illumed by a thousand memories of Thameera; and was darkened at whiles by an old anxiety concerning her.

Not without reason had Melchior been fascinated by things antique and by things that are far away. For the world wherein he walked as Antarion was incomputably old, and the ages of its history were too many for remembrance; and the towering obelisks and piles along the paven road were the high tombs, the proud monuments of its immemorial dead, who had come to outnumber infinitely the living. In more than the pomp of earthly kings, the dead were housed in Phandiom; and their cities loomed insuperably vast, with never-ending streets and prodigious spires, above those lesser abodes wherein the living dwelt. And throughout Phandiom the bygone years were a tangible presence, an air that enveloped all; and the people were steeped in the crepuscular

gloom of antiquity; and were wise with all manner of accumulated lore; and were subtle in the practise of strange refinements, of erudite perversities, of all that can shroud with artful opulence and grace and variety the bare uncouth cadaver of life, or hide from mortal vision the leering skull of death. And here, in Saddoth, beyond the domes and terraces and columns of the huge necropolis, like a necromantic flower wherein forgotten lilies live again, there bloomed the superb and sorrowful loveliness of Thameera.

3

MELCHIOR, in his consciousness as the poet Antarion, was unable to remember a time when he had not loved Thameera. She had been an ardent passion, an exquisite ideal, a mysterious delight and an enigmatic grief. He had adored her implicitly through all the selenic changes of her moods, in her childish petulance, her passionate or maternal tenderness, her sybilline silence, her merry or macabre whims; and most of all, perhaps, in the obscure sorrows and terrors that overwhelmed her at times.

He and she were the last representatives of noble ancient families, whose untabulated lineage was lost in the crowded cycles of Phandiom. Like all others of their race, they were embued with the heritage of a complex and decadent culture; and upon their souls the never-lifting shadow of the necropoli had fallen from birth. In the life of Phandiom, in its atmosphere of elder time, of eon-developed art, of epicureanism consummate and already a little moribund, Antarion had found an ample satisfaction for all the instincts of his being. He had lived as an intellectual sybarite; and by virtue of a half-primitive vigor, had not yet fallen upon the spiritual exhaustion and desolation, the dread implacable ennui of racial senescence, that marked so many of his fellows.

Thameera was even more sensitive, more visionary by nature; and hers was the ultimate refinement that is close to an autumnal decay. The influences of the past, which were a source of poetic fruition to Antarion, were turned by her delicate nerves to pain and languor, to horror and oppression. The palace wherein she lived, and the very streets of Saddoth, were filled for her with emanations that welled from the sepulchral reservoirs of death; and the weariness of the innumerable dead was everywhere; and evil or opiate presences came forth from the mausolean vaults, to crush and stifle her with the formless brooding of their wings. Only in the arms of Antarion could she escape them; and only in his kisses could she forget.

Now, after his journey (whose reason he could not quite remember) and after the curious dream in which he had imagined himself as Francis Melchior, Antarion was once more admitted to the presence of Thameera by slaves who were invariably discreet, being tongueless. In the oblique light of beryl and topaz windows, in the mauve and crimson gloom of heavy-folded tapestries, on a floor of marvelous mosaic wrought in ancient cycles, she came forward languidly to greet him. She was fairer than his memories, and paler than a blossom of the catacombs. She was exquisitely frail, voluptuously proud, with hair of a lunar gold and eyes of nocturnal brown that were pierced by fluctuating stars and circled by the dark pearl of sleepless nights. Beauty and love and sadness exhaled from her like a manifold perfume.

"I am glad you have come, Antarion, for I have missed you." Her voice was as gentle as an air that is born among flowering trees, and melancholy as remembered music.

Antarion would have knelt, but she took him by the hand and led him to a couch beneath the intricately figured curtains. There the lovers sat and looked at each other in affectionate silence.

"Are all things well with you, Thameera?" The query was prompted by the anxious divination of love.

"No, all things are not well. Why did you go away? The wings of death and darkness are abroad, they hover more closely than ever; and shades more fearful than those of the past have fallen upon Saddoth. There have been strange perturbations in the aspect of the skies; and our astronomers, after much study and calculation, have announced the imminent doom of the sun. There remains to us but a single month of light and warmth, and then the sun will go out on the noontide heavens like an extinguished lamp, and eternal night will fall, and the chill of outer space will creep across Phandiom. Our people have gone mad with the predicted horror; and some of them are sunk in despairing apathy, and more have given themselves to frenzied revels and debaucheries. . . . Where have you been, Antarion? In what dream did you lose yourself, that you could forsake me so long?"

Antarion tried to comfort her. "Love is still ours," he said. "And even if the astronomers have read the skies aright, we have a month before us. And a month is much."

"Yes, but there are other perils, Antarion. Haspa the king has looked upon me with eyes of senile desire, and woos me assiduously with gifts, with vows and with threats. It is the sudden, inexorable whim of age and ennui, the caprice of desperation. He is cruel, he is relentless, he is all-powerful."

"I will take you away," said Antarion. "We will flee together, and dwell among the sepulchers and the ruins, where none can find us. And love and ecstasy shall bloom like flowers of scarlet beneath their shadow; and we will meet the everlasting night in each other's arms; and thus we will know the utmost of mortal bliss."

4

BENEATH the black midnight that hung above them like an imminence of colossal, unremoving wings, the streets of Saddoth were aflare with a million lights of yellow and cinnabar and cobalt and purple. Along the vast avenues, the gorge-deep alleys, and in and out of the stupendous olden palaces, temples and mansions, there poured the antic revelry, the tumultuous merriment of a night-long masquerade. Every one was abroad, from Haspa the king and his sleek, sybaritic courtiers, to the lowliest mendicants and pariahs; and a rout of extravagant, unheard-of costumes, a melange of fantasies more various than those of an opium dream, seethed and eddied everywhere. As Thameera had said, the people were mad with the menace of doom foretold by the astronomers; and they sought to forget, in a swift and ever-mounting delirium of all the senses, their dread of the nearing night.

Late in the evening, Antarion left by a postern door the tall and gloomy mansion of his forefathers, and wended his way through the hysteric whirling of the throng toward Thameera's palace. He was garbed in apparel of an antique style, such as had not been worn for a score of centuries in Phandiom; and his whole head and face were enveloped in a painted mask designed to represent the peculiar physiognomy of a people now extinct. No one could have recognized him; nor could he, on his part, have recognized many of the revellers he met, no matter how well-known to him, for most of them were disguised in apparel no less outré, and wore masks that were whimsical or ab-

surd, or loathsome or laughable beyond conception. There were devils and empresses and deities, there were kings and necromancers from all the far, unfathomed ages of Phandiom, there were monsters of mediæval or prehistoric types, there were things that had never been born or beheld except in the minds of insane decadent artists, seeking to surpass the abnormalities of nature. Even the tomb had been drawn upon for inspiration, and shrouded mummies, worm-gnawed cadavers, promenaded among the living. All these masks were the screen of an orgiastic license without precedent or parallel.

All the needful preparations for flight from Saddoth had been made; and Antarion had left minute and careful instructions with his servants regarding certain essential matters. He knew from of old the ruthless, tyrannic temperament of Haspa, knew that the king would brook no opposition to the indulgence of any whim or passion, no matter how momentary. There was no time to be lost in leaving the city with Thameera.

He came by winding devious ways to the garden behind Thameera's palace. There, among the high and spectral lilies of deep or ashen hues, the bowed funereal trees with their fruit of subtle and opiate savor, she awaited him, clad in a costume whose antiquity matched his own, and which was no less impenetrable to recognition. After a brief murmur of greeting, they stole forth together from the garden and joined the oblivious throng. Antarion had feared that Thameera might be watched by the henchmen of Haspa; but there was no evidence of such watching, no one in sight who seemed to lurk or loiter; only the swift movement of an ever-changing crowd, preoccupied with the quest of pleasure. In this crowd, he felt that they were safe.

However, through a scrupulous caution, they allowed themselves to be carried along for awhile in the tide of the city's revel, before they sought the long arterial avenue that led to the gates. They joined in the singing of fescennine songs, they returned the bachannalian jests that were flung by passers-by, they drank the wines that were proffered them by public urn-bearers, they tarried when the throng tarried, moved when it moved.

Everywhere, there were wildly flaming lights, and the ribaldry of loud voices, and the strident moan or feverous pulsing of musical instruments. There was feasting in the great squares, and the doorways of immemorial houses poured out a flood of illumination, a tumult of laughter and melody, as they offered their hospitality to all who might choose to enter them. And in the huge temples of former eons, delirious rites were done to the gods who stared forth with unchanging eyes of stone and metal to the hopeless heavens; and the priests and worshippers drugged themselves with terrible opiates, and sought the stupefying ecstasy of abandonment to an hysteria both carnal and devout.

At length Antarion and Thameera, by unobtrusive stages, by many windings and turnings, began to approach the gates of Saddoth. For the first time in their history, these gates were unguarded; for, in the general demoralization, the sentinels had stolen away without fear of detection or reproof, to join the universal orgy. Here, in the outlying quarter, there were few people, and only the scattered flotsam of the revels; and the broad open space between the last houses and the city wall was utterly abandoned. No one saw the lovers when they slipped like evanescent shadows through the grim yawning of the gates, and followed the gray road into an outer darkness thronged with the dim bulks of mausoleums and monuments.

Here, the stars that had been blinded by the flaring lights of Saddoth were clearly visible in the burnt-out sky. And presently, as the lovers went on, the two small ashen moons of Phandiom arose from behind the necropoli, and flung the despairing languor of their faint beams on the multitudinous domes and minarets of the dead. And beneath the twin moons, that drew their uncertain light from a dying sun, Antarion and Thameera doffed their masks, and looked at each other in a silence of unutterable love, and shared the first kiss of their month of ultimate delight.

5

FOR two days and nights, the lovers had fled from Saddoth. They had hidden by daylight among the mausoleums, they had traveled in darkness and by the doubtful glimmering of the moons, on roads that were little used, since they ran only to age-deserted cities lying in the ulterior tracts of Charmalos, in a land whose very soil had long become exhausted, and was now given over to the stealthy encroachment of the desert. And now they had come to their journey's end; for, mounting a low, treeless ridge, they saw below them the ruinous and forgotten roofs of Urbyzaun, which had lain unpeopled for more than a thousand years; and beyond the roofs, the black unlustrous lake surrounded by hills of bare and wave-corroded rock, that had once been the inlet of a great sea.

Here, in the crumbling palace of the emperor Altanoman, whose high, tumultuous glories were now a failing legend, the slaves of Antarion had preceded them, bringing a supply of food and such comforts and luxuries as they would require in the interim before oblivion. And here they were secure from all pursuit; for Haspa, in the driven fever and goaded ennui of his last days, had doubtless turned to the satisfying of some other and less difficult caprice, and had already forgotten Thameera.

And now, for the lovers, began the life that was a brief epitome of all possible delight and despair. And, strangely enough, Thameera lost the vague fears that had tormented her, the dim sorrows that had obsessed, and was wholly happy in the caresses of Antarion. And, since there was so little time in which to express their love, to share their thoughts, their sentiments, their reveries, there was never enough said or enough done between them; and both were blissfully content.

But the swift, relentless days went by; and day by day, the red sun that circled above Phandiom was darkened by a tinge of the coming shadow; and chillness stole upon the quiet air; and the still heavens, where never clouds or winds or bird-wings passed, were ominous of doom. And day by day, Antarion and Thameera saw the dusking of the sun from a ruinous terrace above the dead lake; and night by night, they saw the paling of the ghostly moons. And their love became an intolerable sweetness, a thing too deep and dear to be borne by mortal heart or mortal flesh.

Mercifully, they had lost the strict count of time, and knew not the number of days that had passed, and thought that several more dawns and noons and eves of joyance were before them. They were lying together on a couch in the old palace—a marble couch that the slaves had strewn with luxurious fabrics—and were saying over and over some litany of love, when the sun was overtaken at high noon by the doom astronomers had foretold; when a slow twilight filled the palace, heavier than the umbrage wrought by any cloud, and was followed by a sudden wave of overwhelming ebon darkness,

and the creeping cold of outer space. The slaves of Antarion moaned in the darkness; and the lovers knew that the end of all was at hand; and they clung to each other in despairing rapture, with swift, innumerable kisses, and murmured the supreme ecstasy of their tenderness and their desire; till the cold that had fallen from infinitude became a growing agony, and then a merciful numbness, and then an all-encompassing oblivion.

6

FRANCIS MELCHIOR awoke in his chair beneath the telescope. He shivered, for the air had grown chill; and when he moved, he found that his limbs were strangely stiff, as if he had been exposed to a more rigorous cold than that of the late summer night. The long and curious dream that he had undergone was inexpressibly real to him; and the thoughts, the desires, the fears and despairs of Antarion were still his. Mechanically, rather than through any conscious renewal of the impulses of his earthly self, he fixed his eye to the telescope and looked for the star he had been studying when the premonitory vertigo had seized him. The configuration of the skies had hardly changed, the surrounding constellation was still high in the southeast; but, with a shock that became a veritable stupefaction, he saw that the star itself had disappeared.

Never, though he searched the heavens night after night through the alternation of many seasons, has he been able to find again the little far-off orb that drew him so inexplicably and irresistibly. He bears a double sorrow; and, though he has grow old and gray with the lentor of fruitless years, with the buying and selling of antiques and the study of the stars, Francis Melchior is still a little doubtful as to which is the real dream: his lifetime on earth, or the month in Phandiom below a dying sun, when, as the poet Antarion, he loved the superb and sorrowful beauty of Thameera. And always he is troubled by a dull regret that he should ever have awakened (if awakening it was) from the death that he died in the palace of Altanoman, with Thameera in his arms and Thameera's kisses on his lips.

Death

By WILFRED BLANCH TALMAN

A stately ship stands in the offing now,
Out past the reef where broken waves are drumming,
Her sails lit up with sun, bright gilded prow,
And rigging taut through which the breeze is humming.
Some day another ship is coming;
No breath of wind shall whisper through her spars,
And I, through phantom sails, shall view the stars.

"A pair of little hands, crudely severed at the wrists, lay on the table's porcelain top."

The Devil's Bride

By SEABURY QUINN

An astounding novel of the devil-worshipping Yezidees, foul murder, and the infamous Black Mass

The Story Thus Far

BEAUTIFUL Alice Hume vanished during the final rehearsal for her wedding in the presence of her mother, her fiancé, John Davisson, and a group of friends that included her family physician, Doctor Samuel Trowbridge, and Trowbridge's eccentric associate, the French physician-detective, Doctor Jules de Grandin. The disappearance was preceded by a strange, far-away whistling noise that produced a peculiar effect on the nerves of the wedding party. This was followed by a crash as one of the church windows was shattered to admit a cloud of billowing yellow haze. When the haze cleared, the bride-to-be was gone.

De Grandin discovered traces of a yellow powder which, he explained to Trowbridge, was *bulala-gwai,* the "little death" used by the natives of the French Congo to produce temporary paralysis. Alice, he

declared, had been abducted while the wedding party was rendered unconscious by *bulala-gwai.*

This theory was associated by de Grandin with an occult message Alice had repeatedly received through a ouija board, a message that persistently spelled:

"A-L-I-C-E C-O-M-E H-O-M-E."

De Grandin also believed the disappearance to be connected with a barbaric girdle he had noticed and admired on Alice. The girl told him the belt belonged to the mysterious, foreign bride of her ancestor, David Hume; that it was known as "the luck of the Humes" and that according to legend it brought luck to Hume women who wore it on their wedding-gowns. De Grandin informed Trowbridge, however, that the leather portion of the girdle was made of human skin and that he had seen similar belts among the Yezidees in Kurdistan.

On their way to join the other searchers at the Hume home, Trowbridge and de Grandin were accosted by a beautiful, exotic woman who told them: "If you're looking for some one, you'll save time and trouble by abandoning the search and going home. She laughed and drove away in her roadster.

At de Grandin's insistence, Alice's mother produced the family Bible in which the records of the Humes had been kept. A concealed document was disclosed, written by David Hume and relating how he had been sold as a slave to the Yezidees, had rescued the daughter of their chief from becoming the "bride of Satan," had married her and later brought her to America.

Despite a sentence in the old manuscript that warned Hume's descendants to flee if they received a message to "come home," Alice's mother refused to admit any connection between the Yezidee legend and her daughter's disappearance. But that very night Arabella Hume was found dead, her body hanging by a silken cord around the throat, in her own boudoir. To all outward appearances it was suicide, but de Grandin insisted Mrs. Hume had been murdered, her neck broken by the *roomal* or strangling-cord of the *Thugs* of India.

Abduction of a baby boy from the Baptist Orphanage aroused de Grandin to a fever pitch of excitement and alarm.

MAINTAINED by liberal endowments and not greatly taxed by superfluity of inmates, the Baptist Home for Children lay on a pleasant elevation some five miles out of Harrisonville. Its spacious grounds, which were equipped with every possible device for fostering organized play among its little guests were, as the newspaper accounts described, surrounded by a brick wall of formidable height with projecting overhangs flanging T-wise from the top. Moreover, in an excess of caution, the builder had studded the wall's crest with a fringe of broken bottle-glass set in cement, and any one endeavoring to cross the barrier must be prepared not only with scaling ladders so long as to be awkward to carry, but with a gangway or heavy pad to lay across the shark-tooth points of glass with which the wall was armored. De Grandin made a rapid reconnaissance of the position, twisting viciously at his mustache meanwhile. "Ah, *hélas,* the poor one!" he murmured as his inspection was completed. "Before I had some hope; now I fear the worst!"

"Eh?" I returned. "What now?"

"Plenty, *pardieu*—a very damn great plenty!" he answered bitterly. "Come, let us interview the *concierge.* He is our only hope, I fear."

I glanced at him in wonder as we neared the pretty little cottage in which the gatekeeper maintained his home and office.

"No, sir," the man replied to de Gran-

din's question, "I'm sure no one could 'a' come through that gate last night. It's usually locked for th' night at ten o'clock, though I mostly sit up listenin' to th' raddio a little later, an' if anything real important comes up, I'm on hand to open th' gates. Last night there wasn't a soul, man or woman, 'ceptin' th' grocery deliveryman, come in here after six o'clock—very quiet day it was, 'count th' cold weather, I guess. I wuz up a little later than usual, too, but turned in 'bout 'leven o'clock, I should judge. I'd made th' rounds o' th' grounds with Bruno a little after seven, an' believe me, I'm here to tell you no one could 'a' been hidin' anywhere without his knowin' it. No, sir!

"Here, Bruno!" he raised his voice and snapped his fingers authoritatively, and a ponderous mastiff, seemingly big enough to drag down an elephant, ambled in and favored us with a display of awe-inspiring teeth as his black lips curled back in a snarl.

"Bruno slept right beside my bed, sir," the gatekeeper went on, "an' th' winder wuz open; so if any one had so much as stopped by th' gate to monkey with it, he'd 'a' heard 'em, an'—well, it wouldn't 'a' been so good for 'em, I'm tellin' you. I recollec' once when a pettin' party parked across th' road from th' gate, Bruno got kind o' suspicious-like, an' first thing any of us knew he'd bolted through th' winder an' made for 'em—like to tore th' shirt off th' feller 'fore I woke up an' called 'im off."

De Grandin nodded shortly. "And may one examine your room for one little minute, *Monsieur?*" he asked courteously. "We shall touch nothing, of course, and request that you be with us at all times."

"We-ell—I don't—oh, all right," the watchman responded as the Frenchman's hand strayed meaningly toward his wallet. "Come on."

The small, neat room in which the gatekeeper slept had a single wide window opening obliquely toward the gate and giving a view both of the portal and a considerable stretch of road in each direction, for the gatehouse was built into, and formed an integral part of the wall surrounding the grounds. From window-sill to earth was a distance of perhaps six feet, possibly a trifle less.

"And your keys were where, if you please?" de Grandin asked as he surveyed the chamber.

"Right on the bureau there, where I put 'em before I went to bed last night, an' they wuz in th' same place this mornin' when they called me from th' office, too. Guess they'd better 'a' been there, too. Any one tryin' to sneak in an' pinch 'em would 'a' had old Bruno to deal with, even if I hadn't wakened, which I would of, 'count of I'm such a light sleeper. You have to be, in a job like this."

"Perfectly," the Frenchman nodded understandingly as he walked to the window, removed the immaculate white-linen handkerchief from his sleeve and flicked it lightly across the sill. "Thank you, *Monsieur,* we need not trouble you further, I think," he continued, taking a bill from his folder and laying it casually on the bureau before turning to leave the room.

At the gateway he paused a moment, examining the lock. It was a heavy snap-latch of modern workmanship, strong enough to defy the best efforts of a crew of journeymen safe-blowers.

"C'est très simple," he murmured to himself as we left the gate and entered my car. "Behold, Friend Trowbridge."

Withdrawing the white handkerchief from his cuff he held it toward me. Across its virgin surface there lay, where he had brushed it on the watchman's window-sill, a smear of yellow powder.

"*Bulala-gwai,*" he told me in a weary, almost toneless voice.

"What, that devil-dust——"

"*Précisément,* my friend, that devil-dust. Was it not simple? To his window they did creep, most doubtlessly on shoes with rubber soles, which would make no noise upon the frozen ground. *Pouf!* the sleeping-powder is tossed into his room, and he and his great mastiff are at once unconscious. They remove his keys; it is a so easy task. The gate is unlocked, opened; then made fast with a retaining wedge, and the keys replaced upon his bureau. The little one is stolen, the gate closed behind the kidnappers, and the spring-latch locks itself. When the alarm is broadcast *Monsieur le Concierge* can swear in all good conscience that no one has gone through the gate and that his keys are in their proper place. But certainly; of course they were. By damn, but they are clever, those ones!"

"Whom do you mean? Who'd want to steal a little baby from an orphans' home?"

"A little *unbaptized* baby—and a boy," he interjected.

"All right, then, a little unbaptized boy."

"I would give my tongue to the cat to answer that," he told me solemnly. "That they are the ones who spirited Mademoiselle Alice away from before our very eyes we can not doubt. The technique of their latest crime has labeled them; but why *they,* whose faith is a bastardized descendant of the old religion of Zoroaster—a sort of disreputable twelfth cousin of the Parsees—should want to do this—*non,* it does not match, my friend. Jules de Grandin is much puzzled." He shook his head and pulled so savagely at his mustache that I feared he would do himself permanent injury.

"What in heaven's name——" I began. And:

"In heaven's name, *ha!* Yes, we shall have much to do in heaven's name, my friend," he cut in. "For of a certainty we are alined against a crew who ply their arts in hell's name."

6. The Veiled Lady Again

HARRISONVILLE'S newest citizens, gross weight sixteen pounds, twelve ounces, delayed their advent past all expectations that night, but with their overdue arrival came trying complications, and for close upon three hours two nurses, a badly worried young house physician and I fought manfully to bring the mother and her twins back across death's doorstep. It was well past midnight when I climbed my front steps, dog-tired, with hands that trembled from exhaustion and eyes still smarting from the glare of surgery lamps. "Half a gill of brandy, then bed—and no morning office hours tomorrow," I promised myself as I tiptoed down the hall.

I poured the spirit out into a graduate and was in the act of draining it when the sudden furious clamor of the night bell arrested my upraised hand. Acquired instinct will not be denied. Scarcely aware what I did, I put the brandy down untasted and stumbled, rather than walked, to the front door to answer the alarm.

"Doctor—Doctor, let me in—hide me. Quick, don't let them see us talking!" the fear-sharpened feminine whisper cut through the darkened vestibule and a woman's form lurched drunkenly forward into my arms. She was breathing in short, labored gasps, like a hunted creature.

"Quick—quick"—again that scarcely audible murmur, more pregnant with terror than a scream—"shut the door—lock it—bolt it—stand back out of the light! Please!"

I retreated a step or two, my visitor still

clinging to me like a drowning woman to her rescuer. As we passed beneath the ceiling-light I took a hasty glance at her. I was vaguely conscious of her charm, of her beauty, of her perfume, so delicate that it was but the faint, seductive shadow of a scent. A tightly fitting hat of black was set on her head, and draped from this, from eartip to eartip, was stretched a black-mesh veil, its upper edge just clearing the tip of her nose but covering mouth, cheeks and chin, leaving the eyes and brow uncovered. Through its diaphanous gauze I could see the gleam of carmined lips and tiny, pearl-like teeth, seemingly sharp as little sabers as the small, childish mouth writhed back from them in panic terror.

"Why—why"—I stammered—"it's the lady we saw when we——"

"Perfectly; it is *Mademoiselle l'Inconnue,* the lady of the veil," de Grandin finished as he descended the last three steps at a run, and, in lavender dressing-gown and purple kidskin slippers, a violet muffler draped round his throat, stepped nimbly forward to assist me with my lovely burden.

"What is it, *Mademoiselle?*" he asked, half leading, half carrying her toward the consulting-room; "have you perhaps come again to tell us that our search is vain?"

"No, no-o!" the woman moaned, leaning still more heavily upon us. "Help me, oh, help me, please! I'm wounded; they—he—oh, I'll tell you everything!"

"Excellent!" de Grandin nodded as he flung back the door and switched on the electric lights. "First let us see your hurt, then—*mon Dieu,* Friend Trowbridge, she has swooned!"

Even as he spoke the woman buckled weakly at the knees, and like a lovely doll from which the sawdust has been let, crumpled forward toward the floor.

I freed one hand from her arm, intent on helping place her on the table, and stared at it with an exclamation of dismay. The fingers were dyed to the knuckles with blood, and on the girl's dark motor coat an ugly dull-red stain was sopping-wet and growing every moment.

"*Très bien,* so!" de Grandin murmured, placing his hands beneath her arms and heaving her up to the examination table. "She will be better here, for—*Dieu des chiens,* my friend, observe!"

As the heavy outdoor wrap the woman wore fell open we saw that it, a pair of modish patent leather pumps, her motor gloves and veil-draped hat were her sole wardrobe. From veil-swathed chin to blue-veined instep she was as nude as on the day she came into the world.

No wound showed on her ivory shoulders or creamy breast, but on her chest, immediately above the gently swelling breasts, was a medallion-shaped outline or cicatrix inside which was crudely tattooed this design:

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed. "What *is* it?"

"*Précisément,* what is it—and what are these?" the little Frenchman countered, ripping aside the flimsy veil and exposing the girl's pale face. On each cheek, so deeply sunk into the flesh below the malar points that they could only be the result of branding, were two small cruciform scars, perhaps three-quarters of an inch in height by half an inch in width, describing the device of a passion cross turned upside-down.

"Why, of all ungodly things——" I began, and:

"*Ha,* ungodly do you say, *mon vieux? Pardieu,* you call it by its proper name!"

said Jules de Grandin. "An insult to *le bon Dieu* was intended, for this poor one wears upon her body——"

"I c-couldn't stand it!" moaned the girl upon the table. "Not that — not that! He looked at me and smiled and put his baby hand against my cheek! He was the image of my dear little—no, *no,* I tell you! You mustn't! O-o-oh, *no!*"

For a moment she sobbed brokenly, then: "Oh, *mea culpa, mea maxima culpa!* Remember not our offenses nor the offenses of our forefathers—spare us, good Lord—I will, I tell you! Yes I'll go to him and tell, if—Doctor de Grandin"—her voice sank to a sibilant whisper and she half rose from the table, glaring about with glazed, unseeing eyes—"Doctor de Grandin, watch for the chalk-signs of the Devil—follow the pointing tridents; they'll lead you to the place when—oh, *mea culpa, mea maxima culpa!* Have pity, Jesu!"

"Delirium," I diagnosed. "Quick, de Grandin, she's running a pretty high temperature. Help me turn her; the wound seems in her back."

It was. Puncturing the soft flesh a little to the left of the right shoulder, glancing along the scapula, then striking outward to the shoulder tip was a gunshot wound, superficial, but undoubtedly painful, and productive of extensive hemorrhage.

With probe and cotton and mercurochrome we sterilized the wound, then made a gauze compress liberally sprinkled with Senn's mixture and made it fast with cross-bandages of adhesive tape. Three-quarters of a grain of morphine injected in her arm provided a defense against recurring pain and sank her in a deep and peaceful sleep.

"I think she'd best be taken to a hospital," I told him when our work was finished. "We've given all the first aid that we can, and she'll be better tended there—we've no facilities for bed-rest here, or——"

"Agreed," he broke in. "To City Hospital, by all means. They have a prison ward there."

"But we can't put here there," I objected. "She's guilty of no crime, and besides, she's in no condition to go out alone for several days. She'll be there when we want her without the need of bars to keep her in."

"Not bars to keep her in," he told me. "Bars *to keep them out,* my friend."

"Them? Who——"

"The good God knows *who,* I only suspect *what,*" he answered. "Come, let us take her there without delay."

"CAN'T be done, son," Doctor Donovan told de Grandin when we arrived at City Hospital with our patient. "The prison ward's exclusively reserved for gents and ladies on special leave from the hoosegow, or those with some specific charge pending against 'em. You'd not care to place a charge against the lady, would you?"

De Grandin considered him a moment. "Murder is still a relatively serious offense, even in America," he returned thoughtfully. "Can not she be held as a material witness?"

"To whose murder?" asked the practical Donovan.

"The little Eastman boy's—he who was stolen from the Baptist Home last night," the Frenchman replied.

"Hold on, feller, be your age," the other cautioned. "Who says the little tad's been murdered? The police can't even find him alive, and till they find his body there's no *corpus delicti* to support a murder charge."

Once more the Frenchman gazed somberly at him; then: "Whether you know it or not, my friend," he answered seriously, "that little one is dead. Dead as

mutton, and he died most unpleasantly—like the sinless little lamb he was. Yes."

"Maybe you've got some inside dope on the case?" Donovan suggested hopefully.

"No—only reason and intuition, but they——"

"They won't go here," the other cut in. "We can't put this girl in the prison ward without a warrant of some sort, de Grandin; it's against the rules and as much as my job's worth to do it. There might be all sorts of legal complications; suits for false imprisonment, and that sort of thing. But see here, she came fumbling at your door, mumbling all sorts of nonsense and clearly out of her head, didn't she?"

The Frenchman nodded.

"All right, then, we'll say she was batty, loony, balmy in the bean, as they say in classic Siamese. That'll give us an excuse for locking her up in H-3, the psychopathic ward. We've got stronger bars on those windows than we have in the prison ward. Plenty o' room there, too; no one but some souses sleeping off D. T.'s and the effects of prohibition whoopee. I'll move 'em over to make room for—by the way, what's your little playmate's name, anyhow?"

"We do not know," returned de Grandid. "She is *une inconnue.*"

"Hell, I can't spell that," Donovan assured him. "We'll have to write her down unknown. All right?"

"Quite," the little Frenchman answered with a smile. "And now you will receive her?"

"Sure thing," the other promised.

"Hey, Jim!" he hailed an orderly lounging in the corridor, "bring the agony cart. Got another customer for H-3. She's unconscious."

"O. K., Chief," the man responded, trundling forward a wheeled stretcher.

FRIGHTENED, pitiful moans of voyagers in the borderland of horror sifted through the latticed doors of the cells facing the corridors of H-3 as we followed the stretcher down the hall. Here a gin-crazed woman sobbed and screamed in mortal terror at the phantoms of alcoholic delirium; there a sodden creature, barely eighteen, but with the marks of acute nephritis already on her face, choked and regurgitated in the throes of deathly nausea. "Three rousing cheers for the noble experiment," Doctor Donovan remarked, an ugly sneer gathering at the corners of his mouth. "I wish to God those dam' prohibitionists had to drink a few swigs of the kind of poison they've flooded the country with! If I had my way——"

"Jasus!" screamed a blear-eyed Irishwoman whose cell we passed. "Lord ha' mercy on us; 'tis she!" For a moment she clung to the wicket of her door like a monkey to the bars of its cage, staring horror-struck at the still form upon the stretcher.

"Take it easy, Annie," Donovan comforted. "She won't hurt you."

"Won't hur-rt me, is it?" the woman croaked. "Won't har-rm me, wid th' Divil's silf mar-rchin' down th' hall beside her! Can't ye see th' horns an' tail an' th' flashin', fiery eyes of 'im as he walks beside her, Doctor darlin'? Oh, Lord ha' mercy; bless an' save us, Howly Mither!" She signed herself with the cross and stared with horror-dazed, affrighted eyes at the girl on the litter till our pitiful procession turned the bend that shut us from her sight.

7. *The Mutter of a Distant Drum*

IT WAS a windy night of scudding clouds which had brought a further fall of snow, and our progress was considerably impeded as we drove home from the hospital. I was nearly numb with cold and on the verge of collapse with fatigue

when we finally stabled the car and let ourselves in at the back door. "Now for that dose of brandy and bed," I promised myself as we crossed the kitchen.

"Yes, by blue," de Grandin agreed vigorously, "you speak wisdom, my friend. Me, I shall be greatly pleased to join you in both."

By the door of the consulting-room I halted. "Queer," I muttered, "I'd have sworn we turned the lights off when we left, but——"

"S-s-sh!" De Grandin's sibilant warning cut me short as he edged in front of me and drew the small but vicious automatic pistol, which he always carried, from its holster underneath his left armpit. "Stand back, Friend Trowbridge, for I, Jules de Grandin, will deal with them!" He dashed the door wide open with a single well-directed kick, then dodged nimbly back, taking shelter behind the jamb and leveling his pistol menacingly. "Attention, hands up—I have you covered!" he called sharply.

From the examination table, where he had evidently been asleep, an under-sized individual bounced rather than rose, landing cat-like on both feet and glaring ferociously at the door where de Grandin had taken cover.

"Assassin!" he shouted, clenching his fists and advancing half a pace toward us.

"Morbleu, he has found us!" de Grandin almost shrieked. "It is the *apache,* the murderer, the robber of defenseless little ones and women! Have a care, monster"—he leaped into the zone of light shed by the desk lamp and brandished his pistol—"stand where you are, if you would go on living your most evil life!"

Disdainful of the pistol as though it were a pointed finger the other advanced, knees bent in an animal-crouch, hands half closed, as though preparing for a death grip on de Grandin's throat. A single pace away he halted and flung wide his arms. *"Embrasse-moi!"* he cried, and in another moment they were locked together in a fond embrace like sweethearts reunited after parting.

"Oh Georges, *mon* Georges, you are the curing sight for tired eyes; you are truly heaven-sent!" de Grandin cried when he had in some measure regained his breath. "Between the sight of your so unlovely face and fifty thousand francs placed in my hand, I should assuredly have chosen you, *mon petit singe!"* To me he added:

"Assuredly you recall Monsieur Renouard, Friend Trowbridge? Georges Jean Jacques Joseph Marie Renouard, *Inspecteur du Service de la Sûreté Générale?"*

"Of course," I answered, shaking hands with the visitor. "Glad to see you again, Inspector." The little colonial administrator had been my guest some years before, and he, de Grandin and I had shared a number of remarkable adventures. "We were just about to take a drink," I added, and the caller's bright eyes lit up with appreciation. "Won't you join us?"

"Parbleu," Renouard assured me, "I do most dearly love your language, Monsieur Trowbridge, and most of all I love the words that you just said!"

Our liquor poured, we sat and faced each other, each waiting for the other to begin the conversation. At length:

"I called an hour or so ago," Renouard commenced, "and was admitted by your so excellent maid. She said that you were out, but bade me wait; then off she went to bed—nor do I think that she did count the silver first. She knows me. Yes. *Bien alors,* I waited, and fell asleep while doing so."

I looked at him with interest. Though shorter by some inches than the average American, Renouard could not be prop-

erly called under-sized. Rather, he was a giant in miniature. His very lack of height gave the impression of material equilibrium and tremendous physical force. Instinctively one felt that the thews of his arms were massive as those of a gladiator and that his torso was sheathed in muscles like that of a professional wrestler. A mop of iron-gray hair was brushed back in an uprearing pompadour from his wide, low brow, and a curling white mustache adorned his upper lip, while from his chin depended a white beard cut square across the bottom in the style beloved of your true Frenchman. But most impressive of all was his cold, pale face—a face with the pallor of a statue—from which there burned a pair of big, deep-set dark eyes beneath circumflexes of intensely black and bushy brows.

"Eh bien, mon Georges," de Grandin asked, "what storm wind blows you hither? You were ever the fisher in troubled waters."

Renouard gulped down his brandy, stroked his mustache and tugged his beard, then drew forth a Russian leather case from which he extracted a "Maryland" cigarette. "Women," he answered sententiously. "Women, *parbleu!* One sometimes wonders why the good God made them." He snapped an English lighter into flame and with painstaking precision set his puissant cigarette aglow, then folded his big white hands demurely in his lap and glanced inquiringly at us with his bright dark eyes as though we held the answer to his riddle.

"Tiens, my friend," de Grandin laughed. "Had he not done so it is extremely probable that you and I would not be here indulging in this pleasant conversation. But be more specific, if you please. What women bring you here, and why?"

Renouard expelled a double stream of acrid smoke from his nostrils, emitting a snort of annoyance at the same time. "One hardly knows the words to tell it," he replied.

"The trouble starts in Egypt. During the war, and afterward until the end of martial law in 1923, Egypt, apart from the Continental system of *maisons de tolérance,* was outwardly at least as moral as London. But since the strong clean hand of Britain has been loosed there has been a constantly increasing influx of white slaves to the country. Today hardly a ship arrives in Alexandria without its quota of this human freight. The trade is old, as old as Nineveh and Tyre, and to suppress it altogether is a hopeless undertaking, but to regulate it, ah, that is something different.

"We were not greatly exercised when the numbers of unfortunate girls going from Marseilles increased in Egypt, but when respectable young girls—*mais oui,* girls of more than mere bourgeois respectability, even daughters of *le beau monde,* were sucked beneath the surface, later to be boiled up as inmates of those infamous Blue Houses of the East—then we did begin to take sharp notice.

"They sent for me. 'Renouard,' they said, 'investigate, and tell us what is which.'

"Très bon, I did commence. The dossiers of half a dozen girls I took, and from the ground upward I did build their cases. Name of a little blue man!" He leaned forward, speaking in a low, impressive tone scarce above a whisper: "There was devilment, literally, I mean, my friends, in that business. By example:

"Each one of these young girls was of an independent turn; she reveled in the new emancipation of her sex. Oh, but yes! So much she relished this new freedom that the ancient inhibitions were considered out of date. The good God, the gentle Christ Child, the Blessed Mother—*ah bah,* they were outmoded;

she must follow after newer—or older—gods.

"*Eh bien,* exceedingly strange gods they were, too. In Berlin, Paris, London and New York there is a sect which preaches for its gospel 'Do What Thou Wilt; This Shall Be the Whole of the Law.' And as the little boy who eats too many bonbons inevitably achieves a belly-ache, so do the followers of this unbridled license reap destruction ultimately. But certainly.

"Each one of these young girls I find, she has enlisted in this strange, new army of the freed. She has attended meetings where they made strange prayers to stranger gods, and—eventually she ends a cast-off plaything, eaten with drugs and surfeited with life, in the little, infamous Blue Houses of the East. Yes.

"I found them all. Some were dying, some were better dead, some had still a little way to tread the dreary path of hell-in-life, but all—*all,* my friends—were marked with this device upon their breasts. See, I have seen him so often I can draw him from memory." Taking a black-oilcloth bound notebook from his pocket he tore out a leaf and scribbled this design upon it:

De Grandin and I stared at each other in blank amazement as he passed the sheet to us.

"Good Lord!" I ejaculated. "It's exactly like——"

"*Précisément; la même chose*—it is the same that Mademoiselle of the Veil displayed," de Grandin agreed. With shining eyes he turned to face Renouard. "Proceed, my friend," he begged. "When you have done we have a tale to tell."

"Ah, but I am far from done," the Inspector replied. "*Bien non.* I did investigate some more, and I found much. I discovered, by example, that the society to which these most unhappy girls belonged was regularly organized, having grand and subordinate lodges, like Freemasons, with a central body in control of all. Moreover, I did find that at all times and at all places where this strange sect met, there was a Russian in command, or very near the head. Does that mean anything to you? No?

"Very well, then, consider this: Last year the Union of the Militant Godless, financed by the Soviet government, closed four thousand churches in Russia by direct action. Furthermore, still well supplied with funds, they succeeded in doing much missionary work abroad. They promoted all sorts of atheistic societies, principally among young people. In America on the one hand they gave much help to such societies as 'The Lost Souls' among college students, and on the other they greatly aided fanatical religious sects which aim at the abolition of innocent amusement—in the name of Christ. Associations for making the Sabbath Day unpleasant by closing of the cinemas, the shops and all places of recreation, have received large grants of money from the known agents of this Godless Union. Moreover, we know for certain that much of the legislation fostered by these bodies has been directly proposed by Russian agents posing as staunch upholders of fundamental religion. You see? On the one side atheism is promoted among the young, on the other religion's own ministers are whipped on by flattery or outright bribery to do such things as will make the churches hateful to all liberal-minded people. The scheme is beautifully simple, and it has worked well.

"Again: In England only half a year ago a clergyman was unfrocked for having baptized a dog, saying he would make it a good member of the Established Church. We looked this man's antecedents up and found that he was friendly with some Russians who posed as *émigrés* —refugees from the Bolshevik oppression. Now this man, who has no fortune and no visible means of support, is active every day in preaching radical atheism, and in weaning his former parishioners from their faith. He lives, and lives well. Who provides for him? one wonders.

"Defections in the clergy of all churches have been numerous of late, and in every instance one or more Russians are found on friendly terms with the apostate man of God.

"*Non,* hear me a little further," he went on as de Grandin was about to speak. "The forces of disorder, and of downright evil, are dressing their ranks and massing their shock troops for attack. Far in the East there is the mutter of a distant drum, and from the fastnesses of other lands the war-drum's beat is answered. Consider:

"In the Congo there is renewed activity by the Leopard Men, those strange and diabolical societies whose members disguise themselves as leopards, then seek and kill their prey by night. The authorities are taking most repressive measures, but still the Leopard Societies flourish more than ever, and the blacks are fast becoming unruly. There will be difficulties.

"In Paris, London and Berlin again and yet again churches are despoiled of sacred plate and blessed vestments, the host is stolen from the altar, and every kind of sacrilege is done. A single instance of this sort of thing, or even several, might be coincidence, but when the outrages are perpetrated systematically, not once, but scores of times, and always at about the same time, though in widely separated places, coincidences become statistics. There can no longer be a doubt; the black mass is being celebrated regularly in all the greater cities of the world; yet we do not think mere insult to God is all that is intended. No, there is some central, underlying motive for this sudden and widespread revival of satanism. One wonders what.

"And here another puzzle rises: In Arabia, north of Irak, in the Kurdish mountains, is the headquarters of a strange people called the Yezidees. About them we know little, save that they have served the Devil as their god time out of mind. Had they been strong numerically, they would have been a problem, for they are brave and fierce, and much given to killing, but they are few in number and their Moslem neighbors ring them round so thoroughly that they have been forced back upon themselves and seldom do they trouble those who do not trouble them. But"—he paused impressively—"on Mount Lalesh, where their great temple stands, strange things have been brewing lately. What it is we do not clearly know, but their members have been gathering from all parts of the East, from as far as Mongolia, in some instances, to celebrate some sort of mystic ceremony. Not only that, but strangers—Europeans, Africans, white, black and yellow men, who have no business being there, have been observed en route to Kurdistan, like pilgrims journeying to Mecca. Less than a month ago a party of brigands waylaid some travelers near Aleppo. Our gendarmes rescued them—they were a party of Americans, and Englishmen, with several Spaniards as well and *all were headed for Kurdistan and Mount Lalesh.* Again one wonders why.

"Our secret agents have been powerless to penetrate the mystery. We only know that many Russians have been seen to

enter the forbidden city of the Yezidees; that the Yezidees, who once were poor, are now supplied with large amounts of ready cash; and that their bearing toward their neighbors has suddenly become arrogant.

"Wild rumors are circulated; there is talk of a revival of the cult of the Assassins, who made life terrible for the Crusaders and the Mussulmans alike. There are whispers of a prophetess to come from some strange land, a prophetess who will raise the standard of the Devil and lead his followers against the Crescent and the Cross. Just what it is we do not surely know, but those of us who know the East can perceive that it means war. The signs are unmistakable; revolution is fomenting. Some sort of unholy *jahad* will be declared, but where the blow will fall, or when, we can not even guess. India? Indo-China? Arabia? Perhaps in all at once. Who knows? London is preparing, so is Paris, and Madrid is massing troops in Africa—but who can fight a figure carved in smoke? We must know at whom to strike before we can take action, *n'est-ce-pas?*

"But this much I can surely tell: One single man, a so-mysterious man whose face I have not seen, but whose trail is marked as plainly as a snake's track in the dust, is always found at hand where the strings of these far-separated things are joined and knotted in a cord. He was a prime mover in the societies to which those wretched girls belonged; he was among those friendly with the unfrocked English clergyman; he was almost, but not quite, apprehended in connection with the rifling of the sanctuary of a church in Cologne; he has been seen in Kurdistan. Across France, England, Arabia and Egypt have I trailed him, always just a little bit too late. Now he is in America. Yes, *parbleu,* he is in this very city!

"*C'est tout!* I must find him, and finding him, I must achieve a method to destroy him, even if I have to stoop to murder. The snake may wriggle, even though his head has been decapitated, but God knows he can no longer bite when it is done. So do I."

JULES DE GRANDIN leaned across the desk and possessed himself of Renouard's cigarette case, extracted from it a vile-smelling "Maryland" and lit it with a smile.

"I know the answers to your problems —or some of them, at least—my friend," he asserted. "This very night there came to us—to this very house—a deserter from the ranks of the accursed, and though she raved in wild delirium, she did let fall enough to tell us how to find this man you seek, and when we find him——" The hard, cold light, which always reminded me of winter sunshine glinting on a frozen stream, came into his eyes, and his thin lips tightened in an ugly line. "When we have found him," he continued, "we shall know what to do. Name of an umbrella, we damn shall!

"The piecemeal information which you have fits admirably with what we already know and better yet with that which we suspect. Listen to me carefully——"

The sudden jangle of the telephone broke in.

"Doctor Trowbridge?" called a deep bass voice as I snatched up the instrument and growled a gruff "hullo?"

"Yes."

"Costello—Detective Sergeant Costello speakin'. Can you an' Doctor de Grandin be ready in five minutes to go wid me? I'd not be afther askin' ye to leave yer beds so early it it warn't important, sor, but——"

"That's all right, Sergeant, we haven't been to bed as yet," I told him. "We're pretty well done in, but if this is important——"

"Important, is it? Glory be to God, if th' foulest murther that iver disgraced th' Shtate o' Jersey ain't important, then I can't think what is. 'Tis out to th' Convent o' th' Sacred Heart, by Rupleyville, sor, an'—I'll take it kindly if ye'll go along wid me, sor. Th' pore ladies out there'll be needin' a docthor's services, I'm thinkin', an' St. Joseph knows I'm afther needin' all th' expert help that Doctor de Grandin can give me, too."

"All right, we'll be waiting for you," I replied as I put the monophone back in its hooks and turned to notify de Grandin and Renouard of our engagement.

8. *"In Hoc Signo——"*

THE querulous crescendo of a squad car's siren sounded outside our door almost as I finished speaking, and we trooped down the front steps to join the big Irish policeman and two other plain-clothes officers occupying the tonneau of the department vehicle. "Sure, Inspector Renouard," Costello greeted heartily as he shook hands, " 'tis glad I am to see ye this mornin'. There's nothin' to do in this case but wor-rk like th' devil an' trust in God, an' th' more o' us there's here to do it, th' better our chances are. Jump in, gentlemen." To the uniformed chauffeur he ordered: "Shtep on it, Casey."

Casey stepped. The powerful Cadillac leaped forward like a mettlesome horse beneath the flailings of a lash, and the cold, sharp air of early winter morning was whipped into our faces with breath-taking force as we sped along the deserted road at nearly eighty miles an hour.

"What is it? What has happened?" de Grandin cupped his hands and shouted as we roared past the sleeping houses of the quiet suburb. Costello raised his gloved hand to his mouth, then shook his head. No voice was capable of bellowing above the screeching of the rushing wind.

Almost before we realized it we were drawn up before the tall graystone walls of the convent, and Costello was jerking vigorously at the bell-pull beside the gate. "From headquarters, Ma'am," he announced tersely, touching his hat as the portress drew back the little wicket in the door and gazed at us inquiringly.

Something more than ordinary silence seemed to brood above the big, bare building as we followed our conductress down the clean-swept corridor to the public reception parlor; rather, it seemed to me, the air was charged with a sort of concentrated, apprehensive emanation of sheer terror. Once, when professional obligations required my attendance at an execution, I had felt some such eery sensation of concentrated horror and anticipation as the other witnesses and I sat mute within the execution chamber, staring alternately with fright-filled eyes at the grim electric chair and the narrow door through which we knew the condemned man would soon emerge.

As we reached the reception room and seated ourselves on the hard, uncomfortable chairs, I suddenly realized the cause of the curiously anxious feeling which possessed me. From every quarter of the building—seemingly from floors and walls and ceilings—there came the almost mute but still perceptible soft sibilation of a whispered chorus. Whisper, whisper, *whisper;* the faint, half-audible susurration persisted without halt or break, endless and untiring as the lisping of the tide upon the sands. It worried me, it beat upon my ears like water wearing on a stone; unless it stopped, I told myself, I would surely shout aloud with all my might for no other reason than to drown its everlasting, monotonous reiteration.

The tap of light-soled shoes and the gentle rustle of a skirt brought relief from the oppressive monotone, and the Mother Superior of the nunnery stood before us. Costello bowed with awkward grace as he

stepped forward. De Grandin and Renouard were frigidly polite in salutation; for Frenchmen, especially those connected with official life, have not forgotten the rift between the orders and the Government of France existing since the disestablishment of 1903.

"We're from headquarters, Mother," Costello introduced; "we came as quickly as we could. Where is it—she—the body, if ye please?"

Mother Mary Margaret regarded him with eyes which seemed to have wept so much that not a tear was left, and her firm lips trembled as she answered: "In the garden, officer. It's irregular for men to enter there, but this is an emergency to which the rules must yield. The portress was making her rounds a little before matins when she heard somebody moving in the garden and looked out. No one was visible, but something looked strange to her, so she went out to investigate. She came to me at once, and I called your office on the 'phone immediately. Then we rang the bell and summoned all the sisters to the chapel. I told them what I thought they ought to know and then dismissed them. They are in their cells now, reciting the rosary for the repose of her soul."

Costello nodded shortly and turned to us, his hard-shaven chin set truculently. "Come on, gentlemen; let's git goin'," he told us. "Will ye lead us to th' gate?" he added to the Mother Superior.

The convent gardens stretched across a plot of level ground for several hundred feet behind the building. Tall evergreens were marshaled in twin rows about its borders, and neatly trimmed privet hedges marked its graveled paths. At the far end, by a wall of ivy-covered masonry some twelve feet high, was placed a Calvary, a crucifix, nine or ten feet high, set in a cairn, which overlooked the whole enclosure. It was toward this Costello led us, his blue-black jaw set bellicosely.

De Grandin swore savagely in mingled French and English as the light, powdery snow rose above the tops of his patent leather evening pumps and chilled his silk-shod feet. Renouard looked round with quick, appraising glances. I watched Costello's face, noting how the savage scowl deepened as he walked.

I think we recognized it simultaneously.

Renouard gave a short half-scream, half-groan.

"Sacré nom de sacré nom de sacré nom!" de Grandin swore

"Jasus!" said Costello.

I felt a sinking in the middle of my stomach and had to grasp Costello's arm to keep from falling with the sudden vertigo of overpowering nausea.

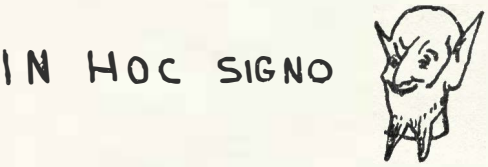
The lifeless figure on the crucifix was not a thing of plaster or of painted wood, it was human—flesh and blood!

Nailed fast with railway spikes through outstretched hands and slim crossed feet, she hung upon the cross, her slender, naked body white as carven ivory. Her head inclined toward her left shoulder and her long, black hair hung loosed across the full white breasts which were drawn up firmly by the outspread arms. Upon her head had been rudely thrust an improvised crown of thorns—a chaplet of barbed wire cut from some farmer's fence—and from the punctures that it made small streams of coral drops ran down. Thin trickles of blood oozed from the torn wounds in her hands and feet, but these had frozen on the flesh, heightening the resemblance to a tinted simulacrum. Her mouth was slightly opened and her chin hung low upon her breast, and from the tongue which lay against her lower lip a single drop of ruby blood, congealed by cold even as it fell, was pendent like a ruddy jewel against the flesh.

Upon her chest, above her breasts,

glowed the tattooed mark which we had seen when she appealed to us for help a scant four hours earlier.

Above the lovely, thorn-crowned head where the replica of Pontius Pilate's inscription had been set, another legend was displayed, an insulting, mocking challenge from the murderers: *"In Hoc Signo* —in this sign," and then a grim, derisive picture of a leering devil's face:



"Ah, *la pauvre!*" de Grandin murmured. "Poor Mademoiselle of the Veil, were not all the bars and bolts of the hospital enough to keep you from them after all? I should have stayed with you, then they would not——" He broke off, staring meditatively at the figure racked upon the cross, his little, round blue eyes hardening as water hardens with a sudden frost.

Renouard tugged at his square-cut beard, and tears welled unashamed in his bright, dark eyes.

Costello looked a moment at the pendent figure on the crucifix, then, doffing his hat, fell to his knees, signed himself reverently and began a hasty, mumbled prayer for the dying.

De Grandin neither wept nor prayed, but his little eyes were hard and cold as eyes of polished agate inlaid in the sockets of a statue's face, and round his small and thin-lipped mouth, beneath the pointed tips of his trim, waxed mustache, there gathered such a snarling grin of murderous hate as I had never seen. "Hear me, my friends," he ordered. "Hear me, you who hang so dead and lovely on the cross; hear me, all ye that dwell in heaven with the blessed saints," and in his eyes and on his face was the terrifying look of the born killer; "when I have found the one who did this thing, it had been better far for him had he been stillborn, for I shall surely give him that which he deserves. Yes, though he take refuge underneath the very throne of God Himself. I swear it upon this!" He laid his hand against the nail-pierced feet of the dead girl as one who takes a ritual oath upon a sacred relic.

IT WAS grisly business getting her from the cross, but at last the spikes were drawn and the task completed. While Costello and Renouard examined every inch of trodden snow about the violated Calvary, de Grandin and I bore the body to the convent mortuary chapel, composed the stiffened limbs as best we could, then notified the coroner.

"This must by no means reach the press, *Monsieur,*" de Grandin told the coroner when he arrived. "Promise you will keep it secret, at least until I give the word."

"H'm, I can't do that very well," Coroner Martin demurred. "There's the inquest, you know; it's my sworn duty to hold one."

"Ah, but yes; but if I tell you that our chances of capturing the miscreants who have done this thing depend upon our secrecy, then you will surely withhold publicity?" de Grandin persisted. "Can you not, by example, summon your jury, show them the body, swear them in, and then adjourn the public hearing pending further evidence?"

Mr. Martin lowered his handsome gray head in silent thought. "You'll testify the cause of death was shock and exposure to the cold?" he asked at length.

"Name of a small asparagus tree, I will testify to anything!" answered Jules de Grandin.

"Very well, then. We'll hush the matter up. I won't call Mother Mary Mar-

garet at all, and Costello can tell us merely that he found her nude in the convent garden. Just how he found her is a thing we'll not investigate too closely. She disappeared from City Hospital psychopathic ward—the inference is she wandered off and died of exposure. It will be quite feasible to keep the jury from seeing the wounds in her hands and feet; I'll hold the official viewing in one of the reposing-rooms of my funeral home and have the body covered with a robe from the neck down. How's that?"

"*Monsieur,*" de Grandin drew himself up stiffly and raised his hand in formal military salute, "permit me to inform you that you are a great man!

"*Allons,* speed, quickness, hurry, we must go!" he ordered when the pitiful body had been taken away and Costello and Renouard returned from their inspection of the garden.

"Where are we rushin' to now, sor?" the big detective asked.

"To City Hospital, *pardieu!* I would know exactly how it comes that one whose custody was given to that institution last night should thus be taken from her bed beneath their very noses and murderously done to death in this so foul manner."

"SAY, de Grandin, was that gal you and Trowbridge brought here last night any kin to the late Harry Houdini?" Doctor Donovan greeted as we entered his office at City Hospital.

De Grandin favored him with a long, hard stare. "What is it that you ask?" he demanded.

"Was she a professional disappearing artist, or something of the kind? We saw her locked up so tight that five men and ten little boys couldn't have got her out, but she's gone, skipped, flown the coop; and not a soul saw her when she blew, either."

"Perfectly, we are well aware she is no longer with you," de Grandin answered. "The question is how comes it that you, who were especially warned to watch her carefully, permitted her to go."

"Humph, I wish I knew the answer to that one myself," Donovan returned. "I turned in a few minutes after you and Trowbridge went, and didn't hear anything further till an hour or so ago when Dawkins, the night orderly in H-3, came pounding on my door with some wild story of her being gone. I threw a shoe at him and told him to get the devil away and let me sleep, but he kept after me till I finally got up in self-defense.

"Darned if he wasn't right, too. Her room was empty as a bass drum, and she was nowhere to be found, though we searched the ward with a fine-tooth comb. No one had seen her go—at least, no one will admit it, though I think some one's doing a piece of monumental lying."

"U'm?" de Grandin murmured noncommittally. "Suppose we go and see."

The orderly, Dawkins, and Miss Hosskins, the night supervisor of the ward, met us as we passed the barred door. "No, sir," the man replied to de Grandin's quick questions, "I didn't see or hear—gee whiz! I wonder if that could 'a' had anything to do with it—no, o' course it couldn't!"

"Eh?" de Grandin returned sharply. "Tell us the facts, *Monsieur.* We shall draw our own conclusions, if you please."

"Well, sir," the man grinned sheepishly, "it was somewhere about five o'clock, possibly a bit later, an' I was sort o' noddin' in my chair down by th' lower end o' th' corridor when all of a sudden I heard a funny-soundin' kind o' noise—sort o' like a high wind blowin', or—let's see—well, you might compare it to the hum of a monster bee, only it was more of a whistle than a buzz, though there was a sort o' buzzin' sound to it, too.

"Well, as I was sayin', I'd been nod-

din', an' this sudden queer noise woke me up. I started to get up an' see what it was all about, but it didn't come again, so I just sat back an——"

"And went to sleep, eh?" Donovan cut in. "I thought you'd been lying, you swine. Fine chance we have of keeping these nuts in with you orderlies snoring all over the place!"

"Monsieur Donovan, if you please!" Renouard broke in with lifted hand. To Dawkins:

"You say this was a high, shrill sound, *mon vieux;* very high and very shrill?"

"Yes, sir, it was. Not real loud, sir, but so *awful* shrill it hurt my ears to listen to it. It seemed almost as though it made me sort o' unconscious, though I don't suppose——"

"Tiens, but *I* do," Renouard broke in. "I think I understand."

Turning to us he added seriously: "I have heard of him. Our agents in Kurdistan described him. It is a sound—a very high, shrill sound—produced by blowing on some sort of reed by those followers of Satan from Mount Lalesh. He who hears it becomes first deafened, then temporarily paralyzed. According to our agents' testimony, it is a refinement of the wailing of the Chinese screaming boys; that high, thin, piercing wail which so disorganizes the hearers' nervous system that his marksmanship is impaired, and often he is rendered all but helpless in a fight."

De Grandin nodded. "We know, my friend," he agreed. "The night Mademoiselle Alice disappeared we heard him —Friend Trowbridge and I—but that time they used their devil-dust as well, to make assurance doubly sure. It is possible that their store of *bulala-gwai* is low, or entirely exhausted, and so they now rely upon the stupefying sound to help them at their work.

"Mademoiselle," he bowed to Miss Hosskins, "did you, too, by any chance, hear this strange sound?"

"I—I can't say I did," the nurse answered with embarrassment. "The fact is, sir, I was very tired, too, and was rather relying on Dawkins being awake to call me if anything were needed, so——" she paused, a flush suffusing her face.

"Quite so," de Grandin nodded. "But——"

"But I *did* wake up with a dreadful headache—almost as though something sharp had been thrust in my ears—just before Dawkins reported that the patient in 47 was missing," she added.

Again de Grandin nodded. "I fear there is nothing more to learn," he returned wearily. "Come, let us go."

"Doctor, Doctor darlin', they wuz here last night, like I told ye they'd be!" the drunken Irishwoman called to Donovan as we went past her door.

"Now, Annie," Donovan advised, "you just lie back and take it easy, and we'll have you in shape to go out and get soused again in a couple o' days."

"Annie th' divil, me name's Bridget O'Shay, an' well ye know it, bad cess to ye!" the woman stormed. "An' as fer shlapin' in this place again, I'd sooner shlape in hell, for 'tis haunted be divils th' house is!

"Last night, Doctor, I heard th' banshee keenin' outside me windy, an' 'Bridget O'Shay,' says I to mesilf, 'th' fairy-wife's come for ye!' an' I lays down on th' floor wid both fingers in me ears to shtop th' sound o' her callin'.

"But prisently there comes a throop o' divils mar-rchin' up th' corridor, th' one in front a-playin' on some sort o' divil's pipes which I couldn't hear a-tall, a-tall, fer havin' me fingers shtuck in me ears; an' walkin' clost behint him there wuz two other wans, an' they all wuz walkin' like they knew where they wuz goin'.

"I watched 'em till they tur-rned th' bend, an' then I took me finger from wan ear, but quick enough I shtuffed it back, fer there wuz th' horriblest screamin' noise in all th' place as would 'a' deafened me entirely if I hadn't shtopped me ears agin.

"Prisently they come again, th' foremost wan still playin' on 'is pipes o' hell, an' wan o' em carryin' sumpin acrost 'is shoulders all wrapped up in a blanket, whilst th' other wuz a-lookin' round from right to left, an' 'is eyes wuz like peat-fires bur-rnin' in a cave, sor, so they wuz. I ducked me head as he wint past, for well I knowed they'd murder me if I wuz seen, and I know what it wuz, too. 'Twas Satan on earth come fer that woman ye brung in here last night, an' well I know she'll not be seen agin!"

"Gosh, that *was* some case of jimjams you had last night!" Donovan laughed. "Better see Father O'Connell and take the pledge again, Annie, or they'll be putting you in the bughouse for keeps some of these days. It's true the girl's wandered off, but we don't think anything has happened to her. We don't know where she is, even."

"*Eh bien,* my friend," de Grandin contradicted as we left the psychopathic ward, "you are most badly mistaken. We know quite definitely where the poor one is."

"Eh? The devil!" Donovan returned. "Where is she?"

"Upon a slab in Coroner Martin's morgue."

"For Pete's sake! Tell me about it; how'd it happen; I'm interested——"

"The papers will contain a story of her death," de Grandin answered as he suppressed a yawn. "I, too, am interested greatly—in five eggs with ham to match, ten cups of coffee and twelve hours' sleep. *Adieu, Monsieur.*"

8. Thoughts in the Dark

I WAS too near the boundary line of exhaustion to do more than dally with the excellent breakfast which Nora McGinnis, my super-efficient household factotum, set before us, but Renouard, with the hardihood of an old campaigner, wolfed huge portions of cereal, fried sausages and eggs and hot buttered toast, washing them down with innumerable cups of well-creamed coffee, while de Grandin, ever ready to eat, drink or seek adventure, stowed away an amazing cargo of food.

"*Très bon,* now let us sleep," he suggested when the last evidence of food had vanished from the table. "*Parbleu,* me, I could sleep for thirty days unceasingly, and as for food, the thought of it disgusts me!

"Madame Nora," he raised his voice and turned toward the kitchen, "would it be too much to ask that you have roast duckling and apple tart for dinner, and that you serve it not later than five this evening? We have much to do, and we should prefer not to do it on an empty stomach."

"No office hours today, Nora," I advised as I rose, swaying with sleepiness, "and no telephone calls for any of us, either, please. Tell any one who can not wait to get in touch with Doctor Phillips."

How long I slept I do not know, but the early dark of midwinter evening had fallen when I sat suddenly bolt-upright in my bed, my nerves still vibrating like telephone wires in a heavy wind. Gradually, insistently, insidiously, a voice had seemed commanding me to rise, don my clothes and leave the house. Where I should go was not explained, but that I go at once was so insistently commanded that I half rose from the bed, reluctance, fear and something close akin to horror dragging me back, but that not-to-be-ig-

nored command impelling my obedience. Then, while I wrestled with the power which seemed dominating me, a sudden memory broke into my dream, a memory of other dreams of long ago, when I woke trembling in the darkened nursery, crying out in fright, then the stalwart bulk of a big body bending over me, hands firm yet tender patting my cheek reassuringly, and the mingled comforting smell of starched linen, Russia leather and good tobacco coming through the darkness while my father's soothing voice bade me not to be afraid, for he was with me.

The second dream dispelled the first, but I was still a-tremble with the tension of the summons to arise when I struggled back to consciousness and looked about the room.

Half an hour later, bathed, shaved and much refreshed, I faced de Grandin and Renouard across the dinner table.

"*Par l'amour d'un bouc,* my friends," de Grandin told us, "this afternoon has been most trying. Me, I have dreamed most unpleasant dreams—dreams which I do not like at all—and which I hope will not soon be repeated."

"*Comment cela?*" Renouard inquired.

"By blue, I dreamed that I received direct command to rise and dress and leave this house—and what is more, I should have done so, had I not awakened!"

"Great Scott," I interjected, "so did I!"

"Eh, is it so?"

Renouard regarded each of us in turn with bright, dark eyes, shrewd and knowing as a monkey's. "This is of interest," he declared, tugging at his square-cut beard. "From what we know, it would seem that the societies to which the unfortunate young ladies who first did bring me in this case are mixed in some mysterious manner with the Yezidees of Kurdistan, *n'est-ce-pas?*"

De Grandin nodded, watching him attentively.

"Very well, then. As I told you heretofore, I do not know those Yezidees intimately. My information concerning them is hearsay, but it comes from sources of the greatest accuracy. Yes. Now, I am told, stretching over Asia, beginning in Manchuria and leading thence across Tibet, westward into Persia, and finally clear to Kurdistan, there is a chain of seven towered temples of the Yezidees, erected to the glorifying of the Devil. The chiefest of these shrines stands upon Mount Lalesh, but the others are, as the electricians say, 'hooked up in series.' Now, underneath the dome of each one of these temples there sits at all times a priest of Satan, perpetually sending off his thought-rays—his mental emanations. Oh, do not laugh, my friends, I beg, for it is so! As priests or nuns professed to the service of God offer up perpetual adoration and prayers of intercession, so do these servants of the archfiend continually give forth the praise and prayer of evil. Unceasingly they broadcast wicked influences, and while I would not go so far as to assert that they can sway humanity to sin, some things I know.

"I said I did not know the Yezidees, but that is only partly so. Of them I have heard much, and some things connected with them I have seen. For instance: When I was in Damascus, seeking out some answer to the riddle of the six young women, I met a certain Moslem who had gone to Kurdistan and while there incurred the enmity of the Yezidee priests. What he had done was not entirely clear, although I think that he had in some way profaned their idols. However that may be, Damascus is a long and tiresome journey from the confines of Lalesh, where Satan's followers hold their sway, but——

"Attend me"—he leaned forward till

the candle-light struck odd reflections from his deep-set eyes—"this man came to me one day and said he had received command to go out into the desert. Whence the command came he did not know, but in the night he dreamed, and every night thereafter he had dreamed, always the same thing, that he arise and go into the desert. 'Was it a voice commanding?' I did ask, and 'No,' he said, 'it was rather like a sound unheard but felt—like that strange ringing in the ears we sometimes have when we have taken too much quinine for the fever.'

"I sent him to a doctor, and the learned medical fool gave him some pills and told him to forget it. *Ha,* forget that never-ending order to arise and leave, which ate into his brain as a maggot eats in cheese? As well he might have told one burning in the fire to dismiss all thought of torment from his mind!

"There finally came a time when the poor fellow could no longer battle with the psychic promptings of the priests of Satan. One night he left his house and wandered off. Some few days later the desert patrol found his burnoose and boots, or what was left of them. The jackals, perhaps with the aid of desert bandits, had disposed of all the rest.

"Now we tread close upon these evil-doers' heels. I have followed them across the ocean. You, my Jules, and you, Monsieur Trowbridge, have stumbled on their path, and all of us would bring them to account for their misdoings. What then?

"What, indeed, but that one of them, who is an adept at the black magic of their craft, has thrown himself into a state of concentration, and sent forth dire commands to us—such subtle, silent orders as the serpent gives the fascinated bird? You, my Jules, have it. So have you, Monsieur Trowbridge, for both of you are somewhat psychic. Me, I am the hard, tough-headed old policeman, practical, seeing little farther than my nose, and then seeing only what I do behold, no more. Their thought-commands, which are a species of hypnotism, will probably not reach me, or, if they do, will not affect my conduct.

"Your greatest danger is while you sleep, for then it is the sentry of your conscious mind will cease to go his guardian rounds, and the gateway to your inner consciousness will be wide open. I therefore think it wise that we shall share one room hereafter. Renouard is watchful; long years of practising to sleep with one hand on his weapon and one eye open for attack have schooled him for such work. You can not move without my knowing, and when I hear you move I wake you. And when I wake you their chain is broken. Do you agree?"

The thought occurred to Jules de Grandin and me at once.

"Alice——" I began, and:

"Yes, *parbleu,* Mademoiselle Alice!" cried de Grandin. "That message which she had, that constant but not understood command: 'Alice, come home!' It was undoubtlessly so given her. Remember, a day or so before she first received it a spy of theirs, pretending to be seeking curios for some collector, came to the house, and saw the marriage girdle of the Yezidees. That was what he wanted, to assure himself that the Alice Hume their spies had run to earth was indeed the one they sought, the descendant of that high priest's daughter of the ancient days, she who had run off with the Christian Englishman. Yes, *par la barbe d'un chat,* no wonder that she could write nothing else upon her ouija board that day; no wonder she puzzled why she had that thought-impression of command to go. Already they had planted in her mind the order to abandon home and love and God and to join herself to their unholy ranks!

"By blue, my Georges, you have solved

two problems for us. It was you who told us of the meaning of that shrilling cry which Friend Trowbridge and I did hear the night on which she disappeared and which made the hospital attachés unable to repel invasion of their ward; now you have thrown more light upon the subject, and we know it was that Mademoiselle Alice had that thought-command to leave before she could suspect that such things were.

"I think it would be wise if we consulted——"

"Detective Sergeant Costello," Nora McGinnis announced from the dining-room door.

"Ah, my friend, come in," de Grandin cried. "You are in time to share a new discovery we have made."

Costello had no answering smile for the little Frenchman's greeting. His eyes were set in something like a stare of horror, and his big, hard-shaven chin trembled slightly as he answered:

"An' ye're in time to share a discovery wid *me,* sor, if ye'll be good enough to shtep into th' surgery a moment."

Agog with interest we followed him into the surgery, watched him extract a paper parcel from his overcoat pocket and tear off the outer wrappings, disclosing a packet of oiled silk beneath.

"What is it? What have you found?" de Grandin questioned eagerly.

"This," the Irishman returned. "Look here!" He tore the silken folds apart and dumped their contents on the instrument table.

A pair of little hands, crudely severed at the wrists, lay on the table's porcelain top.

10. Wordless Answers

DE GRANDIN was the first to recover from the shock. The double background of long practise as a surgeon and years of service with the secret police had inured him to such sights as would break the nerve of one merely a doctor or policeman. Added to this was an insatiable curiosity which drove him to examine everything he saw, be it beautiful or hideous. With a touch as delicate as though he had been handling some frail work of woven glass he took one of the little hands between his thumb and forefinger, held it up to the surgery light and gazed at it with narrowed eyes and faintly pursed lips. Looking at him, one would have said he was about to whistle.

"A child's?" I asked, shrinking from too close examination of the ghastly relic.

"A girl's," he answered thoughtfully. "Young, scarcely more than adolescent, I should say, and probably not well to do, though having inclination toward the niceties of life. Observe the nails."

He turned the small hand over, and presented it palm-downward for my scrutiny. "You will observe," he added, "that they are nicely varnished and cut and filed to a point, though the shaping is not uniform, which tells us that the treatment was self-done, and not the work of a professional manicurist. Again, they are most scrupulously clean, which is an indication of the owner's character, but the cuticle is inexpertly trimmed; another proof of self-attention. Finally"—he turned the hand palm-up and tapped the balls of the fingers lightly—"though the digits are white and clean they are slightly calloused at the sides and the finger tips and thenal region are inlaid with the faintest lines of ineradicable soil—occupational discoloration which no amount of soap and scrubbing-brush will quite remove. Only acid bleacher or pumice stone would erase them, and these she either did not know of, or realized that their continued use would irritate the friction-skin. *Enfin,* we have here the very pretty hands of a young working girl pos-

sessing wholesome self-respect, but forced to earn her daily bread by daily toil. A factory operative, possibly, surely not a laundress or charwoman. There is too much work-soil for the first, too little for the second."

Again he held the hand up to the light. "I am convinced that this was severed while she was alive," he declared. "See, it is practically free of blood; had death occurred some time before the severance, the blood would not have been sufficiently liquid to drain off—though the operation might have been made a short time after death," he added thoughtfully.

"Have you anything to add, my friend?" he asked Costello.

"No, sor. All we know is we found th' hands," the Irishman replied. "They wuz found layin' side be side, wid th' fingers touchin', like they might 'a' been clasped in prayer, but had fallen apart like, *just outside th' wall o' th' convent garden, sor.*"

"Nom d'un miracle du bon Dieu!" exclaimed de Grandin, with that near-blasphemous intimacy he affected for the Deity. "I had some other things in mind tonight but this must take precedence. Come, let us go, rush, hasten, fly to where you found them, then lay our course from there until she shall be found!"

THE Convent of the Sacred Heart stood on an elevation from which it overlooked surrounding territory, and in the hollow to the east lay the little settlement of Rupleyville, a neat but unpretentious place comprised for the most part of homes of thrifty Italians who had been graduated from section gangs upon the Lackawanna's right of way to small truck-farming, huckstering or fruit-stand keeping. A general store, a bakery, a little church erected to Saint Rocco, and a shop in which two glass globes filled with colored water and the sign *Farmacia Italiana* proclaimed its owner's calling were the principal edifices of the place.

To the latter de Grandin led us, and introduced himself in a flood of voluble Italian. The little, wrinkled pharmacist regarded him attentively, then replied torrentially, waving his hands and elevating shoulders and eyebrows till I made sure both would be separated from their respective sub-structures. At length:

"Perfetto; eccellente!" de Grandin cried, raising his hat ceremoniously. "Many thanks, *Signor.* We go at once." To us:

"Come, my friends; I think that we are on the trail at last."

"What did you find out, sor?" Costello asked as the little Frenchman led us hurriedly down the single street the hamlet boasted.

"Ah, but of course, I did forget you do not speak Italian," de Grandin answered contritely. "When we had looked upon the spot where you did find the little hands, I told me, 'It are useless to stand here staring at the earth. Either the poor one from whom those hands were cut are living or dead. In any event, she are not here. If she are alive, she might have wandered off, though not far, for the bleeding from her severed wrists would be too extensive. If she are dead, she could not have moved herself, yet, since she are not here, some one must have moved her. Jules de Grandin, let us inquire.'

"And so I led the way to this small village, and first of all I see the pharmacist's shop. 'Very good,' I tell me, 'the druggist are somewhat of a doctor; injured persons frequently appeal to him for help. Perhaps he will know something.' And so I interrogate him.

"He knew nothing of a person suffering grievous hurt, but he informed me that a most respectable old woman living

near had come to him some time ago in greatest haste and implored that he would sell her opium, as well as something which would staunch the flow of blood. The woman was not suffering an injury. The inference is then that she sought the remedies for some one else. *N'est-ce-pas?* Of course. Very well, it is to her house that we go all quickly."

We halted at the small gate of a cottage garden. The paling fence was innocent of paint, but neatly whitewashed, as were the rough plank sidewalls of the house. An oil-lamp burned dimly in the single room the cottage boasted, and by its feeble light we saw an old woman, very wrinkled, but very clean, bending over a low bed which lay in shadow.

De Grandin knocked imperatively on the whitewashed door, then, as no answer was forthcoming, pushed back the panels and stepped across the threshold.

The room was nearly bare of furniture, the bed, a small table and two rough, unpainted chairs completing its equipment. The little kerosene lamp, a cheap alarm clock and two gayly colored pictures of religious scenes were the sole attempts at ornament. The aged woman, scrupulously neat in smooth black gown and cheap jet brooch, straightened on her knees beside the bed as we came in and raised a finger to her wrinkled lips. "Qui-et pleez," she murmured. "She iss a-sleepa. I have give"—she sought the English word, then raised her shoulders in a shrug of impotence and finished in Italian—"I give *oppio.*"

De Grandin doffed his hat and bowed politely, then whispered quickly in Italian. The woman listened, nodded once or twice, then rose slowly and beckoned us to follow her across the room. *"Signori,"* she informed us in a whisper, "I am a poor woman, me; but I have the means to live a little. At night—what you call him? *si,* scrub—I scrub floors in the bank at the city. Sometimes I come home by the bus at morning, sometimes I walk for save the money. Last night—this morning—I walk.

"I pass the *convento* just when the dark is turning into light today, and as I go for walk downhill to here I hear somebody groan—*o-oh, a-ah!* like that. I go for see who are in trouble, and find this *povera* lying in the snow.

"*Santo Dio,* what you think? Some devil he have cut her arms off close by the hand! She is bleeding fast.

"I call to her, she try for answer, but no can. What you think some more? That devil have cut out her tongue and blood run out her mouth when she try speak!

"I go for look some more. *Santissima Madonna,* her eyes have been put out! Oh, I tell you, *Signori,* it is the sight of sadness that I see!

"I think at first I run for help; then I think, 'No, while I am gone she may die from bleeding. I take her with me.' So I do.

"I am very strong, me. All my life, in old country, in new country, I worka verree hard. Yes, sure. So I put her on my back—so!—and make the run—not walk, run—all way downhill to my house here. Then I put cloths upon her where her hands should be and put her in my bed; then I run all way by the *farmacia* for medicine. The drug man not like for sell me *oppio,* but I beg him on my knee and tell him it is for save a life. Then he give it to me. I come back with a run and make soup of it and from it feed her with a spoon. At first she spit it out again, but after time she swallow it, and now she not feel no more pain. She is asleep, and when she wake I give her more until her hurt all better. I not know who she is, *Signori,* but I not like for see her suffer. She iss so young, so pretty, so—what you say?—niza? Yes. Sure."

De Grandin twisted his mustache and looked at her appreciatively. At length: "*Madame,* you are truly one of God's good noblewomen," he declared, and raised her gnarled and work-worn fingers to his lips as though they had been the white, jeweled fingers of a countess.

"Now, quick, my friends," he called to us. "She must have careful nursing and a bed and rest and the best medical attendance. Call for an ambulance from the pharmacy, my sergeant. We shall await you here."

Swiftly, speaking softly in Italian, he explained the need of expert nursing to the woman, adding that only in a hospital could we hope to revive the patient sufficiently to enable her to tell us something of her assailants.

"But no!" the woman told him. "That can not be, *Signor.* They have cut off her hands, they have cut out her tongue, they have put out her eyes. She can not speak or write or recognize the ones who did it, even though you made them arrest and brought them to her. Me, I think maybe it was the Mafia did this, though they not do like this before. They kill, yes; but cut a woman up like this, *no.* Sicilians verree bad men, but not bad like that, I think."

"*Ma mère,*" de Grandin answered, "though all you say is true, nevertheless I shall find a way for her to talk and tell us who has done this thing, and how we best may find him. How I shall do it I can not tell, but that I shall succeed I am assured. I am Jules de Grandin, and I do not fail. Most of my life has been devoted to the healing of the sick and tracking down the wicked. I may not heal her hurts, for only God's good self can grow new hands and replace her ruined eyes and tongue, but vengeance I can take on those who outraged her and all humanity when they did this shameful thing, and may Satan roast me on a spit and serve me hot in my own gravy with damned, detestable turnips as a garnish if I do not so. I swear it. She shall talk to me in hell's despite.

"*Mais oui,* you must accept it," he insisted as he tendered her a bill and the woman made a gesture of refusal. "Think of your ruined gown, your soiled bed-clothing, and the trouble you have been to. It is your due, not a reward, my old one."

She took the money reluctantly, but thankfully, and he turned impatiently to me. "Stand by, my friend," he ordered; "we must go with her when they have come, for every moment is of preciousness. Me, I do not greatly like the looks of things; the brutal way in which her hands were amputated, the exposure to the cold, the well-meaning but unhygienic measures of assistance which the kindly one has taken. Infection may set in, and we must make her talk before it is too late."

"Make her talk?" I echoed in amazement. "You're raving, man! How can she talk without a tongue, or——"

"*Ah bah!*" he interrupted. "Keep the eyes on Jules de Grandin, good Friend Trowbridge. The Devil and his servants may be clever, but he is cleverer. Yes, by damn, much more so!"

Next month's thrilling installment of this story will bring de Grandin and his friends into the heart of the Devil-Worshippers' temple during the celebration of the blasphemous Black Mass. This will appear on the magazine stands March 1st.

Flight

By JAMES W. BENNETT *and* SOONG KWEN-LING

A brief Chinese story which summarizes the Taoist conception of life after death

THE whale-oil lamp in my chamber grew dim. I dropped the telegram, which I could not bear to read a second time. I gave ample allowance to the justice of death in calling away the very young or the very aged. The children were saved the knowledge of the suffering and misery of life, the ancient ones from bearing their ills too long. But to call away those in the prime, those who have helpless coteries of dependents looking to them—it was unfair!

Suddenly the flame of my lamp grew more dim. It brightened, then dimmed again, as if two shadows had crossed before it. After that it drooped to a tiny pin-point of light, and the room appeared full of moving shapes.

This sense of motion was followed by sound. I heard soft, sibilant whisperings. Eagerly I strained my ears. After a moment I recognized words—or thought I did—for the tones were so soft that I had continuously to piece them together.

"Aren't you glad of this emancipation?" came the question. The muffled voice was queerly familiar. Could it be my younger brother?

"Glad? Of course!" came a reply from across the room.

My heart was pounding. This second voice was that of my elder brother, a whispering echo of his voice. It went on:

"Let us think no more of life. We could not go back to it if we would."

There was an interval of silence; then my younger brother spoke regretfully, wistfully, "Yet, even at this moment our children are weeping and urging us to stay."

The shadow, whence had come the voice of my elder brother, stirred. "True! And because of that, we must take our last look at him who stays. Perhaps we can make him feel that we are here and are saying farewell——"

"It is too late!" interrupted my younger brother. "The Messenger is here——"

"Yes, it is too late!" broke in a booming voice.

The lamp flickered and then, to my poignant regret, it went out. I was in darkness of such an intensity that I gasped. It was like a sable cloak. Through its folds drifted the voice that had last spoken, its resonance diminishing:

"Too late! Hurry! Your sedan chairs are waiting for you! Hurry!"

I DO not know why the mad urge to follow them struck me, yet it was compelling. In the thick blackness I groped for the door. I discovered that the door was gone, that the side walls of the room were gone. Yet this did not strike me as being odd. I accepted it. The air, I noted, had grown cool and fresh.

As I groped along, I suddenly found myself confronted by a wall—a wall of cold, smooth stone. To my left, as I threw out my hand, was a second wall. Behind me, grotesquely enough, a third wall had sprung up. I asked myself calmly: was I to be walled up? To die? But I felt no fear. Then, to my right, my hand found no staying surface of

stone. As I began to move slowly in this direction, the wall behind me moved with me, blocking a backward step.

The path was oppressively long, but at last I succeeded in reaching its termination. There I was caught by a current of air drawing me into a twilight region. The illumination was faint, like the gray light which presages the sunrise.

A broad thoroughfare ran straight before me, seemingly to infinity. A throng of persons, reaching as far as my eye could distinguish, were moving in the roadway, taking the direction of that great propulsion of air. I was soon swept in among them, although none paid the slightest heed to me. I saw women of all ages moving at the right side of the road; the men took their way at the left. No one spoke, even the shuffle of their feet made no sound. All journeyed in a vast preoccupation and bemusement.

While traveling with this silent throng, I saw an old man approaching, the only traveler who pursued the opposite direction. Yet the crowd paid no more heed to him than they did to one another—or to me. He spread out his arms, barring my way, and said in a resonant voice:

"You do not belong here. Come back with me."

I recognized his voice. It was that of the shadow which had taken away my brothers, the entity called by them the Messenger.

"But I can not go back," I answered him. "The wall closed behind me."

"Then it is the will of the Gods that you go on."

"I am following my two brothers. Have you seen them on the way?"

"Seen your brothers?" he queried with what I thought was a touch of exasperation. "How should I know, when I meet so many?"

I quickly described to him the appearance of my brothers. But still he shook his head. Then he asked sharply:

"They were walking, of course?"

"No," I replied. "I heard your voice say that their chairs were ready."

He nodded. "I know whom you mean, now." Beckoning to me to follow, he turned and began retracing his steps, moving in the same direction as the crowd.

After traveling for a space in silence, I asked him: "Why do all these folk walk? You told my brothers that their carrying-chairs were waiting, yet I have seen no chairs on this road."

He answered curtly: "Those who ride are men whose services are needed on high. They take another path—but their destination is the same as these."

"But why do these men and women wear such sad faces?"

"That should not be difficult to guess! They are the foolish ones who are not yet willing to give up the world."

Here my further questions concerning these fellow pilgrims were cut short. We had arrived at an incredibly steep ascent. I offered to assist my guide, who seemed too old to hope to negotiate it. He ignored my outstretched hand and mounted the path with all the vigor of youth.

At the summit the path debouched upon a great plateau. Here a girl stood, garbed in beautiful silks but with vacant, indrawn eyes as of one who day-dreams. With graceful yet mechanical gestures, she ladled, from a white jade jar that was apparently inexhaustible, a liquid. It was golden in color and fragrant with the nectar of a thousand blended fruits. The ascent had been so wearisome and the perfume of the draft so enticing that each traveler drank his fill.

I would gladly have joined the patient line, each awaiting his turn to drink, his eyes fixed hypnotically upon the golden liquid, but the Messenger caught my arm firmly and swung me past. He paid no

heed to my remonstrances. After a moment I saw why he had been unwilling for me to partake of the draft. For, stretching out as far as the eye could reach, lay the recumbent bodies of travelers who had gone before. Countless thousands of them.

"They have drunk the wine of forgetfulness," said my guide. "This is the Garden of Rest, after their long and painful journey and their steep climb."

"What is the duration of their sleep?"

"They remain here for ten Kalpas. If the good they have done in the world does not survive that period, they will be lost in eternal sleep."

"But my brothers!" I said in alarm. "Perhaps they are sleeping here. Sleeping the allotted ten times ten eons."

"No. Those who travel in the carrying-chairs have not been wearied by the journey—and they are not tempted to drink. Did I not tell you that your brothers were needed on high?"

We walked along in the grayness, picking our way amid the sleeping figures. So engrossed was I that I held my eyes on the ground. The Messenger spoke:

"Lift your face. See those gleams of light ahead? They presage the dawn of heavenly existence for those whose good works in life have endured."

I looked into the zenith. Swinging across the heavens in mighty striations were clouds of gay and brilliant colors. But before I had time to savor their magnificence and beauty, my guide commanded:

"Touch the sleeve of my robe."

I obeyed and instantly we were borne into ethereal space. The Garden of Rest stretched out limitlessly below, dotted with its tiny, sleeping figures. I saw the steep hill where the hordes were toiling upward with such pertinacity—to oblivion.

THE sensation of motion ceased. I found that I no longer touched the sleeve of the Messenger's robe. I stood alone on the summit of a verdured hill. Just below me, a stream of chiming silver flowed through flower-embossed meadows. The Garden of Rest and its travelers had vanished. Approaching me were two persons, their robes glittering in the warm rosy light, so different from that cool gray illumination that had tinged the horizon above the countless sleeping pilgrims. Like two young gods the pair approached me.

I stared an instant, dazzled; then I ran toward them with a glad cry of recognition. They each caught me by the hand.

"Why have you come here?" my eldest brother asked. "We had not heard that you were summoned." His voice was gentle, yet puzzled.

"To see you! To see you both!" I answered eagerly. "Is this where you dwell?"

"Beyond the stream," my younger brother replied.

I looked and now, for the first time, I saw, hazily dim, rows of lofty, temple-like buildings. Their roofs gleamed with the patina of gold lacquer.

"So many of them?" I asked, bemused.

They smiled at me and my elder brother spoke: "Not for us alone. Our parents are there, and so are our forefathers."

"Our father and mother?" I cried. "Let me go to them! I must see them!"

The smile on the lips of my two brothers was replaced by a look of sadness.

"No," my elder brother said quietly. "It is not yet time for you to see them. You are meeting us only because you must have seized that precious moment when we were allowed to return to look upon you for the last time." Reluctantly but firmly he took my younger brother by the arm and turned away.

"Wait!" I cried out in alarm. "Don't

go, yet! I have only seen you for an instant!"

"Perhaps"—my younger brother's voice was uncertain—"perhaps They will not be angry if we go a brief way with you on your return journey."

"But I do not wish to return!" I said despairingly.

But even as I spoke, a strand of rosy cloud drifted down and wrapped me in soft, warm mist. I could no longer see my brothers but I could feel the hand of each on my arms. Gently they pushed me forward. I could detect that we were climbing a hill but one not so steep as that tortuous rise just preceding the entry to the Garden of Rest.

Then the cloud thinned slightly and I found myself on the verge of a sheer precipice. I could still feel the reassuring pressure of my brothers' hands but I could not see them. I stared in horror at the yawning, mist-filled depths below, then closed my eyes to shut out the view.

I felt the cliff shake and crack. It became detached and down we dropped. Yet the descent was slow and gentle. I opened my eyes but discerned nothing; that same cloud was masking my vision. I had the sensation that I was coming nearer and nearer the earth, as that descent continued. At last we came to a halt.

"Where are we?" I asked.

"At a wayside resting-place." It was my younger brother's voice. It came from my right.

I could not feel the pressure of my elder brother's hand and, as though reading my mind, my younger brother volunteered:

"He has gone only for a moment, to bring his pearls to show you."

"His pearls?" I repeated in surprize.

"Yes," affirmed my younger brother. "While we wait, I will show you mine. Put out your hand."

He poured into my palm a number of satiny, smooth stones. By bringing them near my eyes I could distinguish an unearthly, glorious luster, like—yet strangely unlike—pearls.

"Where did you get such as these?" I asked.

"From home. They are from my wife's heart. . . . They were once her tears."

"Then, in this life, you remember those who linger in the world?"

"Of course——" His voice broke off, for there was a stir in the mist at my left.

I knew that my elder brother had returned, and was glad. But my joy was only brief. His voice came firmly:

"We have overstayed our time. We must both leave you."

"No!" I cried vehemently. "I have come this far! I will follow you—on and on!"

"That is impossible," my elder brother went on. "You have many good deeds to perform. Such are the materials for your palace. Stone by stone, you must build it, for even we—much as we love you—can not do that. It will be one of that number which you saw, across the stream and the meadows."

"But I want no palace!" I shouted in panic. "I ask no more than to be with you now!"

I reached frantically forward and sought the hand of each. They did not object but gently returned my frenzied pressure. . . . For an instant the mist lifted. I saw their faces smiling at me. . . .

AGAIN the mist lowered. My hands, although warm and tingling, were empty. Then, into the swirling grayness, a light began to penetrate. From a tiny pin-point of color it enlarged. I recognized it—my whale-oil lamp.

And, on the table before me, still lay the telegram announcing the accidental death of my two brothers.

The Milk Carts

By VIOLET A. METHLEY

Croft's efforts to keep the golf course in good condition met with weird obstacles from out of the past

TWO men in plus-fours tramped over the crest of the down. The taller could best be described as bluff; the other smaller, slimmer, paced more slowly, his lips moving as he measured the yards. Frowning, he made entries in a notebook, examined every crease and fold in the ground, with an eye keen as the hawk's, hovering overhead.

"Grand site, eh? High—breezy—fine views——" The bigger man waved his hand with large vagueness, and his companion nodded approvingly, with pursed lips.

"Perfect—couldn't have done it better if I'd planned it myself from the beginning."

Thus did Mr. Seton Croft congratulate the Almighty upon the creation of an ideal natural golf course, and did so without any conscious conceit. For years he had practised golf-course construction; he was without a rival in craft and subtlety of bunkers and hazards, and it was his boast never to make two holes alike.

"Good!" Gilbert Scayles, owner of the land, beamed complacently. "Then we'll get it in hand at once—open next Easter, eh? I'll give you a free hand about engaging labor, and you and your wife can live at the lodge to keep an eye on things."

Seton Croft nodded absent-mindedly.

"This stretch will make a grand twelfth hole—the longest on the course," he said thoughtfully. "Five hundred yards of turf for fairway—trees on one side—sand pits on the other. Put an artificial bunker midway—and there's the twelfth green."

They were now on the crest of the down; only the mounds of the Roman camp rose higher, and Croft pointed to the half-moon of sandy hollows and outcropping rock which ended the vista.

As they set off toward it, along the natural fairway, the golf-architect came to a frowning standstill, staring down.

"Sinful, positively sinful!" he muttered. "A glorious fairway spoilt like that."

Right across, from side to side, ran the furrows of wheel-tracks, bitten through the soft skin of turf to the flesh and bone of chalk and rock beneath.

"By Gad, yes—a confounded shame!" Scayles bent to examine the ruts. "They must be turfed over, and I'll stop anyone from driving this way in future. I've got all rights over the land, and I'll see to it at once."

"We'll get the ruts leveled and turfed first thing, then," Croft commented. "Yes, as I thought, the green almost plans itself; it should be one of the best holes on the course."

Seton Croft was not the man to let grass grow under his feet, except where such grass was required, on a new golf course. Within a week, expert labor was engaged and he was established with his wife in the lodge, spending his days on the course, his evenings with a large sand-

filled tray, in which he had constructed a fascinating small-scale model, complete even to the tiny flags on the greens. Croft was a methodical man.

After giving orders for the first roughing-out of the whole course, he concentrated his own attention upon the planning of the first hole, a difficult bit of work. Consequently, it was not for two or three weeks that he took a general survey to see how the work was progressing, and, in the course of it, reached the twelfth hole, and walked along the fairway to view the returfing of the furrows. Once again, Croft stopped short.

"Look here, Long!" he summoned one of the workmen busy on the twelfth green. "Didn't I give particular orders that these ruts were to be leveled and turfed?"

"Yes, sir, and so they were," the man spoke aggrievedly. "But yesterday evening or early this morning carts have been along the track again, tearing it up like you see."

"Confound them!" Croft, who rarely swore, broke out furiously. "Get it put right as soon as possible, and I'll speak to Mr. Scayles at once. This shan't happen again."

Scayles was as indignant as could be wished. Notice-boards were set up, orders sent all round the estate, whilst Croft concentrated upon the repair of the damage, laying fresh soil in the ruts, applying turf like new-grafted skin.

Inquiries had not led to the discovery of the culprits; all the cart-owners in the neighborhood denied having driven across the golf course; as one of them put it, reasonably enough:

"It isn't a short cut anywhere, and it don't lead nowhere, so what'd be the sense of doing it?"

But the trouble was not over. Two days after all had been put right, Croft took his wife round the course, to hear her opinion of it as a practical golfer, which he himself was not. She was properly and satisfactorily enthusiastic—until they reached the fairway of the twelfth hole. And there, once again, the turf was torn transversely by those deeply bitten cart-tracks.

Croft lost his temper completely for once.

"It'll never be in condition now by the time of the opening," he declared. "It must be some cursed swine of villagers who've made up their minds that it's a right of way across the course, and drive their carts over it on purpose."

In corroboration of his words came a voice from close by, and the Crofts became aware of an aged rustic, with gnarled hands clasped on the top of a knotted stick from which they were almost indistinguishable. He worked his toothless mouth and blinked rheumy eyes, speaking quaveringly.

"Eee, Mester, 'e'll niver keep them ruts smooth, niver in this world," he mouthed. "They'll be druv theer agin."

"Why—do you know who makes them?" Croft demanded.

"Iss—iss!" the old fellow nodded shakily. "For sure I do. 'Tes the milk-carts."

"Where from? Whose milk-carts are they?" Croft asked.

"Can't tell 'ee that. But they do always come, tearing up the ruts, whativer 'ee do. Rattling and clattering, they comes, all the cans a-jangling—they plaguey milk-carts!"

THE old man shuffled away, mumbling. Croft could obtain no more information from him, nor did further inquiries help matters much. Scayles and his steward both insisted that there were no dairy-farms with carts and cans in the neighborhood. Moreover, old Ted Hollins was known to be soft in the brain,

and you could not take anything he said for truth; he rambled most of his time.

Nevertheless, the old man's words had made an impression upon Croft, which was to be unpleasantly revived some weeks after the ruts had once more been repaired. For the architect returned to the lodge and his wife one lunchtime, with looks which boded disaster.

"Those cursed carts again!" he burst out. "Deeper tracks than ever. It's the most deliberate blackguardism I ever saw, and there must be connivance in the district. Scayles is furious, and I'm about ready to chuck the whole thing. You can't work against determined opposition like this—it's heartbreaking."

"You'd feel worse if you gave up," his wife said wisely, and Croft nodded, with gloomy assent.

"You're right. I'd rather catch the brutes. The workmen are inclined to give trouble, too—want me to alter the lie of the hole, say they'll make the turf good this once, but not again. And I can't coerce 'em; if those fellows turn sulky and strike work, we'll never get the job done in time."

"It's absolutely sickening—but what can you do, dear, to prevent it happening again?" Mrs. Croft said sympathetically.

To that question Croft supplied an answer on the evening after the re-turfing had been again finished. After dinner, he put on his boots again, with a grimly set mouth.

"Going out again, dear?" his wife asked.

"Yes—going to spend the night at the twelfth hole," Croft told her. "Going to spend every night there, till I catch those scoundrels. I'm not taking any chance this time; if they come again, they'll have me to reckon with. Don't fuss, old girl."

Being a wise wife, Mrs. Croft did not. She contented herself with making sure that her husband put on a warm overcoat, and took a packet of sandwiches and a whisky-flask in the pockets.

THE night was overcast, with a dim moon giving an air of unreality to the whole scene, which Croft felt vaguely, as he took a short cut across the course toward the twelfth fairway.

He walked along the edge of the rough, where sorrel and scabious grew in the yellowish grass. A little squealing creature ran out from almost under his feet, a bird gave a feeble pipe; otherwise it was very silent.

Croft reached a point where the ground fell away on the left, whilst to the right the slope rose smoothly toward the earthworks of the Roman camp, except for a deep cleft in the downs sparsely filled with bushes. The twelfth green was no more than fifty yards away; the newly-placed turves showed in bright stripes across the brownish-green of the fairway. Croft glanced toward them anxiously, but they were smooth and untouched, and with a sigh of relief he sat down on the edge of the fairway.

It was a lonely vigil. Croft smoked, ate his sandwiches, sat gazing out over the wide, misty stretch of valley, playing fantastically with the idea of it as a huge golf course to be planned, that distant ridge a bunker—that rising field a green. But it was all rather dream-like; Croft was half dozing when the first sound broke the stillness, a clank-clank-clank of metal, the jangle of cans. Old Ted was right then—the milk-carts were coming.

Croft sprang to his feet and looked round. The clanking jangle grew louder, coming from the rising ground on the right, the bush-filled cleft. He thought, now, he could catch men's voices, and the trampling of horse-hoofs was unmistakable.

Anger and irritation came surging back. These malicious boors thought

they'd have it all their own way again, did they? Well, they should find out! Croft grasped the stick which he carried and advanced in the direction of the growing sounds.

Suddenly, with clatter of metal and creak of harness a vehicle emerged from the chalk-cleft and swung down toward the smooth turf of the fairway. It was driven, milk-cart fashion, by a driver who stood behind the high, curved front, and behind could be caught a glimpse of another, and another. Croft strode forward, raising his stick threateningly.

"Here, you get way out of this!" he cried. "You've no business here. If you claim any rights, do it through the law courts, not by wilful destruction of——"

His voice trailed off, for no answer came from the driver, and he urged his horse forward steadily. More furious than he had ever been in his life before, Croft snatched at the bridle.

As he did so, something thrust him on one side, some power, scarcely physical, which stunned and bewildered him. He found himself a-sprawl on the turf, with the vehicle sweeping by, clattering, jangling, followed by another, and another. Gleaming with metal-work, drawn by horses under high yokes, they were not quite milk-carts, Croft realized, dragging himself on to his knees and staring in amazement. The drivers were swarthy, with strong features, and thick bodies, in closely molded leather jerkins.

Straight across the fairway they drove, wheeling into the rough grass beyond; one shouted to another in a strange tongue, which was somehow familiar, and they were off, with a clatter and jingle, the drivers bending low—cracking their long whips.

And Croft still watched, dazed and bewildered. . . .

Now they were returning at breakneck speed; they passed close to him; with a clatter and jangle, with a roar and a swirl they were gone, up and away toward the silent, dominant earthworks of the Roman camp.

But Seton Croft, golf-architect, sat huddled on the dry grass, trying to realize what strange spectacle he had seen in the misty moonlight, and what was its meaning.

"Chariots—Roman soldiers chariot-racing, men from the camp on the hill," he whispered. "This is where they did their training, when they were in garrison here—by Gad, yes!"

Presently he rose, and went to where the deep wheel-ruts showed on the new-laid turf, stood staring for some moments. It was almost daylight when he reached the lodge, and found a heavy-eyed wife waiting for him anxiously.

"My dear, you must be half dead," she fussed over him. "I've made a fire, so sit down and get warm, and drink this cocoa—Seton, how funny and dazed you look. Did you catch them?"

"Yes," Croft answered. "I caught them in the act."

"Oh, the wretches! How dared they? Did you give them in charge?"

"No," Croft spoke slowly. "You see, they proved to me that they had a prior claim to be there. . . . I rather think I shall alter that hole after all."

SO THAT is why the twelfth hole of Seton Croft's latest masterpiece in golf courses takes quite an unexpected direction. He tells people who criticize it that there are a lot of things to consider in country districts—rights of user, for instance. It only makes trouble to go against the older inhabitants of a place, when you're laying out a golf course, Croft says wisely.

A Short, Shuddery Story

The Thing in the Cellar

By DAVID H. KELLER

IT WAS a large cellar, entirely out of proportion to the house above it. The owner admitted that it was probably built for a distinctly different kind of structure from the one which rose above it. Probably the first house had been burned, and poverty had caused a diminution of the dwelling erected to take its place.

A winding stone stairway connected the cellar with the kitchen. Around the base of this series of steps successive owners of the house had placed their firewood, winter vegetables and junk. The junk had gradually been pushed back till it rose, head high, in a barricade of uselessness. What was back of that barricade no one knew and no one cared. For some hundreds of years no one had crossed it to penetrate to the black reaches of the cellar behind it.

At the top of the steps, separating the kitchen from the cellar, was a stout oaken door. This door was, in a way, as peculiar and out of relation to the rest of the house as the cellar. It was a strange kind of door to find in a modern house, and certainly a most unusual door to find in the inside of the house—thick, stoutly built, dexterously rabbeted together, with huge wrought-iron hinges, and a lock that looked as though it came from Castle Despair. Separating a house from the outside world, such a door would be excusable; swinging between kitchen and cellar it seemed peculiarly inappropriate.

From the earliest months of his life Tommy Tucker seemed unhappy in the kitchen. In the front parlor, in the formal dining-room, and especially on the second floor of the house he acted like a normal, healthy child; but carry him to the kitchen, he at once began to cry. His parents, being plain people, ate in the kitchen save when they had company. Being poor, Mrs. Tucker did most of her work, though occasionally she had a charwoman in to do the extra Saturday cleaning, and thus much of her time was spent in the kitchen. And Tommy stayed with her, at least as long as he was unable to walk. Much of the time he was decidedly unhappy.

When Tommy learned to creep, he lost no time in leaving the kitchen. No sooner was his mother's back turned than the little fellow crawled as fast as he could for the doorway opening into the front of the house, the dining-room and the front parlor. Once away from the kitchen, he seemed happy; at least, he ceased to cry. On being returned to the kitchen his howls so thoroughly convinced the neighbors that he had colic that more than one bowl of catnip and sage tea was brought to his assistance.

It was not until the boy learned to talk that the Tuckers had any idea as to what made the boy cry so hard when he was in the kitchen. In other words, the baby had to suffer for many months till he obtained at least a little relief, and even when he told his parents what was the matter, they were absolutely unable to comprehend. This is not to be wondered at, because they were both hard-working, rather simple-minded persons.

What they finally learned from their

little son was this: that if the cellar door was shut and securely fastened with the heavy iron lock, Tommy could at least eat a meal in peace; if the door was simply closed and not locked, he shivered with fear, but kept quiet; but if the door was open, if even the slightest streak of black showed that it was not tightly shut, then the little three-year-old would scream himself to the point of exhaustion, especially if his tired father would refuse him permission to leave the kitchen.

Playing in the kitchen, the child developed two interesting habits. Rags, scraps of paper and splinters of wood were continually being shoved under the thick oak door to fill the space between the door and the sill. Whenever Mrs. Tucker opened the door there was always some trash there, placed by her son. It annoyed her, and more than once the little fellow was thrashed for this conduct, but punishment acted in no way as a deterrent. The other habit was as singular. Once the door was closed and locked, he would rather boldly walk over to it and caress the old lock. Even when he was so small that he had to stand on tiptoe to touch it with the tips of his fingers he would touch it with slow caressing strokes; later on, as he grew, he used to kiss it.

His father, who only saw the boy at the end of the day, decided that there was no sense in such conduct, and in his masculine way tried to break the lad of his foolishness. There was, of necessity, no effort on the part of the hard-working man to understand the psychology back of his son's conduct. All that the man knew was that his little son was acting in a way that was decidedly queer.

Tommy loved his mother and was willing to do anything he could to help her in the household chores, but one thing he would not do, and never did do, and that was to fetch and carry between the house and the cellar. If his mother opened the door, he would run screaming from the room, and he never returned voluntarily till he was assured that the door was closed.

He never explained just why he acted as he did. In fact, he refused to talk about it, at least to his parents, and that was just as well, because had he done so, they would simply have been more positive than ever that there was something wrong with their only child. They tried, in their own ways, to break the child of his unusual habits; failing to change him at all, they decided to ignore his peculiarities.

That is, they ignored them till he became six years old and the time came for him to go to school. He was a sturdy little chap by that time, and more intelligent than the usual boys beginning in the primer class. Mr. Tucker was, at times, proud of him; the child's attitude toward the cellar door was the one thing most disturbing to the father's pride. Finally nothing would do but that the Tucker family call on the neighborhood physician. It was an important event in the life of the Tuckers, so important that it demanded the wearing of Sunday clothes, and all that sort of thing.

"The matter is just this, Doctor Hawthorn," said Mr. Tucker, in a somewhat embarrassed manner. "Our little Tommy is old enough to start to school, but he behaves childish in regard to our cellar, and the missus and I thought you could tell us how to do about it. It must be his nerves."

"Ever since he was a baby," continued Mrs. Tucker, taking up the thread of conversation where her husband had paused, "Tommy has had a great fear of the cellar. Even now, big boy that he is, he does not love me enough to fetch and carry for me through that door and down

those steps. It is not natural for a child to act like he does, and what with chinking the cracks with rags and kissing the lock, he drives me to the point where I fear he may become daft-like as he grows older."

The doctor, eager to satisfy new customers, and dimly remembering some lectures on the nervous system received when he was a medical student, asked some general questions, listened to the boy's heart, examined his lungs and looked at his eyes and fingernails. At last he commented:

"Looks like a fine, healthy boy to me."

"Yes, all except the cellar door," replied the father.

"Has he ever been sick?"

"Naught but fits once or twice when he cried himself blue in the face," answered the mother.

"Frightened?"

"Perhaps. It was always in the kitchen."

"Suppose you go out and let me talk to Tommy by myself?"

And there sat the doctor very much at his ease and the little six-year-old boy very uneasy.

"Tommy, what is there in the cellar you are afraid of?"

"I don't know."

"Have you ever seen it?"

"No, sir."

"Ever heard it? smelt it?"

"No, sir."

"Then how do you know there is something there?"

"Because."

"Because what?"

"Because there is."

That was as far as Tommy would go, and at last his seeming obstinacy annoyed the physician even as it had for several years annoyed Mr. Tucker. He went to the door and called the parents into the office.

"He thinks there is something down in the cellar," he stated.

The Tuckers simply looked at each other.

"That's foolish," commented Mr. Tucker.

" 'Tis just a plain cellar with junk and firewood and cider barrels in it," added Mrs. Tucker. "Since we moved into that house, I have not missed a day without going down those stone steps and I know there is nothing there. But the lad has always screamed when the door was open. I recall now that since he was a child in arms he has always screamed when the door was open."

"He thinks there is something there," said the doctor.

"That is why we brought him to you," replied the father. "It's the child's nerves. Perhaps fœtida, or something, will calm him."

"I tell you what to do," advised the doctor. "He thinks there is something there. Just as soon as he finds that he is wrong and that there is nothing there, he will forget about it. He has been humored too much. What you want to do is to open that cellar door and make him stay by himself in the kitchen. Nail the door open so he can not close it. Leave him alone there for an hour and then go and laugh at him and show him how silly it was for him to be afraid of an empty cellar. I will give you some nerve and blood tonic and that will help, but the big thing is to show him that there is nothing to be afraid of."

ON THE way back to the Tucker home Tommy broke away from his parents. They caught him after an exciting chase and kept him between them the rest of the way home. Once in the house he disappeared and was found in the guest room under the bed. The afternoon being already spoiled for Mr. Tucker, he

determined to keep the child under observation for the rest of the day. Tommy ate no supper, in spite of the urgings of the unhappy mother. The dishes were washed, the evening paper read, the evening pipe smoked; and then, and only then, did Mr. Tucker take down his tool box and get out a hammer and some long nails.

"And I am going to nail the door open, Tommy, so you can not close it, as that was what the doctor said, Tommy, and you are to be a man and stay here in the kitchen alone for an hour, and we will leave the lamp a-burning, and then when you find there is naught to be afraid of, you will be well and a real man and not something for a man to be ashamed of being the father of."

But at the last Mrs. Tucker kissed Tommy and cried and whispered to her husband not to do it, and to wait till the boy was larger; but nothing was to do except to nail the thick door open so it could not be shut and leave the boy there alone with the lamp burning and the dark open space of the doorway to look at with eyes that grew as hot and burning as the flame of the lamp.

That same day Doctor Hawthorn took supper with a classmate of his, a man who specialized in psychiatry and who was particularly interested in children. Hawthorn told Johnson about his newest case, the little Tucker boy, and asked him for his opinion. Johnson frowned.

"Children are odd, Hawthorn. Perhaps they are like dogs. It may be their nervous system is more acute than in the adult. We know that our eyesight is limited, also our hearing and smell. I firmly believe that there are forms of life which exist in such a form that we can neither see, hear nor smell them. Fondly we delude ourselves into the fallacy of believing that they do not exist because we can not prove their existence. This Tucker lad may have a nervous system that is peculiarly acute. He may dimly appreciate the existence of something in the cellar which is unappreciable to his parents. Evidently there is some basis to this fear of his. Now, I am not saying that there is anything in the cellar. In fact, I suppose that it is just an ordinary cellar, but this boy, since he was a baby, has thought that there was something there, and that is just as bad as though there actually were. What I would like to know is what makes him think so. Give me the address, and I will call tomorrow and have a talk with the little fellow."

"What do you think of my advice?"

"Sorry, old man, but I think it was perfectly rotten. If I were you, I would stop around there on my way home and prevent them from following it. The little fellow may be badly frightened. You see, he evidently thinks there is something there."

"But there isn't."

"Perhaps not. No doubt, he is wrong, but he thinks so."

IT ALL worried Doctor Hawthorn so much that he decided to take his friend's advice. It was a cold night, a foggy night, and the physician felt cold as he tramped along the London streets. At last he came to the Tucker house. He remembered now that he had been there once before, long ago, when little Tommy Tucker came into the world. There was a light in the front window, and in no time at all Mr. Tucker came to the door.

"I have come to see Tommy," said the doctor.

"He is back in the kitchen," replied the father.

"He gave one cry, but since then he has been quiet," sobbed the wife.

"If I had let her have her way, she would have opened the door, but I said to her, 'Mother, now is the time to make

a man out of our Tommy.' And I guess he knows by now that there was naught to be afraid of. Well, the hour is up. Suppose we go and get him and put him to bed?"

"It has been a hard time for the little child," whispered the wife.

Carrying the candle, the man walked ahead of the woman and the doctor, and at last opened the kitchen door. The room was dark.

"Lamp has gone out," said the man. "Wait till I light it."

"Tommy! Tommy!" called Mrs. Tucker.

But the doctor ran to where a white form was stretched on the floor. Sharply he called for more light. Trembling, he examined all that was left of little Tommy. Twitching, he looked into the open space down into the cellar. At last he looked at Tucker and Tucker's wife.

"Tommy—Tommy has been hurt—I guess he is dead!" he stammered.

The mother threw herself on the floor and picked up the torn, mutilated thing that had been, only a little while ago, her little Tommy.

The man took his hammer and drew out the nails and closed the door and locked it and then drove in a long spike to reinforce the lock. Then he took hold of the doctor's shoulders and shook him.

"What killed him, Doctor? What killed him?" he shouted into Hawthorn's ear.

The doctor looked at him bravely in spite of the fear in his throat.

"How do I know, Tucker?" he replied. "How do I know? Didn't you tell me that there was nothing there? Nothing down there? In the cellar?"

Laughter in the Night

By AUGUST W. DERLETH *and* MARK SCHORER

A hideous burst of laughter from the moor where the gallows tree had stood portended tragedy

MR. WILLIAM HANLEY cursed as his machine stuck in the drive that entered the courtyard of the *Antler Inn.* He put the motor into reverse and tried to back out of the deep muddy ruts; the wheels ground in the mud, but the machine did not move. The rain came down in blinding sheets, and despite his strong headlights, Hanley could hardly make out the shape of the inn as it loomed faintly up in the night a hundred yards ahead of him. Nothing to do but run for it, he thought. He pulled up the collar of his coat, put his brief-case under his arm, and ducked out of the machine across the slippery and apparently grassless courtyard to the veranda of the inn.

He pounded loudly on the door, wondering whether the landlord could hear his knock above the sound of the rain beating down, and the howl of the wind. Mr. Hanley was shivering in the cold

when the door opened a bit, and a woman looked out. When she saw the man standing there with his coat drawn up around his ears and the rain dripping off the brim of his hat, she opened the door quickly and let him in.

A little puddle of water formed where Mr. Hanley stood just inside the door. He held his dripping hat in his hand and asked for a room.

"I'm sorry," the hostess said, "but we are full up."

Mr. Hanley frowned. "You must have some place where I can stay for the night!"

"Nothing, I'm afraid," she said. Then she added, a little dubiously, "Perhaps you can find lodging at the *Mason House* a few miles up the road?"

"But my car's stuck out there, and it's an awful night to send a man out." Mr. Hanley smiled at her, looking very bedraggled in his soaked clothes; almost wistfully he looked across the room to the roaring fireplace.

"We have no room, sir. I'm sorry."

No amount of persuasion could have induced Mr. Hanley to leave the *Antler Inn* that night, and the stubborn attitude of the hostess did not shake his determination to stay. Surely there was some place, a little closet or a bench, where he could spend the remainder of the night? No, they were full up, she told him again. But he had to stay somewhere—couldn't think of going out into that rain and wind again. The hostess remained adamant. He could not stay.

But at this point, the host, a large, burly man, appeared from the rear of the inn. He had evidently overheard part of the conversation, for he stepped forward, looking hard at the woman, and said, "We'll give you a room."

For a moment the woman looked as if she had not understood aright; then she turned and faced her husband. "Not *that* room, Peter?"

"That room," said Peter.

"No, no," the woman said, quickly, and would perhaps have gone on to say more, had not Mr. Hanley himself interrupted.

"Look here," he said, "if you have an empty room, I see no reason why it shouldn't be put to use."

The host nodded, and the woman looked at him nervously. "There's only one provision," the host went on. "If we give you the room, you must promise not to raise the shade on the window."

Mr. Hanley looked at the man and woman blankly for a moment. "That's an odd request," he said at last. "Why do you make it?"

A dubious glance passed between the host and his wife. "There is madness beyond that window," said the woman in a low voice.

Mr. Hanley frowned and looked at the man.

The host began to speak. "The window opens on what was once a gallows stand. Many highwaymen were hanged there and there's a curious story of a ghoul who disturbed the bodies laid to rest beneath the gallows tree." He coughed. "The last time the room was occupied, a man lost his mind—he died later, I believe. The room's all right though. I've seen a few things, of course, but there's nothing if you keep the shade down."

"Very well," agreed Mr. Hanley cheerily. Anything to end this, he thought. "My car's outside in the driveway," he added.

The woman nodded, remembering.

THE host was turning away when Mr. Hanley spoke again. "By the way, can you tell me how far I am from the estate of Mr. Herbert Altamount?"

The host looked at him, pondering. "About seven miles," he said.

"Seven miles!" exclaimed Mr. Hanley. "Why, I thought . . . that it was much farther than that."

"No, 'tisn't," said the host. "As a matter of fact, this inn was once Altamount property."

Mr. Hanley was led up the stairs and shown into the room. Alone, he stood for a minute with his back to the door, thinking. "I must have been going in a circle all the time," he murmured, tugging in some perplexity at his mustache. "Confound that rain!"

He looked around him. What a cozy room it was, after all! Instinctively he glanced at the single window, over which hung attractive chintz curtains; behind them was the dull brown of the shade. What nonsense, he thought, not to raise the shade! He gave his attention finally to unpacking his things.

He finished at last and took up a book to read. He wondered, as he sat down, whether they had put his motor in shelter. And more important, whether it was possible for any one to find him; the rain, he felt sure, would wipe out all traces.

He had just started to read when there came a knock on his door, and a moment after, the host's face, now remarkably timid, peered in at him.

"I'm sorry," he began apologetically, "but I didn't want you to think that there was anything about my story not quite right."

"Oh," said Mr. Hanley coldly.

"You see, there really was a ghoul. They hanged him on the gallows tree; he was the last to die there. They say he went mad at the last, and they couldn't stop him laughing at them. Only the rope choked him off. Now, sometimes, if you lift the shade—he comes back. He isn't a pleasant sight, but he'll not do you any harm. But sometimes he brings something about, somehow his laughter kills people. But that's only when they've done something wrong."

Mr. Hanley started suddenly, looking sharply at his host. "What do you mean?" he asked curtly.

"Well," the host coughed a little, "last year we found a tenant dead here. We'd warned him, but he wouldn't listen, and later on we'd found he was a man who'd undergone trial for murder but got out of everything by a clever trick. Another time it was an escaped convict, a murderer. Both of them were distant relatives of old Mr. Altamount over yonder." He coughed again. "As a matter of fact," he went on, "there's a queer story connected with the appearance of this ghoul."

"What is it?" asked Mr. Hanley. He had begun, inexplicably, to feel nervous. Did the host suspect anything? he wondered.

"The last man hanged, the ghoul, they said, was the last of the old Altamount line. It is still said hereabouts that he was innocent, that he was wrongly convicted, and sent to the gallows by the present Mr. Altamount and his relatives, because they wanted his lands and wealth. And it is true that they got all he had, after they had sworn that he had been robbing the graveyards hereabouts. Just before he went to the gallows, the condemned man swore that from that time on the Altamount family would decline, and that it would come to an end with this generation. And it is strange that so many of them have died. It is said, too, that the condemned man swore that many would turn to crime, and two of them have done so, and even now they say that Mr. Herbert Altamount and his London cousin, the only one left, are mixed up in some pretty bad business—swindling, they call it."

"Well, the ghoul seems to have prophesied correctly, doesn't he?" Mr. Hanley assumed a bravado he did not feel.

"That he does. The last thing he said is not likely to come true, in my belief."

"And that?'

"He promised to come back and haunt the gallows tree until he had strangled the last of the new Altamount line. And since the ghost of that poor man won't move from here, I think Mr. Herbert Altamount is quite safe."

Mr. William Hanley wanted to say, "But Mr. Altamount is not the last of the line," but instead, he said, "Have you actually seen the ghost-ghoul?"

The host nodded slowly, and spoke reluctantly. "I've seen something — I wouldn't say what. But, yes, I think I've seen him." The man looked at Mr. Hanley helplessly. "You won't raise the shade?"

"No."

Mr. Hanley shook his head. The host bowed and withdrew. Immediately Mr. Hanley's eyes rested on the lowered shade. The devil take the man! he thought. If I want to raise that shade, I shall. Then he turned back to his book and started to read. He had begun again to feel nervous. Perhaps there was something in that story. If you had done wrong? How would the specter know? Mr. Hanley chuckled grimly. "I shall have to be very careful," he muttered, one eye on the shade. There came to bother him with peculiar insistency the vague memory of an Altamount, and a cousin, both of whom had met their deaths in a mysterious fashion at an inn near the old estate.

HE HAD read seven pages, and all the time he was reading he kept thinking about the drawn shade, so that at last, when he started on the eighth page, he went over and raised it. Then he saw that the moon had come out, and the wet countryside glistened in the pale light. He hesitated for a moment, looking out. Then he went swiftly to his brief-case, opened it a little, and looked in. Those things were safe, at any rate. He *was* beginning to feel a little shaky. Looking at the papers in his brief-case, he wondered whether after all it would not be better to burn them. But abruptly he gave up the idea. He drew his chair over to the window and sat there; then he turned to his book once more.

He had got a quarter of the way through the book, which was a thin volume, when he found himself looking attentively out of the window. He had seen out of the corner of his eye some furtive movement in the ghostly moonlight below, and now his ears caught the sound of low chuckling. He put the book aside and pressed his face to the pane; then he silently opened the window and leaned out.

Yes, there was certainly a man prowling about below. Could it be the landlord? No, thought Mr. Hanley, for the fellow was creeping about too secretly for that. He fixed his eyes on the skulking shadow and watched, fascinated. The man was creeping forward in a straight line of shadow. But there should be no shadow, there, reflected Mr. Hanley—unless—— He looked up abruptly, and there, reaching up into the sky, barren, lifeless, he saw a gallows tree. He sat struck with the suddenness of the thing—he had thought the tree had been taken down, but perhaps he had misunderstood. How could these people leave the thing standing there?

The creeping figure had come to the foot of the gallows tree now, and it turned its face suddenly and looked up into the moonlight. Mr. Hanley jerked sharply back at sight of it—his heart was beating uncontrollably. The face below him looked suddenly familiar to him—it looked like the face of Herbert Altamount. He felt the blood throbbing in his veins, and his collar seemed suffo-

cating. He ran his finger uneasily along his collar, caressing his neck. He thought abruptly, Suppose Altamount *had* recognized him? And, worse, suppose Altamount had been struck too hard; perhaps he had . . . not recovered? Mr. Hanley brushed the thought away quickly; his hands were trembling as he put them once more on the sill of the window and bent to look out once again.

Then, as he looked down, Mr. Hanley saw that the creature below was looking squarely at him; even as Mr. Hanley watched, the thing in the shadow of the gallows tree began to move closer to the wall. Abruptly Mr. Hanley fell back with a strangled cry; *the thing was coming up!* He leaped backward, but before he could turn, the sound of mounting laughter reached him, and a shadow launched itself at him through the night.

TO THE man and woman in the kitchen below, there came the sudden sound of terrible laughter. The woman stood rooted; she looked at the man. Then together they ran up the stairs, and in terror they knocked on the door of Mr. Hanley's room. There was no answer; so they tried the door, and it moved. Abruptly the laughter stopped. The door fell open wide, and they saw Mr. Hanley.

He was huddled in the chair by the window, his head thrown back over the heavy arm of the chair, as if he had jerked himself from the window with terrible force. His face was twisted and contorted into the utmost horror, and the veins in his forehead stood out like great cords. His face was discolored. The mouth was wide, wrenched open, gasping for air. On his neck there were strangely darkening marks—as if he had been strangled! Then, as they stood there, Mr. Hanley's brief-case seemed to slide of itself off the bed, papers scattering from it, and for a moment a shadow crossed the moonlight entering at the window; then it was gone.

The woman and her husband backed quietly out of the room and ran hastily down the stairs, where they stood cowering in the hall.

"I told you," whimpered the woman. "I told you."

"Do you think he . . . saw?" asked the man.

Then, suddenly, before the woman could answer, there broke out from above, the utter cosmic sound of uncontrollable laughter!

"Oh! Oh!" whispered the woman in a terror-struck voice. She choked in her throat and leaned heavily on the man. "He was dead. *Dead!*" The laughter stopped as suddenly as it began.

There was an abrupt pounding on the front door. Neither the host nor his wife moved. The pounding was repeated, and then the man lurched forward, moving awkwardly. The woman came after him, slowly, terror-stricken.

The door opened and a constable stood there; behind him the host could see other figures.

"Are you the proprietor?" asked the constable.

The man nodded.

"We have traced a man here, a short dark-haired man, with a little black mustache. His name is Hanley, William Hanley."

"Upstairs," said the host, waving his head vaguely back toward the stairs. He wanted to say, "But's he's dead," but the words stuck in his throat.

"I'm sorry," said the constable, "but I have a warrant for his arrest for the murder of his cousin, Mr. Herbert Altamount, and the theft of some incriminating papers." He stepped forward briskly, looking inquiringly from the man to the woman. Addressing the man, he said, "Will you please lead the way?"

The Eyrie

(Continued from page 294)

appear in an issue. By the way, is Kirk Mashburn the same as W. K. Mashburn, Jr., who gave us such splendid stories as *Sola, Tony the Faithful* and *The Sword of Jean Lafitte?*" [Yes, this is the same man. He has simply shortened his name for publication purposes.—THE EDITORS.]

Robert E. Howard, himself an author of note, writes: "Congratulations on the appearance and excellence of the current WEIRD TALES. The make-up and all the illustrations are unusually good, and the contents are of remarkably uniform merit. That is what struck me—the high standard of all the stories in the issue. If I were to express a preference for any one of the tales, I believe I should name Derleth's *Those Who Seek*—though the stories by Smith, Long, Hurst and Jacobi could scarcely be excelled. In the latter's tale especially there are glimpses that show finely handled imagination almost in perfection—just enough revealed, just enough concealed. Smith's sweep of imagination and fantasy is enthralling, but what captivates me most is the subtle, satiric humor that threads its delicate way through so much of his work—a sly humor that equals the more subtle touches of Rabelais and Petronius. Yes, I consider the current magazine uniformly fine, of an excellence surprizing considering the fact that neither Lovecraft, Quinn, Hamilton, Whitehead, Kline nor Price was represented."

Writes Fred E. Ebel, of Milwaukee: "I haven't missed WEIRD TALES since the Paleozoic age! Your best serial is *The Wolf-Leader.* Here is for more and larger werewolves! Science-fiction is O. K. but keep it weird."

Readers, which story do you like best in this issue? Your favorite stories in the January WEIRD TALES, as shown by your letters and votes, are Clark Ashton Smith's fantasy, *The Monster of the Prophecy,* and the second installment of Gaston Leroux's serial, *The Haunted Chair.*

MY FAVORITE STORIES IN THE MARCH 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 Vengeance of Ixmal

(Continued from page 309)

past cycle of my being. I know that love is of that part of me that can never lie with dust!"

"You shall not lift the curse," Ixmal grated, stepping closer.

QUICKLY, fearfully, as if afraid of being cheated at the last moment of centuries of waiting, Tascala slipped her arms about Pembrooke's neck. A heavy, jewel-studded bracelet upon her wrist scratched his flesh cruelly at her sudden movement, so that he winced in pain. He felt the blood trickle from the wound down toward his shoulder.

"Blood!" Ixmal breathed into Tascala's ear, while he glared balefully and purposefully into Pembrooke's eyes over her shoulder. "There is something better here than love, Tascala!"

Pembrooke, numb under the more-than-natural force of the high priest's hypnotic eyes, could only stand helplessly with his arms about Tascala. He felt her stiffen in his embrace, saw her lips begin their hellish writhing, while Ixmal whispered abominations in her ear. He felt her icy breath coming closer on his neck.

A groan burst from Pembrooke's dry throat, weighted with all the bitterness of his disappointment and horror in that moment. A tremor shook Tascala at the sound. He saw her face turn upward, slowly, jerkily, as if there were a weight that bore upon her head.

Ixmal yelled a command into her ear that Pembrooke did not understand, but he felt Tascala's panting breath upon his throat. Then, as if whatever bond that held her had been burst, her lips moved swiftly toward him—and kissed him softly, full upon the mouth.

From Ixmal came one fiendish howl of frustration—choked in the middle, as if his throat were suddenly full of dust. And dust was Ixmal: so swiftly did he shrink and shrivel and subside into a tiny powdered heap at their feet that neither Pembrooke nor Tascala saw him vanish.

In his arms, Tascala looked into Pembrooke's face with all the glory of a soul set free shining in her eyes. Her lips clung to his with an abandonment of passion, and they were soft, and sweet—and *warm!* Her body was close to his, and it, too, was warm with the fire of love and life.

One instant they stood, locked in the embrace four centuries had denied; one instant, while Tascala sobbed, "Beloved!" Then she was gone.

Pembrooke was standing one moment with Tascala held against him; in the next, he looked stupidly and aghast at the empty circle of his arms, within which there was nothing but a few settling motes of dust that fluttered softly downward amidst the dying beams of the now unveiled moon. The dawn wind that crept in from across the desert stirred two little heaps of dust at his feet, sifting their particles gently across the top of what was once the great temple of Tapalapan. Littered ornaments—a golden fillet, set with one great emerald, a rough, bosselated and jeweled bracelet—lay dully with the dust.

"Tascala—Tascala!"

The cry was wrung in anguish from Pembrooke, who stared unseeing at his empty arms. He knew, now, that Ixmal had been right, and Tascala, as well as the priest, rested at last with the ashes of what had been Tapalapan.

WEARILY, brokenly, Pembrooke stumbled down the side of the ancient mound. Midway down the precipitous

slope, his ankle turned as the result of a careless step. Falling headlong, his forehead came in violent contact with the corner of an outcropping piece of stone. Limply, as if he had been a mere loose-jointed puppet, Pembrooke rolled and bounced to the bottom of the steep declivity, as dawn flared behind the distant mountain tops.

His companions, Doctor Whitaker and Greely (themselves strangely wan and weak), found him when the morning sun had climbed into the sky.

Pembrooke was one great mass of cuts and bruises; there was an angry contused wound upon his forehead, and his limbs were bent in abnormal and grotesque fashion. Doctor Whitaker dressed his cuts and tended his bruises as well as might be with the use of their first-aid kit; but it was all too apparent that Pembrooke was in dire need of attention that could not be given him in camp. Accordingly they set out for Santa Rosalia.

When noon breathed its hot breath upon the village, Pembrooke lay without moving, in a quiet room of Father Sebastiano's quarters. The priest watched and served, sharing his ministry with Greely and Doctor Whitaker. At length he shook his head.

"I am afraid, *Señores*," he whispered, "the doctor for whom we have sent to Celayos will not arrive in time, and I fear his skill would not suffice, even if he were here already. See how still this poor one lies, the vital spark so low he does not even moan."

The day wore wearily on; and sunset came before the doctor from Celayos. The fat village mayor stole into the room, to inquire again about the Señor Pembrooke. A breeze stirred, crept in from the desert.

Pembrooke, who had lain so still, without even a whimper passing the pale lips from which the priest now and again wiped the traces of a crimson trickle, suddenly moved his head. He made as if to extend his arms, though they responded but feebly to his efforts. Father Sebastiano bent over the bed, peering, and began to pray. Pembrooke whispered clearly above the priest's droning:

"I am coming—Tascala!" Then he was still again, and there was the seal of finality upon his stillness, now. One spark had died: or perhaps it but burned on, brighter, elsewhere. . . .

"Look!" hoarsely directed the mestizo mayor. His thick finger quivered, pointing at the wall above the bed. There was a faint shadow there, a shadow with the seeming of a slender, girlish outline. . . .

"There is a little tree in the courtyard, and the setting sun casts its shadow on the wall." Father Sebastiano's voice was sharper than it need have been: "Don" Tomás had made no comment upon the queerness of that shadow. The priest had looked for himself.

"Look!" again "Don" Tomás whispered: "Another shadow joins the first! *Tascala has found her lover*—the curse is lifted!"

But the sun slipped suddenly away; and whatever shadows there may have been upon the wall, they seemed to have melted into the dusk.

Outside, the breeze that had come with sunset rustled softly through the foliage in the courtyard. The rotund mayor of Santa Rosalia crossed himself, furtively watching the others in the silent room. From the strained look in Father Sebastiano's eyes, from the odd way in which the two *norte americanos* exchanged startled glances, "Don" Tomás knew that they had, all of them, heard alike.

Through the open windows, it seemed that the rustling in the leaves outside made a low, glad whispering:

"Tascala! At last, my Love!"

It may not have been the breeze that whispered.

The Wolf-Leader

By ALEXANDRE DUMAS

The Story Thus Far

THIBAULT, a French shoemaker, lived alone in a forest near Villers-Cotterets on the estate of the Baron of Vez. A good-looking man in his late twenties, Thibault had seen just enough of the world to make him discontented with his own station in life.

The Baron of Vez was an ardent huntsman. Following a stag one day, his dog pack lost the scent near Thibault's hut. Thibault sought to obtain the stag for himself, by poaching, but was found out, and escaped a severe whipping only by the intervention of a girl, Agnelette. The girl told Thibault quite frankly, after the Baron departed, that she wished to marry, and Thibault engaged himself to her.

But Thibault's rancor against the Baron was so great that he was willing to go to any length to get even with him. He had carelessly called upon the Devil to give the stag to him, and to his astonishment he found the stag tied inside his hut when he went home that night.

But the stag was a mild surprize in contrast to Thibault's second visitor, a huge black wolf that appeared in the hut in a very mysterious way. When the shoemaker raised a hatchet with an idea of killing the wolf, he was dumfounded to hear the beast speak. The strange creature gave Thibault to understand that the Devil was of a mind to bargain and would grant the man's desires in return for hairs from his head, one for the first wish, two for the second, four for the third and so on, doubling the number for every wish granted. The wolf then gave Thibault a ring in exchange for one the shoemaker was wearing, and the unholy pact was complete.

Thibault's ambition fired by the black wolf's promises, the shoemaker determined to forget Agnelette and marry Madame Polet, the wealthy young widow who owned the mill at Croyolles. But he found that Madame Polet was enamored of another, and in his rage he behaved so badly that she ordered the servants to put him out. Thibault escaped up a steep

*This remarkable werewolf novel, by Alexandre Dumas, *fils*, is not included in the published collections of Dumas' works in English, and will therefore be new to our readers, except those who have had the good fortune to read the story in the original French.

This story began in WEIRD TALES for August

hillside where the servants could not follow. "What can we do against a werewolf?" they asked their mistress.

Going home through the forest, Thibault was alarmed when a pack of wolves surrounded him, but he soon discovered that they were friendly. That night and subsequent nights they formed a guard around his hut, even hunting for deer and bringing him venison to eat.

One lock of Thibault's hair was now entirely red, but his envy of the nobility made him resolve to use his satanic power to the utmost, even if all his hair should be claimed by the Devil's color.

Returning from one of his escapades, guarded by his wolves, Thibault witnessed the wedding procession of his lost love, Agnelette, who marries Engoulevent, one of the retainers of the Baron of Vez. Maddened by jealousy, he drowns his sorrow in drinking at an inn.

Returning to his cabin, he is nearly run down by the Lord of Vauparfond, and expresses the wish that he might change places with the Lord of Vauparfond for twenty-four hours. No sooner has he uttered the wish than it is granted. Dragging into the hut his own body, into which the soul of the Lord of Vauparfond has been temporarily placed, Thibault in the body and clothes of the nobleman goes to keep an assignation with the Countess of Mont-Gobert. He is surprized by the Count and fatally wounded in a duel.

The twenty-four hours are up, and he and the Lord of Vauparfond exchange bodies just one minute before the Baron expires. Thibault wakes up to find himself in his cabin, while fierce flames are beating about him. The populace has set fire to his dwelling, and amid cries of "Death to the werewolf!" he dashes through the flames and escapes to join his pack of wolves in the forest.

He informs the Countess of Mont-Gobert who has killed her lover. To avenge her lover's death she stabs her husband and then commits suicide.

Thibault meets Agnelette in the woods and all his passion for her revives. She refuses to go away with him, and in a fit of anger he curses her and expresses the wish that Agnelette's husband shall speedily die. Agnelette flees in terror and Thibault watches her going, exclaiming to himself, "Ah! now I am indeed a lost and accursed soul!"

CHAPTER 22

Thibault's Last Wish

URGED in her flight by a hideous terror, and anxious to reach the village where she had left her husband with all speed possible, Agnelette, for the very reason that she was running so hastily, was forced by her failing breath to pause at intervals along the way. During these short spaces of rest she endeavored to reason with herself, trying to convince herself of the folly of attaching importance to words which could have no power in themselves, and which were dictated by jealousy and hatred, words which had by now been scattered to the winds, but notwithstanding all her mental arguments, she had no sooner regained her breath than she started off again at the same precipitate pace, for she felt she should know no peace until she had seen her husband again.

Best part of her way led through the forest, and near the wildest and most solitary enclosures, but she gave no thought to the wolves, which were the terror of every town and village within ten miles round. Only one fear possessed her, that of coming across her husband's dead body. More than once, as her foot struck against a stone or a branch, her heart stopped beating, and she felt as if her last breath had been drawn, while a sharp cold

seemed to enter her very vitals, her hair stood on end and her face grew wet with perspiration. At last, at the end of the long path she had been traversing, arched over by the trees, she saw ahead of her a vista of open country lying bathed in the soft silver light of the moon. As she emerged from the gloom into the light, a man, who had been concealed behind a bush in the hollow lying between the forest and the open country, sprang in front of her and took her in his arms.

"Ah! ah!" he said, laughing, "and where are you off to, Madame, at this hour of the night, and at this pace too?" Agnelette recognized her husband.

"Etienne! dear, dear Etienne," cried the young woman, throwing her arms round his neck. "How thankful I am to see you again, and to find you alive and well! Oh, my God, I thank Thee!"

"What, did you think, you poor little Agnelette," said Engoulevent, "that Thibault and his wolves had been making their dinner of me?"

"Ah! do not even speak of Thibault, Etienne! Let us fly, dear one, fly to where there are houses!"

The young huntsman laughed again. "Well, now then, you will make all the gossips of Préciamont and Vez declare that a husband is of no use at all, not even to restore his wife's courage."

"You are right, Etienne; but although I have just had the courage to come through these great dreadful woods, now that I have you with me and should feel reassured, I tremble with fear, and yet I know not why."

"What has happened to you? Come, tell me all about it," said Etienne, giving his wife a kiss. Then Agnelette told him how she had been attacked by the wolf, how Thibault had rescued her from its claws, and what had passed between them afterward. Engoulevent listened with the greatest attention.

"Listen," he said to Agnelette, "I am going to take you home and shut you up carefully with the grandmother, so that no harm may come to you; and then I shall ride over and tell my Lord of Vez where Thibault has taken up his quarters."

"Oh! no, no!" cried Agnelette, "you would have to ride through the forest, and there is no knowing what danger you might run."

"I will make a detour," said Etienne. "I can go round by Croyolles and Value instead of crossing the forest."

Agnelette sighed and shook her head, but made no further resistance; she knew that Engoulevent would not give in on this matter, and she reserved her strength to renew her entreaties when she was once indoors.

And in truth, the young huntsman only considered that he was doing his duty, for a great *battue* had been arranged for the next day in a part of the forest on the farther side from that on which Agnelette had met Thibault. Etienne, therefore, was bound to go without delay and report to his master the whereabouts of the wolf-leader. There was not too much of the night left for the work of re-arranging for the morrow's *battue*.

As they drew near Préciamont, Agnelette, who had not spoken for a while, decided that she had, during her silence, amassed a sufficient number of reasons to justify her in beginning her solicitations afresh, which she did with even more earnestness than she had put into her former arguments. She reminded Etienne that Thibault, even though he might be a werewolf, had, so far from hurting her, actually saved her life; and that after all, he had not abused his power when he had her in it, but had allowed her to leave him and rejoin her husband. And after that, to betray where he was to his mortal enemy, the Lord of Vez, was not performing a duty, but committing an act of

treachery; and Thibault, who would certainly get wind of this treachery, would never under similar circumstances show mercy to any one again.

Agnelette became quite eloquent as she pleaded Thibault's cause. But, when marrying Engoulevent, she had made no more secret of her former engagement to the shoemaker than she had of this last interview with him, and however perfect a confidence he had in his wife, Engoulevent was nevertheless not unsusceptible to jealousy. More than that, there existed an old grudge between the two men, ever since the day when Engoulevent had spied out Thibault in his tree, and his boar-spear in a neighboring bush. So he stood his ground, and though listening to Agnelette, continued to walk briskly toward Préciamont.

And so arguing together, and each insisting that he or she was in the right, they came to within a stone's throw of the first forest-fences. To protect themselves as far as possible from Thibault's sudden and unexpected assaults, the peasants had instituted patrol parties, who mounted guard at night as in times of war. Etienne and Agnelette were so pre-occupied with their discussion, that they did not hear the call of "Who goes there?" from the sentinel behind the hedge, and went walking on in the direction of the village. The sentinel seeing something moving in the darkness which to his prepossessed imagination appeared to be a monstrous form of some kind, and hearing no answer to his challenge, he prepared to shoot.

Looking up at that moment, the young huntsman suddenly caught sight of the sentinel, as the moonlight shone on the barrel of his gun. Calling out "Friend," he threw himself in front of Agnelette, flinging his arms round her, so as to make a shield of his body. But at the same instant the gun went off, and the unfortunate Etienne, giving one last sigh, fell forward without a groan against the wife he was clasping in his arms. The bullet had pierced his heart.

WHEN the people of Préciamont, on hearing the gun shot, came running up to the spot, they found Engoulevent dead, and Agnelette lying unconscious beside her husband. They carried her to her grandmother's, but she only came to her senses to fall into a state of despair which bordered on delirium, and which at last became almost madness. She accused herself of her husband's death, called him by name, begged the invisible spirits, which seemed to haunt her, even in the short intervals of slumber which her excited state of brain made possible, to have mercy upon him. She called Thibault's name, and addressed such heartbroken supplications to him that those about her were moved to tears. By degrees, in spite of the incoherence of her words, the real facts became evident, and it grew to be generally understood that the wolf-leader was in some way accountable for the unhappy accident which had caused poor Etienne's death. The common enemy was therefore accused of having cast a spell over the two unfortunate young creatures, and the animosity felt toward the former shoemaker became intensified.

In vain doctors were sent for from Villers-Cotterets and Ferté-Milon, Agnelette became worse and worse; her strength was rapidly failing; her voice, after the first few days, grew feebler, her breath shorter, although her delirium was as violent as ever, and everything, even the silence on the doctors' part, led to the belief that poor Agnelette would soon follow her husband to the grave. The voice of the old blind woman alone seemed to have any power to allay the fever. When she heard her grandmother speaking, she

grew calmer, the haggard staring eyes grew softer and suffused with tears; she would pass her hand over her forehead as if to drive away some haunting thought, and a sorrowful wandering smile would pass across her lips.

One evening, toward night, her slumber seemed to be more agitated and distressed than usual. The hut, feebly lit by a little copper lamp, was in semi-darkness; the grandmother sat by the hearth, with that immobility of countenance under which peasants and savages hide their strongest feelings. At the foot of the bed on which Agnelette lay, so worn and white that, had it not been for the regular rise and fall of her bosom with its troubled breathing, you might have taken her for dead, knelt one of the women, whom the Baron was paying to attend upon the widow of his young huntsman, engaged in telling her beads; the other was silently spinning with her distaff. All at once, the sick woman, who for some minutes past had been shivering at intervals, seemed to be fighting against some horrible dream, and gave a piercing cry of anguish. At that moment the door burst open, a man seemingly encircled by flames rushed into the room, leapt to Agnelette's bed, clasped the dying woman in his arms, pressed his lips upon her forehead, uttering cries of sorrow, then rushed out and disappeared.

The apparition had come and gone so quickly that it seemed almost like a hallucination, and as if Agnelette were endeavoring to repulse some invisible object as she cried out, "Take him away! take him away!" But the two watchers had seen the man and had recognized Thibault, and there was a clamoring outside, in the midst of which the name of Thibault could be distinguished.

Soon the clamor came nearer to Agnelette's hut, and those who were uttering the cries ere long appeared on the threshold; they were in pursuit of the wolf-leader. Thibault had been seen prowling in the neighborhood of the hut, and the villagers, warned of this by their sentinels, had armed thmeslves with pitchforks and sticks preparatory to giving him chase. Thibault, hearing of the hopeless condition in which Agnelette was, had not been able to resist his longing to see her once again, and at the risk of what might happen to him, he had passed through the village, trusting to the rapidity of his movements, had opened the door of the hut and rushed in to see the dying woman.

The two women showed the peasants the door by which Thibault had escaped, and like a pack that has recovered the scent they started afresh on his track with renewed cries and threats. Thibault, it need hardly be said, escaped from them and disappeared in the forest.

Agnelette's condition, after the terrible shock given her by Thibault's presence and embrace, became so alarming that before the night was over the priest was sent for; she had evidently now but a few hours longer to live and suffer. Toward midnight the priest arrived, followed by the sacristan carrying the cross, and the choir-boys bearing the holy water. These went and knelt at the foot of the bed, while the priest took his place at the head beside Agnelette. And now some mysterious power seemed to re-animate the dying woman. For a long time she spoke in a low voice with the priest, and as the poor child had no need of long prayers for herself, it was certain that she must be praying for another. And who was that other? God, the priest, and Agnelette alone knew.

CHAPTER 23

The Anniversary

As soon as Thibault ceased to hear the furious cries of his pursuers behind him, he slackened his pace, and the usual

silence again reigning throughout the forest, he paused and sat down on a heap of stones. He was in such a troubled state of mind that he did not recognize where he was, until he began to notice that some of the stones were blackened, as if they had been licked by flames; they were the stones of his own former hearth. Chance had led him to the spot where a few months previously his hut had stood.

The shoemaker evidently felt the bitterness of the comparison between that peaceful past and this terrible present, for large tears rolled down his cheeks and fell upon the cinders at his feet. He heard midnight strike from the Oigny church clock, then one after the other from the other neighboring village towers. At this moment the priest was listening to Agnelette's dying prayers.

"Cursed be the day!" cried Thibault, "when I first wished for anything beyond what God chooses to put within the reach of a poor workman! Cursed be the day when the black wolf gave me the power to do evil, for the ill that I have done, instead of adding to my happiness, has destroyed it for ever!"

A loud laugh was heard behind Thibault's back.

He turned; there was the black wolf himself, creeping noiselessly along, like a dog coming to rejoin its master. The wolf would have been invisible in the gloom but for the flames shot forth from his eyes, which illuminated the darkness; he went round the hearth and sat down facing the shoemaker.

"What is this?" he said. "Master Thibault not satisfied? It seems that Master Thibault is difficult to please."

"How can I feel satisfied?" said Thibault. "I, who since I first met you, have known nothing but vain aspirations and endless regrets? I wished for riches, and here I am in despair at having lost the humble roof of bracken under shelter of which I could sleep in peace without anxiety as to the morrow, without troubling myself about the rain or the wind beating against the branches of the giant oaks.

"I wished for position, and here I am, stoned and hunted down by the lowest peasants, whom formerly I despised. I asked for love, and the only woman who loved me and whom I loved became the wife of another, and she is at this moment cursing me as she lies dying, while I, notwithstanding all the power you have given me, can do nothing to help her!"

"Leave off loving anybody but yourself, Thibault."

"Oh! yes, laugh at me, do!"

"I am not laughing at you. But did you not cast envious eyes on other people's property before you had set eyes on me?"

"Yes, for a wretched buck, of which there are hundreds just as good browsing in the forest!"

"You thought your wishes were going to stop at the buck, Thibault; but wishes lead on to one another, as the night to the day, and the day to night. When you wished for the buck, you also wished for the silver dish on which it would be served; the silver dish led you on to wish for the servant who carries it and for the carver who cuts up its contents. Ambition is like the vault of heaven; it appears to be bounded by the horizon, but it covers the whole earth. You disdained Agnelette's innocence, and went after Madame Poulet's mill; if you had gained the mill, you would immediately have wanted the house of the Bailiff Magloire; and his house would have had no further attraction for you when once you had seen the Castle of Mont-Gobert.

"You are one in your envious disposition with the fallen Angel, your master and mine; only, as you were not clever enough to reap the benefit that might have

accrued to you from your power of inflicting evil, it would perhaps have been more to your interest to continue to lead an honest life."

"Yes, indeed," replied the shoemaker, "I feel the truth of the proverb, 'Evil to him who evil wishes.' But," he continued, "can I not become an honest man again?"

The wolf gave a mocking chuckle.

"My good fellow, the devil can drag a man to hell," he said, "by a single hair. Have you ever counted how many of yours now belong to him?"

"No."

"I can not tell you that exactly either, but I know how many you have which are still your own. You have one left! You see it is long past the time for repentance."

"But if a man is lost when but one of his hairs belongs to the devil," said Thibault, "why can not God likewise save a man in virtue of a single hair?"

"Well, try if that is so!"

"And, besides, when I concluded that unhappy bargain with you, I did not understand that it was to be a compact of this kind."

"Oh, yes! I know all about the bad faith of you men! Was it no compact then to consent to give me your hairs, you stupid fool? Since men invented baptism, we do not know how to get hold of them, and so, in return for any concessions we make them, we are bound to insist on their relinquishing to us some part of their body on which we can lay hands. You gave us the hairs of your head; they are firmly rooted, as you have proved yourself and will not come away in our grasp. . . . No, no, Thibault, you have belonged to us ever since, standing on the threshold of the door that was once there, you cherished within you thoughts of deceit and violence."

"And so," cried Thibault passionately, rising and stamping his foot, "and so I am lost as regards the next world without having enjoyed the pleasures of this!"

"You can yet enjoy these."

"And how, I pray?"

"By boldly following the path that you have struck by chance, and resolutely determining on a course of conduct which you have adopted as yet only in a half-hearted way; in short, by frankly owning yourself to be one of us."

"And how am I to do this?"

"Take my place."

"And what then?"

"You will then acquire my power, and you will have nothing left to wish for."

"If your power is so great, if it can give you all the riches that I long for, why do you give it up?"

"Do not trouble yourself about me. The master for whom I shall have won a retainer will liberally reward me."

"And if I take your place, shall I also have to take your form?"

"Yes, in the night-time; by day you will be a man again."

"The nights are long, dark, full of snares; I may be brought down by a bullet from a keeper, or be caught in a trap, and then good-bye riches, good-bye position and pleasure."

"Not so; for this skin that covers me is impenetrable by iron, lead or steel. As long as it protects your body, you will be not only invulnerable, but immortal; once a year, like all werewolves, you will become a wolf again for four and twenty hours, and during that interval you will be in danger of death like any other animal. I had just reached that dangerous time a year ago today, when we first met."

"Ah!" said Thibault, "that explains why you feared my Lord Baron's dogs."

"When we have dealings with men, we are forbidden to speak anything but the truth, and the whole truth; it is for them to accept or refuse."

"You have boasted to me of the power that I should acquire; tell me, now, in what that power will consist?"

"It will be such that even the most powerful king will not be able to withstand it, since his power is limited by the human and the possible."

"Shall I be rich?"

"So rich, that you will come in time to despise riches, since, by the mere force of your will, you will obtain not only what men can only acquire with gold and silver, but also all that superior beings get by their conjurations."

"Shall I be able to revenge myself on my enemies?"

"You will have unlimited power over everything which is connected with evil."

"If I love a woman, will there again be a possibility of my losing her?"

"As you will have dominion over all your fellow creatures, you will be able to do with them what you like."

"There will be no power to enable them to escape from the trammels of my will?"

"Nothing, except death, which is stronger than all."

"And I shall only run the risk of death myself on one day out of the three hundred and sixty-five?"

"On one day only; during the remaining days nothing can harm you, neither iron, lead, nor steel, neither water, nor fire."

"And there is no deceit, no trap to catch me, in your words?"

"None, on my honor as a wolf!"

"Good," said Thibault, "then let it be so; a wolf for four and twenty hours, for the rest of the time the monarch of creation! What am I to do? I am ready."

"Pick a holly-leaf, tear it in three pieces with your teeth, and throw it away from you, as far as you can."

Thibault did as he was commanded.

Having torn the leaf in three pieces, he scattered them on the air, and although the night till then had been a peaceful one, there was immediately heard a loud peal of thunder, while a tempestuous whirlwind arose, which caught up the fragments and carried them whirling away with it.

"And now, brother Thibault," said the wolf, "take my place, and good luck be with you! As was my case just a year ago, so you will have to become a wolf for four and twenty hours; you must endeavor to come out of the ordeal as happily as I did, thanks to you, and then you will see realized all that I have promised you. Meanwhile I will pray the lord of the cloven hoof that he will protect you from the teeth of the Baron's hounds; for, by the devil himself, I take a genuine interest in you, Friend Thibault."

And then it seemed to Thibault that he saw the black wolf grow larger and taller, that it stood up on its hind legs and finally walked away in the form of a man, who made a sign to him with his hand as he disappeared.

We say *it seemed to him,* for Thibault's ideas, for a second or two, became very indistinct. A feeling of torpor passed over him, paralyzing his power of thought. When he came to himself, he was alone. His limbs were imprisoned in a new and unusual form; he had, in short, become in every respect the counterpart of the black wolf that a few minutes before had been speaking to him. One single white hair on his head alone shone in contrast to the remainder of the somber-colored fur; this one white hair of the wolf was the one black hair which had remained to the man.

THIBAULT had scarcely had time to recover himself when he fancied he heard a rustling among the bushes, and the sound of a low, muffled bark. . . . He thought of the Baron and his hounds, and trembled. Thus metamorphosed into

the black wolf, he decided that he would not do what his predecessor had done, and wait till the dogs were upon him. It was probably a bloodhound he had heard, and he would get away before the hounds were uncoupled. He made off, striking straight ahead, as is the manner of wolves, and it was a profound satisfaction to him to find that in his new form he had tenfold his former strength and elasticity of limb.

"By the devil and his horns!" the voice of the Lord of Vez was now heard to say to his new huntsman a few paces off, "you hold the leash too slack, my lad; you have let the bloodhound give tongue, and we shall never head the wolf back now."

"I was in fault, I do not deny it, my lord; but as I saw it go by last evening only a few yards from this spot, I never guessed that it would take up its quarters for the night in this part of the wood and that it was so close to us as all that."

"Are you sure it is the same one that has got away from us so often?"

"May the bread I eat in your service choke me, my lord, if it is not the same black wolf that we were chasing last year when poor Marcotte was drowned."

"I should like finely to put the dogs on its track," said the Baron, with a sigh.

"My lord has but to give the order, and we will do so, but he will allow me to observe that we have still two good hours of darkness before us, time enough for every horse we have to break its legs."

"That may be, but if we wait for the day, l'Eveillé, the fellow will have had time to get ten leagues away."

"Ten leagues at least," said l'Eveillé shaking his head.

"I have got this cursed black wolf on my brain," added the Baron, "and I have such a longing to have its skin, that I feel sure I shall catch an illness if I do not get hold of it."

"Well then, my lord, let us have the dogs out without a moment's loss of time."

"You are right, l'Eveillé; go and fetch the hounds."

L'Eveillé went back to his horse, which he had tied to a tree outside the wood, and went off at a gallop, and in ten minutes' time, which seemed like ten centuries to the Baron, he was back with the whole hunting train. The hounds were immediately uncoupled.

"Gently, gently, my lads!" said the Lord of Vez, "you forget you are not handling your old well-trained dogs; if you get excited with these raw recruits, they'll merely kick up a devil of a row, and be no more good than so many turnspits; let 'em get warmed up by degrees."

And, indeed, the dogs were no sooner loose, than two or three got at once on to the scent of the werewolf, and began to give cry, whereupon the others joined them. The whole pack started off on Thibault's track, at first quietly following up the scent, and only giving cry at long intervals, then more excitedly and of more accord, until they had so thoroughly imbibed the odor of the wolf ahead of them, and the scent had become so strong, that they tore along, baying furiously, and with unparalleled eagerness in the direction of the Yvors coppice.

"Well begun is half done!" cried the Baron. "You look after the relays, l'Eveillé; I want them ready whenever needed! I will encourage the dogs. . . . And you be on the alert, you others," he added, addressing himself to the younger keepers; "we have more than one defeat to avenge, and if I lose this view halloo through the fault of any one among you, by the devil and his horns! he shall be the dogs' quarry in place of the wolf!"

After pronouncing these words of encouragement, the Baron put his horse to the gallop, and although it was still pitch-dark and the ground was rough, he kept

the animal going at top speed so as to come up with the hounds, which could be heard giving tongue in the lowlands about Bourg-Fontaine.

CHAPTER 24

Hunting Down the Werewolf

THIBAULT had got well ahead of the dogs, thanks to the precaution he had taken of making good his escape at the first note of the bloodhound. For some time he heard no further sound of pursuit; but, all at once, like distant thunder, the baying of the hounds reached his ears, and he began to feel some anxiety. He had been trotting, but he now went on at greater speed, and did not pause till he had put a few more leagues between himself and his enemies. Then he stood still and took his bearings; he found himself on the heights at Montaigu. He bent his head and listened—the dogs still seemed a long way off, somewhere near the Tillet coppice.

It required a wolf's ear to distinguish them so far off. Thibault went down the hill again, as if to meet the dogs; then, leaving Erneville to the left, he leaped into the little stream which rises there, waded down its course as far as Grimaucourt, dashed into the woods of Lessart-l'Abbesse, and finally gained the forest of Compiègne. He was somewhat reassured to find that, in spite of his three hours' hard running, the steel-like muscles of his wolf legs were not in the least fatigued. He hesitated, however, to trust himself in a forest which was not so familiar to him as that of Villers-Cotterets.

After another dash of a mile or so, he decided that by doubling boldly he would be most likely to put the dogs off the scent. He crossed at a gallop all the stretch of plain between Pierrefond and Mont-Gobert, took to the woods at the Champ Meutard, came out again at Vauvaudrand, regained the stream by the Sancères timber floatage, and once more found himself in the forest near Long-Pont.

Unfortunately for him, just as he reached the end of the Route du Pendu, he came across another pack of twenty dogs, which Monsieur de Montbreton's huntsmen was bringing up as a relay, for the Baron had sent his neighbor news of the chase. Instantly the hounds were uncoupled by the huntsmen as he caught sight of the wolf; for seeing that the latter kept its distance, he feared it would get too far ahead if he waited for the others to come up before loosing his dogs. And now began the struggle between the werewolf and the dogs in very earnest. It was a wild chase, which the horses, in spite of their skilled riders, had great difficulty in following, a chase over plains, through woods, across heaths, pursued at a headlong pace.

As the hunt flew by, it appeared and disappeared like a flash of lightning across a cloud, leaving behind a whirlwind of dust, and a sound of horns and cries which echo had hardly time to repeat. It rushed over hill and dale, through torrents and bogs, and over precipices, as if horses and dogs had been winged like Hippogriffs and Chimeras. The Baron had come up with his huntsmen, riding at their head, and almost riding on the tails of his dogs, his eye flashing, his nostrils dilated, exciting the pack with wild shouts and furious blasts, digging his spurs into his horse's sides whenever an obstacle of any kind caused it to hesitate for a single instant.

The black wolf, on his side, still held on at the same rapid pace; although sorely shaken at hearing the fresh pack in full pursuit only a short way behind him just as he had got back to the forest, he had not lost an inch of ground. As he retained

to the full all his human consciousness, it seemed to him impossible, as he still ran on, that he should not escape in safety from this ordeal; he felt that it was not possible for him to die before he had taken vengeance for all the agony that others made him suffer, before he had known those pleasures that had been promised him, above all—for at this critical moment his thoughts kept on running on this—before he had gained Agnelette's love.

At moments he was possessed by terror, at others by anger. He thought at times that he would turn and face this yelling pack of dogs, and, forgetting his present form, scatter them with stones and blows. Then, an instant after, feeling mad with rage, deafened by the death-knell the hounds were ringing in his ears, he fled, he leaped, he flew with the legs of a deer, with the wings of an eagle. But his efforts were in vain; he might run, leap, almost fly, the sounds of death still clung to him, and if for a moment they became more distant, it was only to hear them a moment after nearer and more threatening still. But still the instinct of self-preservation did not fail him; and still his strength was undiminished; only, if by ill luck, he were to come across other relays, he felt that it might give way. So he determined to take a bold course so as to out-distance the dogs, and to get back to his lairs, where he knew his ground and hoped to evade the dogs.

He therefore doubled for the second time. He first ran back to Puiseux, then skirted past Viviers, regained the forest of Compiègne, made a dash into the forest of Largue, returned and crossed the Aisne at Attichy, and finally got back to the forest of Villers-Cotterets at the lowlands of Argent. He trusted in this way to baffle the strategic plans of the Lord of Vez, who had, no doubt, posted his dogs at various likely points.

ONCE back in his old quarters Thibault breathed more freely. He was now on the banks of the Ourcq between Norroy and Trouennes, where the river runs at the foot of deep rocks on either side; he leaped up on to a sharp-pointed crag overhanging the water, and from this high vantage ground he sprang into the waves below, then swam to a crevice at the base of the rock from which he had leapt, which was situated rather below the ordinary level of the water, and here, at the back of this cave, he waited.

He had gained at least three miles upon the dogs; and yet scarcely another ten minutes had elapsed when the whole pack arrived and stormed the crest of the rock. Those who were leading, mad with excitement, did not see the gulf in front of them, or else, like their quarry, they thought they would leap safely into it; for they plunged, and Thibault was splashed, far back as he was hidden, by the water that was scattered in every direction as they fell into it one by one. Less fortunate, however, and less vigorous than he was, they were unable to fight against the current, and after vainly battling with it, they were borne along out of sight before they had even got scent of the werewolf's retreat. Overhead he could hear the tramping of the horses' feet, the baying of the dogs that were still left, the cries of men, and above all these sounds, dominating the other voices, that of the Baron as he cursed and swore.

When the last dog had fallen into the water, and been carried away like the others, he saw, thanks to a bend in the river, that the huntsmen were going down it, and persuaded that the Baron, whom he recognized at the head of his hunting-train, would only do this with the intention of coming up it again, he determined not to wait for this, and left his hiding-place. Now swimming, now leaping with agility from one rock to the other,

at times wading through the water, he went up the river to the end of the Crêne coppice.

Certain that he had now made a considerable advance on his enemies, he resolved to get to one of the villages near and run in and out among the houses, feeling sure that they would not think of coming after him there. He thought of Préciamont; if any village was well known to him, it was that; and then, at Préciamont, he would be near Agnelette.

It was now six o'clock in the evening; the hunt had lasted nearly fifteen hours, and wolf, dogs and huntsmen had covered fifty leagues at least. When, at last, after circling round by Manereux and Oigny, the black wolf reached the borders of the heath by the lane of Ham, the sun was already beginning to sink, and shedding a dazzling light over the flowery plain; the little white and pink flowers scented the breeze that played caressingly around them; the grasshopper was singing in its little house of moss, and the lark was soaring up toward heaven, saluting the eve with its song, as twelve hours before it had saluted the morn.

The peaceful beauty of nature had a strange effect on Thibault. It seemed enigmatical to him that nature could be so smiling and beautiful, while anguish such as his was devouring his soul. He saw the flowers and heard the insects and the birds, and he compared the quiet joy of this innocent world with the horrible pangs he was enduring, and asked himself, whether after all, notwithstanding all the new promises that had been made him by the devil's envoy, he had acted any more wisely in making this second compact than he had in making the first. He began to doubt whether he might not find himself deceived in the one as he had been in the other.

As he went along a little footpath nearly hidden under the golden broom, he suddenly remembered that it was by this very path that he had taken Agnelette home on the first day of their acquaintance; the day, when inspired by his good angel, he had asked her to be his wife. The thought that, thanks to this new compact, he might be able to recover Agnelette's love, revived his spirits, which had been saddened and depressed by the sight of the universal happiness around him. He heard the church bells at Préciamont ringing in the valley below; its solemn, monotonous tones recalled the thought of his fellow men to the black wolf, and of all he had to fear from them. So he ran boldly on, across the fields, to the village, where he hoped to find a refuge in some empty building.

As he was skirting the little stone wall of the village cemetery, he heard a sound of voices, approaching along the road he was in. He could not fail to meet whoever they might be who were coming toward him, if he himself went on; it was not safe to turn back, as he would have to cross some rising ground whence he might easily be seen; so there was nothing left for it but to jump over the wall of the cemetery, and with a bound he was on the other side. This graveyard as usual adjoined the church; it was uncared for, and overgrown with tall grass, while brambles and thorns grew rankly in places.

The wolf made for the thickest of these bramble bushes; he found a sort of ruined vault, whence he could look out without being seen, and he crept under the branches and hid himself inside. A few yards away from him was a newly dug grave; within the church could be heard the chanting of the priests, the more distinctly that the vault must at one time have communicated by a passage with the crypt. Presently the chanting ceased; and the black wolf, who did not feel quite at ease in the neighborhood of a church, and

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Coming Next Month

I HAD, it transpired, hit upon Mrs. Lorriquer's bedroom, and there plain before me—it was a light, clear night, and all the eight windows stood open to the starlight and what was left of a waning moon—lay Mrs. Lorriquer on the stub-posted mahogany four-poster with its tester and valance. The mosquito-net was not let down, and Mrs. Lorriquer, like most people in our climate, was covered, as she lay in her bed, only with a sheet. I could, therefore, see her quite plainly, in an excellent light.

But—that was not all that I saw.

For, beside the bed, quite close in fact, stood Simon Legrand, facing me, the clothes, the closely buttoned *surtout,* the spreading, flaring *de Joinville* scarf, fastened with the amazing brooch, the pock-marked, ill-natured face, the thick, black hair, the typical *croupier* mustache, the truculent expression; Simon Legrand, to the life.

And between him as he stood there, glaring truculently at me, intruding upon his abominable manifestation, and the body of Mrs. Lorriquer, as I glared back at this incredible configuration, there stretched, and wavered, and seemed to flow, *toward* him and *from* the body of Mrs. Lorriquer, a whitish, tenuous stream of some milky-looking material—like a waved sheet, like a great mass of opaque soap-bubbles, like those pouring grains of attenuated *plasma* described in *Dracula;* when in the dreadful castle in Transylvania, John Harker stood confronted with the materialization of that arch-fiend's myrmidons.

All these comparisons rushed through my mind, and, finally, the well-remembered descriptions of what takes place in the "materialization" of a "control" at a mediumistic *seance* when material from the medium floats toward and *into* the growing incorporation of the manifestation, building up the body through which the control expresses itself.

All this, I say, rushed through my mind with the speed of thought, and recorded itself so that I can easily remember the sequence of these ideas. But, confronted with this utterly unexpected affair, what I did, in actuality, was to pause, transfixed with the strangeness, and to mutter, "My God!" . . .

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April WEIRD TALES Out March 1

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thought that the road must now be clear, decided that it was time to start off again and to find a safer retreat than the one he had fled to in his haste.

But he had scarcely got his nose outside the bramble bush when the gate of the cemetery opened, and he quickly retreated again to his hole, in great trepidation as to who might now be approaching. The first person he saw was a child dressed in a white alb and carrying a vessel of holy water; he was followed by a man in a surplice, bearing a silver cross, and after the latter came a priest, chanting the psalms for the dead.

Behind these were four peasants carrying a bier covered with a white pall over which were scattered green branches and flowers, and beneath the sheet could be seen the outline of a coffin; a few villagers from Préciamont wound up this little procession. Although there was nothing unusual in such a sight as this, seeing that he was in a cemetery, and that the newly dug grave must have prepared him for it, Thibault, nevertheless, felt strangely moved as he looked on. Although the slightest movement might betray his presence and bring destruction upon him, he anxiously watched every detail of the ceremony.

THE priest having blessed the newly made grave, the peasants laid down their burden on an adjoining hillock. It is the custom in our country when a young girl, or young married woman, dies in the fullness of her youth and beauty, to carry her to the graveyard in an open coffin, with only a pall over her, so that her friends may bid her a last farewell, her relations give her a last kiss. Then the coffin is nailed down, and all is over. An old woman, led by some kind hand, for she was apparently blind, went up to the coffin to give the dead one a last kiss; the peasants lifted the pall from the still face, and there lay Agnelette.

A low groan escaped from Thibault's agonized breast, and mingled with the tears and sobs of those present. Agnelette, as she lay there so pale in death, wrapped in an ineffable calm, appeared more beautiful than when in life, beneath her wreath of forget-me-nots and daisies. As Thibault looked upon the poor dead girl, his heart seemed suddenly to melt within him. It was he, as he had truly realized, who had really killed her, and he experienced a genuine and overpowering sorrow, the more poignant since for the first time for many long months he forgot to think of himself, and thought only of the dead woman, now lost to him for ever.

As he heard the blows of the hammer knocking the nails into the coffin, as he heard the earth and stones being shovelled into the grave and falling with a dull thud on to the body of the only woman he had ever loved, a feeling of giddiness came over him. The hard stones he thought must be bruising Agnelette's tender flesh, so fresh and sweet but a few days ago, and only yesterday still throbbing with life, and he made a movement as if to rush out on the assailants and snatch away the body, which dead, must surely belong to him, since, living, it had belonged to another.

But the grief of the man overcame this instinct of the wild beast at bay; a shudder passed through the body hidden beneath its wolf skin; tears fell from the fierce blood-red eyes, and the unhappy man cried out: "O God! take my life, I give it gladly, if only by my death I may give back life to her whom I have killed!"

The words were followed by such an appalling howl, that all who were in the cemetery fled, and the place was left utterly deserted. Almost at the same moment,

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the hounds, having recovered the scent, came leaping in over the wall, followed by the Baron, streaming with sweat as he rode his horse, which was covered with foam and blood. The dogs made straight for the bramble bush, and began worrying something hidden there.

"Halloo! halloo! halloo!" cried the Lord of Vez, in a voice of thunder, as he leapt from his horse, not caring if there was any one or not to look after it; and drawing out his hunting-knife, he dashed toward the vault, forcing his way through the hounds. He found them fighting over a fresh and bleeding wolfskin, but the body had disappeared.

There was no mistake as to its being the skin of the werewolf that they had been hunting; for with the exception of one white hair, it was entirely black.

What had become of the body? No one ever knew. Only as from this time forth Thibault was never seen again, it was generally believed that the former sabot-maker and no other was the werewolf.

Furthermore, as the skin had been found without the body, and as from the spot where it was found a peasant reported to have heard some one speak the words: "O God! take my life! I give it gladly, if only by my death I may give back life to her whom I have killed," the priest declared openly that Thibault, by reason of his sacrifice and repentance, had been saved!

And what added to the consistency of belief in this tradition was, that every year on the anniversary of Agnelette's death, up to the time when the monasteries were all abolished at the Revolution, a monk from the Abbey of the Premonstratensians at Bourg-Fontaine, which stands half a league from Préciamont, was seen to come and pray beside her grave.

[THE END]

W. T.—9

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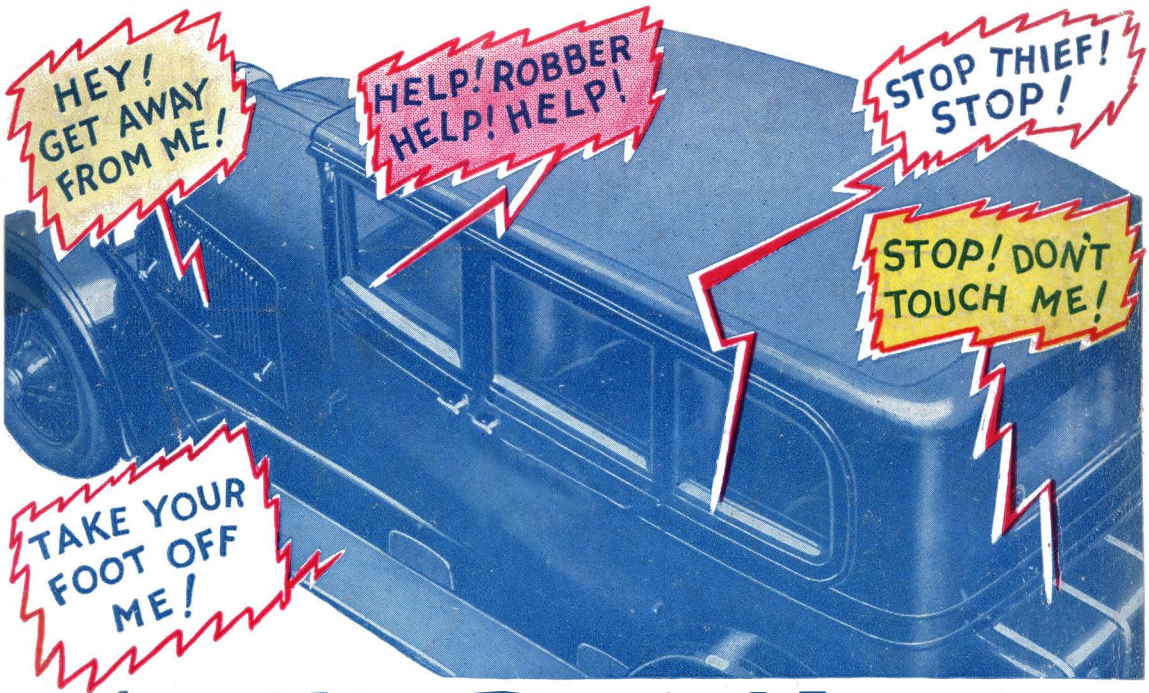

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