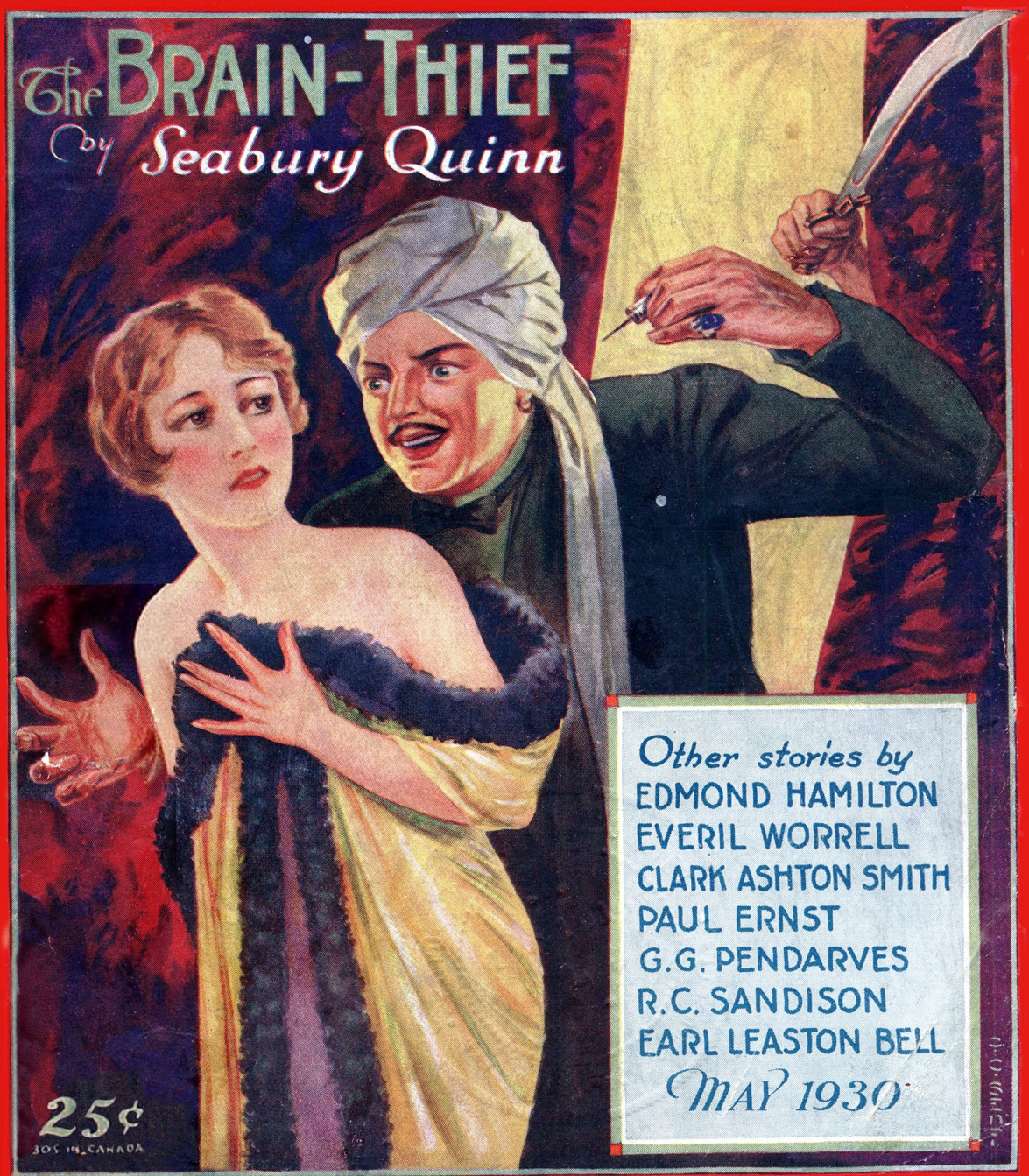
Weird Tales

The Unique Magazine



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Weird Tales

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A MAGAZINE of the BIZARRE and UNUSUAL

VOLUME XV NUMBER 5

Published monthly by the Popular Fiction Publishing Company, 2457 E. Washington Street, Indianapolis, Ind. Entered as second-class matter March 20, 1923, at the post office at Indianapolis, Ind., under the act of March 3, 1879. Single copies, 25 cents. Subscription, $2.50 a year in the United States, $3.00 a year in Canada. English office: Charles Lavell, 13, Serjeant's Inn, Fleet Street, E. C. 4, London. The publishers are not responsible for the loss of unsolicited manuscripts, although every care will be taken of such material while in their possession. The contents of this magazine are fully protected by copyright and must not be reproduced either wholly or in part without permission from the publishers.

NOTE—All manuscripts and communications should be addressed to the publishers' Chicago office at 840 North Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Ill.

FARNSWORTH WRIGHT, Editor.

Contents for May, 1930

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"WHERE do you think Poe and E. T. A. Hoffmann would take their stuff if they were alive today?" asks William Bolitho in his article on "Pulp Magazines" in the *New York World*. And he supplies, by inference, the answer: In WEIRD TALES, of course.

The pulp magazines have had few defenders, for it is the custom of snobbery to look down on them as something inferior in literary merit. It is refreshing, therefore, to see a recognized authority on contemporary literature rise to their defense. The pulp magazines, says Mr. Bolitho, "are printed on paper which in a short year is yellow; in five more cracks and crumbles, and by the time its first peruser is earning $40 a week and has a garage will have utterly disappeared in dust. As it is, it is harder to find a given out-of-print back number of any one of them than a first folio of Shakespeare. . . . I will distinguish them, roughly, into three unequal classes: the detective magazines, the adventure series and those of general fancy. . . . Those two we will for the moment leave for the third queer class; that is the most curious. It is composed of collections of short tales of fancy and imagination. A curious internal classification, well understood by the adepts, rules here. The range is, roughly, to use names: from Astounding Stories of Superscience, as the French would say, on the right, through Amazing Stories in the center, to the altogether admirable—that is my personal taste—WEIRD TALES on the extreme left of imagination, which adds proudly to its title The Unique Magazine.

"Now the real defense of this class of popular literature has to be explained. . . . Literature, like all the arts, at its worst and at its best, has this in common all through: it is an assistance to the imagination. At worst it is a prop, a crutch to the imagination, that allows not more than a walk, which is cumbersome, and which health finally discards. The highest reaches of art not only support you but by a mysterious internal working suffuse you like wine, as against crutches, to such a degree that in certain cases it may even stimulate into action an independent and original creative faculty itself. . . . In youth, especially, there are certain works which in themselves

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later, in cold, middle-aged blood, perhaps seem mere frameworks, but which eminently and delightfully serve as catalysts for the imagination, which in everyone is then at its boiling-point, to combine with the unutterable and endless beauty of the world. So these magazines. I know as well as anyone that they are in a certain proportion, as large as you like, the product of hack writers. What does that matter? The strange thing in these circles is that criticism is probably much more remorseless and sincere than in the more pretentious. For hack or not, whatever the pay, each of the pulp magazine authors has to produce interest; he has to hold his readers, not merely to show how clever he is, or he is lost.

"And the standard, the unjust literary standard itself, is surprizingly satisfied often with them. Make no mistake about that. In almost any one of them there are one or two that are really good, not merely catalytic, as I have said, but nourishing. Why should not this be so? Why, here is the folklore stratum, where the stoutest talents have always rooted themselves. Here and not in the artificial heat of tender little highbrow reviews is where one should look for the real new talent. . . .

"In this world there are chiefs, evidently. I am inclined to think they must be pretty good. There are Otis Adelbert Kline and H. P. Lovecraft, whom I am sure I would rather read than many fashionable lady novelists they give teas to; and poets too. Meditate on that, you who are tired of the strained prettiness of the verse in the great periodicals, that there are still poets here of the pure Poe school who sell and are printed for a vast public."

"I have been a reader of WEIRD TALES since the first issue," writes D. V. Simpson, of Marion, Ohio. "I have not missed more than one or two copies in all that time. Ever since I was a child I have been partial to stories of the type that you publish, but until the appearance of this magazine there were very few of them to be had. Of all those who write for WEIRD TALES—and most of your authors are fine—I think I prefer Lovecraft. I wish that his stories might appear much more often, and I think this is the prevailing sentiment among your readers."

A letter from Rose Niescik, of South Banchester, Connecticut, says: "*Behind the Moon* ended very well, and the whole adventure was very exciting. But I think that the new serial, *The Black Monarch,* will surpass it. It's very thrilling. I like that kind of story. *Thirsty Blades* was also very good. I can't wait till I receive the March issue."

A letter from Arthur L. Bayne, of Brooklyn, New York, says: "For the first time since I started reading WEIRD TALES I am enclosing the 'favorite stories' coupon. Beyond question *The Thought Monster* is a marvelous creation of the author. Your stories have always averaged high. I like particularly the interplanetary tales; strange lands and strange peoples are always engrossing. Let me again repeat that WEIRD TALES gives me the spice for my monthly literary meals."

(Continued on page 584)

Just A Twist Of The Wrist

Banishes Old-Style Can Openers to the Scrap Heap and BRINGS AGENTS UP TO $6 AND $8 IN AN HOUR

WOMEN universally detest the old-tyle can opener. Yet in every home in the land cans are being opened with it, often several times a day. Imagine how thankfully they welcome this new method—this automatic way of doiug their most distasteful job. With the Speedo can opening machine you can just put the can in the machine, turn the handle, and almost instantly the job is done.

End This Waste and Danger

You undoubtedly know what a nasty, dangerous job it is to open cans with the old-fashioned can opener. You have to hack your way along slowly—ripping a jagged furrow around the edge. Next thing you know, the can opener slips. Good night! You've torn a hole in your finger. As liable as not it will get infected and stay sore a long time. Perhaps even your life will be endangered from blood poisoning!

You may be lucky enough to get the can open without cutting yourself. But there's still the fact to consider that the ragged edge of tin left around the top makes it almost impossible to pour out all of the food. Yet now, all this trouble, waste and danger is ended. No wonder salesmen everywhere are finding this invention a truly revolutionary money maker!

A "Million Dollar" Can Opening Machine

The Speedo holds the can—opens it—flips up the lid so you can grab it—and gives you back the can without a drop spilled, without any rough edges to snag your fingers—all in a couple of seconds! It's so easy even a 10-year-old child can do it in perfect safety! No wonder women—and men, too—simply go wild over it! No wonder Speedo salesmen have sold to every house in the block and have made up to $10 an hour.

Generous Free Test Offer

Frankly, men, I realize that the profit possibilities of this proposition as outlined briefly here may seem almost incredible to you. So I've worked out a plan by which you can examine the invention and test its profits without risking one penny.

Get my free test offer while the territory you want is still open—I'll hold it for you while you make the test. I'll send you all the facts about salesmen making up to $100 and even more in a week. I'll also tell you about another fast selling item that brings you two profits. All you risk is a 2c stamp—so grab your pencil and shoot me the coupon right now.

CENTRAL STATES MFG. CO., Dept. E-2383
4500 Mary Avenue (Est. over 20 years) St. Louis, Mo.

AGENTS!

Full Time $265 in a Week

"Here is my record for first 30 days with Speedo: June 13, 60 Speedos; June 20, 84 Speedos; June 30, 192 Speedos; July 6, 288 Speedos; I made $265 in a week. M. Ornoff, Va.

PART TIME
14 Sales in 2 Hours

J. J. Corwin, Ariz., says "Send more order books. I sold first 14 orders in 2 hours."

SPARE TIME
Big Money Spare Time

Barb, W. Va., says: "Was only out a few evenings and got 20 orders."

SPEEDO

Central States Mfg. Co.
4500 Mary Ave., Dept E-2383,
St. Louis, Mo.

Rush me your FREE TEST OFFER.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____

( ) Check here if interested only in one for your home.

(Continued from page 582)

"I thought *The Haunted Chessmen* in the March W. T. a grand story —one of the very best chess stories I've read," writes Edmond Hamilton, author of *The Sun People* in this issue.

Robert L. Grantham, of Cainsville, Ontario, writes to the Eyrie: "I have been very disappointed in not reading more stories by Murray Leinster. I don't think any readers will ever forget his gripping story, *The Strange People*, which appeared in your magazine about two years ago. Let us have more stories by him if possible. Robert E. Howard is one of my favorite authors. I wish we had more stories of Solomon Kane by him. *The Haunted Chessmen*, by E. R. Punshon, is certainly your best story in the March issue, with Gaston Leroux's story, *In Letters of Fire*, a close second. Let us have more reprints from your early issues." [A new Solomon Kane story by Mr. Howard will appear in next month's issue—THE EDITOR.]

A. V. Pershing, of Kenova, West Virginia, writes to the Eyrie: "Give us stories of werewolves, the Oriental, China, Atlantis, ghost stories, and the type that Lovecraft wrote. Please reprint *Beyond the Door* by Paul Suter, and all of H. P. Lovecraft's stories, beginning with *The Rats in the Walls*. Give us, please, more stories from H. P. Lovecraft, Eli Colter and H. de Vere Stacpoole. Keep WEIRD TALES weird." [*The Rats in the Walls* will be the reprint story in next month's issue.—THE EDITOR.]

Readers, what is your favorite story in this issue of WEIRD TALES? The most popular story in the March issue was *The Haunted Chessmen by* E. R. Punshon. Second and third places went to *The Drums of Damballah* by Seabury Quinn, and *In Letters of Fire* by Gaston Leroux.

MY FAVORITE STORIES IN THE MAY 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:

Has True Love Come To You?

HAVE you ever experienced the *thrill* of true love or didn't you recognize it when it came? Can you tell when a person really loves you? Is your love-life unhappy because you don't know the vital, fundamental facts about life? Are there certain questions about your sex-life you would like to ask your family physician? If you want the mysteries of sex explained clearly and frankly, clip and mail the coupon below at once.

Learn the Truth About Life

How long must we be slaves to prudery? Will you let "false modesty" rob you of the right to understand the greatest force of life? Why continue to stumble along in ignorance—making costly mistakes that may wreck your happiness—when it is so easy to learn the truth about sex? Thanks to Dr. B. G. Jefferis, Ph.D., a large 512-page book—"Safe Counsel"—has been written that explains in easy-to-understand language the things you should know about your body, your desires and your impulses. It answers the questions that brides want to know on the eve of their wedding—that youth approaching manhood demand of their elders—that married people should know. The *real* facts are told—*frankly* and *truthfully*. Over 100 illustrations explain many subjects that have long puzzled you.

DO YOU KNOW

How to woo to win?
How to keep love aflaming?
What every girl should know?
Ethics of the unmarried?
How to perpetuate the honeymoon?
The mistakes every couple should avoid?
How to control your impulses?
What kind of women make the best wives?
What men love in women?
The kind of a man that always attracts women?
Why petting is dangerous?
How to fascinate the other sex?
What every young man should know?

Answers Questions Frankly

"Safe Counsel" discusses the most intimate problems of your life. This big book has 512 pages—10 Special Sections—109 Subdivisions—each treating a different phase of the sex question. Here are a few of the subjects discussed: The Power and Peculiarities of Love. Advice to Newly Married Couples. Anatomy and Physiology, Birth Control, Secrets of Marriage, Sex Determination. At What Age to Marry, When to Set the Wedding Date, How to Win and Hold Love, Mistakes Every Bridegroom Should Avoid, Private Words to Maidens, Answers to Sex Questions, The Art of Happy Marriages, Diseases and Disorders—What to Do, The Social Evil, Advice to Expectant Mothers. Childbirth—and scores of other intimate subjects. You owe it to yourself to get direct, first-hand knowledge on sex matters. Don't let another day pass until you get a copy of this great book.

It is impossible to give you all the facts about this wonderful book here, but if you would like to see a copy without risking a cent, just mail the coupon and a copy will be sent at once.

SEND NO MONEY
Simply Mail the Coupon—

Don't send any now. Just clip and mail the coupon. We will send the regular $4.00 Gift Edition of "Safe Counsel" by return mail. When it arrives hand the postman the Special Reduced Price of only $1.98, plus postage. Read the book for 5 days. If not satisfied, return it and your money will be refunded. You take no risk. So order now!

MAIL THIS COUPON NOW

FRANKLIN PUBLISHING COMPANY
800 No. Clark St., Dept. 8601, Chicago, Ill.

Please send me a copy of the $4.00 Gift Edition of "Safe Counsel" in a plain wrapper marked "Personal." I will pay the postman only $1.98, plus postage, upon arrival. Although I am benefiting by this special reduced offer, I may return the book within 5 days, if not satisfied and you agree to refund my money.

Name_____

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If you may be out when the postman calls send $2.00 cash with order and we will pay the postage.

Price outside of U.S.—$2.50, cash with order.

Shadows on the Road

By **ROBERT E. HOWARD**

Nial of Ulster, welcome home!
What saw you on the road to Rome?—
  Legions thronging the fertile plains?
Shouting hordes of the country folk
  With the harvest heaped in their groaning wains?
Shepherds piping under the oak?
Laurel chaplet and purple cloak?
  Smokes of the feasting coiled on high?
Meadows and fields of the rich, ripe green
  Lazing under a cobalt sky?
Brown little villages sleeping between?
What saw you on the road to Rome?
"Crimson tracks in the blackened loam,
  "Skeleton trees and a blasted plain,
  "A heap of skulls and a child insane,
  "Ruin and wreck and the reek of pain
"On the wrack of the road to Rome."

Nial, what saw you in Rome?—
  Purple emperors riding there,
Down aisles with walls like marble foam,
  To the golden trumpet's mystic flare?
  Dark-eyed women who bind their hair,
As they bind men's hearts, with a silver comb?
  Spires that cleave through the crystal air,
  Arch and altar and amaranth stair?
Nial, what saw you in Rome?
"Broken shrines in the sobbing gloam,
  "Bare feet spurning the marble flags,
"Towers fallen and walls digged up,
  "A woman in chains and filthy rags.
"Goths in the Forum howled to sup,
"With an emperor's skull for a drinking-cup.
"The black arch clave to the broken dome.
  "The Coliseum invites the bat,
  "The Vandal sits where the Cæsars sat;
"And the shadows are black on Rome."

Nial, Nial, now you are home,
Why do you mutter and lonely roam?
  "My brain is sick and I know no rest;
  "My heart is stone in my frozen breast,
  "For the feathers fall from the eagle's crest
"And the bright sea breaks in foam—
  "Kings and kingdoms and empires fall,
  "And the mist-black ruin covers them all,
  "And the honey of life is bitter gall
"Since I traveled the road to Rome."

NEXT MONTH

Another great collection of fine stories is scheduled for the June issue of WEIRD TALES, on sale May 1.

The Priestess of the Ivory Feet

by Seabury Quinn

An utterly strange story about a sinister love-cult and a kiss which meant death for him who gave it.

In the Borderland

by Pedro Diaz

A wholly strange and unusual thrilling tale of the electric chair— a weird story of extraordinary interest and fascination.

Haunted Hands

by Jack Bradley

The hands of Tchianski the pianist were the hands of a killer—a gruesome and powerful story of diabolism.

The Moon of Skulls

by Robert E. Howard

A powerful story of mystery and horror in the nightmare valley of Negari; a tale of a mad people, and Nakura, God of the Skull—by the author of "Skull-Face" and "The Shadow Kingdom."

James Lamp

by E. F. Benson

Another fine tale by one of the best-known British writers of weird stories.

The Empty Road

by Wallace West

A weird and thrilling tale about a man who was able to remember the future as well as the past.

The Planet of Horror

by Wilford Allen

The weirdest interplanetary story ever written—about a strange horror that lurked in the air-lanes between the planets.

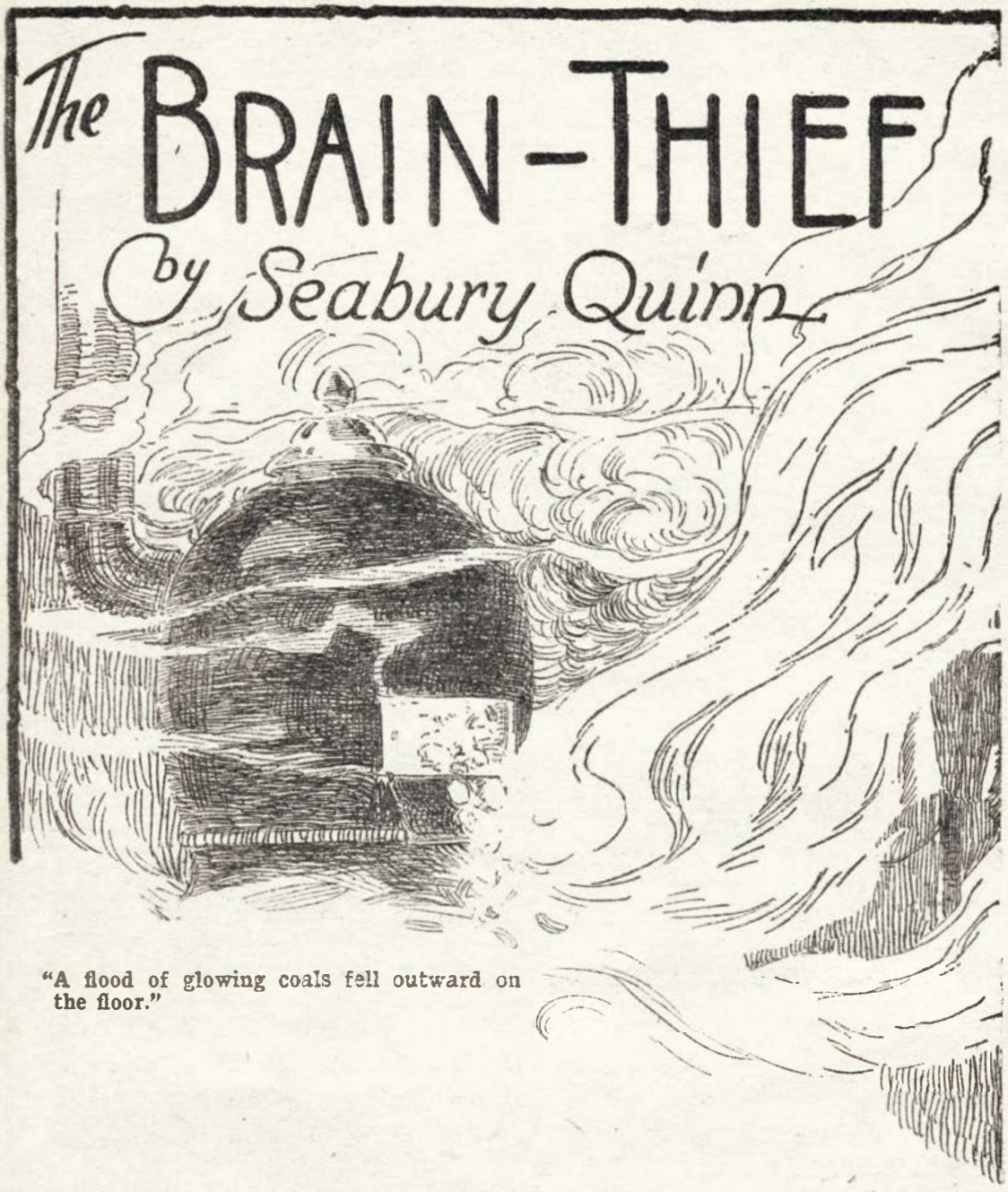
These are some of the super-excellent stories that will appear in the June issue of WEIRD TALES.

June Issue on Sale May 1

Subscription Rates: $2.50 a year in U. S. or possessions; Canadian $3.00: Foreign $3.50.
WEIRD TALES, 840 N. Michigan Ave. Chicago, Ill.

The BRAIN-THIEF

by Seabury Quinn



"A flood of glowing coals fell outward on the floor."

"*TIENS, Monsieur*, you amaze me, you astound me; I am astonished, I assure you. Say on, if you please; I am entirely attentive." Jules de Grandin's voice. vibrant with interest, came to me as I closed the front door and walked down the hall toward my consulting-room.

"*Holà*, Friend Trowbridge," he hailed as his quick ear caught my step outside, "come here, if you please; there is something I would have you hear, if you can spare the time."

The tall young man, prematurely gray at the temples, seated opposite de Grandin rose as I entered the study and greeted me with an air of restraint.

"Oh, how d'ye do?" I growled grudgingly, then turned my back on the visitor as I looked inquiringly at de Grandin. If there was one person

more than another whom I did not desire my roof to shelter, it was Christopher Norton. I'd known the cub since his first second of life, had tended him for measles, whooping-cough and chicken-pox, had seen him safely through adolescence, and was among the first to wish him luck when he married Isabel Littlewood. Now, like every decent man in the city, I had no desire to see any of him, except his back, and that at as great a

distance as possible. "If you'll excuse me——" I began, turning toward the door.

"*Parbleu,* that is exactly what I shall not!" de Grandin denied. "I know what you think, my friend; I know what everyone thinks, but I shall make you and all of them change your minds; yes, by damn, I swear it! Come, good friend, be reasonable. Sit and listen to the story I have heard, suspending your judgment meantime.

"Say it again, young *Monsieur,*" he ordered the visitor. "Relate your so pitiful tale from the beginning, that Dr. Trowbridge may know as much as I."

There was such a look of distress on young Norton's face as he looked half pleadingly, half fearfully at me that, had he been anything but the thoroughgoing scoundrel he was, I could have found it in my heart to be sorry for him. "It seems Isabel and I have been divorced," he began, almost tentatively. "I—I suppose I wasn't as good to her as I might have been——"

"You *suppose,* you confounded young whelp!" I burst out. "You *know* you treated that girl as no decent man would treat a dog! You know perfectly well you broke her heart and every promise you made her at the altar—you smashed her life and betrayed her confidence and the confidence of every misguided friend who trusted you——" I choked with anger, and wheeled furiously on de Grandin.

"Listen to me," I ordered. "I don't know what this good-for-nothing young reprobate has been telling you, but *I* tell you whatever he's said is a pack of lies—lies from beginning to end. I've known him all his life—helped him begin breathing thirty years ago by slapping his two-seconds-old posterior with a wet towel—and I've known the girl he married all her life, too. He and she were born within a city block of each other, less than a month apart. Their parents were friends, they went to school together and played together, and were boy and girl sweethearts. When they finally married, all us old fools who'd watched them grow from childhood swarmed round and gave them our blessing. Then, by George, before they'd been married a year, this young jackanapes showed himself in his true colors. He abused her, beat her, finally deserted her and ran off with his best friend's wife. If that's the sort of story you've listened to, I'm surprized——"

"*Cordieu,* surprized you most assuredly shall be, my friend, but not as you think," de Grandin interrupted. "Be good enough to seize your tongue-tip between thumb and forefinger while the young *Monsieur* concludes his story."

"I don't expect you to believe me, sir," young Norton began again; "I don't know I'd believe such a story if it were told me—but it's true, all the same. As far as I can remember, the last time I saw Isabel was this morning when I left for the office. We'd had a little misunderstanding—nothing serious, but enough to put us both in a huff—and I stopped at Caminelli's and bought some roses as a peace-offering on my way home tonight.

"I fairly ran the last half-block to the house, and didn't wait for the maid to let me in. It was when I got in the hall I first noticed changes. Most of the old furniture was gone, and what remained was standing in different places. I thought, 'She's been doing a lot of house-cleaning since this morning,' but that was all. I was too anxious to find her and make up, you see.

"I called, 'Isabel, Isabel!' once or twice, but no one answered. Then I ran upstairs."

He paused, looking pleadingly at me, and the half-puzzled, half-frightened look which had been on his face throughout his recital deepened.

"There was a nurse—a nurse in

hospital uniform—leaving the room as I ran down the upper hall," he continued slowly. "She looked at me and smiled, and said, 'Why, how nice of you to bring the flowers, Mr. Norton. I'm sure they'll be delighted.'

"That 'they' didn't mean anything to me then, but a moment later it did. On the bed, with a little, new baby cuddled in the curve of her elbow, lay Betty Baintree! Try and realize that, Dr. Trowbridge; Betty, Jack Baintree's wife, whom I'd last seen at the Colony Country Club dance last Thursday night, was lying in bed in my house, a young baby in her arms!

"She greeted me familiarly. 'Why, Kit, dear,' she said, 'I didn't expect you so soon. Thanks for the flowers, honey.' Then: 'Come kiss baby; she's been restless for her daddy the last half-hour.'

"It was then she seemed to notice the look of blank amazement on my face for the first time. 'Kit, boy, whatever is the matter?' she asked. 'Don't you——'

" 'Wha—what are *you* doing here, Betty?' I managed to gasp. 'Isabel—where is she?'

" '*Isabel?*' she echoed incredulously. 'What's got into you, dear—what makes you look so strangely? Haven't you any greeting for your wife and baby?'

" 'My—wife—and—baby?' I stammered. 'But——'

"I don't know just what happened next, sir. I've a confused recollection of staggering from that accursed room, stumbling down the stairs and meeting the nurse, who looked at me as though she'd seen a ghost, then tottering toward the door and running, hatless and coatless, to my mother's house in Auburndale Avenue. I ran up the steps, tried the door and found it locked. Then I almost beat in the panels with my fists. A strange maid, not old Sadie, answered my frantic summons and looked at me as though she suspected my reason. The family occupying the house was named Bronson, she told me. They'd lived there for the past two years—'*since shortly after the widow Norton's death.*'

" 'Am I mad, or is this all some horrible nightmare?' I asked myself as I turned once more toward my home, or rather toward the house which had been my home this morning.

"It wasn't a dream, as I assured myself when I returned and found Betty crying hysterically in bed with the nurse trying to comfort her and looking poisoned daggers at me as I came in the door.

"I GOT my hat and coat and wandered about town looking for someone I knew—someone who might offer me a ray of comforting light to guide me through the terrible fog into which I seemed to have plunged. Half a block from home I met Dr. Raymond, of the Presbyterian Church, whom I'd known since I was a lad in his Sunday School's infant class. I spoke to him, tried to stop him, but he passed me without a sign of recognition. Either he cut me dead or failed to see me, as though I'd been a disembodied spirit.

"Finally, I managed to locate Freddy Myers. He and I were in high school and college together, and had always been good friends. He let me in, but that was about all. Not a word of greeting, save a chilly 'How do you do?' Not a smile, not even a handshake did he offer me, and he remained standing after I'd come into the hall and made no move to take my hat and coat or invite me to be seated.

"I put the proposition squarely up to him; told him what I'd just been through, and asked him for God's sake to tell me where Isabel was. The news of my mother's death two years before was shock enough, but Isabel's disappearance—Betty Baintree in my house, and the baby—I was like an earthman suddenly set down on the moon.

"For a while Fred listened to me as he might have listened to the ravings of a drunken man; then he asked me if I were trying to kid him. When I assured him I was sincere in my questions, he grew angry and told me, just as you have, Dr. Trowbridge, how I'd abused Isabel, how my disgraceful amours with other women had finally forced her to divorce me, and how I was ostracized by every decent man who'd known me in the old days. Finally, he ordered me out and told me he'd punch my face if I ever spoke to him again.

"I don't know what to think, sir. Freddy's abuse was so genuine, his anger so manifestly sincere and his scorn so patently righteous that I knew it couldn't all be some ghastly practical joke of which I was the victim. Besides, there was the strange maid in Mother's house and the news of Mother's death—*that* couldn't have been arranged, even if Isabel and Betty and Freddy had joined in a conspiracy to punish me for the burst of nasty temper I showed this morning.

"For a little while I thought I'd gone crazy and all the astonishing things which seemed to have happened were only the vagaries of a lunatic. Indeed, sir, I'm not sure I'm sane, even yet—I hope to God I'm not! But what am I to do? Can't anybody explain the situation to me? Suppose you found yourself in my place, sir." He turned appealing, haunted eyes on me.

"Then I remembered hearing someone tell of the wonderful things Dr. de Grandin did," he concluded. "I'd been told he'd corrected maladjusted destinies as though by magic, sometimes; so I've come here as a last resort.

"You're my last hope, Dr. de Grandin," he finished tragically. "I don't know, except by inference and such reconstruction of events as I can make from the crazy, meaningless things I've seen and heard tonight, what's happened, but one thing seems certain: For the last two years time has stood still for me. There's been a slice of two years carved right out of my memory, and all the terrible things which have occurred during that period are a sealed book to me. Can't you do something for me, sir? If you can't, for God's sake, send me to a lunatic asylum. I don't know just what sins I've committed, but even though I've committed them unconsciously, the uncertainty of it all is driving me to madness, and an asylum seems the only refuge left."

Jules de Grandin brushed the tightly waxed ends of his small blond mustache with the tip of a well-manicured forefinger. "I think we need not consider the padded cell as yet, my friend," he encouraged. "At present I am inclined to prescribe a stiff dose of Dr. Trowbridge's best brandy for you—and a like potion for myself.

"And now, *Monsieur,*" he continued as he drained the final drop of cognac from his goblet, "I would suggest that you take the medicine I shall prepare, then go to bed—Friend Trowbridge has a spare chamber for your accommodation."

For a few moments he busied himself in the surgery, returning with a beaker of grayish, cloudy liquid, which young Norton tossed off at a gulp.

TEN minutes later, with my unwelcome guest soundly sleeping in my spare bedroom, de Grandin took up a pencil and pad of note-paper and turned to me. "Tell me, *mon vieux,*" he ordered, "all you can of this so unfortunate young man's domestic tragedy."

"Humph," I retorted, still smarting at the generous use he had made of my hospitality, "there's precious little to tell. Kit Norton is a rotter from the backbone out; there's not an ounce of decency in his whole make-up. The girl he married was one of

the finest young women in the city, absolutely above reproach in every way, and they seemed ideally happy for a little time; then, without a moment's warning, his whole nature seemed to change. He became an utter sot, found fault with everything she did, and blamed her for his business reverses—he had plenty of 'em, too, for he began to neglect his real estate office at the same time he began neglecting his wife—and it wasn't long before his affairs with other women became the scandal of the town. The climax came when he and Betty Baintree eloped.

"Norton and Frank Baintree had been inseparable friends from boyhood. Frank married Betty a short time after Kit and Isabel were married, and the couples continued the friendship. When Kit and Betty ran off, of course, the lid blew off the whole rotten mess. It was then we all realized Kit's contemptible conduct toward Isabel was all part of a deliberately planned scheme to force her to divorce him—and the proof of it was that Betty had acted toward Frank just as Kit had acted toward Isabel for about the same period. There's no doubt of it, the brazen pair had conspired to force a divorce so they could be free to marry, and when their plans failed to work, they had the effrontery to elope, leaving identical notes with their deserted partners. It's an unsavory business from start to finish, de Grandin, and I wish you hadn't gotten mixed up in it, for——"

"*Non,* let us not be too hasty, Friend Trowbridge," the little Frenchman interrupted. "See, you have already given me much of importance to think of. Had not Madame Betty's conduct been identical with that of Monsieur Christopher, I might have seen a reason for it all; as it is—*eh bien,* I know not quite what to think. Such cases, however, are not altogether unknown. Once before I have seen something like this. A certain tradesman in Lyons—a draper, he was—left his home for the shop one morning, and was heard from no more. Five years passed, and he was thought dead by all who knew him, when *pouf!* where should he be found but living in Marseilles, happy and respectable as could be, with another wife and a family of fine, healthy children? In Lyons he had been a draper; in Marseilles he was a bricklayer—a trade, by the way, for which he had no apparent ability in his former life. Maurice Simon, his name was, but in Marseilles he knew himself only as Jean Dufour. Every test was made to prove him a malingerer, but it seemed established beyond all reasonable doubt that the unfortunate man was actually suffering a split consciousness—all memory of his former life in Lyons was completely obliterated from his mind, and his wife and children were utter strangers to him. Reproaches and argument alike left him unmoved. 'I am Jean Dufour, bricklayer, of Marseilles,' he repeated stubbornly. At last they managed to convince him of his identity. The realization of what he had done, how he had wrecked two women's lives and the lives of his children, drove him mad. He died raving in a hospital for the insane."

"But that can't possibly be the case here," I expostulated. "We know——"

"*Pardonnez-moi,* we know nothing; even less," de Grandin denied. "Come, let us go."

"Go?" I echoed. "Go where?"

"To interview Madame Betty, of course," he returned coolly. "I may be wrong, but unless I am more mistaken than I think, we may find interesting developments at her home."

Grumbling, but with my curiosity piqued, I rose to accompany him to the pretty little cottage where Kit Norton had taken his bride three years before.

"It is most strange," he muttered as we passed through the quiet

streets. "It seems hardly likely the poor Monsieur Christopher should have suffered the same fate. And yet——" He broke off musingly.

"What's that?" I asked sharply, annoyed at his persistent sympathy for young Norton.

"I did but think aloud," he returned. "The unfortunate gentleman of Lyons, of whom I spoke earlier in the evening—his aberration was an oddly tangled one. Investigations by the police showed that several days before he deserted his family and set out for Marseilles, he had an altercation with a certain fortune-telling man from the East; indeed, he had gone so far as to tweak his nose, and the Oriental had pronounced a curse of forgetfulness on him."

As we paused before the cottage gate a long roadster, driven as though contending for a racing-trophy, dashed past us and stopped at the curb with a screeching of sharply applied brakes. A moment later its occupant leaped out and ran at breakneck speed up the brick path leading to Norton's front stoop. "Lesterdale!" I exclaimed in surprize.

"Eh, what do you say?" de Grandin asked.

"That's Lesterdale, the best nerve man in the city," I responded. "Wonder what brings him here?"

"Let us see," the Frenchman returned matter-of-factly. "The house is open. Let us enter."

Dr. Lesterdale had a case worthy of all his skill, we discovered almost as soon as we marched unbidden into Norton's cottage.

Betty Norton crouched in her bed, her knees drawn up, her chin resting on them, and her arms flailing the unresisting air with the fury of the grand movement stage of hysteria. As we paused at the bedroom door we caught a glimpse of her tear-smeared face as she stared wildly about the room with wide, horror-numbed eyes. "Frank," she shrieked, "oh, Frank my love, where are you?"

"Doctor," she bent a terrified look on Lesterdale, "I dreamed—I thought I was Kit Norton's wife, that I was the mother of—oh, say it isn't true, Doctor."

"*Tiens,* what is this?" de Grandin muttered. "Has she, too, emerged from a state of suspended memory?"

Lesterdale's eyes were cool with professional unconcern. Like everyone else in the city he knew the scandal of Betty's divorce and remarriage, and had he been there in any capacity other than that of physician, I could well imagine how his glance would have been blank with cold contempt as he looked at the pretty woman contorted on the bed. "Water!" he ordered shortly of the terrified nurse.

A moment later he dissolved a small white tablet in the half-filled tumbler she brought, plunged the nozzle of his hypodermic into the mixture and barked another order. "Alcohol—sponge—in the case yonder," he snapped.

The nurse got the alcohol and a cotton sponge from his kit and swabbed Betty's left arm.

The needle pierced the girl's delicate skin and I saw a blister rise as the morphia went home before the syringe-plunger's pressure.

"See the child has substitute feedings—dextri-maltose, milk and water, Wilson's formula No. 2—can't have it nurse with the mother full o' morphine. Call me if she kicks up another row." Lesterdale glanced appraisingly at Betty, noted the narcotic already stealing over her, and turned toward the door. "She ought to be quiet for the rest of the night," he added over his shoulder.

"Oh, hullo, Trowbridge," he called as he recognized me by the door. "What's up, did they rout you out, too? Devil of a note, dragging a man from the bridge table to calm a conscience-stricken female. What?"

"But do you think it's just an attack of conscience?" I countered. "Mightn't it be a case of puerperal insan——"

"No," he cut in. "Not even lactational neurosis; no symptom of it. It's hysteria, pure and simple, or"—he smiled acidly—"more simple than pure, I'd say, considering who's having it. Don't see how it happened, but something's awakened the little strumpet's conscience, and it's hurting her like the devil. Good-night," he nodded shortly as he passed down the hall without a backward glance.

"*Mordieu,* he is hard, that one; hard like a nail," de Grandin murmured. "A good neurologist he may be, Friend Trowbridge, but I think he is also a monumental fool. Let us interrogate the *garde-malade.*"

The nurse recognized me with a start of surprize as we edged into the room. "Mr. Norton called at my office, and——" I began, but she cut me short.

"Oh, he did, did he?" she returned sourly. "I should think he would, after what he's done. He——"

"Slowly, *Mademoiselle,* if you please," de Grandin urged. "Our perceptions are dull, and you go too fast. What, precisely, did Monsieur Norton do?"

The girl stared at him. "What?" she echoed. "Plenty. He came home from the office with a beautiful bouquet, then pretended he didn't know his own wife and baby, and went flying out of the house like a crazy man. He drove the poor thing to this——" she glanced compassionately at Betty. "He hadn't been gone half an hour when she went completely to pieces and started raving like a lunatic!"

"Ah?" de Grandin tweaked his mustache meditatively. "Now we begin to make progress. What, if you please, was the exact nature of her delusion?"

The nurse considered a moment. Years of hospital training had taught her accurate observation where symptoms were concerned, and professional habit was stronger than womanly anger. "She began crying as though her heart would break," she replied slowly; "then, when he came back the second time and stared wildly in the room before rushing off again, she seemed to change completely. I've never seen anything like it. One moment she was crying and wringing her hands, begging Mr. Norton to recognize her, the next she was like a different woman. Just for a moment she stopped crying, and a sort of dazed, surprized look came into her eyes; then she looked round the room as though she'd never seen it before—like a casualty victim coming out of the ether in the emergency ward," she finished with professional clarity.

"This dazed, bewildered condition lasted only a moment; then, like a woman recovering from a faint, she asked, 'Where am I?'

"I soothed her as best I could; told her Mr. Norton had gone out for a moment, but would be back directly, and held the baby out to her. This seemed to excite her all the more. I had to explain where she was, who she was, *and who the baby was*—can you imagine? Instead of calming her, it seemed to make her worse. She stared unbelievingly at me, and when I showed her the baby again, she fell to screaming at the top of her voice and calling for somebody named Frank. Have you any idea who it could be, Dr. Trowbridge?"

"What else happened?" I returned, evading her question.

"That's all, sir. I grew alarmed when she seemed to shrink from her own child, and called Dr. Loverdale. He's the best nerve man in town, don't you think?"

"Quite," I agreed. "If you——"

"*Non, mon ami,*" de Grandin interrupted. "Trouble the good *mademoiselle* no more. We have already heard enough—*parbleu,* I fear we have heard more than we can conveniently piece together. Come, let us go.

"*Grand Dieu,*" he murmured as we reached the street, "it is amazing, it is astonishing, it is bewildering! Has the clock of time turned back, and are we once more in the Seventeenth Century?"

"Eh?" I asked.

"Is witchcraft rampant in our midst?" he returned. "*Barbe d'un bouc,* my friend, I know not whether to say we have witnessed two most extraordinary cases of mental derangement or something wholly and entirely infernal."

2

HOMER ABBOT, son of my old schoolmate, Judge Winslow Abbot, and one of the cleverest of the younger members of the local bar, was waiting nervously in my consulting-room next morning. "It's about Marjorie," he began, almost before we had exchanged greetings. "I'm dreadfully worried about her, Doctor!"

"What's wrong?" I asked, noting the parentheses of wrinkles which worry had etched between his brows. "Do you want me to run over and look at her?"

"No, sir; I'm afraid this business is a little out of your line," he confessed. "To tell you the truth, I've come to you more as a friend than as a physician." He paused a moment, as though debating whether to continue; then: "She's been acting queerly, recently. About a week ago she began coming down to breakfast all crocked up—circles under her eyes, no more life than a wet handkerchief, and all that sort of th'ng, you know. I was concerned at once, and begged her to come to you, but she just laughed at me.

"It's gone from bad to worse, since. She's irritable as the deuce—flies off the handle at nothing, scolds me like a shrew with or without reason; most of the time she seems actually trying to avoid me, makes every kind of excuse to keep from coming to the door with me in the morning, pleads a headache, or some other indisposition, to get away from me in the evening, even——"

"H'm," I smiled knowingly to myself. A happy explanation of Marjorie's sudden vagaries had occurred to me, but Homer's next words killed it.

"Three nights ago I happened to wake up about one o'clock," he hurried on. "You know that feeling of vague malaise we sometimes have for no reason at all? That's what I felt when I sat up in bed and looked round. Everything was quiet—too quiet—in the room. I switched on the night light and looked across at Marjorie's bed. It was empty.

"I waited and waited. When half an hour went by with no sign of her, I couldn't stand it any more. I looked everywhere—went through the house from cellar to attic; she wasn't anywhere. It wasn't till I'd finished my search and returned almost frantic to the bedroom that I noticed her clothing was missing from the chair where she usually puts it; when I went to the closet I found her heavy sports coat gone, too.

"I sat up waiting for her till nearly five o'clock; finally, I couldn't stick it any more, and dropped off to sleep.

"Marjorie was sleeping peacefully as a child when I woke two hours later, and when I tried to rouse her and ask where she'd been during the night, she turned from me like a fretful child, too, and mumbled something about wanting to be let alone.

"I tried my best to ask her about it that evening, but she had a couple of girl friends in to dinner and we played contract afterward, so I didn't get a word alone with her till after eleven, when the company left. Then she fairly ran upstairs to bed, complaining of a splitting headache, and each time I tried to speak to her she

begged me to let her alone to suffer in peace.

"I don't think she went out that night, *but I don't know.*"

"Eh?" I asked, impressed by the emphasis he laid on the last four words. "How d'ye mean?"

For answer he thrust his hand into his waistcoat pocket and extracted a tiny square of folded white paper. "What do you make of this?" he asked, handing me the packet.

I opened the paper, disclosing a dust of fine, white, crystalline powder, wet my forefinger, gathered a few grains of the substance on it, and touched it to my tongue. "Good heavens!" I ejaculated.

"Morphine, isn't it?" he asked.

"No, it is codein," I returned. "Where——"

"On her dresser, yesterday morning," he cut in. "And there was another like it, with a few grains of the stuff still adhering to the paper, on the pantry shelf. We had coffee with our refreshments the night before, and I thought mine tasted bitter, but the others laughed at me, so I thought maybe the trouble was with me rather than the coffee. By the way, Marjorie brought the coffee in herself that night, and it wasn't till I found these powders that I recalled she brought mine in separately, the only cup on the tray—no chance for me to take the wrong one that way, you see.

"I slept like a log that night, and woke with a queer, dizzy feeling yesterday morning. Marjorie was still asleep when I was dressed and ready for breakfast, and it was just by chance I discovered the powder. You see, I thought perhaps her headache was still troubling her, and went to her dresser for some cologne. That's where I found the package I just showed you. I thought I recognized it; they gave me something of the kind in the hospital at St. Nazaire during the war."

"But see here, boy," I expostulated, "maybe we're making a mountain of a molehill. This stuff's codein, beyond doubt, and Marjorie shouldn't be allowed to have it; but it's possible some quack gave it her for those headaches she's been complaining of—more than one woman's been made a dope fiend that way. That feeling of depression you had on waking——"

"Wasn't present this morning," he interrupted sharply. "I don't know how I came to reason it all out, but the moment I found that infernal stuff I *knew* she'd drugged my coffee the previous night. So I took the paper and went downstairs and fixed a dummy pack with table salt, and left it where I'd found the codein on her dresser. It was while I was looking for salt to make the dummy I found the empty codein paper in the pantry.

"Dr. Trowbridge," he leaned forward impressively, "last night, after dinner, my coffee was salty as brine!"

Young Homer Abbot and I faced each other a moment in solemn-eyed silence. I opened my lips to utter some banality, but he hurried on:

"I pretended to become sleepy almost immediately, and went to bed—but I didn't undress. Marjorie didn't trouble even to come upstairs to see if I had fallen asleep; I suppose she was so sure the dope had done its work. I heard the front door close before I'd been in bed half an hour, and jumped up, slipped on my shoes and jacket, and ran after her. I got down just in time to see her taxi round the corner, and though I chased it like a hound hunting a rabbit, it lost me in the fog, and I had to give up.

"Marjorie came in a few minutes after five this morning," he concluded. Then, because he was still little more than a boy, and because his happy little world had tumbled to pieces before his eyes, Homer Abbot put his arm down on my desk, pil-

lowed his face against it and cried like a heart-broken child.

"Poor chap," I sympathized. "Poor boy, it's a rotten shame. and——"

"And we had best be stirring ourselves to correct it, my friend," Jules de Grandin supplemented as he stepped noiselessly into the room.

"I must ask forgiveness for eavesdropping," he added as he paused beside me, "but I caught the beginning of the young *monsieur's* so tragic tale, and could not forbear to linger till I heard its end.

"Do not despair, my friend," he patted Homer's bowed shoulder gently. "All looks hopeless, I know, but I think there is a reason behind it all, nor is it what you think.

"Trowbridge, my friend," he added, his little eyes snapping with cold fury, "I damnation think this business of Monsieur Abbot's and that of Monsieur Norton are bound up together somehow. Yes. Certainly there is someone, or some *thing*, in this city which stands in urgent need of eradication, and I shall supply that need—may Satan fry me in a pan with butter and parsnips if I do not so!"

Again he turned to Homer. "Think, *Monsieur*," he urged, "what happened before your so charming wife began to show this remarkable change? Consider carefully: the smallest happening, the seemingly least important thing, may guide us to a solution of the case. What, by example, did you do for several days before she manifested the first symptom—even the very night before her indisposition became patent?"

Young Abbot took his chin in his hand as he bent his thoughts backward. "I can't recall anything, especially, that happened about that time," he answered slowly. "Let's see, four of us went to the theater that Thursday night, and stopped at a night club afterward. U'm, yes; something rather queer *did* happen there. We had a little spat, but——"

"Excellent!" de Grandin interjected. "This *petite querelle*, it was about what, if you please?"

"Nothing of importance," the other replied. "There was a queer, bilious-looking fellow sitting alone at a table across from us, and he kept looking at Marjorie. I didn't notice him at first, but at last he got on my nerves, and I rose to speak to him. Marjorie begged me not to make a scene, and the fellow left a few minutes afterward—damn him, I'd have wrung his neck, if I'd caught him!" he ended savagely.

"Indeed, and for why?" de Grandin asked softly.

"Just before he left the room he turned and held up a little mirror, or some small, round, bright object, and flashed a ray from it directly into Marjorie's eyes. I made a dash for him, but he'd gone before I could reach the door."

"U'm," de Grandin murmured to himself. "That is of importance, also." He nodded once or twice thoughtfully; then: "And *Madame*, your wife, she said what?" he asked.

"She fussed at me!" Homer returned in an injured voice. "Declared I'd made a disgraceful scene and humiliated her, and all that kind of thing. Next morning she slept late, and was as exhausted as though she'd just risen from a sickbed when she finally got up."

Jules de Grandin studied the end of his cigarette with slow, thoughtful care. At last, "It is fantastic," he murmured, "but I damn fear it is so, none the less.

"Very good, *Monsieur*," he turned again to Abbot, "you will oblige us by acting as though nothing untoward has occurred at your house. I especially desire that you do not let *Madame* suspect you have discovered her attempts to drug you. Anon, I think, we shall unravel this sorry tangle for you, but it may take time."

3

NORA MCGINNIS, my genial household factotum, laid a sheaf of letters beside my plate when de Grandin and I repaired to the breakfast room half an hour later.

"Hullo," I remarked, "here's one for Kit Norton. Wonder how anyone knew he's stopping here?"

"I mentioned it to the nurse before we left his house last night," de Grandin replied. "Open the letter, if you please. Monsieur Norton sleeps late this morning, I made sure he should. Meantime, the note may contain something which will prove helpful to us."

I slit the envelope and read:

"Kit:

"They tell me Frank divorced me because of you and Isabel divorced you on my account. They say we've been married two years and the baby's ours. I can't understand it all; and I shan't try. I'm taking the baby with me. It's best.

"Yours,

"BETTY."

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed. "What can this mean?"

"Mean?" de Grandin was on his feet, his little eyes blazing like those of a suddenly incensed cat. "Mean? *Mort d'un rat,* it means murder; no less, my friend! Come, quick, when was that letter mailed?"

"It's postmarked 12:40," I returned. "Must have been dropped about midnight last night."

"*Hélas* — too late!" he cried. "Come, prove that my fears are all too well grounded, Friend Trowbridge!"

Grasping my hand he fairly dragged me to the study, where he motioned me to take up the telephone. Next instant he rushed to the consulting-room extension and called Main 926.

"*Allo?*" he cried when the connection was put through.

"City Mortuary," was the curt return. "Who's speaking?"

"You have there the bodies of a young woman and an infant girl—Madame Norton and her child?" de Grandin affirmed, rather than asked.

"Gawd A'mighty, how'd you know? Who is this?" came the startled reply.

"Have the goodness to answer, if you please," the Frenchman insisted.

"Yeah, we've got 'em. Th' police boat fished 'em outa th' river less'n half an hour ago. Who th' hell *is* this?"

"One who can prove she destroyed herself while of unsound mind," de Grandin returned as he hung up the receiver.

"You see?" he asked as he reentered the study.

"No, I'm hanged if I do!" I shot back. All I understood was that Betty Norton had drowned herself and her baby.

"We shall avenge her; have no fear on that score, *mon vieux,*" de Grandin promised in a low, accentless voice. "The swine responsible for this shall die, and die most unpleasantly, or may Jules de Grandin never again taste roast gosling and burgundy. I swear it!"

4

JULES DE GRANDIN tossed aside the copy of *l'Illustration* he had been perusing since dinner and glanced at the diminutive watch strapped to his wrist. "It is time we were going, my friend," he informed me. "Be sure to dress warmly; the March wind is sharp as a scolding woman's tongue tonight."

"Going?" I echoed. "Where——"

"To Monsieur Abbot's, of course," he returned. "I determined it this morning."

"You what?" I demanded. "Well, of all the brass-bound nerve——" I began, but Kit Norton interrupted me.

"May I come, too, sir?" he asked.

"Assuredly," the Frenchman nodded. "I think you may find interest in that which we shall undoubtlessly see tonight, young *Monsieur.*"

Grumbling, but curious, I hustled into a corduroy hunting-outfit, high laced boots and a leather windbreaker. Similarly arrayed, de Grandin and Norton joined me in the hall, and, at the Frenchman's suggestion, we hailed a taxicab and rode to within a block of Abbot's house, then walked the remainder of our journey.

It was cold work, waiting in the shadow of the hedge skirting Homer's front lawn, and I was in momentary dread of being seen by a passing policeman and arrested as a suspicious character, but our vigil was at last cut short by de Grandin's soft exclamation. "*Attendez-vous, mes amis,* you recognize her?"

I peered through the wall of windshaken hedge in time to see a svelte figure, muffled from chin to heels in fur, glide swiftly down the steps and pause irresolutely at the curb. "Yes," I nodded, "it's Marjorie Abbot, but——"

"*Très bon,* it is enough," de Grandin cut in, turning to flash the light of his pocket electric torch toward the corner where our taxi loitered.

The vehicle drove slowly toward us, passed by and slowed down at the curb where Marjorie stood. "Cab, lady?" hailed the chauffeur. The girl nodded, and a moment later we saw the red eye of the vehicle's tail light blink mockingly at us as it rounded the corner.

"Well," I exclaimed, "of all the treacherous tricks! That scoundrel deliberately passed us by after you'd signaled him, and——"

"And did precisely as he was instructed," de Grandin supplied with a chuckle. "Trowbridge, my friend, you are a peerless pill-dispenser, but you are sadly lacking in subtlety. Consider: Do we wish to advertise our presence to Madame Marjorie? Decidedly not. What then? If our cab remained in plain sight, Madame Marjorie could not well fail to see it, and would unquestionably think it queer if it did not apply for her patronage. Had she been forced to seek another vehicle, she would have been on her guard, and looked constantly behind to see if she were followed. In such conditions, we should have had Satan's own time to mark her destination without being discovered. As it is, our so excellent driver conveys her where she desires to go, returns for us, and makes the trip over again. *Voilà, c'est très simple, n'est-ce-pas?*"

"Umph," I admitted grudgingly. "What's next?"

"To warn Monsieur Abbot of our advent," he returned. "He awaits us; I have told him to be prepared."

We crossed the yard and rang Abbot's bell, but no response came to our summons. Despairing of making the bell heard, de Grandin hammered on the door; still no answer.

"*Eh bien,* can he have fallen asleep in good earnest?" the Frenchman fumed. "Let us go in to him."

The door was unlatched and we had no difficulty entering, but though we called repeatedly, no answer came to our hails. At length: "Upstairs, my friends," the Frenchman ordered. "Our plans seem to have miscarried, but I will not have it so."

Wrapped to the chin in blankets, but fully clothed save for shoes and jacket, Homer Abbot lay in his bed, his head tilted grotesquely to one side, his heavy respiration proclaiming the deepness of his slumber.

"Wake, my friend, rouse up, we are come!" de Grandin cried, seizing the sleeper's shoulder and giving it a vigorous shake.

Young Abbot's head rolled flaccidly from side to side, but no sign of consciousness did he give.

Once more de Grandin shook him, then, "By damn, you *will* wake, though I kill you in the process!" he declared, shoving the sleeper so fiercely that he tumbled from the bed, his limbs sprawling uncouthly, like the

arms and legs of a rag-doll from which the sawdust had been drained.

"*Grand Dieu,* observe!" the little Frenchman ordered, pointing dramatically to a tiny spot of red upon the upper part of Homer's shirt sleeve.

"Hypo!" I commented as I saw the telltale stain.

"*Bien oui,* drugs given by mouth failing, she has made use of injections," de Grandin agreed excitedly. "Quick, Friend Trowbridge, time is priceless; to the nearest pharmacy for strychnia and a syringe, if you please. We shall rouse him to accompany us despite all their planning!"

I hurried on my errand till my breath came pantingly, returned with the stimulant in less time than I should have thought possible, and prepared an injection. The powerful medicine acted swiftly, and Homer's lids fluttered upward almost before I could withdraw the needle.

"How now, my friend, were you caught napping?" de Grandin asked.

"Looks that way," the other answered. "I turned in as you suggested, and pretended to be sound asleep, but she must have suspected something. Shortly after I went to bed she came in, bent over me and called softly. I didn't answer, of course, but my lids must have quivered, the way they usually do when someone looks intently at you, for she bent still closer and kissed me. Just as her lips touched mine I felt a sting in my arm, and before I could let out a yell, I was dead to the world."

"Exactly, precisely, quite so," the Frenchman agreed. "Now, let us depart. Our taxicab has returned."

"Sure, I can go there again," the chauffeur answered de Grandin's excited query. "Th' place is out th' Andover Road about five miles—deserted as hell on Sunday afternoon, too; you couldn't miss it, once you've been there."

"*Très bien; allez-vous-en!*"

"Huh?"

"Let us go, let us hasten, let us fly, my excellent one, my prince of chauffeurs; time presses and there is five dollars extra for you if you make speed."

"Buddy, just you set back an' hold onto your hair," the driver cautioned. "Watch me earn that five-spot!"

He did. At a wholly unlawful speed we raced along the wide, smooth turnpike, passing an occasional interurban bus and one or two bootleggers' cars, cityward bound with their loads of conviviality, but encountering no other traffic.

THE house was rather small, of frame construction, and badly in need of repainting. Surrounding it was a rickety paling fence, and a yard of considerable extent, densely overgrown with lilac trees, dwarf cedars and a few straggling rhododendrons. Apparently no light burned inside, but de Grandin motioned us forward while he stayed to pay the chauffeur.

"Discretion is essential, my friends," he cautioned as he joined us. "Let us proceed with caution." Thereupon we dropped behind each shadowing bush and advanced by a series of short, quick dashes, like infantrymen at skirmish practise.

Slowly we circled the house, at length descried a single feeble ray of light flickering from beneath a drawn blind and tight-barred shutters. The Frenchman glued his eye to the chink whence the light emanated, then drew back with a shrug of impatience. "I can see nothing," he admitted dejectedly.

We looked at each other in helpless discomfiture, but in a moment the little man was grinning delightedly. "Messieurs Norton—Abbot," he demanded in a whisper, "can you emulate a cat?—two cats?—several cats?"

"A *cat?*" the youngsters chorused in amazement.

"But certainly. A pussy-cat, a kitty," de Grandin agreed. "Can you caterwaul and meaul like a duet of tom-cats enjoying a quarrel?"

"Certainly," Abbot returned, "but——"

"There are no buts, my friend. Do you and Monsieur Norton repair to yonder lilac bush, and thereupon set up such a din as might make a dead man leave his coffin in search of peace elsewhere. Continue your concert a full two minutes, then fling a stone into a distant thicket, to simulate the crashing of departing felines through the undergrowth. Remain utterly quiet for two minutes more, then join me as soundlessly as may be. You understand? Very well; be off!"

Grinning broadly, Abbot and Norton departed to a screen of lilac bushes, and in a moment there rose such a racket of howls, caterwauls and vicious hisses as might have convinced anyone that two lusty tom-cats had staged a finish-fight on the lawn.

I rocked with laughter at the exhibition, but my mirth was swallowed in admiration of de Grandin's strategy as I watched him. From under his leather jacket he drew a long, curve-bladed Senegalese knife and fell to cutting the shutter-slats away. As he worked he thrust a stick of chewing-gum between his teeth and began masticating furiously. The razor-sharp steel sheared through the rotten, worm-eaten wood almost as if it had been cheese, and in a moment an opening six inches wide by two high had been made. Cutting a slat from the other shutter barring the window, he laid the wooden cleats on the frosty lawn, then slipped the great pigeon's-blood ruby from his finger and pressed it against the window-pane.

The stone cut through the glass almost as easily as the knife had hacked the wood, and in a moment a small circular opening was chopped from the pane. Just before the circle was complete, the Frenchman took the gum from his mouth, flattened it against the glass and thrust his fingertip into it. Then, cutting the remainder of the circle with the ruby, he nonchalantly lifted out a disk of glass without a single betraying tinkle having sounded.

Shutters and window having been drilled through, he proceeded to make a small incision in the linen window-blind with the tip of his knife, thereby making it possible for us to see and hear all which went on inside the lighted room.

A final burst of feline profanity and a crashing in the bushes by the fence apprised the world that one of the struggling cats had quit the field of honor hotly pursued by his victorious rival, and in another moment Abbot and Norton joined us.

With upraised finger de Grandin enjoined silence, then waved us forward to the observation-slits he had cut.

We viewed the scene within as though looking through the peep-hole of a camera obscura. An old-fashioned cannon stove, heaped almost to overflowing with glowing coal, stood in the center of the room, and from the ceiling swung an oil lamp by one of those complicated pulley arrangements once common to every rural dining-room. In a rather tattered easy-chair lounged a tall, spare man of indeterminate age, a long, cord-belted dressing-gown of paisley weave covering his dinner clothes. His skin was sallow with a sallowness that was more than mere pallor, there was a distinctly yellowish cast to it, like new country butter; close-cropped hair of raven blackness crowned his head as closely as a skull-cap, growing well down over his broad, low brow and seeming to lend an intensity to the burning, searching eyes which

glowed like twin pools of black ink in the immobile yellow mask of his face. Slim black brows spanned his forehead and met, forming a sharp downward angle above the bridge of his thin, narrow-nostriled nose. There was neither amusement nor hate nor any other sign of emotion on his mask-like face, only intense, implacable concentration, as he bent his changeless stare on the woman standing rigid as though frozen against the wall opposite him.

"——take them off—all!" he was saying in a low, sibilant voice as we pressed our eyes to the peep-hole. Evidently we arrived in the midst of a conversation, or, rather, a monolog, for the woman was mute as she was motionless.

"Marjorie!" Homer Abbot exclaimed softly as he recognized his wife rigid against the wall. Then:

"That's the man who tried to flirt with her at the supper club the——"

"And that's the man Isabel and I saw at the theater the other night—I mean before I lost my memory," Kit Norton cut in. "We were coming from the theater and I jostled him when he deliberately got in my way to peer into Isabel's face. He looked at me as though he'd have liked to murder me, but all he did was raise his hand and flash a big, bright ring before my eyes. It dazzled me for a moment, and when I reached out to grab him by the collar, he was gone. He must have——"

"Silence!" de Grandin's sharp whisper cut short his recital. The seated, yellow-faced man was speaking again.

"At once!" he commanded in the same level, toneless voice, and I noticed that his thin lips scarcely moved as he spoke.

The woman by the wall trembled as though with a sudden chill, but her hands rose flutteringly to her throat, undid the clasp of her long fur cloak and threw it back from her shoulders. "All!" the man repeated tonelessly, inexorably.

Quickly, mechanically, she unloosed the fastenings of her costume. In a moment she was done and stood facing him, still and straight as a statue carved in ivory, arrayed only in the beauty with which generations of New Jersey forebears had endowed her.

"You are slightly rebellious," the seated man remarked. "We must cure that. Wake!"

Marjorie Abbot started as though a cup of chilled water had been dashed in her face, saw her crumpled garments on the floor at her feet, and made a wild, ineffectual clutch at the topmost wisp of silk on the pile of clothing.

"Still!" The girl straightened like a puppet stretched upright by a spring, but a tortured cry burst from her, even as she stiffened into immobility.

It was a pitiful, bleating cry which wrung my heart. Once, when I was a little boy, I spent a season on an uncle's farm and was given a lamb for pet. All summer I loved and pampered the little, woolly thing till it became tame and friendly as a house-dog. At autumn came slaughtering-time, and with the unsentimental practicality of country folk they gave my pet to the itinerant butcher who came to do the killing. Never shall I forget the startled, reproachful cry of that lamb as, his confidence and gentle friendliness betrayed, he felt the gleaming knife cross his throat. It was such a cry of helpless terror and despair Marjorie Abbot gave. But it was not repeated.

"Quiet!" commanded the yellow-faced man. "Be motionless, be speechless, but retain full consciousness. At my unspoken command you have left your silly husband and come to me; you have exposed your body to my eyes when I ordered it, though your strongest instincts forbade it. Hereafter you obey my slightest thought;

you have neither volition nor will of your own when I command otherwise. You will know what you do, and realize that you act against your desires, but you will be powerless to explain by word or act. You will apparently wilfully and wantonly drag your husband's name and your own through scandal after scandal; you will use your charm to allure, but never will you make return for what you receive; you will be pitiless, heartless, passionless, a woman taking all, giving nothing, living only to create misery and heartbreak for all with whom you come in contact. You understand?"

Only the wide, terror-stricken stare of the motionless, nude girl's eyes replied, but the answer was eloquent.

"Do not think I can not do this—that your love for your husband can withstand my power," the man went on. "I caused the break between the fool Norton and his wife; it was I who made the Baintree girl desert her husband and create a scandal with Norton. But they knew nothing of what they did—I commanded their memories to sleep, and they slept. Last night I wakened Norton—how the fool must have squirmed when he saw a strange woman in his home, and learned all which had happened while I kept his memory locked in the secret chamber of my mind! Last night I released my hold upon his wife, too, so that both awakened in a strange world, separated from the mates they loved, despised by all who knew them; found themselves parents of a child whose very existence they had not suspected till I released them from my spell. I think we shall find amusement watching their efforts to adjust themselves." For the first time his thin, pale lips curved in a snarling smile.

"You wonder why I did this to them—why I do it to you?" he demanded. "Because I hate them, hate you—hate every hypocritical member of your two-faced race! In my country white men talk morality and honor, then take our women when they feel inclined; abandon them when they wish. In India I could do nothing; the English pigs prevented it. But in France I found a welcome—they drew no color line there, but received me as a great artist. Ha—the Frenchmen proved almost as stupid as your Americans, but not quite; no nation in the world is composed of such utter fools as you! You welcomed me as a refugee from British oppression; I am free to work my will here. Your dull Western minds are malleable as wax to my superior will. I who can make multitudes believe they see me cast my rope into the sky, then climb it to the clouds, find the subjection of your wills to mine less than child's play.

"Who am I?" he broke off with sudden sharpness, staring intently at her. "Answer!"

"My lord and my master," she faltered.

"And who are you?"

"Your thing and creature, your less than slave, your chattel, to do with as you will, my lord."

"What is your wish?"

"I have no wish, no will, no desire, no mind, save to do as you command, O lord and ruler of my existence," she answered, slipping to her knees, laying her hands palm-upward on the floor, then bending forward and beating her smooth forehead softly on the rug between them.

"It is well. Resume your clothing and your duties, O monstrous uncouthness. Remember, from this time forward you know neither truth nor honor nor virtue nor fair dealing, save to make mock of them. It is understood?"

"It is understood, master." Again she struck her brow against the floor between her supplicatingly outstretched hands.

"Like hell it is!" With a maddened roar Homer Abbot smashed

through the rotting shutters, crashed the window-panes to a hundred fragments and hurled himself into the superheated room. "You damned ape-faced swine," he shouted, "you might have broken Kit Norton's home and made his name a byword all over town, but you don't do it to me!"

He lunged frantically at the slender form reclining in the shabby armchair. Unconcerned as though there had been no interruption, his wife proceeded with the process of donning her flimsy silk undergarments.

"Ah? We have a caller, it seems," the seated man remarked pleasantly. He made no move to defend himself, but his sable, deep-set eyes narrowed to mere specks of shining black flame as he focused them on the intruder.

Homer Abbot stopped stone-still in mid-stride as though he had run into an invisible wall of steel. A dazed, half-puzzled, half-frightened look came to his face as he bent every ounce of energy toward advancing, yet remained fixed as a thing carved of stone.

"You are right, my dear sir," the yellow-faced one pursued; "I shall not make your name a scandal in the town—not in the sense you mean, at any rate. But concerning your *wife's* name—ah, that is something different. I shall kill you and command her to remain here with your body till the police arrive. She will know how you died, but she will not tell. Oh, no; she will not tell, for I shall forbid her, and you yourself have heard her acknowledge my authority."

He laughed soundlessly as he drew an automatic pistol from the pocket of his dressing-gown. It was one of those German monstrosities of murderousness, built like a miniature machine-gun, which sprays ten bullets from its muzzle at a single pressure of the trigger.

Slowly, seeming to delight in the delay, he raised the weapon till it covered Abbot's heart, then:

"Have you prayed; are you prepared to meet the White Man's God, all-conquering white man, who is so weak before the commands of my will?" he asked. "If so, I shall——"

"*Chapeau d'un cochon,* you shall do nothing, and damnably little of it!" Jules de Grandin shouted as he launched himself through the broken window.

The distance between them was quite eight feet, but the Frenchman cleared it with the lightning speed of a famished cat leaping on an unwary bird. Before the seated man could deflect his aim from Homer Abbot, de Grandin was beside him and the lamplight glittered on the wide, curved blade of his great knife as he swung it downward saberwise.

Through coat sleeve and shirt sleeve, through flesh and bone and sinew, the keen steel cut, severing the man's arm midway between carpus and elbow as neatly as a surgical operation might have done.

The hand fell to the carpeted floor with a thud, the fingers clenching in muscular spasm, and the pistol, clutched in the severed fist, sputtered a fusillade of futile shots like a bunch of firecrackers set off together.

As a spilth of ruby blood spurted from his severed radial and brachial arteries, a look of stupefaction, of incredulous wonderment, replaced the grimace of tigerish fury which had been on the yellow-skinned one's face. For a moment he regarded the bleeding stump and the small, almost femininely dainty hand lying on the floor with confounded astonishment; then his surprize seemed swallowed up in mad, unreasoning terror. In the twinkling of an eye he was changed from the calm, sinister personification of the inscrutable East to a groveling thing—a member of an inferior, dominated race trembling and defenseless before the resistless pur-

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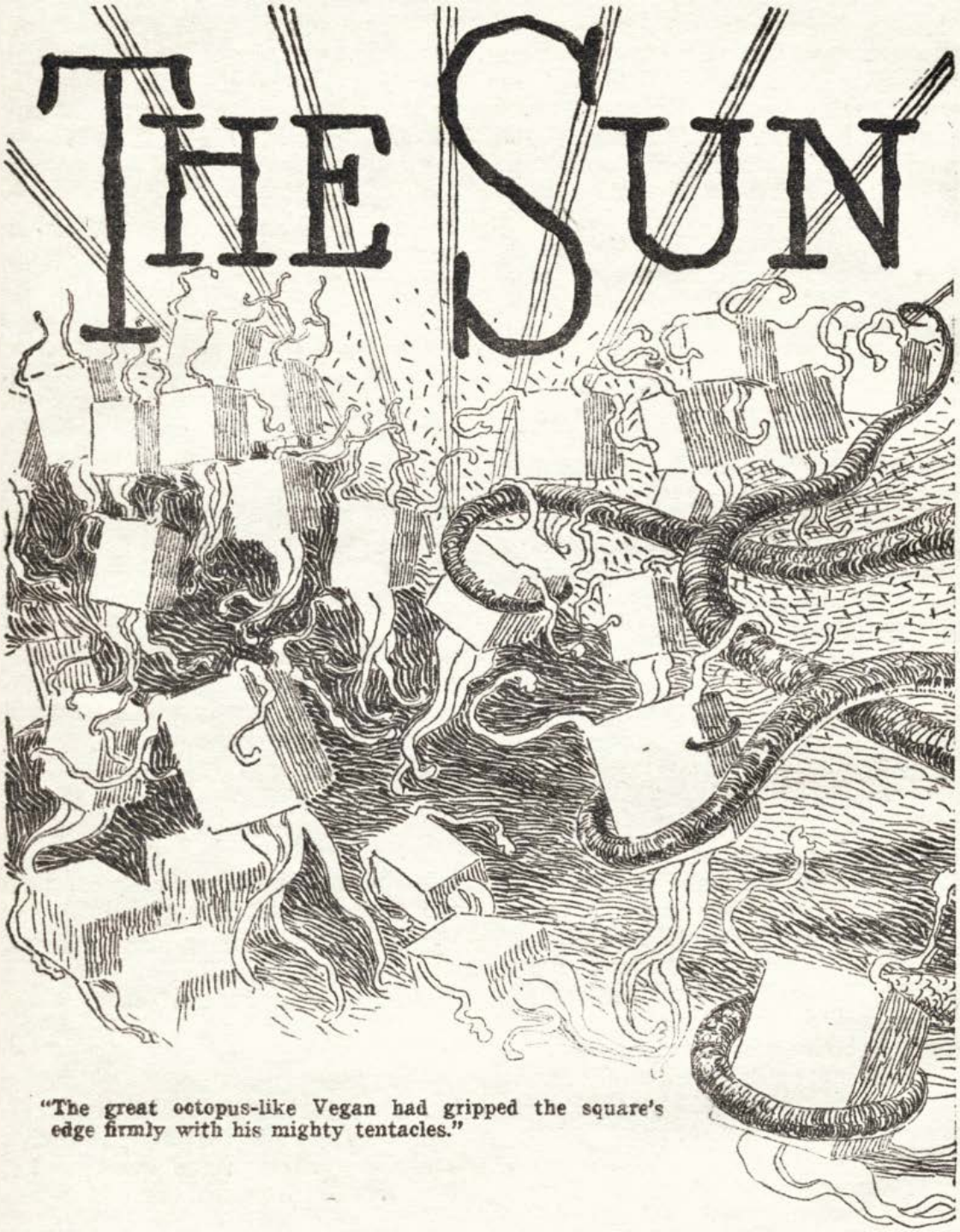
THE SUN



"The great octopus-like Vegan had gripped the square's edge firmly with his mighty tentacles."

"NORT NORUS, Chairman of the Council of Suns!"

As my name rang forth, I was stepping up onto the great dais at the center of the Hall of Suns. The roar of dissimilar voices that had filled that hall a moment before died instantly, and from all the thousands of differing forms gathered here in the great Council of Suns of which I was head there came no sound. Great plant-men of Capella, strange faceless hairy beings from Mizar, big, green-bodied amphibians from Aldebaran—these and all the countless other unlike

PEOPLE

by Edmond Hamilton

forms about them were silent in that moment as I stood upon the dais, facing them. And as silent were the two great forms that stood behind me: J'han Jal, Chief of the Interstellar Patrol, of the bird-like races of Sirius, his tall body covered with short feathers, his arms and legs ending in great talons, with a great beak between his two dark keen eyes; and Mirk En, Chief of the Science Bureau, a big octopus-bodied

Vegan, his round, single-eyed body-mass the center of his nine great tentacle-limbs.

But though all these stood silent in that moment, there came through the hall's tall windows an unceasing roar of tumultuous activity from outside. Through those windows I could look out across the tumult, across the distant strange black cities towering into the brilliant white light of great Canopus overhead. And in their streets, I could see, swarmed great-headed and bodiless Canopans, their thin, piping voices coming to my ears in a dull roar. Over those shouting, wildly swirling throngs there soared countless great ships, darting up and out from Canopus into space or slanting down out of space toward the great sun's worlds. Only a moment I gazed out over that mighty tumult, and then turned back to the members of the great Council, who stood in silence before me.

"Members of the Council," I addressed them, "each one of you knows what peril to our galaxy it is that has gathered you all here. Each one of you knows what tremendous panic has gripped all the galaxy's suns and worlds. Each of you knows, in short, what terrible doom is even at this moment destroying our universe!"

They were silent before me as I paused, listening to me in an utter tension of body and spirit, while from outside there came still the distant roar of the panic-driven crowds. Then I was speaking on.

"Our galaxy, our universe, consists as you all know of thousands of suns, great and small, gathered together in a roughly disk-shaped mass, floating here in infinite space. Upon the worlds of almost all these suns exist our races, races of dissimilar beings who yet combined long ago into our great Federation of Suns, with its capital here at Canopus, the mightiest and most central of all the galaxy's suns. For eons our ships have plied the ways of our universe from sun to sun; for eons the cruisers of our mighty Interstellar Patrol have watched and warded the ways between those suns. Banded thus into this mighty Federation, indeed, our races, our suns, have come to be more and more dependent upon each other for continued existence. And now that great Federation of Suns, our great galaxy itself, is being broken up, destroyed!

"It was but two days ago that the first warning of the thing came to us. Great Deneb, at the galaxy's edge, was beginning, its astronomers reported, to move outward into space with ever-increasing speed! Deneb, like almost all our suns, had moved always through space yet had kept always inside the galaxy's mass, just as countless bees can each be moving yet can hold together steadily in a compact swarm. But now, it was clear, Deneb was doing what never a sun in our universe had done before, was leaving that universe, was moving out from the galaxy!

"Hardly had that astounding news been received by us, indeed, when there came from Spica, far around the galaxy's edge from Deneb, the same startling news. Spica also, its astronomers flashed word, was moving outward into the void of space. And swiftly from other of the outermost and inner suns, from Rigel and Mira and Betelgeuse and Altair, came the same amazing news, that they also were beginning to move outward, to separate! Report after swift report we received in the next hours, from the astronomers of sun after sun, from Sirius and Algol and Saiph and Arcturus and Procyon, from myriads upon myriads of others, until by now it is known definitely that practically every sun in the galaxy, save great Canopus which lies motionless here at the galaxy's center, is moving away from its swarming fellow-suns; that

the galaxy's great swarm of stars is breaking up as its stars move away in all directions!

"But what caused this outward movement of all the galaxy's suns? That is what we sought first to learn, since it might be that this movement was but a temporary phenomenon. You know that the galaxy's suns have been held together by their gravitational attraction toward each other. It is that attraction of sun for sun that has held them always in the galaxy's disk-like mass, regardless of their own movements, in the same way that chips floating in water will gather in a mass despite their own movements. If that gravitational attraction between the galaxy's suns did not exist, they would no longer be held together, the swarm would disintegrate; since besides their movements the unopposed light-pressure of one sun upon another would cause them to spread out in all directions. If that gravitational attraction between the suns of the galaxy did not exist, that was what would happen, we knew, and since that *was* happening, we knew that in some way the gravitational attraction had been nullified.

"That, indeed, was what our Science Bureau soon found to be the case. They found that there were radiating out through our galaxy unceasing vibrations of immense force which were destroying the gravitational pull of our suns upon each other. You know that long ago we found gravitational attraction to be a vibratory force, whose wave-length or frequency depends upon the size of the gravitational body. Thus gravitation, like any other vibratory force, can be destroyed by opposing to its vibrations other dampening vibrations of equal wave-length and frequency. And that, we found, is what this strange force, this strange vibration radiating out through our galaxy, is doing: it is annihilating the pull of our great suns upon each other. The gravitational force of their worlds is so much lower in frequency by reason of their far smaller size that it is unaffected by the strange vibrations which are destroying the attraction of our suns for each other. Thus the worlds of each sun cling to that sun by their own attraction for it, move with that sun still, but the suns themselves no longer attract each other and thus are spreading outward from the galaxy in all directions.

"And that outward movement marks th end of our galaxy's mighty swarm of suns. Already its countless stars are spreading outward, farther and farther from each other, in all directions. Slowly now they are moving outward, but ever faster, and within twenty hours more, we have calculated, the great outer suns will be so far out that even were this destroying vibration removed and the attraction of our suns for each other restored, it would be too late to draw them back into the galaxy's swarm. Outward—outward—all are moving outward save great Canopus here at the center, which soon will be left alone in space where once floated the great universe of which it was capital. For by then each of the great suns of that universe will be pursuing its own way into the great void, separated for all time from its fellow-suns of our galaxy, and that it is that has sent blind terror rolling across all the peoples of our suns and worlds. For it means the end forever of our mighty Federation of Suns, the end forever of our galaxy, our universe!"

I PAUSED for a moment, and a death-like silence greeted me, a silence more terrible than any shout of fear. And I saw that all eyes were upon me in an utter tenseness of fear and hope.

"We of the Council of Suns have gathered here to stand against that doom even now while it separates forever our swarming suns. Whence is coming that great radiating vibration that is breaking up our universe?

That is the question that we sought first to solve. Working unceasingly on that question in the first hours after the alarm, our scientists strove to locate the source of those vibrations, using directional-ray apparatus to test them from a score of different suns. By charting and combining their findings, they have managed to locate the source of those great vibrations. And that source, they found, lies at the very center of the galaxy's mightiest and most central sun, lies at the center of great Canopus! From far within Canopus' fires are coming these vibrations that are wrecking our galaxy. The fact is beyond dispute. Whether these are being loosed, as our scientists think, by some chance combination of atomic forces at Canopus' heart, or whether they are loosed from some other source, it is certain that it is from the great sun's center that those vibrations are coming. And so, to save our universe, there is but one thing that must be done, that can be done. And that is to penetrate down to Canopus' center and destroy if possible whatever great centers of atomic force have formed there that are loosing these radiating vibrations that are destroying our galaxy!

"To penetrate down to Canopus' center! That may seem to you impossible, insane, to penetrate through the awful white fires of the galaxy's greatest sun, that titanic ball of fire whose terrific heat is such as to break up the atomic structures of even the gases of which it is composed, whose radiated heat alone warms scores of circling worlds. To penetrate to the great sun's center—what cruiser, you will say, could do it? We have heat-resistant cruisers, indeed, cruisers that can resist high temperatures, can dare the glowing nebulæ, but these would be annihilated instantly in the gigantic sun's terrific temperatures. Yet down into the heart of Canopus a cruiser must go if the galaxy is to be saved! And knowing that, the Chief of the Science Bureau has in the last two days turned all its energies upon the equipment of such a cruiser, and has succeeded but now in equipping one of the cruisers of the Interstellar Patrol to enable it to plunge unharmed into the great sun's boiling fires!

"In that cruiser has been set a mechanism which radiates vibrations tuned to meet and destroy the vibrations of radiant heat for a considerable distance around the ship. Great projectors have also been set in rows along the cruiser's sides and at its stem and stern, projectors which when turned on will project broad fan-like rays, the matter-destroying rays used as weapons by the Interstellar Patrol. Now when this cruiser plunges toward great Canopus it will turn on both the projectors and the generator of the heat-destroying vibrations, which will keep any smallest degree of the mighty sun's awful heat from ever reaching the cruiser. And when the cruiser plunges into the boiling seas of flaming gases, the matter-destroying rays from the projectors will keep all those gases from ever touching the cruiser.

"With that vacuum-sheath created by the projectors about it, the cruiser can plunge into the mighty sun's fires without being ever touched by its flaming gases. And the terrific, unthinkable heat can not harm it, can not even reach it, since the vibrations of that radiant heat will be dampened, nullified, destroyed all around it by the opposing vibrations from the generator inside the ship. Thus this cruiser can plunge into Canopus' fires and can, unless it encounters perils of which we know nothing, make its way to the center of the great sun, to those regions of atomic force which have formed there and are apparently loosing these gravity-destroying vibrations outward upon our universe. With its great matter-destroying rays this cruiser can, if it finds them, break up and destroy these centers or regions of atomic force, and

so save our galaxy from destruction.

"But one cruiser we have that can do that, and in that cruiser J'han Jal and Mirk En and I are starting toward the great sun at once. We three—the Chairman of the Council of Suns, the Chief of the Interstellar Patrol, and the Chief of the Science Bureau—we three are going in this great hour of peril to penetrate into great Canopus' fires and if possible destroy whatever source there is loosing these vibrations of doom upon us. For unless the attraction of our galaxy's suns toward each other is restored within twenty hours its outermost suns will have moved too far away to be ever pulled backward into its swarm. So that it is only by finding the source of those vibrations at the heart of great Canopus and by stopping their radiation outward that we have any last chance of lifting this doom that even now is disintegrating our universe!"

2

"CANOPUS' edge will be before us in minutes!" J'han Jal said, turning toward me. "Already we are well inside the corona."

I nodded. "Hold straight ahead at the same speed," I told him. "We'll turn on our protective generator and projectors in a moment."

J'han Jal's talon-hands held the cruiser's controls steady at my words, keeping it racing straight forward. Though the Chief of the Interstellar Patrol, he himself had stood at those controls from the start of our cruiser from the Hall of Suns an hour before, knowing as we all did what mighty destinies hung upon this single cruiser of ours. Now, as he stood there gazing ahead through the little control room's great windows, Mirk En and I stood to right and left of him. Silent now, in a silence that reigned complete in the control room save for the never-ceasing throb of the great mechanisms beneath whose propulsion-vibrations our cruiser flung on through space, and the strange half-heard voices of the crew busy about those mechanisms, we three gazed together toward the stupendous and appalling spectacle before us.

For there before us burned in space the colossal blinding sphere of mighty Canopus, greatest and most central of all the galaxy's suns. A huge globe of intensely brilliant white fire, to our stunned eyes it seemed a gigantic wall of light across all the heavens, its supernal brilliance beating in upon us dazzlingly despite the great light-repellent shields which had been fitted over all our cruiser's windows to protect us from that terrific glare. Familiar enough to us had been the great sun always, but now it was as though we saw it for the first time in all its stupefying splendor. For never before had we or any others approached so near to it as now we were, our little cruiser having moved at cautious speed in toward it from the great world of the Hall of Suns, and now penetrating into the stupendous glowing region of the mighty sun's corona.

That corona was like a colossal halo of glowing light that surrounded all the giant sun and into which our moving little cruiser was penetrating, seeming no more than some dark, tiny insect in size. Gazing ahead through the corona's great glow, we could make out the clearer features of the huge sun's surface before us, our window-shields allowing us to inspect them though at the expense even then of dazzled eyes. A tremendous sphere of boiling white fire, of incandescent white gases of unthinkable heat, the mighty sun loomed before us. Out from that sphere we could see vast prominences leaping, titanic uprushing jets of incandescent gas capable each of licking up hundreds of worlds. And upon the sun's surface, the photosphere, we could see here and there darker regions, great sun-spots which were each, we knew, gigantic whirlpools or maelstroms of the in-

candescent gases that composed the colossal sun.

"Those gases— and those awful fires——" said J'han Jal. "To penetrate into them—into a sun—it's something never dreamed of in all the galaxy before!"

"But we can do it—*must* do it," I said. "Somewhere inside that sun is the source of the vibrations that are breaking up the galaxy, and they must be halted."

"But our protective equipment—our generator and projectors—hadn't we best turn them on now?" asked Mirk En. "This corona's heat is growing every moment, Nort Norus."

I nodded, glancing at a dial which recorded the fact that the temperature about us had become indeed dangerous to our cruiser. Then I swiftly clicked over the series of switches that controlled the generator beneath and the projectors about our ship. At once the peculiar loud throbbing of the generator became audible, radiating out the vibrations which were meeting and destroying the vibrations of radiant heat directly about us. And as I glanced now at the dial, our cruiser still racing onward, it was to see the temperature that it recorded swiftly decreasing, until in a moment the temperature just outside our cruiser was the absolute cold of space, even as we raced in toward the mighty sun!

From our ship's sides came the low hissing of the matter-destroying rays being shot forth unceasingly in broad fans that sheathed all our ship. These were not being used, really, since there was no matter in the great sun's corona, but at every moment we were drawing nearer toward the boiling white sea of the sun's photosphere. Onward we were racing, J'han Jal's great talons steady on the controls, Mirk En and I beside him; and now through our window-shields it seemed that the colossal sphere was only one tremendous sea of blinding white thundering flame that walled the firmament before us. Outward, around and near to us, as we shot on, the mighty prominences of the huge sun were leaping, and we saw that dead ahead in the giant sun's surface there spun one of the gigantic maelstroms or whirlpools that are called sun-spots.

I pointed toward it. "Veer left, J'han Jal," I told the big Sirian. "We daren't be caught in one of those sun-spot maelstroms—even with our protective vacuum-sheath it would whirl us about in its great currents and possibly wreck us."

He swerved the ship to the left of the great sun-spot's maelstrom of unthinkable fires, a whirlpool of flaming gases that extended far beneath the surface, we knew, and that could have engulfed countless worlds. And now there were whirling about us great masses of glowing vapors, vapors that were themselves of tremendous heat and that were composed of iron and calcium and sodium and many other metals, existing in vapor form only, here in the tremendous temperatures of great Canopus. Through those vapor-masses our cruiser was shooting on unharmed, though, its protective rays keeping its vacuum always about it, its generator's vibrations repelling and nullifying the terrible radiant heat from all about it. Onward we shot until I saw with pounding heart that within minutes we would be plunging into the terrible fires of the mighty sun itself.

Nearer—nearer—we were racing toward the surface, a titanic upright sea of boiling white flame, and then Mirk En cried out suddenly, pointed ahead. From that surface a giant prominence was shooting, was rushing in an instant all about us. No sound came from it to us across our vacuum-sheath, but as it caught our cruiser it whirled it this way and that with wild, terrific power. For though the gases of that prominence did not touch the cruiser itself by reason of its vacuum-sheath, their swift rush of

tremendous matter-masses exerted a gravitational attraction upon our little ship and tossed it this way and that in their grip. I heard hoarse cries from the crew beneath, glimpsed great J'han Jal holding our ship's stem grimly ahead even in the grip of that colossal out-rushing prominence, and then it had receded and we were humming on toward the surface of mighty Canopus. But now it lay just before us, an awful ocean of dazzling white fire, the terrible and gigantic sunspot maelstrom away to our right. And then our ship had shot into that boiling white sea of flame, was plunging into Canopus' awful fires toward its heart!

STUNNED, blinded, overwhelmed, it was in that moment as though all about us was only a titanic rushing of colossal masses of fire, a wild and ceaseless fluxing of awful floods of flame about our cruiser. Gripped and tossed this way and that by rushing masses of incandescent gases, I was aware in a moment that J'han Jal had kept the cruiser's stem still forward, and that we were plunging farther and farther into those flames, swaying and pitching from side to side but racing steadily onward! Steady around our ship there hung the vacuum-sheath that kept from us the destroying fires, and steady beneath throbbed the generator whose vibrations repelled the terrible heat from all about us. Were either of those protections to fail suddenly, I knew, our cruiser and all within it would vanish in a split-second in one single blast of fire, changed into vapors by the awful heat of the incandescent masses into which we were plunging!

On—on—still we were plunging toward the great sun's center, Mirk En and I steadying ourselves beside J'han Jal as our cruiser rushed on into Canopus' thundering fires. Great feathered Sirian, octopus-like Vegan, erect earth-man—surely trio strange enough did we make as we plunged on in that fearful journey the like of which none in the galaxy had ever made before. On—on—and now it seemed that the wild rush of awful flame-masses became suddenly swifter, more awful, in their thunderous rush about us, became even more blinding, even more unthinkable in heat.

"The photosphere!" cried J'han Jal beside me. "We've passed through the photosphere!"

"Hold straight on!" I shouted. "We've got to reach the center!"

Now we were reeling on into the wild fires of the interior, whose temperature all about us now, I knew, was countless thousands of degrees! On into that interior we were rushing, plunging through Canopus' titanic inferno with only our immaterial heat-destroying vibrations and the slender vacuum-sheath about our ship to protect it from annihilation in those awful fires!

On and on—all things in the universe seemed to have dissolved into a single mighty flood of rushing flame through which our ship was endlessly battling. Beside me J'han Jal was braced strongly against the controls, holding them in a grasp of iron with his great talons, keeping our cruiser heading onward despite all the rushing currents of fire that surged about us and made our ship pitch and sway crazily. To his right Mirk En held with his great octopus-tentacles to the control standards, gazing ahead stedfastly at the awful seas of fire through which we rushed; while I, braced beside J'han Jal, watched tensely the dials before us, with loud in my ears now the steady throbbing of our generator and the hissing of our rays which were alone preserving us from a fearful death, and the cries of our crew beneath.

By now, I knew, we were deep beneath the surface, and since our protective equipment seemed functioning perfectly my hopes that we might attain the great sun's center grew

stronger. But in the very next moment panic stabbed lightning-like across those hopes; for our cruiser was suddenly gripped as though by a gigantic hand, was whirled away blindly through the fires as though by colossal forces, J'han Jal and Mirk En and myself being flung to the control room's end by that wild swift reeling of our ship. And as the ship spun crazily in the grasp of the colossal currents of fire, as the control room's walls and floor and ceiling seemed revolving lightning-like around us as we clutched in vain for holds upon it, I heard J'han Jal's deep, despairing cry.

"A sun-spot!" he cried. "We've run into one of the titanic maelstroms beneath the surface!"

Even in that terrible instant the meaning of the Sirian's cry passed through my ears to my brain in a revealing flash of terror. A sun-spot's mighty maelstrom—and we had blundered into it here far beneath the surface! For we knew that the giant whirlpools of the great sun-spots did extend far into the sun's interior, and plunging into those interior fires we had blundered into the terrific whirling currents of that awful maelstrom of boiling gases. Now, gripped gravitationally by the titanic currents of the whirling maelstrom, our cruiser was spun about like a chip spinning in a maelstrom of water, whirled about by those colossal currents with terrific speed and force.

Flung against the control room's walls by the cruiser's terrible gyrations, I heard from beneath the wild cries of our crew's dissimilar members, the hoarse shouts of J'han Jal and Mirk En beside me, the metallic straining and drawing of the cruiser's walls as they yielded a little to the terrific forces which were whirling the ship about. With every moment the cruiser was being whirled at greater and greater speed, around and downward, and I guessed that it was nearing the narrowing bottom of the gigantic maelstrom, far beneath the surface. Not for long could our ship spin thus in the grip of that colossal maelstrom, I knew, and resist its terrific forces; for though our generator's heat-destroying vibrations throbbed forth still, though the hissing rays kept about our ship still its vacuum sheath, it seemed to my ears in that wild moment that the generator's throbbing had faltered a little beneath this wild whirling. Were that generator to halt for but a fractional instant, I knew, that instant would see us resolved into vapors. And unless we won free of the terrible sun-spot's whirling depths the generator could not much longer function, it was clear.

The thought spurred me to wild efforts to reach the controls as we were tossed about the control room. Twice I gripped them and was torn from my hold, and then as for the third time I grasped them I reached back, caught J'han Jal who was rolling beside me, pulled him to me; and then he caught the levers in his grasp, and with my hands and Mirk En's great tentacles bracing him, strove to bring our ship to a level keel in the whirling fires, to win out of the awful whirlpool. Slowly, foot by foot, we fought those whirling currents, and foot by foot edged out of them, until at last, with the last of the cruiser's power, it seemed, we had won clear and were plunging onward again into the interior of mighty Canopus.

WE DREW great breaths as we won out of that perilous maelstrom, and I found myself trembling from the reaction. But now, as we plunged still on and on, I estimated that we were already far in great Canopus' interior. It was from somewhere at the center, we knew, from whatever strange regions of atomic force might lie there, that there were radiating the vibrations that were breaking up our galaxy, and now J'han Jal and Mirk En and I began to watch for

the appearance of such regions. Set up before me were three of those directional-rayinstrumentswith which our scientists had determined the origin of the great vibrations, and I saw now from those instruments that the point of origin lay not far ahead, that we must be already almost in toward Canopus' center. The mighty sunspot maelstrom had whirled us far in, I knew, and so we watched excitedly as we plunged through the rushing fires, Mirk En keeping his gaze upon the radio-activerecording-instruments which would register the nearness of any such atomic force regions as those for which we searched.

Upon those instruments, though, showed no sign of the existence of such regions, yet my own instruments showed unmistakably that with every moment we were approaching the strange vibration's origin. The thing was inexplicable, and as we shot on and on, already almost to the center of the mighty sun, as I guessed, it became even stranger to us, for still there were no indications of atomic force regions ahead. Had our terrible journey into Canopus' central fires been in vain? It could not be, I tried to reassure myself, since my dials showed the vibration's origin close ahead. And suddenly a still stranger thing obtruded itself upon our attention, and that was the fact that around us the fires were becoming denser, slowermoving, our temperature dials showing them to be growing also somewhat cooler. Those fires around us were like the surface-layer or photosphere of Canopus into which we had first plunged!

A photosphere here at the great sun's heart! Even as we stared stupefiedly at those fires through which we rushed, I saw from the direction dials that the origin of the vibrations that we sought was directly ahead now. Tensely I gazed forward as we shot through the white fires, hoping to glimpse the atomic regions from which those vibrations came. Then suddenly, breath-takingly, our ship had rushed out of its white fires and into *space* — a great space that stretched before us, a tremendous white-lit space encircled on all sides by the rushing fires of colossal Canopus around it!

A tremendous space here at Canopus' center! But even as we stared in stupefaction we saw a thing more stunning, saw that within this space there revolved a great ring of a score of spherical worlds! That ring of worlds moved almost at the edge of the mighty globular space, almost touching, it seemed, the encircling white fires of Canopus. And as I saw that now the direction-arrows of the dials pointed toward those worlds, I uttered a great cry of sudden understanding.

"These worlds!" I cried. "These worlds at Canopus' center! It's from *them* that the gravitation-destroying vibrations are radiating—the vibrations that are breaking up our universe!"

3

"THESE worlds the source of the great vibrations?" cried J'han Jal. "But how can this great space—these worlds—exist here at Canopus' center?"

"And what upon those worlds is radiating those vibrations?" exclaimed Mirk En. "Here at the heart of Canopus, it seems, are space, and worlds,and—peoplesof thoseworlds?"

We stared toward the Vegan, startled by that suggestion, and then I motioned toward the nearest of the great ring of worlds. "There is but one thing to do—to reconnoiter them. Whatever is upon them, it is certain that they are the origin of the vibrations."

J'han Jal swerved over the controls, sending our ship humming toward the nearest of that great ring of circling planets. Those worlds, we saw, moved around always in that same ring formation inside this hol-

low space, very close to the mighty walls of white fire that encircled them, so close indeed that they seemed almost on the point of plunging inside those fires. All of the score of worlds seemed of the same approximate size, and it was toward the whole ring of them, and not any one, that the direction-dials pointed, which thus indicated all of them as the source of the vibrations that were breaking up our whole galaxy.

As we hummed through the white-lit space toward that nearest world I was gazing about, and could see that this tremendous hollow at Canopus' heart, while of great size and able to hold hundreds of worlds like those that moved within it, was yet not large when compared to the fiery mass of the great sun about it. Down through that titanic mass of fires we had penetrated to this hollow with our cruiser, the first in all the galaxy ever to dream of its existence here at the great sun's heart. And now I reached forth and turned off the generator and the hissing ray-sheath, turning then to the mouthpiece before me and briefly apprising the crew beneath to keep watchfully to their stations at the cruiser's propulsion-mechanisms and ray-tubes.

By that time the world toward which we were heading was looming large before us, a great sphere gleaming oddly in the light of the encircling white fires beside it, moving along just inside those rushing fires, it seemed, with the great ring of its fellow worlds. High above it we soared, circled once or twice, and then were dropping smoothly down in watchful, broad spirals. J'han Jal and Mirk En and I gazed watchfully toward its surface, and then suddenly the big Sirian uttered a low exclamation and his talons upon the controls brought our cruiser abruptly to a halt. At the same moment as he, Mirk En and I had glimpsed clearly the features of the gleaming world's surface, a few thousand feet below, and as we gazed down now with him Mirk En's voice was echoing our thoughts.

"A peopled world, as I suspected!" the great Vegan exclaimed. "A peopled world—here at Canopus' heart!"

A peopled world it was, indeed, that lay beneath us, a world whose surface gleamed so oddly because almost every square yard of it was paved with white metal, that reflected back brightly the intense brilliance of the white fires that encircled these worlds. And here and there rose structures of the same white metal, great white-gleaming cubes of giant dimensions. Not crowded together, but set here and there at regular intervals over this world's surface with great open spaces between them were those white-gleaming cubes. Here and there through the air—for air it was now into which our cruiser had dropped—there moved from building to building what seemed square platforms of the same white metal, flitting smoothly above this world. And upon those squares, and upon the metal paving beneath, we could glimpse the race that peopled this world.

And that race, those creatures, were themselves cube-creatures! Each of them was a great cube of white flesh the height of a tall man, a cube supported by four powerful flesh-limbs, one at each corner of its cube-like body! From the four upper corners, in the same way, there branched four powerful arms, while in each of the four sides of the cube-like body was set a single eye, and in one of those sides also a small mouth-opening! Cube-creatures! I saw, even as we stared in amazement at them, that it must have been because of the cube-shape of their own bodies that these creatures had constructed their buildings and almost all else upon their world in the same shape, unconsciously following the design of their own strange bodies. And in ceaseless streams and groups, they were moving there beneath our hovering cruiser!

"But that square of green force!" cried Mirk En, pointing across the strange world's gleaming metal surface. "You see it—that square of green light there?"

"Green force!" I exclaimed, gazing toward where he pointed. "And it's toward that square, and toward the other worlds, that our direction dials point! That green force it is, then, that is radiating the vibrations out into our galaxy!"

For there, far across that world's surface from us, there was set flush into the metal paving between the great cube-buildings a giant square of glowing green light. Unceasingly it glowed, a deep strange glow that even to our eyes seemed more force than light, and we saw that it faced out toward and through the encircling fires, that the gravitation-destroying vibrations were thus penetrating through the fires of colossal Canopus all about these worlds and destroying the attraction of all the galaxy's suns for each other! It was the strange cube-creatures of these worlds at Canopus' heart, therefore, and not any regions of atomic force, that were sending out the vibrations that already were wrecking our galaxy!

But why? I think that was the question that throbbed most intensely through our brains as we stared appalled down toward that significant square of glowing green force. Why should these cube-creatures, here at the center of Canopus and separated forever by its fires from the outer galaxy, never even dreamed of by the peoples of the galaxy—why should they want to break up the galaxy around Canopus? What strange, dark plan had caused them to send forth the vibrations that were causing the suns to leave our universe, to break up that swarm forever as they moved into outer space? The thing was incomprehensible, and J'han Jal was turning toward me as perplexed as myself.

"That great square of green force it is that is releasing part of the vibrations out upon our galaxy!" he said. "But then there must be more of them—on the others of these worlds, Nort Norus!"

I nodded swiftly. "There must be," I said, "a great square of glowing force upon each world, possibly, though I see no control for them. But the next world—we'll go on to it and see——"

In a moment our cruiser had shot up again and was rocketing out from the atmosphere of that world toward the next, through the space that separated them. Swiftly that next world in the ring was looming in view as we hummed toward it, seeming as its gleaming surface largened before us to be exactly like the first. The great white-gleaming cube-buildings, the squares moving to and fro from building to building, the strange cube-creatures that moved here and there on squares and on the metal paving—all were the same as on the first world. The same too was the great square of glowing green force set in the metal paving, and we saw that this green force-square, by reason of its world's altered position in the great ring, pointed out through Canopus' fires in a slightly different direction, releasing its vibrations out over the galaxy at a different angle.

Stupefied, almost unbelieving, we stared, and then were moving on toward the third world in the great ring, spiraling down through its atmosphere toward it in the same way. At first glance all seemed the same there as on the first two worlds, cube-creatures and buildings and flying squares and giant square of green force appearing a replica of the others. But as we gazed down from our cruiser's control room Mirk En pointed suddenly toward something beside the great square of green force, something small and gleaming which we could but vaguely glimpse. At once J'han Jal was sending the cruiser lower toward it, lower with our

eyes riveted upon it until we had halted but a few hundred feet above the flying squares below. And from that height we saw that it was a small white-metal cube-structure beside the giant inset square of green force. A small gleaming cube-structure raised on four slender metal limbs above the level of the force-square, and filled, we could see through its open door, with panel upon panel of strange-appearing instruments and switches among which moved a half-dozen watching cube-creatures!

"The central control!" I cried. "It can only be the central switch-box of the great squares of radiating green force on all this ring of worlds—the switches that control the radiation outward through the galaxy of the great gravitation-destroying wave!"

"But look beneath, Nort Norus! The squares—the cube-creatures—thye've seen us, they're coming up toward us!"

J'HAN JAL'S cry drove through my brain like a stiletto of sound, and as I glanced away from the central switch I saw that beneath us the swarming squares were swiftly rising, the eyes of their cube-creature occupants turned up toward us! From far away over the gleaming surface those squares were leaping up through the air, in scores and hundreds! And as they sped upward, from the foremost of them, from bulges near the edges of those metal squares, there shot toward us slender beams of green light, that seemed the same as those great glowing squares of green force which radiated the gravitation-destroying vibrations.

"Up, J'han Jal!" I cried. "They're coming from the side too—they're trying to get above us!"

For even as J'han Jal flung open the controls and sent our cruiser whirling steeply upward I saw that the squares rushing toward us from the sides were whirling up in a sharp slant in an effort to cut off our escape, to catch us between themselves and the uprushing squares from below. Up we flashed, and then from the squares beneath that had leaped to within striking distance there stabbed toward us a score or more of the glowing green beams. But at that moment J'han Jal jerked our ship over in a wild reel sidewise through the air, and the green beams drove by us to strike the squares rushing above us.

As they struck we saw those squares crumble as though compressed suddenly from all around by a gigantic grasp, and fall suddenly to the surface of the world below. Even in that wild instant as our cruiser reeled away I realized what had happened, realized that those green beams were of the same gravitation-destroying power as the great green squares of force that were disintegrating all our galaxy. Striking those squares above us, they had instantly cut off from them all gravitational forces from about them, and since those squares, like all other things in this world and in any world, had been constructed to meet the gravitational pull of the world beneath it, the sudden complete removal of that pull so affected them as to make them collapse and crumple merely from their own interior stresses.

Now, though, as our cruiser shot sidewise and upward, the green beams of the squares beneath were leaping up again. And as we dodged them again by jerking to one side, I shouted a swift order into the mouthpiece before me. The next moment there stabbed down from our cruiser's ray-tubes the deadly crimson rays of the Interstellar Patrol, those terrific rays which wipe from existence all matter they touch by changing it from a matter-vibration in the ether to a light-vibration. They shot down like stabbing swords of crimson light among the swarms of upwhirling squares beneath us, and as there broke and burst across those swarms flare

upon flare of fountaining red brilliance, dozens of those squares were flashed into annihilation. I heard the hoarse shouts of J'han Jal and Mirk En beside me, at that, and the high-pitched cries of our ray-crews beneath, but swiftly the uprushing squares, despite our lightning-leaping crimson rays, were coming up after us, overtaking us.

"Straight up!" I cried to J'han Jal. "We're almost out of this world's atmosphere and they can't leave it on those squares!"

Already we were shooting up through the last of that atmosphere, and now as we flashed up into empty space, the thundering wall of white flame of great Canopus encircling us, ahead and above us, we saw the pursuing hordes of squares slowing, halting beneath. But even as we seemed safe from pursuit the cube-creatures upon those squares were swiftly donning gleaming metallic and flexible suits. In another moment the cube-creatures were rushing up once more after us, rushing up from their world's atmosphere into the emptiness of space.

"They've put on metal suits that protect them from the cold and airlessness of space!" exclaimed Mirk En. "They're coming after us!"

"On into Canopus' fires, then!" I cried. "It's the one way to escape them!"

And with its utmost speed our cruiser shot onward toward those roaring white encircling flames from which an hour ago we had emerged into this great space. Close behind us were the pursuing squares once more, now, and again their green glowing beams and our crimson rays were crossing and clashing as they shot up after us. Pursuit and flight of inexpressible strangeness was that, pursuit by strange cube-creatures who were wrecking our galaxy, and flight on our part into the awful fires of the mighty sun. Already I had turned on our generator of heat-nullifying vibrations, our ray-projectors that kept the vacuum sheath about our ship, but now, though those white fires were close ahead, the pursuing squares were closer behind. A last burst of speed, a last blast of green beams loosed from just behind us, and then we had plunged once more into great Canopus' rushing fires.

"We'll wait here inside the sun until they've given up the pursuit," I told the others as our ship plunged on. "Then we can make our way back to that world—to the central switch-cube!"

So, bringing the cruiser to a halt, we hung motionless in the swirling seas of fire, our generator and vacuum sheath protecting us perfectly from the awful heat and flame. For minute after long minute we hung there, knowing that if we emerged too soon the cube-creatures' squares would still be awaiting us. Time was precious to us, we knew, for already had passed almost half of the twenty hours that had remained to us before the galaxy's outmost suns would have passed outside its swarm forever, and we must destroy that great vibration which was loosing those suns before the twentieth hour ended if the galaxy's break-up was to be halted.

J'han Jal remained grimly silent at the controls, Mirk En and I going down now through the cruiser's ray-rooms and motor-rooms, inspecting the propulsion mechanisms and especially the generator and ray-projectors that kept us from annihilation in the fires that thundered about us. At last we returned to the control room, and having hung for two hours inside the sun's fires, began to move in again toward the central great space.

On we plunged and then broke out into that space again, its great ring of worlds before us. No cube-creatures on their squares were in sight before us, though, and J'han Jal and Mirk En and I breathed with heartfelt relief at the sight. But abruptly, at that moment, something hissed and swung

around our cruiser from behind! We whirled about. Behind us had crept upon us three great squares, close to the wall of fires, one of which had thrown around our ship a great band of flexible metal that pinioned our cruiser to that square, while from right and left the other two great squares, crowded with cube-creatures, were rushing upon us!

4

"CAPTURED!" I cried wildly. "They've lain in wait for us—have captured us and our cruiser!"

"Not yet!" shouted J'han Jal. "Those other two squares—look!"

For at the very moment that we became first aware of the rush of those two squares from either side upon us, there had come a swift hissing from beneath and then out from our cruiser's sides there had driven to right and left a half-dozen brilliant crimson beams, the rays of our ray-crews beneath who were not to be taken unawares even by such a surprize as this! In the next moment those onrushing squares were mere bursting flares of crimson light. But the square that held us by the great flexible metal band had drawn us against itself, and we dared not loose our rays upon it, for they would have annihilated our own ship. And as we realized that fact there came upon our ship's side, upon the space-door in its hull, a terrific hammering and clanging.

"The cube-creatures on that square!" yelled Mirk En. "They're trying to break inside—to board us!"

"Try to break loose from them, J'han Jal!" I cried. "Try to break the band that holds us to them!"

But already the great Sirian had flung open the controls to their utmost, had sent our ship leaping forward with all the force of its throbbing mechanisms. But it could not break thus from the hold of the great square beside us, the thick broad metal band that it had flung around us holding our cruiser to it as though in the grip of a giant. And out on that square, massed against the space-door of our cruiser, were crowding the cube-creatures in their strange metal suits, hammering with metal tools upon our space-door, striving with all their power to break or pry it open, to pour in upon us. They dared not use their green beams any more than we dared use our crimson rays, but once inside the cruiser they meant to sweep us from existence, it was clear. A moment more and they would have battered through the great door—and then I shouted into the mouthpiece to my two friends.

"To the hull space-door, quick," I shouted. "We'll use our own space-suits to hold them out—to fight it out with them!"

And with Mirk En and J'han Jal racing beside me, the big Sirian laughing a little from sheer joy of battle, we were rushing down from the control room into the ray-room from which the big space-door opened. The clangor inside that room from the creatures beating against it outside was terrific, but in that moment we paid it but small attention, all our crew rushing into the room and throwing themselves into the space-suits which were in every cruiser of the Interstellar Patrol. For each of our dissimilar forms a specially shaped space-suit was provided, and instantly we were donning those suits. They were of flexible metal, much like those used by the cube-creatures, but having transparent-metal vision-plates near the head of each, each suit providing a perfect insulation against the cold and airlessness of space. Another moment and we were almost all in our suits, great Mirk En struggling last of all into his big nine-tentacled suit, and then I flung suddenly open the great space-door against which

the things outside hammered. As the air of the ray-room rushed out into space our scores of followers, with J'han Jal and Mirk En and me at their head, were rushing out upon the hordes of cube-creatures on the square fastened to our cruiser.

The next instant we were whirling across that square with those creatures in the wildest hand-to-hand battle that I have ever experienced. Cube-creatures in scores, and scores of dissimilar beings drawn from every peopled star in the galaxy, almost, we struggled in mad combat on the slippery metal surface of the great square, hanging there in empty space. Away to the right there spun the nearest of the great ring of worlds, and to our left and all about us flamed the awful barrier of flame that was the giant sun itself. And we creatures there on the square's surface, each in his space-suit, were engaged in a wild battle whose intensity was such as to make us forget utterly in that moment the cosmic and awful panorama about us.

Gripped on first rushing forth by two of the cube-creatures, I felt their eight great arms swiftly grasping me as I endeavored with wild blows to thrust them back. Beneath those blows their cube-like bodies flinched, but as we whirled they gripped me tighter, and I saw that *they were trying to tear open the space-suit I wore* —were trying to annihilate me instantly by allowing the air generated automatically inside it to rush out into space, causing me to perish instantly. But even as they grasped it I had gripped a metal tool that was knocking about on the square's surface beneath me in the wild mêlée of combat that surrounded us, and brought that sharp-edged tool down upon their own flexible metal suits in two swift great blows. As its sharp end pierced through those suits, I felt their grasp on me relax, vanish, saw them crumple to the square's surface dead, slain instantly by the cold of space as their suits were penetrated!

But about me now were rushing a half-dozen more of the cube-creatures, three of whom had grasped me again, and as I struggled fiercely against those in turn I saw that all about me was still raging furiously this strange and fearful battle. Great J'han Jal, I saw, was towering erect in his metal suit at the center of a half-dozen of the cube-creatures, sending them reeling back from him with swift raking blows of his great taloned arms. But most terrible of all in that grim combat was Mirk En. The great octopus-like Vegan had gripped the square's edge firmly with two of his mighty tentacles, and now with the other seven of those tentacle-arms was gripping cube-creature after cube-creature in the scores that whirled about him, was slamming them down upon the square's surface with terrific force, his mighty arms cutting paths of death through the throngs that swirled about him.

And over all the surface of the square the scores of our crew, outnumbered almost two to one as they were, were battling furiously with the great cube-creatures. The strange, unlike forms of our crew's members in their metal space-suits, the masses of great cube-creatures — these whirled around me in a mad mêlée in which the only things clear to me were the three great monsters with whom I was battling, and who had borne me down now to my knees as I struck furiously at them with fast-waning strength. One of them crumpled and dropped dead as my metal tool-weapon pierced through his suit, but the other two had gripped me firmly about the body now, and for minutes—minutes in which I was conscious only of the wild roar of combat about us, the swaying to and fro of battling forms around me—I struggled with those two great creatures. They gradually bore me down, and then both, gripping my body, were endeavoring

with all their strength to tear the round head-case loose from my space-suit.

I felt the metal of that suit giving, knew that another moment would see instant death for me as the suit was torn open, and then there was a rush of movement beyond the two things and they were gripped abruptly by swift-coiling metal-clad tentacles that raised them high and slammed them down upon the square with terrible force, where they lay broken and dead. I staggered to my feet, then, and saw that it was Mirk En who had saved me. And I saw, too, that about us on the square the combat with the cube-creatures was almost over, nearly all of them having been killed, while but half of our crew was left around us.

IT WAS Mirk En's great fighting-power that more than aught else had turned the scale for us against the great odds we had faced, and now with Mirk En and J'han Jal I was leaping with our crew's remaining members upon the dozen remaining cube-creatures. Fiercely they fought us still, but we gave them no quarter, and in a few moments all of them but one had been slain by us, Mirk En raising that one cube-creature upward to whirl him down to death also. As he did so, though, a sudden idea flashed across my mind and I grasped the great Vegan's tentacle-arm, motioned to him to take the cube-creature into our cruiser. He paused, then did so, J'han Jal and I and the remaining members of our crew, still in our space-suits, following him into the cruiser. The square was littered now with the tumbled dead of our crew and of the cube-creatures alike, all still in their metal suits.

As we entered our cruiser, slamming shut the space-door and turning on the air-control that filled the ray-room again with air, we swiftly doffed our heavy space-suits, and I spoke swiftly to J'han Jal and Mirk En. "This captured cube-creature!" I told them. "From him we can learn, maybe, how best to halt this vibration his race is loosing outward through the galaxy."

Mirk En nodded, glancing at the cube-creature, whose own metal suit had been ripped off and who stood guarded now beside us. "We should be able to communicate with him with the thought-speech machine, Nort Norus," he said. "At least we'll try it."

The great Vegan Science Chief uttered an order and in a moment one of our crew had brought from another of the cruiser's rooms the thought-speech machine, a compact metal cabinet from which five flat metal bands led, ending in shining little clips. It was this mechanism that had been used always among the galaxy's races for communication with those races who were without audible speech, since this mechanism was one that mechanically converted thought into clear speech in our own language, by catching and amplifying the brain's thought-currents and causing them to actuate a corresponding series of word-speakers. Whether it would work with a creature so alien to us as the cube-creature we did not know, but there was a chance that it might; and so Mirk En swiftly attached the mechanism's bands to the creature's body, making five small incisions in that body after some study of it, and attaching the clips of the bands to the nerve-centers inside. Then, reversing the machine's control so that speech into it was reproduced in the creature's brain as thought, I spoke clearly into the cabinet's opening.

"You are captured and have but one chance for life," I said, "and that is to tell us your race's purpose in loosing those gravitation-destroy-

ing vibrations, and to tell us how best they can be turned off."

The cube-creature's strange dark eyes, one in each side of him, widened as I spoke thus, and I knew from that that the machine had reproduced my speech as thought in his brain. I reversed the mechanism's control, and in a moment the answer came in the clear metallic tones of the mechanism, the cube-creature's thought translated by the mechanism into our speech.

"You will spare me if I tell you that?" he asked, and quickly I replied in the affirmative. Then for a moment the cube-creature surveyed us with his inscrutable, strange eyes, while Mirk En and J'han Jal and I watched him, and then he was speaking, or rather the mechanism connected to him was speaking to us his thoughts. And as from time to time that mechanism went silent for a brief instant we knew it was because certain thoughts of this alien creature had no equivalent in our speech.

"It is to ward off doom from ourselves," the metallic voice was saying, "that we have loosed doom upon your galaxy. For during all the ages that you peoples of the outer universe have existed on the worlds around your stars, the stars around this mighty central sun, we cube-creatures, we sun-peoples, have existed here inside it. This mighty sun of Canopus"—the thought-speech machine so rendered his own name for the great sun—"this great sun of Canopus has always had this tremendous hollow here at its heart. It was when the mighty sun formed first out of the condensing nebulæ that this hollow at its heart formed, because the light-pressure inward of the colossal sun around it would allow it to condense no further. And so this great hollow here, a small one compared to the colossal sun's mass but large in itself, has existed always unknown to you of the outer universe.

"In this hollow there swirled at first the chance fragments of great incandescent gases that had broken into it from the condensing sun around it, and these gases because of their comparatively small quantity soon cooled, hardened into molten masses of matter, which in turn were drawn by their own gravitational attraction for each other into worlds, into a score of worlds turning in a compact ring at the very center of this hollow.

"These inner planets of Canopus being of the same physical constitution as its outer ones, it is not surprizing that at last upon them even as upon the outer ones there arose life. For even as the outer planets, these inner worlds had air and water. And though they received great heat from Canopus' terrible fires all around them, that heat was not too great. For you know that a photosphere will form over a great sun's surface, a denser layer that impedes somewhat the interior light and heat from radiating outward; and in the same way a photosphere layer had formed at Canopus' inner surface, around the great hollow it enclosed. This kept the heat radiated into that hollow from being so great as to scorch life from its worlds, and so life flourished and came at last to its culminating species in us cube-creatures. We races, with our greater knowledge and science came at last to hold unchallenged all the score of Canopus' inner worlds.

"We built our great metal cube-buildings, paving even the surface of our worlds between those buildings with metal. We devised the squares on which we can fly through air or space, and the metal suits that protect us in moving through space and that allow us to move easily from one of our worlds to another. Through the colossal fires about us

we could not pierce, but we did find a way to send a light-ray unbent and unchanged through the great sun's terrific light and heat and force. And by means of that way we were able to look out upon the galaxy of suns that was gathered about our own. We saw the inhabitants of those suns rising in civilization, saw their great interstellar wars giving way to a confederation of all their peoples, saw them fighting back the vast perils that crowded from time to time upon them. But never, we saw, did they ever dream of the existence of our worlds and races here at the center of their greatest sun, and never did we desire to leave our home here where we were safe, we thought, from all dangrs.

"But at last we cube-creatures realized that there was one danger from which we were not safe, a danger that had crept gradually upon us for eons. As I told you, when our inner worlds had first formed here at Canopus' heart they had moved in a small ring at the very center of this hollow space. But though they would have moved there always, their centrifugal force of motion just balancing the outward pull of Canopus around them, there was another force acting upon them. That was the additional pull of all the thousands of mighty suns that had formed also around Canopus, whose distant gravitational attraction, acting upon us through the encircling fires, was enough to cause our ring of worlds to expand, so that as time went on the ring was moving just inside the encircling fires. And very soon, we realized, the unceasing pull of the galaxy's many suns would cause our ring of worlds to spread into the encircling fires, our worlds plunging to death inside those fires.

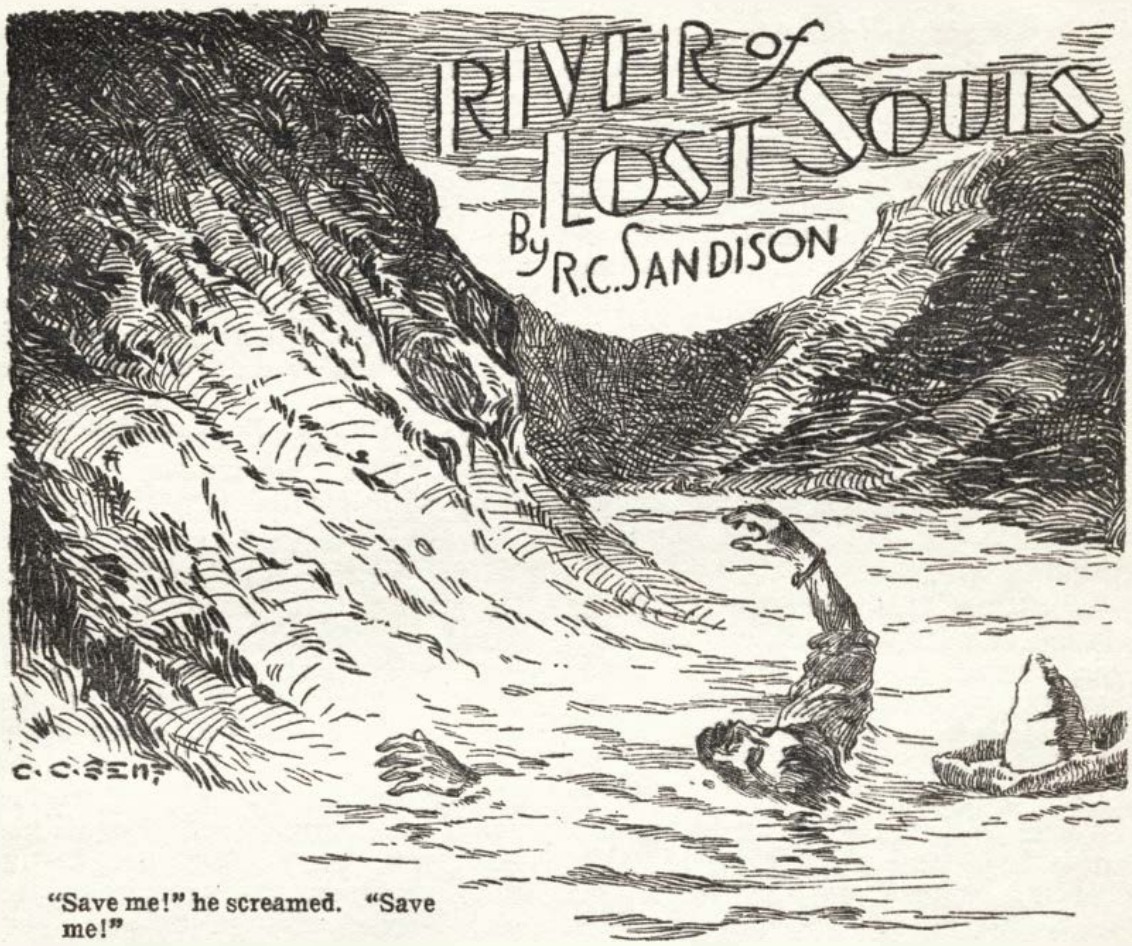
"It was a mighty danger indeed that confronted us, and we gathered all our power and craft to meet it. We could not leave this space at Canopus' center and migrate outward in all our hordes, yet death faced our worlds swiftly here. So we made at last our great decision to meet that danger by radiating outward a great gravitation-destroying vibration that would nullify the attraction of all the galaxy's suns. That would halt their pull upon us and save our worlds from death, but at the same time it would break up the whole galaxy! That, however, was of but small import to us, for we were determined to save our own worlds, even though in doing so we destroyed your universe.

5

"So we set to work upon the apparatus that was to radiate that gravitation-destroying vibration outward. In each of our worlds was placed a great square mechanism whose top alone showed, set flush in each world's surface, and which glowed with green force as it radiated those tremendous vibrations. Each green force-square was pointed out in a different direction, by reason of the ring-formation of our worlds, and so their vibrations would reach through all the galaxy. And upon my own world was placed the central control, its super-intricate switches and recorders being located in a small upheld cube-building just beside the force-square of that world.

"Our work was finished, but only just in time! For while we had been toiling upon it, our ring of worlds had been spread still farther, and they now were so close inside the encircling fires of Canopus that minutes more of that pull of the galaxy's suns would drag us into those fires! Like mad beings we had worked toward the last, so that it was but a few moments before our worlds were to take their final plunge to

(Continued on page 713)



"Save me!" he screamed. "Save me!"

UP FROM the somber canyon of the Picketwire the wind rose and howled, driving the rain against the line-camp bunkhouse of the Diamond Cross. And the clustering cedars and piñons bowed and shuddered, as if in horror of the night.

Inside the bunkhouse three men were gathered: Shorty Lawlor, wizened and narrow-eyed, shuffling cards for his eternal solitaire; Rosy Cheeks Dayton, boyish and young and looking out of place on a cattle-ranch; and Pedro Rivera, the Mexican—bovine, superstitious Pedro, with his chin cupped in his hands, staring somberly at Rosy.

Rosy sat twirling a crucifix by its chain between his slim fingers. An incredibly old crucifix it was, all incrusted with dirt and grime, of a strange, bizarre pattern that according to Shorty looked "heathenish."

"Pedro says we oughta dig up the body again and give it back the cross," observed Shorty, laying out four aces.

"Don't see how it come to drop off," frowned Rosy, "but as long as it did, I'm keeping it. Maybe this'll bring real money from a museum or some place. Say, that fellow must've been lying there, in his armor, for maybe three hundred years, till the flood washed him up. He must be one of the old Spanish fellows that used to ride herd around here."

"You been sayin' that all day," said Shorty wearily. "Looks like a hunk o' nothin' to me. An' I never heard o' no luck comin' from robbin' the dead."

"We didn't rob him!" said Rosy indignantly. "This dropped off when we carried him over to the grave we

dug. What was the use of standing out there in the rain to dig him up again just to give him this? *He'll* never miss it. Shut up, Pedro! You give me the galloping fidgets!"

"Why," asked Pedro in heavy Spanish, "why did not the dead one rot and crumble in those three hundred years?"

"Air's too dry in Colorado," said Rosy. "Shut up! Gosh, listen to the coyotes!"

"Wolves," corrected Shorty. "It looks like even a wolf'd have better sense than to be out on a night like this. Sufferin' cactus! What was that?"

Cutting high above the screaming wind and lashing rain came a wild, inhuman cry. The howling of the wolves stopped abruptly.

"Mountain-lion," said Rosy.

"Ain't no cat," said Shorty, "not out in the rain."

The scream came again, nearer this time, and picking up his rifle, Shorty stepped to the door. The rain lashed his face, and the flickering lamplight in the room only intensified the darkness outside. But its feeble gleam must have carried, for a sudden shout came out of the darkness. Shorty bellowed in reply.

And then into the circle of light a man stepped as abruptly as if he had materialized out of the night. Shorty stepped back to allow him to enter, but at the threshold the man halted, looking up at the little cowpuncher questioningly.

"Don't stand there, stranger! Come in! Come in!"

With a smile that showed sharp-pointed teeth, the stranger entered with a softly murmured: "A thousand thanks, my friend," in oddly accented Spanish.

Rosy carelessly slipped the crucifix about his neck as he arose to greet the stranger. He drew back a step as the man came forward; there was something repulsive in the fellow's yellow, parchment skin, and his black eyes that seemed to have a red glow far back in their depths.

"Come here to the fire an' squat, mister," went on Shorty hospitably. "Have an idee the rain's cold!"

"Most certainly," agreed the stranger, still speaking Spanish and obeying Shorty's gesture. A cascade of water dropped from his broad-brimmed Stetson as he removed it, and rivulets ran from his sodden goatskin chaps.

"*Par' 'onde está su caballo?*" asked Rosy. "Where is your horse? I'll put it up with our string."

Rosy understood him to say that he had lost it. As a matter of fact, the stranger was not easy to understand. The Spanish he spoke was the lisping Castilian of old Spain, and the words and construction he used were equally strange. Even Pedro for a moment had failed to recognize his mother tongue. On the other hand, the stranger seemed equally at fault in understanding them, though both Americans spoke Mexican Spanish nearly as well as English.

The wolves had taken up their howling again, and seemed to be circling nearer the bunkhouse.

"*Carajo!*" laughed the stranger, showing his pointed teeth again. "Harken to the little brethren!"

"The little brethren?" repeated Pedro, puzzled.

"Of a certainty! The wolves, my brother. Dost thou not hear them, also?"

Pedro, like Rosy, drew back. He had no liking for a man who referred to wolves as "little brethren"; and the easy use of the Spanish second person offended him. A Mexican reserves "thou" for his nearest and dearest.

The stranger noted the backward step and smiled again, and Pedro wondered dully how his lips could be so very red when his skin was so yellow. Then the black eyes wandered to Rosy and fixed on the crucifix.

"A curious object, friend of mine! Methinks I have seen its like before."

Grasping the meaning rather than the words of the archaic speech, Rosy leaned forward that the stranger might examine it the better.

"You would never guess where I found it," he said in Spanish. "With the very much rain, the Picketwire has flooded and we keep watch here to prevent the flood from drowning Diamond Cross cattle. While we rode the canyon edge today, we found a body in armor that the water had washed up. When we reburied it, this crucifix dropped from it. The dead man, no doubt, was a Spanish *conquistador*."

"Perhaps," observed the stranger, "this poor fellow was one of those unfortunate ones for whom the river was named—Rio de las Animas Perdidas."

"It's the Picketwire," said Shorty, the practical.

"But it used to be the Las Animas," argued Rosy, switching to English. "That's what the Spanish called it originally—the River of Damned Souls. Then the French, with the same idea, called it Le Purgatoire, and that's where we get the name Picketwire."

Shorty shrugged his shoulders. Rosy's high-school diploma had always held him in awe.

"I never could dope out that name," went on Rosy musingly. "Most people say they called it that because the canyon's such a gloomy place, but sweet cats—it isn't *that* gloomy!"

He broke off abruptly, conscious of the demands of hospitality.

"You must be very tired," he continued in Spanish. "There is an extra bunk—do us the honor to accept it."

The stranger arose and bowed.

"With ten thousand thanks," he said.

He reached out to place his hat on a peg above the fireplace, whence Pedro had taken a string of garlic only an hour or two before. With the hat almost on the peg, the man's finger's twitched as with a sudden spasm; the sombrero dropped to the floor. He recovered it with a smile and shrug, placing it instead on the mantel shelf.

Pedro made a muttered exclamation that sounded like "*Santissima Maria!*"

The stranger was the last between blankets. Rosy watched him idly from his own bunk, and wondered at his own distaste in removing the crucifix about his throat. Another thought came to him as he watched the stranger; the man was so outrageously awkward in undressing; it was almost as if he had never worn a pair of chaps before. And how emaciated his body was! Then the steady beat of the rain lulled Rosy off to sleep.

HE AWOKE with a start. The rain had stopped and the moon was now shining intermittently between scudding clouds, fitfully illuminating the cabin's interior. He awoke with a vague feeling that something was wrong.

He turned his head idly, looking over at Pedro's bunk, and then his breath came in with a hiss. Something was bending over the sleeping man—something whose face was pressed to Pedro's throat—something——

Stealthily, Rosy slipped his hand from beneath the blankets and groped for his gun. It hung in its holster at the head of his bunk. His fingers closed tightly around its smooth black grip.

The thing turned, as if scenting the presence of danger. It turned its head toward Rosy—and Rosy's first shot went wild. For the squared, open mouth dripped blood, and a trickle of blood lay dark against Pedro's brown throat.

And then, even before Rosy could fire again, the outlines of the thing became hazy. It seemed to shrink, to drop on all fours, and a huge wolf, whose yellowed fangs dripped blood, crouched snarling across the cabin.

Rosy heard a choking, profane cry from Shorty, and then the wolf had leaped at his throat. In a panic he fired again—fired with his gun-muzzle touching the broad, hairy breast. The great fangs clicked within an inch of his throat—and the wolf fell back.

He fired again—and heard the crash of Shorty's thirty-thirty. Bullets ripped the floor, the walls, all about the wolf. It crouched and leaped again. But again, as if striking a stone wall, it was hurled back, though its fetid breath was hot in Rosy's face.

It snarled and leaped for the barred door. Shorty fired again as it passed—the bullet chucked into the opposite wall. And then the wolf was gone. The door remained closed and barred.

"It wasn't—it couldn't be—it ain't——" Shorty was babbling.

"Look!" said Rosy faintly.

He pointed to the stranger's bunk. The top blanket was thrown carelessly back. But the lower blanket lay smooth and unwrinkled. There was no sign that a body had ever lain there. The stranger's clothes were gone. Only his hat still lay on the mantelpiece.

"Pedro!" yelled Shorty. "He—he's——"

But Pedro was not dead. With his wide eyes sick with horror he lay watching them.

With a shudder, Rosy picked up the hat on the mantel—and dropped it as if it had turned suddenly red-hot. From the inner band a series of marks stared up at him—marks that resolved themselves into a name—John Miller. Jack Miller, the owner of the neighboring Circle M.—Jack Miller, who always dressed as if he were to ride in a rodeo—with hair chaps——

"God!" moaned Shorty. "Who—what was it?"

"*Un vampiro!*" said Pedro in a voice like a groan. "A vampire from hell! See, was it not that he could not touch the peg where the garlic hung? Is not garlic of the most terrible to these things of the night?"

"More than that," said Rosy. "Think how he talked—old-fashioned. And in Jack Miller's clothes. And his face—wasn't it familiar? It was—it was the dead man from Picketwire Canyon—from the River of Lost Souls."

Outside, from down toward the canyon, the strange, inhuman cry shrilled and echoed again. And the howling wolves seemed to answer it in a chorus of glee.

PADRE RIVAS, the priest of the little Mexican church at Acequia Negra, peered out of his window and smiled in pleased fashion as he recognized his visitors.

He liked Rosy Dayton. Until Rosy had come to the Diamond Cross, Father Rivas had often felt those years spent in acquiring an education were largely wasted, if his life was to be spent among people who knew Cicero only as the son of Augustus Mutt. And then, too, Rosy had never been known to refer to a Mexican as a spig.

But as he opened the door, instantly he knew something was wrong. Rosy's face was haggard, and behind him Pedro Rivera peered with staring eyes, and skin of pasty green.

Rosy seated himself in the priest's parlor, and twisted his hat nervously between his fingers.

"I—I have something to tell you, padre," he began nervously. "It—it's altogether impossible but—well, it happened. A—something——"

"*Un demonio!*" cried Pedro. "A very devil from hell——"

"So it was, padre! The devil him-

self!" And he plunged into a recital of the night's events.

"It was Jack Miller's hat," he concluded. "I rode into Sweetwater this morning and told the deputy sheriff. They sent a posse around, and found the body. The—the wolves had been at it. But—but, padre; there was no evidence of blood in the wounds." He paused and shuddered. "And then Pedro and I rode out to the canyon where we buried—the—it. The—the grave was empty, padre."

The priest sat silent for a moment, thoughtfully tapping the arm of his chair.

"To deny that there are literal devils," he said at last, "is to deny the evidence of Holy Writ. Then, too, it is evident that sacred and holy things are abhorrent to this creature; save for that crucifix you, too, would have died by—wolves. And yet——" He paused and frowned, and looked at Pedro.

Pedro's wits were preternaturally sharp that morning. He understood even before Rosy did. His groping fingers delved beneath his shirt and brought a cross of gold to light.

"Why did it not save Pedro?" finished the priest. "It can mean but one thing—it means that only your particular crucifix has any power over the thing. May I see it, please?"

Rosy took it from his neck and passed it to the priest. Rivas examined it closely and nodded.

"It is of very ancient workmanship, and of a curious pattern. They knew more of such creatures of the night in those days than we do now. Perhaps this has a significance that escapes us. Yet it may be useful in spite of that."

"But, padre, what is to be done?" babbled Pedro.

"Little by our own power; everything by the power of the Lord! Yet it appears this is no ordinary vampire, who defies the power of crucifixes, and rests in ground not hallowed. You are surprized I know of this? I read many stories"—he nodded toward a pile of magazines on the table—"and those stories dealing with the weird and supernatural I dote on most. Perhaps now my hobby shall be turned to account."

"But what can we do, padre? No bullet harms it——"

"A stake through the heart," said the priest musingly. "But where could we find the vampire at rest? A branch of wild rose, a sacred bullet—the same objection! Frankly, my son, I do not know. But let me counsel you thus: do not tell this story to others. Your countrymen would laugh at you. Mine would be panic-stricken. Silence I impose on you—both of you!"

"But if they're not warned——"

"I will take steps. And remember this, always: even as St. John has written, 'Even the devils are subject to us through *Thy* name!' "

ANGELA VELEZ, Angela of the tumbled hair and flashing eyes and slim, brown legs—Angela was doing the family washing in the little rivulet that trickles down from the Acequia Negra, humming a verse of *El Coyotito* as she worked.

"A song very beautiful—that," observed a voice in Spanish from across the streamlet.

Angela started and looked up. A tall, bareheaded man stood looking down at her with a smile—a man clad in goatskin chaps and a very torn and dirty shirt, with curious dark stains down the front of it. In the shadow of the cedars his eyes glowed queerly, and his voice had an odd accent that she understood with difficulty.

"I am happy that you like my song," she said.

"Only beautiful songs could pass such lips," said the stranger gallantly. "Is it permitted that I talk with thee of the near at hand?"

Angela looked at him carefully, and found him not ill-looking, except for his sallow skin, slightly wrinkled. Courtly strangers are rare along the Picketwire; so:

"The brook is but a narrow one, *señor*."

Indeed, a man could have crossed it in a stride with ease, but the stranger, after half a step forward, turned and proceeded upstream to the spring, around which he walked and back down on her side of the water.

"I," he observed, "am Don Diego Cosme Rosales y Mendoza. And what might be the name of such a lovely daughter of old Spain?"

"I am a daughter of Mexico," said Angela primly, "and my name is Angela Velez."

"Mexico!" said Don Diego and his eyes widened. Then he smiled as he added, "Angela! Indeed thou art a very angel, my dear!"

He paused and straightened in a listening attitude. The tread of horses was audible from the cedars beyond the acequia. Angela arose and stood beside him watching.

A dusty, weary horse plodded into sight, with Rosy Dayton astride it. Angela smiled.

Even as Father Rivas, she liked Rosy—originally, because he was the only American at Sweetwater who called her Angela rather than "Ann-jelly;" and more recently, with all the fire of her loyal, coquettish little Mexican heart.

But now Rosy's face was strained and haggard as he rode up and dismounted beside her.

"Greetings, *mi angelita!*" he murmured with the travesty of his usual grin. "Have you seen any strangers about?"

Angela stared at him in surprize and turned to where Don Diego had stood a moment before.

A horned toad stared glassily from the shade of a prickly pear, but of Don Diego there was no sign.

"Why, where is he?" she exclaimed. "Only a moment since—a most gallant gentleman, Roseo *mio*. Don Diego Cosme Rosales y Mendoza!" She rolled the lordly syllables on her tongue with delight. "Only a moment ago he stood there."

"What did he look like?" asked Rosy hoarsely.

"Oh, *muy distinguido!* Of the most notable! But he wore no hat, Roseo. And his skin was yellowed, but his lips were, oh, so very red!"

"His face wasn't wrinkled?"

"But no, Roseo. Of the scarcely at all."

"He would be!" muttered Rosy. "He would be younger!"

"You know him, oh Roseo?"

Rosy looked down at her miserably. No use in spreading panic, Father Rivas had said. The priest had a plan of his own. But Angela—her smooth, brown throat, with the soft little hollow at its base—and Don Diego out there in the tangle of cedars! Without answering, he snatched the crucifix from his own throat and gave it to her.

"Wear that always, *angelita!* And——" He paused and looked at the unfinished washing. "Come, I'll help you finish the clothes. This acequia is no place for you."

"But, Roseo—all my life I have lived in Acequia Negra."

"But not at the spring," said Rosy. "And it's—it's different now."

But when the washing was finished, and carried to the adobe house beyond the cedars, he did not linger. To Angela's disappointment, he mounted and rode hastily away.

Don Diego must be found before another night—and what might that night bring? He had looked feverishly through the magazines Father Rivas had shown him—through the book of *Dracula*. After all, vampires weren't invincible. And if the Spaniard had been in the vicinity so recently, he could scarcely have traveled far—or could he? "The dead

travel fast——" Rosy groaned, as he urged his tired horse past the spring and up into the mesas beyond. Then with a sudden new idea, he circled back toward Acequia Negra.

But Angela was piqued at his abrupt leaving. He had not so much as kissed her. Certainly Don Diego would have been more gallant. And why had he disappeared so quickly when Rosy had ridden up? Perhaps he was still about the spring. She would go and see. The acequia no place for her? Nonsense! Rosy must be jealous. Gurgling happily at the thought, she slipped back toward the spring.

And scarcely had she reached it when Don Diego stood before her as suddenly as if he had risen from the earth. The horned toad was gone, but beside him crouched the tame coyote of Manuel Garcia; the animal seemed to combine a curious mixture of elation and terror.

"Why did you run away?" demanded Angela. "Is it that you fear Señor Roseo?"

Don Diego's red lips smiled, though his eyes did not.

"I fear no man. But who am I to intrude between a *señorita* and her lover? Behold, he has brought thee a love token!"

One lean forefinger pointed at the crucifix about Angela's throat. She gurgled happily again.

"He told me to wear it always. Is it not of the most beautiful?"

"Indeed it is. Come here—by the spring—in the better light, that I may see it."

Wonderingly, Angela followed him. The cedar-shaded spring could scarcely be said to afford better light. Don Diego's hand moved toward the cross, then stopped abruptly.

"Wilt thou not hold it in thy so small hands, that I may see it more closely?"

Angela hesitated a moment. Rosy had told her to wear it always, but *always* hardly meant she might never remove it, not even for a moment. She slipped the chain over her head and extended it in her cupped hands to Don Diego.

But the Spaniard made no attempt to touch it; he took a side-step that brought him to the bank of the spring, the coyote following close at his heels. Angela wondered at that, too; heretofore only Manuel could control the little wolf.

And then she saw something else, that sent a little icy trickle down her spine. The inky surface of the Black Spring cast back her reflection, from her tousled hair to her slim ankles—but of Don Diego beside her it gave no sign. She looked again. No, there was no image of Don Diego.

She looked at him with horror-widening eyes—and the Don's lips ceased smiling. He barked some harsh word, and the coyote leaped. Straight against her outstretched arm it sprang, and fell into the water beyond. And with it went the crucifix, the weight of its heavy gold carrying it like a plummet into the bottomless black water.

"You—you wizard!" screamed Angela. "You have lost me the gift of Roseo!"

With scratching fingers, she sprang at the Spaniard's face. But he caught her wrists in a grip like steel; the strength of twenty men must have been in his thin hands, icy-cold.

"Yes, my little angel!" he mocked. "I have lost thee thy charm that would have bound me to the grave for another three centuries! No, no, struggle not, little one; the strength of many men have I, and power such as no man knows! Supreme am I, little flower; supreme and of the most powerful! Never again can another crucifix like that one be made. Fra Domenico made it (may his soul shrivel!), who knew the lore of the ancient church and the magic of the Aztecs. And the Indians killed Fra Domenico three hundred years ago!

Never again may the might of man or of——" A Name trembled on his lips that he seemed unable to utter. "No might in the universe may prevail against me!" he finished.

He released her wrists and beat himself upon the chest, and laughed —a wild, shrill laugh that the coyote answered with a staccato bark.

"For this purpose the Son of God was manifested—that he might destroy the works of the devil!" The voice, strong and calm, came from behind them.

At the first words, Don Diego had whirled and started, as if burned with a white-hot iron.

Father Rivas stood behind them, quietly fingering his rosary, with Rosy beside him.

The don recovered himself.

"Once," he observed, "thy words would have frightened me, priest. But no more. Centuries ago, before the Genoese discovered this land of thine, I found the secret of immortality. Once, it is true, I was caught at my rest, and bound to the earth for a time, yet even Fra Domenico succeeded only partly. At stated times, my spirit stepped free from the body chained by his accursed arts, and roamed the world again. Much that I saw I did not understand, much that I heard was in a language I do not know. But this I learned: there is no power today to equal mine—nothing may ever destroy me." He paused a moment and seemed to shiver. "Nothing!" he repeated with increased vehemence.

"Except the God you have forsworn!"

Don Diego laughed.

"Only by arts that thou or no living man knowest, priest. I am supreme. Soon thy pale bodies shall be my founts of life! Thy women"—he paused to eye Angela—"thy women shall be mine in this life and in life after the death which is not death! A new kingdom I shall found——"

Rosy's hand had disappeared in his pocket. It came forth now, holding an open clasp-knife. The Count of Dracula in the story had been slain with a knife. . . . The Spaniard watched him with a tolerant smile, continued smiling even when the broad blade was buried to the hilt in his breast.

Rosy sprang back panting. He raised the knife to strike again. The Don's ice-cold fingers touched him—the strength seemed to drain from his arms.

"It is useless," said the Spaniard. "The cleft heart—the severed head—the driven stake—are for others, but not for me."

"What know you of magic?" asked the priest scornfully. "What know you of the magic that can transport man's voice across thousands of miles of space; of the magic that enables man to fly swifter than the fleetest bird; that enables him to stay under water for hours; that can in moments slay whole cities or cause the heart that has stopped to beat once more?"

Don Diego stared at him intently, and once more seemed to shiver slightly.

"It may be as thou sayest," he nodded, at last. "Indeed, some of it I know is true. But tell me, oh, priest, can thy wizards of this day do *this?*"

As he spoke he glanced up at the sky. The sun was almost—not quite —at the zenith. His hands made a few passes in the air. And the outlines of his body grew misty; in a moment only a wisp of vapor could be seen floating down toward the River of Lost Souls, and an eery laugh seemed to drift back toward them. The coyote raised its muzzle and howled quaveringly.

"Yet he is not invincible," said the priest slowly. "Even as he boasted, the memory of *something* with power to destroy him came to him. 'For the devils also believe and tremble.' "

"It's another," said Rosy hollowly, as he dropped heavily into a chair. Angela leaned over timidly and stroked his shoulder. "A—a baby at Bear Springs. Every bit of blood—gone——"

"Dead?" asked Father Rivas, and then more slowly: "Undead?"

They were at the Velez 'dobe, he and Rosy, where Don Diego was seen most often—now a bat that fluttered at the windows; now a wolf that howled in the cedars; now a rattlesnake that basked in the sun, scornful of rocks hurled at it—or of bullets.

"I can't go through it again," moaned Rosy. "When we—we—staked—the little boy at Poso—and the sheep-herder at Lockwood—and —and Jack——"

"We gave them peace, my son," said the priest softly. "It is the work of God!"

Three weeks had passed with Don Diego still at large. The Americans at Sweetwater knew him only as the murderer of Jack Miller, and possibly others. What the Mexicans knew, they did not say, but strings of garlic hung at door and windows of every 'dobe, and every brown throat was encircled by necklaces of cloves of garlic.

Yet the deaths of three people, and the mysterious illness of others, whose blood seemed to drain through tiny wounds in their throats, had given them precious clues to the vampire's strength and weakness. In spite of his boasts, he was bound by some of the laws of the undead. He cast no shadow or reflection; he could not enter a house without being invited; he could not cross running water; the presence of garlic banished him. And apparently he must remain in one form, whatever it might be, between the hours of noon and sunset.

"If only," groaned Rosy, "we could do something! But we can't find a trace of him when he—rests—and——"

There was a commotion at the door; Pedro, wild-eyed, stumbled in, voluble for once from fright.

"I have seen him!" cried the man wildly. "I have seen him and only the good God has saved me. Out there in the mesas—beyond the spring—he was coming through the trees—his red eyes burned into me! *Carramba*—my feet, they were frozen —I could not move. He was licking those lips with that little red tongue like a serpent's. I clutched the garlic about my throat and trembled. And then as he stepped between two trees, entangled he was in a twisting vine. He jerked, he tugged, he swore, and as he was on the point of freeing himself, I became alive again, and fled from the place!"

The last of it Rosy had scarcely heard, as an enormous idea took shape in his mind. No lethal weapon might harm the Spaniard, but a vine might ensnare him and hold him fast. Then perhaps——

He arose with a sudden bitter little laugh.

"Father Rivas said the arm of God is strong and shall prevail. I think Don Diego shall change his mind about the power of God!"

Then his voice altered as he spoke gently in Spanish.

"*Angelita mia*, I ask of you a terrible thing. I ask you to risk your life—and the life after death—and the soul—to bring Diego back to the earth from whence he came. Canst thou do it, *mi querida*?"

Angela brushed back her tousled hair as she looked up at him with wondering eyes. He winced as he saw how pale and thin she had become in these last days.

"I, Roseo? What is it that I can do? But, oh, yes, *querido mio!* My fault it was for losing the crucifix," she choked a little. "My life I would give so gladly to undo that!"

"My fault it was," said Rosy

gloomily, "for not replacing the thing on his cursed body. But, please God, it *will* be undone. You must go to the canyon, *angelita,* and walk there daily, until *he* finds you. I will be hidden close by. And I think—there is just a chance—that he will never harm people more! But the garlic you must not wear, for then he might not come."

Angela shivered as she stared out toward the somber Black Spring; then with a swift motion she tore the cloves of garlic from her throat.

"Promise me, Roseo," she almost whispered, "that if—that if—Don Diego succeeds—you will not let me—be as he is! Promise, Roseo *mio!*"

Rosy closed his eyes. Suppose his wild guess was wrong—in fancy he could see the red lips grin in triumph—the squared mouth again dripping with blood—Angela's blood. The thought of a stake plunging through her soft little body—Rosy choked. And then another vision—the body of Jack Miller—his friend—of the boy at Poso—of the sheep-herder—of the baby at Bear Springs—of all the other bodies that would follow. . . .

"I promise, *angelita*—oh, *carissima mia!*" And he held her tightly as if to defy the power of Don Diego to snatch her from him.

Dimly he was aware that the arms of Father Rivas were around them both.

ANGELA stood tense by the edge of the canyon. The sun was sinking—in a few minutes all the forces of evil would be Don Diego's. If Rosy failed—she shivered as she moved nearer the canyon's rim.

Close beside her a tortuous trail led down to the river, but just at her feet the canyon wall dropped sheer, in a dizzy precipice. If Rosy failed—down there would be peace—and rest that the vampire might not break.

Father Rivas was back there, too, she knew, a crucifix clutched in his hand, and prayers mounting desperately to his lips. He had said the great God would protect her—but would He? She turned her face up to the magnificence of the sunset sky. Would He Who moved sun and stars pause to pity her—the little Mexican girl—the spig? She looked back toward Sweetwater—where the wise *Americanos* laughed at spig superstitions—the wise *Americanos* for whom she was offering to die. . . .

"Evening greetings, little flower!" The don's deep voice boomed in her ear. She looked up into a face that had grown twenty years younger in a month. "I feared it was that thou liked me not, yet here I see thee to meet me. A blessed day, little one."

Father Rivas, back among the trees, had thrilled. He alone had seen Don Diego plod up the steep trail from the canyon's bottom. Their surmise was right! Superior though he was to stake or knife or crucifix, yet one law of the undead still bound him. Caught at noon in the form of man, a man he must remain until sunset, for he would scarcely climb that weary trail if he might fly as a bat or float up as a wisp of vapor.

But where was Rosy? Angela was shrinking back from the vampire's embrace. She seemed like a bird the priest had once seen charmed by a rattler. Where was the thud of horse's hoofs? Only the barking of a prairie-dog broke the silence.

The priest darted forward, the crucifix held out before him. He snatched Angela almost from the Spaniard's arms—stood at bay between them. The Spaniard smiled faintly.

"A good evening to thee, priest. What is that toy thou hast there?"

"Back to your grave!" cried the priest. "Unclean! Ye are of your father, the devil! Back, I say!"

"Once before I told thee thy"—the vampire faltered—"thy Master is powerless. Proof I shall give thee when yonder sun sets in——"

There was a clatter of hoofs on the stones. Something long and black and snaky whirled and hissed through the air. The noose of a rawhide riata settled about Don Diego's shoulders.

All in a second, Rosy's trained pony whirled off at right angles. Even the enormous strength of the vampire could not withstand the rush and plunge of the galloping horse. He was hurled off his feet, battered against the rocks, as his body bounced and dashed at the end of the riata. Rosy spurred down the canyon trail.

Angela's scream was drowned in the torrent of oaths that poured from the struggling Spaniard's lips. His hands caught the riata; hauled on it with terrible strength. But the strength of fifty men could not have snapped that plaited rawhide.

From rock to rock he bounced, down to the River of Lost Souls. It seemed his bones must be shattered, yet somehow he struggled to his feet as they reached the canyon's bottom.

The flood waters had passed away. The river was now in its normal state, two trickling rivulets in a waste of gravel and sand. Almost overnight weeds and grass had sprung up in the river bed—except in one patch of raw, red sand—barren and sinister.

Down the river-bed Rosy galloped, his horse laboring against the vampire's strength, that equaled a score of men. Not for a moment must Don Diego be allowed to gain firm footing.

Now they were opposite that barren spot of sand. Rosy touched one spur to his horse. It whirled in its tracks. Like the lash of a cracking whip, Don Diego was flung about. Out from the clean grass he was hurled onto the blood-red sand.

Rosy touched the reins, and the horse plowed to a stop. With his face stony-hard as the rocks of the canyon, he opened a clasp-knife. The riata hummed like a violin-string as it parted. Don Diego floundered to his knees.

From the canyon's brim, Angela and Father Rivas saw him arise, but now he was in to his ankles. And even as they watched him plunge and flounder, he sank to his knees.

In that instant some hint of his fate seemed to dawn on the Spaniard. He screamed terribly, as he clawed desperately at the slack rawhide. He exerted all his enormous strength—and sank to his waist.

His hands moved in the air, making frenzied passes. His reddening eyes rolled up to the sun that hovered over the canyon's rim.

Then he screamed again—the scream of a lost soul that looks into hell.

"Save me!" he screamed. "Save me! I will not harm thee! I promise—the word of a peer of Spain! I will depart from here—I will return to Castille——"

The trio of watchers remained silent.

"I will make you rich!" he screamed as the red sand reached to his breast. "I know the hiding-place of the canyon's gold! Yellow gold—bullion—twelve great chests full! All for you—if you but save me!"

And when they still made no answer, he cursed them wildly.

"May your souls shrivel, as will my body! Locked in this accursed sand—for all time to come—the thirst—the torture——"

He clutched at his throat. He clawed at the sand. Suddenly he seemed very small and pitiful. They wondered why they had feared him. Angela moved as if she would descend to help him. Father Rivas, granite-jawed, stopped her.

Then a gleam of triumph came into the red eyes. The sun sank behind the canyon's rim. His arms waved again, making passes in the air.

As once before, the outlines of his head and waving arms grew misty.

All else lay beneath the sand. And then a wisp of vapor hovered in the air where he had been.

"Oh, God!" prayed the priest, his knuckles white as he clutched the cross. "Oh, God, do not permit——" He broke off, then raised his voice in a great shout. "I thank Thee, oh, my God—I thank Thee——"

Far below, the wisp of vapor was disappearing in the sand, being sucked inexorably down, attached unbreakably to that which lay beneath. It twisted and struggled in the failing light, and then it was gone.

The red sand lay desolate and barren as before, as Rosy rode back up the canyon. Angela was running to meet him.

And a vagrant wind chuckled as if in glee among the cedars, for the River of Lost Souls had reclaimed its own, never to loose it more.

MARMORA

By **DONALD WANDREI**

Out of the west, foul breezes sweep,
Out of the dark where the black moons creep,
With the breath of the web-faced things asleep
In Marmora.

A ruby flares in the glistening sky,
In the marble palace, gold dwarfs cry,
Long-dead creatures murmur and sigh
In Marmora.

In a marsh that even the water-snakes spurn,
Mandrakes writhe and witch-fires burn,
Swart talons toward the ruby turn,
In Marmora.

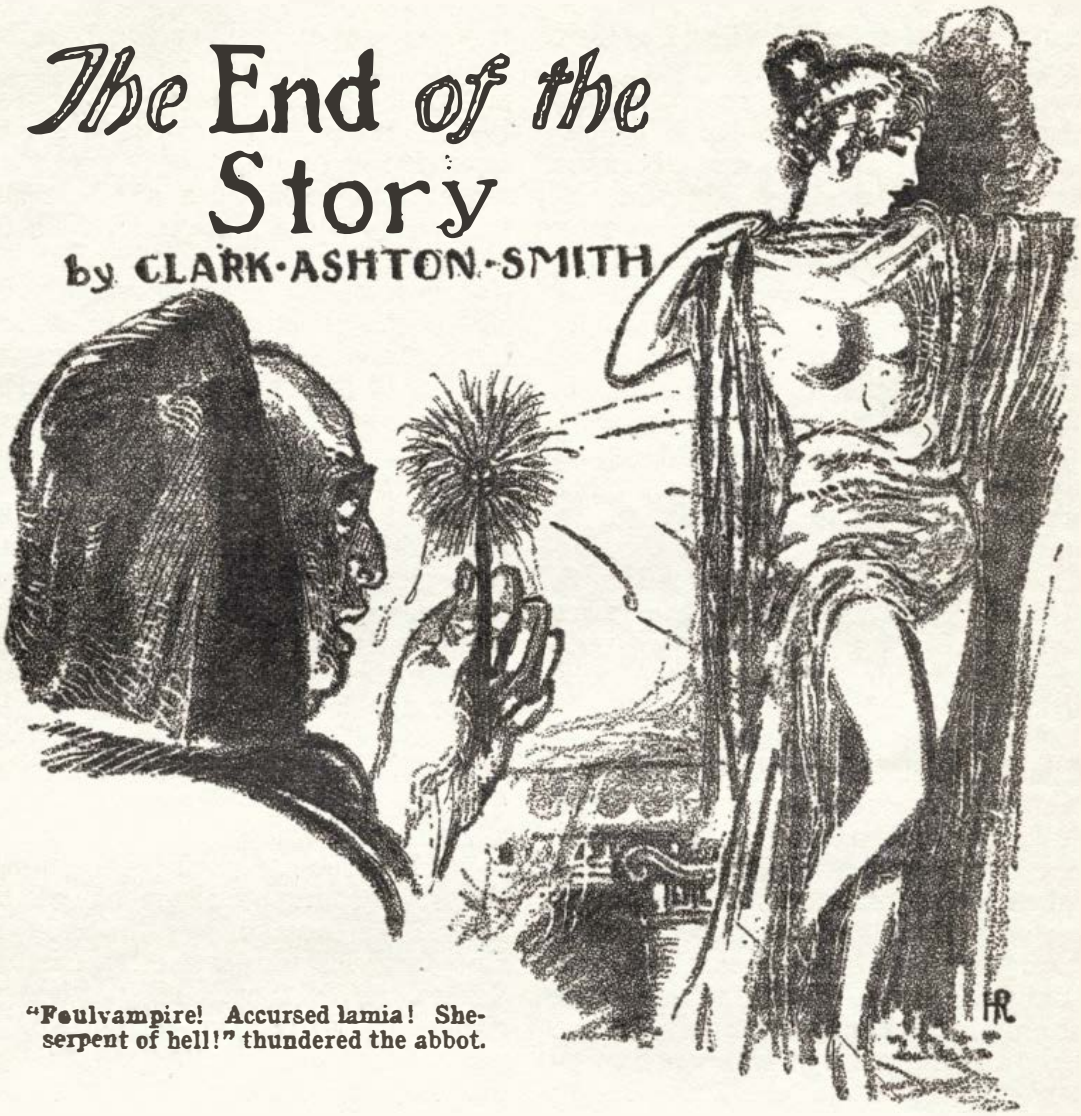
All night the blood-red ruby glares,
Before the palace a beacon flares,
But the spell-bound half-beasts lie in their lairs
In Marmora.

Out of the sky, a black star shines,
From the palace, a marble monster whines,
On the throne a king for its worm-queen pines
In Marmora.

Smooth is the liquid ink of the lake,
On its shore, mad emeralds burn in the brake,
A slain man moans on a pointed stake
In Marmora.

The End of the Story

by CLARK·ASHTON·SMITH



"Foulvampire! Accursed lamia! She-serpent of hell!" thundered the abbot.

THE following narrative was found among the papers of Christophe Morand, a young law-student of Tours, after his unaccountable disappearance during a visit at his father's home near Moulins, in November, 1789:

A sinister brownish-purple autumn twilight, made premature by the imminence of a sudden thunderstorm, had filled the forest of Averoigne. The trees along my road were already blurred to ebon masses, and the road itself, pale and spectral before me in the thickening gloom, seemed to waver and quiver slightly, as with the tremor of some mysterious earthquake. I spurred my horse, who was wofully tired with a journey begun at dawn, and had fallen hours ago to a protesting and reluctant trot, and we galloped adown the darkening road between enormous oaks that seemed to lean toward us with boughs like clutching fingers as we passed.

With dreadful rapidity, the night was upon us, the blackness became a tangible clinging veil; a nightmare confusion and desperation drove me to spur my mount again with a more cruel rigor; and now, as we went, the first far-off mutter of the storm mingled with the clatter of my horse's hoofs, and the first lightning flashes illumed our way, which, to my

amazement (since I believed myself on the main highway through Averoigne), had inexplicably narrowed to a well-trodden footpath. Feeling sure that I had gone astray, but not caring to retrace my steps in the teeth of darkness and the towering clouds of the tempest, I hurried on, hoping, as seemed reasonable, that a path so plainly worn would lead eventually to some house or château where I could find refuge for the night. My hope was well-founded, for within a few minutes I descried a glimmering light through the forest-boughs, and came suddenly to an open glade, where, on a gentle eminence, a large building loomed, with several litten windows in the lower story, and a top that was well-nigh indistinguishable against the bulks of driven cloud.

"Doubtless a monastery," I thought, as I drew rein, and descending from my exhausted mount, lifted the heavy brazen knocker in the form of a dog's head and let it fall on the oaken door. The sound was unexpectedly loud and sonorous, with a reverberation almost sepulchral, and I shivered involuntarily, with a sense of startlement, of unwonted dismay. This, a moment later, was wholly dissipated when the door was thrown open and a tall, ruddy-featured monk stood before me in the cheerful glow of the cressets that illumed a capacious hallway.

"I bid you welcome to the abbey of Perigon," he said, in a suave rumble, and even as he spoke, another robed and hooded figure appeared and took my horse in charge. As I murmured my thanks and acknowledgments, the storm broke and tremendous gusts of rain, accompanied by ever-nearing peals of thunder, drove with demoniac fury on the door that had closed behind me.

"It is fortunate that you found us when you did," observed my host. " 'Twere ill for man and beast to be abroad in such a hell-brew."

Divining without question that I was hungry as well as tired, he led me to the refectory and set before me a bountiful meal of mutton, brown bread, lentils, and a strong excellent red wine.

He sat opposite me at the refectory table while I ate, and, with my hunger a little mollified, I took occasion to scan him more attentively. He was both tall and stoutly built, and his features, where the brow was no less broad than the powerful jaw, betokened intellect as well as a love for good living. A certain delicacy and refinement, an air of scholarship, of good taste and good breeding, emanated from him, and I thought to myself: "This monk is probably a connoisseur of books as well as of wines." Doubtless my expression betrayed the quickening of my curiosity, for he said, as if in answer:

"I am Hilaire, the abbot of Perigon. We are a Benedictine order, who live in amity with God and with all men, and we do not hold that the spirit is to be enriched by the mortification or impoverishment of the body. We have in our butteries an abundance of wholesome fare, in our cellars the best and oldest vintages of the district of Averoigne. And, if such things interest you, as mayhap they do, we have a library that is stocked with rare tomes, with precious manuscripts, with the finest works of heathendom and christendom, even to certain unique writings that survived the holocaust of Alexandria."

"I appreciate your hospitality," I said, bowing. "I am Christophe Morand, a law-student, on my way home from Tours to my father's estate near Moulins. I, too, am a lover of books, and nothing would delight me more than the privilege of inspecting a library so rich and curious as the one whereof you speak."

Forthwith, while I finished my meal, we fell to discussing the classics, and to quoting and capping passages from Latin, Greek, or Christian

authors. My host, I soon discovered, was a scholar of uncommon attainments, with an erudition, a ready familiarity with both ancient and modern literature that made my own seem as that of the merest beginner by comparison. He, on his part, was so good as to commend my far from perfect Latin, and by the time I had emptied my bottle of red wine we were chatting familiarly like old friends.

All my fatigue had now flown, to be succeeded by a rare sense of well-being, of physical comfort combined with mental alertness and keenness. So, when the abbot suggested that we pay a visit to the library, I assented with alacrity.

He led me down a long corridor, on each side of which were cells belonging to the brothers of the order, and unlocked, with a large brazen key that depended from his girdle, the door of a great room with lofty ceiling and several deep-set windows. Truly, he had not exaggerated the resources of the library; for the long shelves were overcrowded with books, and many volumes were piled high on the tables or stacked in corners. There were rolls of papyrus, of parchment, of vellum; there were strange Byzantine or Coptic bibles; there were old Arabic and Persian manuscripts with floriated or jewel-studded covers; there were scores of incunabula from the first printing-presses; there were innumerable monkish copies of antique authors, bound in wood or ivory, with rich illuminations and lettering that was often in itself a work of art.

With a care that was both loving and meticulous, the abbot Hilaire brought out volume after volume for my inspection. Many of them I had never seen before; some were unknown to me even by fame or rumor. My excited interest, my unfeigned enthusiasm, evidently pleased him, for at length he pressed a hidden spring in one of the library tables and drew out a long drawer, in which, he told me, were certain treasures that he did not care to bring forth for the edification or delectation of many, and whose very existence was undreamed of by the monks.

"Here," he continued, "are three odes by Catullus which you will not find in any published edition of his works. Here, also, is an original manuscript of Sappho—a complete copy of a poem otherwise extant only in brief fragments; here are two of the lost tales of Miletus, a letter of Pericles to Aspasia, an unknown dialogue of Plato, and an old Arabian work on astronomy, by some anonymous author, in which the theories of Copernicus are anticipated. And, lastly, here is the somewhat infamous *Histoire d'Amour*, by Bernard de Vaillantcoeur, which was destroyed immediately upon publication, and of which only one other copy is known to exist."

As I gazed with mingled awe and curiosity on the unique, unheard-of treasures he displayed, I saw in one corner of the drawer what appeared to be a thin volume with plain untitled binding of dark leather. I ventured to pick it up, and found that it contained a few sheets of closely written manuscript in old French.

"And this?" I queried, turning to look at Hilaire, whose face, to my amazement, had suddenly assumed a melancholy and troubled expression.

"It were better not to ask, my son." He crossed himself as he spoke, and his voice was no longer mellow, but harsh, agitated, full of a sorrowful perturbation. "There is a curse on the pages that you hold in your hand: an evil spell, a malign power is attached to them, and he who would venture to peruse them is henceforward in dire peril both of body and soul." He took the little volume from me as he spoke, and re-

turned it to the drawer, again crossing himself carefully as he did so.

"But, father," I dared to expostulate, "how can such things be? How can there be danger in a few written sheets of parchment?"

"Christophe, there are things beyond your understanding, things that it were not well for you to know. The might of Satan is manifestable in devious modes, in diverse manners; there are other temptations than those of the world and the flesh, there are evils no less subtle than irresistible, there are hidden heresies, and necromancies other than those which sorcerers practise."

"With what, then, are these pages concerned, that such occult peril, such unholy power lurks within them?"

"I forbid you to ask." His tone was one of great rigor, with a finality that dissuaded me from further questioning.

"For you, my son," he went on, "the danger would be doubly great, because you are young, ardent, full of desires and curiosities. Believe me, it is better to forget that you have even seen this manuscript." He closed the hidden drawer, and as he did so, the melancholy troubled look was replaced by his former benignity.

"Now," he said, as he turned to one of the book-shelves, "I will show you the copy of Ovid that was owned by the poet Petrarch." He was again the mellow scholar, the kindly, jovial host, and it was evident that the mysterious manuscript was not to be referred to again. But his odd perturbation, the dark and awful hints he had let fall, the vague terrific terms of his proscription, had all served to awaken my wildest curiosity, and, though I felt the obsession to be unreasonable, I was quite unable to think of anything else for the rest of the evening. All manner of speculations, fantastic, absurd, outrageous, ludicrous, terrible, defiled through my brain as I duly admired the incunabula which Hilaire took down so tenderly from the shelves for my delectation.

At last, toward midnight, he led me to my room—a room especially reserved for visitors, and with more of comfort, of actual luxury in its hangings, carpets and deeply quilted bed than was allowable in the cells of the monks or of the abbot himself. Even when Hilaire had withdrawn, and I had proved for my satisfaction the softness of the bed allotted me, my brain still whirled with questions concerning the forbidden manuscript. Though the storm had now ceased, it was long before I fell asleep; but slumber, when it finally came, was dreamless and profound.

WHEN I awoke, a river of sunshine clear as molten gold was pouring through my window. The storm had wholly vanished, and no lightest tatter of cloud was visible anywhere in the pale-blue October heavens. I ran to the window and peered out on a world of autumnal forest and fields all a-sparkle with the diamonds of rain. All was beautiful, all was idyllic to a degree that could be fully appreciated only by one who had lived for a long time, as I had, within the walls of a city, with towered buildings in lieu of trees and cobbled pavements where grass should be. But, charming as it was, the foreground held my gaze only for a few moments; then, beyond the tops of the trees, I saw a hill, not more than a mile distant, on whose summit there stood the ruins of some old château, the crumbling, broken-down condition of whose walls and towers was plainly visible. It drew my gaze irresistibly, with an overpowering sense of romantic attraction, which somehow seemed so natural, so inevitable, that I did not pause to analyze or wonder; and once having seen it, I could not take my eyes away, but lingered at the

window for how long I knew not, scrutinizing as closely as I could the details of each time-shaken turret and bastion. Some undefinable fascination was inherent in the very form, the extent, the disposition of the pile—some fascination not dissimilar to that exerted by a srain of music, by a magical combination of words in poetry, by the features of a beloved face. Gazing, I lost myself in reveries that I could not recall afterward, but which left behind them the same tantalizing sense of innominable delight which forgotten nocturnal dreams may sometimes leave.

I was recalled to the actualities of life by a gentle knock at my door, and realized that I had forgotten to dress myself. It was the abbot, who came to inquire how I had passed the night, and to tell me that breakfast was ready whenever I should care to arise. For some reason, I felt a little embarrassed, even shamefaced, to have been caught day-dreaming; and, though this was doubtless unnecessary, I apologized for my dilatoriness. Hilaire, I thought, gave me a keen, inquiring look, which was quickly withdrawn, as, with the suave courtesy of a good host, he assured me that there was nothing whatever for which I need apologize.

When I had breakfasted, I told Hilaire, with many expressions of gratitude for his hospitality, that it was time for me to resume my journey. But his regret at the announcement of my departure was so unfeigned, his invitation to tarry for at least another night was so genuinely hearty, so sincerely urgent, that I consented to remain. In truth, I required no great amount of solicitation, for, apart from the real liking I had taken to Hilaire, the mystery of the forbidden manuscript had entirely enslaved my imagination, and I was loth to leave without having learned more concerning it. Also, for a youth with scholastic leanings, the freedom of the abbot's library was a rare privilege, a precious opportunity not to be passed over.

"I should like," I said, "to pursue certain studies while I am here, with the aid of your incomparable collection."

"My son, you are more than welcome to remain for any length of time, and you can have access to my books whenever it suits your need or inclination." So saying, Hilaire detached the key of the library from his girdle and gave it to me. "There are duties," he went on, "which will call me away from the monastery for a few hours today, and doubtless you will desire to study in my absence."

A little later, he excused himself and departed. With inward felicitations on the longed-for opportunity that had fallen so readily into my hands, I hastened to the library, with no thought save to read the proscribed manuscript. Giving scarcely a glance at the laden shelves, I sought the table with the secret drawer, and fumbled for the spring. After a little anxious delay, I pressed the proper spot and drew forth the drawer. An impulsion that had become a veritable obsession, a fever of curiosity that bordered upon actual madness, drove me, and if the safety of my soul had really depended upon it, I could not have denied the desire which forced me to take from the drawer the thin volume with plain unlettered binding.

SEATING myself in a chair near one of the windows, I began to peruse the pages, which were only six in number. The writing was peculiar, with letter-forms of a fantasticality I had never met before, and the French was not only old but well-nigh barbarous in its quaint singularity. Notwithstanding the difficulty I found in deciphering them, a mad, unnaccountable thrill ran through me at the first words, and I

read on with all the sensations of a man who has been bewitched or who has drunken a philtre of bewildering potency.

There was no title, no date, and the writing was a narrative which began almost as abruptly as it ended. It concerned one Gerard, Comte de Venteillon, who, on the eve of his marriage to the renowned and beautiful demoiselle, Eleanor des Lys, had met in the forest near his château a strange, half-human creature with hoofs and horns. Now Gerard, as the narrative explained, was a knightly youth of indisputably proven valor, as well as a true Christian; so, in the name of our Savior, Jesus Christ, he bade the creature stand and give an account of itself.

Laughing wildly in the twilight, the bizarre being capered before him, and cried:

"I am a satyr, and your Christ is less to me than the weeds that grow on your kitchen-middens."

Appalled by such blasphemy, Gerard would have drawn his sword to slay the creature, but again it cried, saying:

"Stay, Gerard de Venteillon, and I will tell you a secret, knowing which, you will forget the worship of Christ, and forget your beautiful bride of tomorrow, and turn your back on the world and on the very sun itself with no reluctance and no regret."

Now, albeit half unwillingly, Gerard lent the satyr an ear and it came closer and whispered to him. And that which it whispered is not known; but before it vanished amid the blackening shadows of the forest, the satyr spoke aloud once more, and said:

"The power of Christ has prevailed like a black frost on all the woods, the fields, the rivers, the mountains, where abode in their felicity the glad, immortal goddesses and nymphs of yore. But still, in the cryptic caverns of earth, in places far underground, like the hell your priests have fabled, there dwells the pagan loveliness, there cry the pagan ecstasies." And with the last words, the creature laughed again its wild unhuman laugh, and disappeared among the darkening boles of the twilight trees.

From that moment, a change was upon Gerard de Venteillon. He returned to his château with downcast mien, speaking no cheery or kindly word to his retainers, as was his wont, but sitting or pacing always in silence, and scarcely heeding the food that was set before him. Nor did he go that evening to visit his betrothed, as he had promised; but, toward midnight, when a waning moon had arisen red as from a bath of blood, he went forth clandestinely by the postern door of the château, and following an old, half-obliterated trail through the woods, found his way to the ruins of the Château des Faussesflammes, which stands on a hill opposite the Benedictine abbey of Perigon.

Now these ruins (said the manuscript) are very old, and have long been avoided by the people of the district; for a legendry of immemorial evil clings about them, and it is said that they are the dwelling-place of foul spirits, the rendezvous of sorcerers and succubi. But Gerard, as if oblivious or fearless of their ill renown, plunged like one who is devil-driven into the shadow of the crumbling walls, and went, with the careful groping of a man who follows some given direction, to the northern end of the courtyard. There, directly between and below the two centermost windows, which, it may be, looked forth from the chamber of forgotten chatelaines, he pressed with his right foot on a flagstone differing from those about it in being of a triangular form. And the flagstone moved and tilted beneath his foot, revealing a flight of granite steps that went down into the earth.

Then, lighting a taper he had brought with him, Gerard descended the steps, and the flagstone swung into place behind him.

On the morrow, his betrothed, Eleanor des Lys, and all her bridal train, waited vainly for him at the cathedral of Vyones, the principal town of Averoigne, where the wedding had been set. And from that time his face was beheld by no man, and no vaguest rumor of Gerard de Venteillon or of the fate that befell him has ever passed among the living. . . .

Such was the substance of the forbidden manuscript, and thus it ended. As I have said before, there was no date, nor was there anything to indicate by whom it had been written or how the knowledge of the happenings related had come into the writer's possession. But, oddly enough, it did not occur to me to doubt their veridity for a moment; and the curiosity I had felt concerning the contents of the manuscript was now replaced by a burning desire, a thousandfold more powerful, more obsessive, to know the ending of the story and to learn what Gerard de Venteillon had found when he descended the hidden steps.

In reading the tale, it had of course occurred to me that the ruins of the Château des Faussesflammes, described therein, were the very same ruins I had seen that morning from my chamber window; and pondering this, I became more and more possessed by an insane fever, by a frenetic, unholy excitement. Returning the manuscript to the secret drawer, I left the library and wandered for awhile in an aimless fashion about the corridors of the monastery. Chancing to meet there the same monk who had taken my horse in charge the previous evening, I ventured to question him, as discreetly and casually as I could, regarding the ruins which were visible from the abbey windows.

He crossed himself, and a frightened look came over his broad, placid face at my query.

"The ruins are those of the Château des Faussesflammes," he replied. "For untold years, men say, they have been the haunt of unholy spirits, of witches and demons; and festivals not to be described or even named are held within their walls. No weapon known to man, no exorcism or holy water, has ever prevailed against these demons; many brave cavaliers and monks have disappeared amid the shadows of Faussesflammes, never to return; and once, it is told, an abbot of Perigon went thither to make war on the powers of evil; but what befell him at the hands of the succubi is not known or conjectured. Some say that the demons are abominable hags whose bodies terminate in serpentine coils; others, that they are women of more than mortal beauty, whose kisses are a diabolic delight that consumes the flesh of men with the fierceness of hell-fire. . . . As for me, I know not whether such tales are true; but I should not care to venture within the walls of Faussesflammes."

Before he had finished speaking, a resolve had sprung to life full-born in my mind: I felt that I must go to the Château des Faussesflammes and learn for myself, if possible, all that could be learned. The impulse was immediate, overwhelming, ineluctable; and even if I had so desired, I could no more have fought against it than if I had been the victim of some sorcerer's invultuation. The proscription of the abbot Hilaire, the strange unfinished tale in the old manuscript, the evil legendry at which the monk had now hinted—all these, it would seem, should have served to frighten and deter me from such a resolve; but, on the contrary, by some bizarre inversion of thought, they seemed to conceal some delectable mystery, to denote a hidden world of ineffable things, of vague undreamable pleasures that set my brain on fire and made my pulses throb deliriously. I

did not know, I could not conceive, of what these pleasures would consist; but in some mystical manner I was as sure of their ultimate reality as the abbot Hilaire was sure of heaven.

I determined to go that very afternoon, in the absence of Hilaire, who, I felt instinctively, might be suspicious of any such intention on my part and would surely be inimical toward its fulfilment.

My preparations were very simple: I put in my pockets a small taper from my room and the heel of a loaf of bread from the refectory; and making sure that a little dagger which I always carried was in its sheath, I left the monastery forthwith. Meeting two of the brothers in the courtyard, I told them I was going for a short walk in the neighboring woods. They gave me a jovial "*pax vobiscum*" and went upon their way in the spirit of the words.

HEADING as directly as I could for Faussesflammes, whose turrets were often lost behind the high and interlacing boughs, I entered the forest. There were no paths, and often I was compelled to brief detours and divagations by the thickness of the underbrush. In my feverous hurry to reach the ruins, it seemed hours before I came to the top of the hill which Faussesflammes surmounted, but probably it was little more than thirty minutes. Climbing the last declivity of the boulder-strewn slope, I came suddenly within view of the château, standing close at hand in the center of the level table which formed the summit. Trees had taken root in its broken-down walls, and the ruinous gateway that gave on the courtyard was half-choked by bushes, brambles and nettle-plants. Forcing my way through, not without difficulty, and with clothing that had suffered from the bramble-thorns, I went, like Gerard de Venteillon in the old manuscript, to the northern end of the court. Enormous evil-looking weeds were rooted between the flagstones, rearing their thick and fleshy leaves that had turned to dull sinister maroons and purples with the onset of autumn. But I soon found the triangular flagstone indicated in the tale, and without the slightest delay or hesitation I pressed upon it with my right foot.

A mad shiver, a thrill of adventurous triumph that was mingled with something of trepidation, leaped through me when the great flagstone tilted easily beneath my foot, disclosing dark steps of granite, even as in the story. Now, for a moment, the vaguely hinted horrors of the monkish legends became imminently real in my imagination, and I paused before the black opening that was to engulf me, wondering if some satanic spell had not drawn me thither to perils of unknown terror and inconceivable gravity.

Only for a few instants, however, did I hesitate. Then the sense of peril faded, the monkish horrors became a fantastic dream, and the charm of things unformulable, but ever closer at hand, always more readily attainable, tightened about me like the embrace of amorous arms. I lit my taper, I descended the stair; and even as behind Gerard de Venteillon, the triangular block of stone silently resumed its place in the paving of the court above me. Doubtless it was moved by some mechanism operable by a man's weight on one of the steps; but I did not pause to consider its modus operandi, or to wonder if there were any way by which it could be worked from beneath to permit my return.

There were perhaps a dozen steps, terminating in a low, narrow, musty vault that was void of anything more substantial than ancient, dust-encumbered cobwebs. At the end, a small doorway admitted me to a second vault that differed from the first only in being larger and dustier. I passed through several such vaults, and then

found myself in a long passage or tunnel, half blocked in places by boulders or heaps of rubble that had fallen from the crumbling sides. It was very damp, and full of the noisome odor of stagnant waters and subterranean mold. My feet splashed more than once in little pools, and drops fell upon me from above, fetid and foul as if they had oozed from a charnel. Beyond the wavering circle of light that my taper maintained, it seemed to me that the coils of dim and shadowy serpents slithered away in the darkness at my approach; but I could not be sure whether they really were serpents, or only the troubled and retreating shadows, seen by an eye that was still unaccustomed to the gloom of the vaults.

Rounding a sudden turn in the passage, I saw the last thing I had dreamt of seeing—the gleam of sunlight at what was apparently the tunnel's end. I scarcely know what I had expected to find, but such an eventuation was somehow altogether unanticipated. I hurried on, in some confusion of thought, and stumbled through the opening, to find myself blinking in the full rays of the sun.

Even before I had sufficiently recovered my wits and my eyesight to take note of the landscape before me, I was struck by a strange circumstance: Though it had been early afternoon when I entered the vaults, and though my passage through them could have been a matter of no more than a few minutes, the sun was now nearing the horizon. There was also a difference in its light, which was both brighter and mellower than the sun I had seen above Averoigne; and the sky itself was intensely blue, with no hint of autumnal pallor.

Now, with ever-increasing stupefaction, I stared about me, and could find nothing familiar or even credible in the scene upon which I had emerged. Contrary to all reasonable expectation, there was no semblance of the hill upon which Faussesflammes stood, or of the adjoining country; but around me was a placid land of rolling meadows, through which a golden-gleaming river meandered toward a sea of deepest azure that was visible beyond the tops of laurel-trees. . . . But there are no laurel-trees in Averoigne, and the sea is hundreds of miles away: judge, then, my complete confusion and dumfoundment.

It was a scene of such loveliness as I have never before beheld. The meadow-grass at my feet was softer and more lustrous than emerald velvet, and was full of violets and many-colored asphodels. The dark green of ilex-trees was mirrored in the golden river, and far away I saw the pale gleam of a marble acropolis on a low summit above the plain. All things bore the aspect of a mild and clement spring that was verging upon an opulent summer. I felt as if I had stepped into a land of classic myth, of Grecian legend; and moment by moment, all surprize, all wonder as to how I could have come there, was drowned in a sense of ever-growing ecstasy before the utter, ineffable beauty of the landscape.

Near by, in a laurel-grove, a white roof shone in the late rays of the sun. I was drawn toward it by the same allurement, only far more potent and urgent, which I had felt on seeing the forbidden manuscript and the ruins of Faussesflammes. Here, I knew with an esoteric certainty, was the culmination of my quest, the reward of all my mad and perhaps impious curiosity.

As I entered the grove, I heard laughter among the trees, blending harmoniously with the low murmur of their leaves in a soft, balmy wind. I thought I saw vague forms that melted among the boles at my approach; and once a shaggy, goat-like creature with human head and body ran across my path, as if in pursuit of a flying nymph.

In the heart of the grove, I found a marble palace with a portico of Doric columns. As I neared it, I was greeted by two women in the costume of ancient slaves; and though my Greek is of the meagerest, I found no difficulty whatever in comprehending their speech, which was of Attic purity.

"Our mistress, Nycea, awaits you," they told me. I could no longer marvel at anything, but accepted my situation without question or surmise, like one who resigns himself to the progress of some delightful dream. Probably, I thought, it was a dream, and I was still lying in my bed at the monastery; but never before had I been favored by nocturnal visions of such clarity and surpassing loveliness.

The interior of the palace was full of a luxury that verged upon the barbaric, and which evidently belonged to the period of Greek decadence, with its intermingling of Oriental influences. I was led through a hallway gleaming with onyx and polished porphyry, into an opulently furnished room, where, on a couch of gorgeous fabrics, there reclined a woman of goddess-like beauty.

At sight of her, I trembled from head to foot with the violence of a strange emotion. I had heard of the sudden mad loves by which men are seized on beholding for the first time a certain face and form; but never before had I experienced a passion of such intensity, such all-consuming ardor, as the one I conceived immediately for this woman. Indeed, it seemed as if I had loved her for a long time, without knowing that it was she whom I loved, and without being able to identify the nature of my emotion or to orient the feeling in any manner.

She was not tall, but was formed with exquisite voluptuous purity of line and contour. Her eyes were of a dark sapphire blue, with molten depths into which the soul was fain to plunge as into the soft abysses of a summer ocean. The curve of her lips was enigmatic, a little mournful, and gravely tender as the lips of an antique Venus. Her hair, brownish rather than blond, fell over her neck and ears and forehead in delicious ripples confined by a plain fillet of silver. In her expression, there was a mixture of pride and voluptuousness, of regal imperiousness and feminine yielding. Her movements were all as effortless and graceful as those of a serpent.

"I knew you would come," she murmured in the same soft-voweled Greek I had heard from the lips of her servants. "I have waited for you long; but when you sought refuge from the storm in the abbey of Perigon, and saw the manuscript in the secret drawer, I knew that the hour of your arrival was at hand. Ah! you did not dream that the spell which drew you so irresistibly, with such unaccountable potency, was the spell of my beauty, the magical allurement of my love!"

"Who are you?" I queried. I spoke readily in Greek, which would have surprized me greatly an hour before. But now, I was prepared to accept anything whatever, no matter how fantastic or preposterous, as part of the miraculous fortune, the unbelievable adventure which had befallen me.

"I am Nycea," she replied to my question. "I love you, and the hospitality of my palace and of my arms is at your disposal. Need you know anything more?"

The slaves had disappeared. I flung myself beside the couch and kissed the hand she offered me, pouring out protestations that were no doubt incoherent, but were nevertheless full of an ardor that made her smile tenderly.

Her hand was cool to my lips, but the touch of it fired my passion. I ventured to seat myself beside her on the couch, and she did not deny my familiarity. While a soft purple twi-

light began to fill the corners of the chamber, we conversed happily, saying over and over again all the sweet absurd litanies, all the felicitous nothings that come instinctively to the lips of lovers. She was incredibly soft in my arms, and it seemed almost as if the completeness of her yielding was unhindered by the presence of bones in her lovely body.

The servants entered noiselessly, lighting rich lamps of intricately carven gold, and setting before us a meal of spicy meats, of unknown savorous fruits and potent wines. But I could eat little, and while I drank, I thirsted for the sweeter wine of Nycea's mouth.

I DO not know when we fell asleep; but the evening had flown like an enchanted moment. Heavy with felicity, I drifted off on a silken tide of drowsiness, and the golden lamps and the face of Nycea blurred in a blissful mist and were seen no more.

Suddenly, from the depths of a slumber beyond all dreams, I found myself compelled into full wakefulness. For an instant, I did not even realize where I was, still less what had aroused me. Then I heard a footfall in the open doorway of the room, and peering across the sleeping head of Nycea, saw in the lamplight the abbot Hilaire, who had paused on the threshold. A look of absolute horror was imprinted upon his face, and as he caught sight of me, he began to gibber in Latin, in tones where something of fear was blended with fanatical abhorrence and hatred. I saw that he carried in his hands a large bottle and an aspergillus. I felt sure that the bottle was full of holy water, and of course divined the use for which it was intended.

Looking at Nycea, I saw that she too was awake, and knew that she was aware of the abbot's presence. She gave me a strange smile, in which I read an affectionate pity, mingled with the reassurance that a woman offers a frightened child.

"Do not fear for me," she whispered.

"Foul vampire! accursed lamia! she-serpent of hell!" thundered the abbot suddenly, as he crossed the threshold of the room, raising the aspergillus aloft. At the same moment, Nycea glided from the couch, with an unbelievable swiftness of motion, and vanished through an outer door that gave upon the forest of laurels. Her voice hovered in my ear, seeming to come from an immense distance:

"Farewell for awhile, Christophe. But have no fear. You shall find me again if you are brave and patient."

As the words ended, the holy water from the aspergillus fell on the floor of the chamber and on the couch where Nycea had lain beside me. There was a crash as of many thunders, and the golden lamps went out in a darkness that seemed full of falling dust, of raining fragments. I lost all consciousness, and when I recovered, I found myself lying on a heap of rubble in one of the vaults I had traversed earlier in the day. With a taper in his hand, and an expression of great solicitude, of infinite pity upon his face, Hilaire was stooping over me. Beside him lay the bottle and the dripping aspergillus.

"I thank God, my son, that I found you in good time," he said. "When I returned to the abbey this evening and learned that you were gone, I surmised all that had happened. I knew you had read the accursed manuscript in my absence, and had fallen under its baleful spell, as have so many others, even to a certain reverend abbot, one of my predecessors. All of them, alas! beginning hundreds of years ago with Gerard de Venteillon, have fallen victims to the lamia who dwells in these vaults."

"The lamia?" I questioned, hardly comprehending his words.

"Yes, my son, the beautiful Nycea

who lay in your arms this night is a lamia, an ancient vampire, who maintains in these noisome vaults her palace of beatific illusions. How she came to take up her abode at Faussesflammes is not known, for her coming antedates the memory of men. She is old as paganism; the Greeks knew her; she was exorcised by Apollonius of Tyana; and if you could behold her as she really is, you would see, in lieu of her voluptuous body, the folds of a foul and monstrous serpent. All those whom she loves and admits to her hospitality, she devours in the end, after she has drained them of life and vigor with the diabolic delight of her kisses. The laurel-wooded plain you saw, the ilex-bordered river, the marble palace and all the luxury therein, were no more than a satanic delusion, a lovely bubble that arose from the dust and mold of immemorial death, of ancient corruption. They crumbled at the kiss of the holy water I brought with me when I followed you. But Nycea, alas! has escaped, and I fear she will still survive, to build again her palace of demoniacal enchantments, to commit again and again the unspeakable abomination of her sins."

Still in a sort of stupor at the ruin of my new-found happiness, at the singular revelations made by the abbot, I followed him obediently as he led the way through the vaults of Faussesflammes. He mounted the stairway by which I had descended, and as he neared the top and was forced to stoop a little, the great flagstone swung upward, letting in a stream of chill moonlight. We emerged, and I permitted him to take me back to the monastery.

As my brain began to clear, and the confusion into which I had been thrown resolved itself, a feeling of resentment grew apace—a keen anger at the interference of Hilaire. Unheedful whether or not he had rescued me from dire physical and spiritual perils, I lamented the beautiful dream of which he had deprived me. The kisses of Nycea burned softly in my memory, and I knew that whatever she was, woman or demon or serpent, there was no one in all the world who could ever arouse in me the same love and the same delight. I took care, however, to conceal my feelings from Hilaire, realizing that a betrayal of such emotions would merely lead him to look upon me as a soul that was lost beyond redemption.

On the morrow, pleading the urgency of my return home, I departed from Perigon. Now, in the library of my father's house near Moulins, I write this account of my adventures. The memory of Nycea is magically clear, ineffably dear as if she were still beside me, and still I see the rich draperies of a midnight chamber illumed by lamps of curiously carven gold, and still I hear the words of her farewell:

"Have no fear. You shall find me again if you are brave and patient."

Soon I shall return, to visit again the ruins of the Château des Faussesflammes, and redescend into the vaults below the triangular flagstone. But, in spite of the nearness of Perigon to Faussesflammes, in spite of my esteem for the abbot, my gratitude for his hospitality, and my admiration for his incomparable library, I shall not care to revisit my friend Hilaire.

The LAND of LUR

by EARL·LEASTON·BELL·

"They would clutch and miss, and howl horrific ululations."

HIGH are the hills, the haughty hills that hide the Land of Lur. Like sentient things demoniac they stab the sad-starred sky, disdainfully defiant of the gods that gave them birth.

Beyond the far-flung Syspia Sea—which lies beyond the Seventh Sea—these monstrous mountains rise. Dark and deformed, hunchbacked with hate, they form the country's coast.

Beautiful is Syspia with its sobs and its sighs and its laughter; with its dawns as red as rubies and its dusks of darksome gold—Syspia, the shimmering, glimmering. But fierce and foul beyond compare is Lur's uncanny coast. Like fiends defiling vestal baths the mucid mountains stand, ascending sheer from pure and dazzling depths.

> No verdure vests those slimy steeps
> Which mariners from other deeps
> Have named the Hills of Hell.
> Malignant mists play hide-and-seek
> Around each pompous, peccant peak
> Where nameless horrors dwell.

Yes, beautiful is Syspia, until the sailor nears the Hills of Hell, whose feet no unwrecked ship has ever touched; for when the valiant voyager makes bold to reach Lur's shore, the storm-gods of the mountains wake for war. Their lusty legions slither down in arrogant array. With yowls and yells they tear the tides, and make the mists into thick thunder clouds. And when the waves rise mountain-high as to defy the lightning's leaping glare, and the wo-wind's requiem

reverberates, the stoutest ship must wreck upon the rocks; must crash like eggs trod on by Brobdingnagians.

It is then that

The Sea of Syspia knows no calm;
No sunshine comes to bring its balm;
The wild waves sing a solemn psalm,
A dirge of death—
Deep dirge of death.

And when the storm is over and the shipwrecked reach the shore, they find most of their mates already there, all vitreous-eyed and strangely, sadly changed. . . . Ghosts do not linger long beneath the waves.

And Syspia, softly sighing, mourns not for the newly dead: her dolor-song is for the dead-alive. For Lur's cold coast is long and bare—a foul, infernal fringe. There is no hope for those cast there; the very ghosts themselves can not depart. The devils of the Hills of Hell seize all who dare ascend. Mirages mock, real ships are seen, but Syspia bears no sail that can avail. And so the doomed must linger on in plight that calls to death, tormented till they retrogress into abysmal brutes. Urged by desireless, kindly ghosts, some seek surcease of sorrow in the sea; but most of them starve on and on, for love of life is strongest when there's little life to love; when Erebus, the atrous, claims the mind. But comes the day when all are gone save one—an atavism gnawing on his final comrade's bones. And then the last man dies.

Strong was the craft that carried me to Lur's curse-ridden coast, but stronger were the horrors from the hills. Of all the crew—good men and true—none reached the rocks save me.

'Twas thus

I came to Lur's unhallowed shore
Where ghosts of mariners galore
Cried out, "Oh come and dream no more!"
In mockery—
So frightfully!

"There is no hope—what seems so is delusion." Thus spoke the spectral forms that crowded round; and then, with many a sigh and sign, entreated me to share their common fate.

THE hours were days, the days were months, the while I lingered there. Once Syspia cast a rotting octopus ashore . . . and I did eat.

Then came the glorious Eastertide, when demons dare not stir; and in that sacred season I bade all the ghosts farewell and started out to climb the Hills of Hell.

O God! the horror of that climb! They say that You created all. Let me deny that lie! For out of goodness evil can not come; love can not father hate. No, Lucifer still lives, and all his lieges from Abaddon down to Zammiel.

Though blinded by the Easter light that kept them in their caves, the entities of evil reached for me. Their lurid eyes, illumined with the hate of deepest Hell, kept glaring, glowering at me through the gloom. Their obscene shapes writhed in their impotence. They leered and jeered mad malisons that left a sulfurous smell; envenomed echoes shook the shameless hills. And more than once a shedim shape would half emerge from shadowed cell and grasp at me with greedy, gargoyle grin. Thank God, their hellish hideousness was only half revealed! With many a hiss they'd clutch—and miss, and missing, howl horrific ululations.

Evil emanations came from every curse-choked cave and cloaked me like a suffocating shroud—evil adumbrations that were like the ghosts of ghosts. But they could not continue long in Easter's holy glow, and soon I saw them slink back to their sources.

Spite of these things I journeyed on, past crags a-creep with black abominations, past cliffs that oozed with foulest feculence, across ravines where slimy serpents crawled like sinuous sin. I plodded on, footsore and

spent, until at last the horrors lay behind; until the Hills of Hell were far above.

Below me lay fair foothills, undulating, green, serene; and farther on, a vast and verdant vale.

The day was near to dying when I reached the sylvian slopes; inclement clouds half hid the sleepy sun. In search of sanctuary for the night, I chanced at length upon a clearing wherein stood a faded fane—an ancient, tiny temple—an ivy-shrouded shrine with doors agape. I entered this strange refuge and sought rest, reclining on a richly cushioned pew. Eldritch gleams that glimmered through the multipictured panes sent eery iridescence through the gloom—the glamorous gloom that covered aisle and apse.

Outside

The red sun turned to domes of gold
The clouds before his vision rolled.
And sought the far horizon's fold;
Then came the night.

But sleep came not with vespertime, nor with narcotic night; for out of the west the storm hordes came, ferocious, frenzy-fraught, and blotted out the melancholy moon and every star—engulfed the ghastly gibbous moon and every timorous star. For three long hours the tempest tramped upon the trembling hills—trod like Gog and Magog on the shivering, quivering hills. The lightning flashed, the thunder crashed, the wo-wind screeched and screamed. The tribulation of the trees — the sylvan sussuration — became a sob and then a threnody. And on the gale there came, it seemed, howling from the heights—damnations from the distant Hills of Hell—a fulminous cacophony of curses. And when the wind was at its worst and chaos seemed to beckon, the holy place that sheltered me was shaken crest to crypt by deafening detonations crashing like the crack of doom. A thousand Thors could hardly deal such din.

Louder, bolder boomed the thunder,
Wilder did the tempest rave.
And the forest, bowing under,
Moaned as if its soul to save.

THE morning came cerulean, and not a shadow stirred. And in morn's ray I sought a way that led to inmost Lur.

But first my eyes were to behold a new, unholier horror. The path that pointed from the church ran through a copse of cedars, and in that wood I found gray stones—gray slabs that guarded empty, gaping graves! A vacant village of the dead—a torn and tenantless necropolis!

"My God!" I cried. "What can this mean?—this desecration of the dead?—this ravage that has robbed them of their rest?"

And then, to add to my amaze, I noted that each tombstone told an enigmatic tale. "Here *lay* the body——" each inscription started.

Long I pondered as I paused by those pathetic pits, and mused the more on finding several unmolested mounds, all of them new-molded and unmarked.

At length I left the gruesome grove and wandered on until the wood gave way to rolling fields. And here I found vast vineyards and long lines of fruited trees, and respite from my weariness and hunger.

My incredible journey resumed, I remarked that the roadway grew wider, but held no track nor trace of recent travel; and then, as mile on mile I trekked the trail, another abnormality I noted: throughout the fair and fertile countryside there was no sign of human habitation—no house nor hut amid that husbandry.

At last the undulating land that held the vineyards vanished. I faced a flower-flecked field of endless area.

Long I roamed through that perfumed prairie
On a road that ran straight as a string—
On a beautiful, bud-bordered highway
Where I was the lone breathing thing.
Not a bird-song was heard in the hedges;
Not a cricket-chirp, though it was spring.

And when the saffron sunset cast its color on the scene, there came a gleam —a beam reflected from some spot before me. And then—"Thank God!" I cried in joy. "The journey's nearly ended!"

The coruscating light revealed a mass of metal roofs—the tops of homes and temples in a many-towered town that stood out dimly in the darkening distance.

The outré outlines of the place grew plainer as I progressed, and soon I saw a scene suggestive of the long ago —a city circled by great walls like ancient Jericho—a town of towers and turrets that were made in massive mold—a Mecca in the mystic Land of Lur.

I followed the road round the rampart a distance of more than a mile; and then, as the daylight surrendered to graylight, I found a Gargantuan gate—an iron-paled, ponderous portal beyond which appeared languid lights. And on peering inside, through the bars, I espied two Cerberus-like sentries on guard. Each was dighted in hauberk and helmet, and each had a halberd in hand. And on seeing me there they cried out as in fear—cried out as to give an alarm. Then they opened the entrance and seized me, and hurried me into the town. There the people came out and sent up a great shout of astonishment as they surged round.

And then my captors carried me toward a central place—a castle with the tallest tower of all. The crowd grew greater on the way, and in their cries I sensed, it seemed, a gracious note of greeting. The forms and faces of the folk were blurred as in the mellow-lighted street the figures milled.

Into a vast, high-vaulted hall beneath the tower they took me—a hall where countless candles flamed and flickered. And when the light fell on the faces of the men of Lur, I shuddered at the shadows in their eyes . . . eyes eery with the very soul of sadness . . . hopeless, heavy-lidded, horror-haunted . . . framed in faces that were oddly old . . . faces that were *ancient* more than aged . . . sorrow-faded rather than senile.

They were a strange and striking lot—a pageant from the past. All were garbed in garments of a mediæval mode—costumes quaint, Quixotic, colorful. Some were richly plumed and clad in shining panoply—the knightly legions of the Land of Lur. The raven robes of priests were also there.

FAR down the hall arose a dais that held a dazzling throne, and thereon sat a man in regal raiment—a man whose face made out his majesty—a patriarchal sovereign with the saddest face of all. I noted this when to his seat they took me. I bowed, and then he bade me tell my tale.

"Thrice welcome to the Land of Lur," he said when I had finished. "And welcome to the towered Town of Tur. Greetings in my name, the name of Loris, Lord of Lur. At first we feared that you might be a devil in disguise—a demon from the dismal Swamp of Swur. But now we know you are the friend whose coming to us was foretold in ancient ages by our oracles.

"Now listen, stranger, to the story of my lonely land—to the jeremiad of my fiend-infested kingdom.

"This home of horror once was fairest of all earthly isles. Vessels from all harbors sailed the silvery Syspia Sea with voyagers who come to visit Lur; and once our own proud ships touched every shore. All Heaven smiled upon us till four hundred years ago; thenceforth we've heard the hoarse laugh of all Hell.

"Lur, as you know, lies farthest from the continental lands; it is the earth's most isolated isle. The entities of evil which held forth on other shores apparently knew naught of our existence, or cared not for our country's far exile. And so it was till Europe learned the art of exorcism.

Then began the exodus of Lucifer's dark legions—the great hegira of Belial's hordes. Most of them joined in the great migration—all the strongest, most ferocious fiends—and finally they found the Land of Lur.

"And thus it was our country came to be a den of demons. Some of the most malignant stayed among our coastal mountains and formed the guard that girdles all the isle. Many wandered on until they reached the Wood of Wur; others settled in the Swamp of Swur.

"Invisible at first, they grew so fearless in their new-found freedom that shortly they assumed their frightful forms. We had no formula with which to fight them; no charm to fling in their infernal faces. They haunted every hearth and home in Lur. They seized us; sought to subjugate our souls. Our children gave their life-blood to the blasphemous Black Mass the devils held deep in the Wood of Wur. They preyed upon us in our impotence till some of us cursed Deity and died. We found our only refuge in our churches.

"At length our magi mastered certain methods of defense. At their behest we set up sacred cities and walled them with a wondrous kind of stone—a rare, enchanted rock whose strength repelled all evil forces—all save the Ghoupires of the Swamp of Swur. And Tur became the center of asylum, the largest of our talismanic towns. Then, to forefend against the fiends while working in our fields, we built small churches of the cherished stone at points where we could readily find refuge. Perhaps you saw one of these fanes while on the trail to Tur—and marked the tombs made tenantless by Ghoupires."

"The graves! The Ghoupires!" I exclaimed. "What form of fiend are they?"

"They are the most maleficent of all," the sovereign said. "They are a hybrid horde. Among the vilest vermin that came to the Land of Lur were ghouls and vampires from each end of earth. They mated when they reached the Swamp of Swur; brought into being Hell's unholiest brood—the ghastly Ghoupires, foulest of all fusions, who disinter and then devour our dead. And we are almost helpless in their hands. They mock our magic and our priestly power. But only once a year do they appease their hideous hunger—the last night in the mournful month of Mur. Then, astride great unicorns as black as Satan's sable, they swoop upon and sack our cemeteries, and take the bodies to the Swamp of Swur. There the female Ghoupires feast on blood—blood which their witchcraft has made warm again. The males then satisfy their gruesome greed——"

"But why not burn the bodies?" I inquired, sick and a-shudder. "Why put them in the ground as food for fiends?"

"Ah," he replied, "their ashes have been scattered to our sorrow. Unless we leave the corpses for the demons to dig up, they wreak their wrath by ravaging our cities and seizing living Lurians to devour. And when the Ghoupires storm our gates and wreck our guardian walls, the other demons rush in through the ruins. . . . Therefore the odious, cursed compromise.

"The fearful night that brings the Feast of Fiends is almost here; but you have no need to be troubled. Lur has a lasting legend—uttered by our oracles—that finally a voyager would span the Syspia Sea, land shipwrecked on our horror-haunted shore, and safely cross the hate-hot Hills of Hell; and having thus in fact defied the fiends, become invulnerable to all their venom. You are the very first to mock the monsters of the mountains."

Two days I tarried in the Town of Tur, and visited its every tower and turret; and more than once I

heard this moan—this mad lament of Lur:

Sad are the souls that dwell within
The towered Town of Tur,
And pity, God, on all of us
Within the Land of Lur;
Great pity on our dead, for now
It is the Month of Mur,
And soon the fiends must have their feast
Deep in the Swamp of Swur
That lies beyond the darkness of
The woful Wood of Wur.

BENEATH a monstrous moon I wandered through the Wood of Wur, the God-forsaken forest that lies near the Swamp of Swur—the dismal dank that was my destination.

O God! they say that You created all. Let me again deny that loathsome lie! For out of goodness, I repeat, no evil thing can come. Deity could not have made the denizens of that dark wood who massed to menace me—the sinister, sardonic shapes whose red-green eyes glared banefully from every hole and bush — who crowded close but dared not do me harm; and God could not have given voice to throats that were so vile—that thundered forth such molten maledictions.

I saw afreets of every sort, and countless caco-demons. Asmodeus appeared, and Ahriman with Delv, his doting servant; and pre-Adamic Eblis, proud as ever. The Furies three were there — Tesiphone, Alecto and Magæri. So was lusty Loki, lord of strife. Lamias looked on with blood upon their lickerish lips. Graveless Lemures groaned their prayer that they be granted rest. Gnomes and goblins grinned at me, and imps joined in the diabolic jabbering of the Jinns, while the werewolf flashed his fangs. I saw the incubi and succubi, and heard the heartless Harpies hiss their hunger. . . . And over all I sensed, methought, the sulfurous self of Mephistopheles.

Then, to save my sanity, I fled the Wood of Wur, intending to return at once to Tur. Alas! I lost my way and landed in the Swamp of Swur!

I wandered many a weary mile; then, as the bloodshot moon was marking midnight, I came upon a clearing in the midst of the morass, around which sat the fiends whom I had faced back in the forest! The embers in their evil eyes flamed up as they beheld me; they growled a greeting most malevolent, and cursed the powers that protected me.

Suddenly the beat of hoofs broke through their feral fuming. They heard, and gave a hellish howl of welcome.

And then, astride their snorting unicorns, the bestial Ghoupires burst upon the scene! Each bore a bulky burden that gave off a stifling stench. Dismounting in the center of the fiend-encircled space, the demons placed their plunder on the ground.

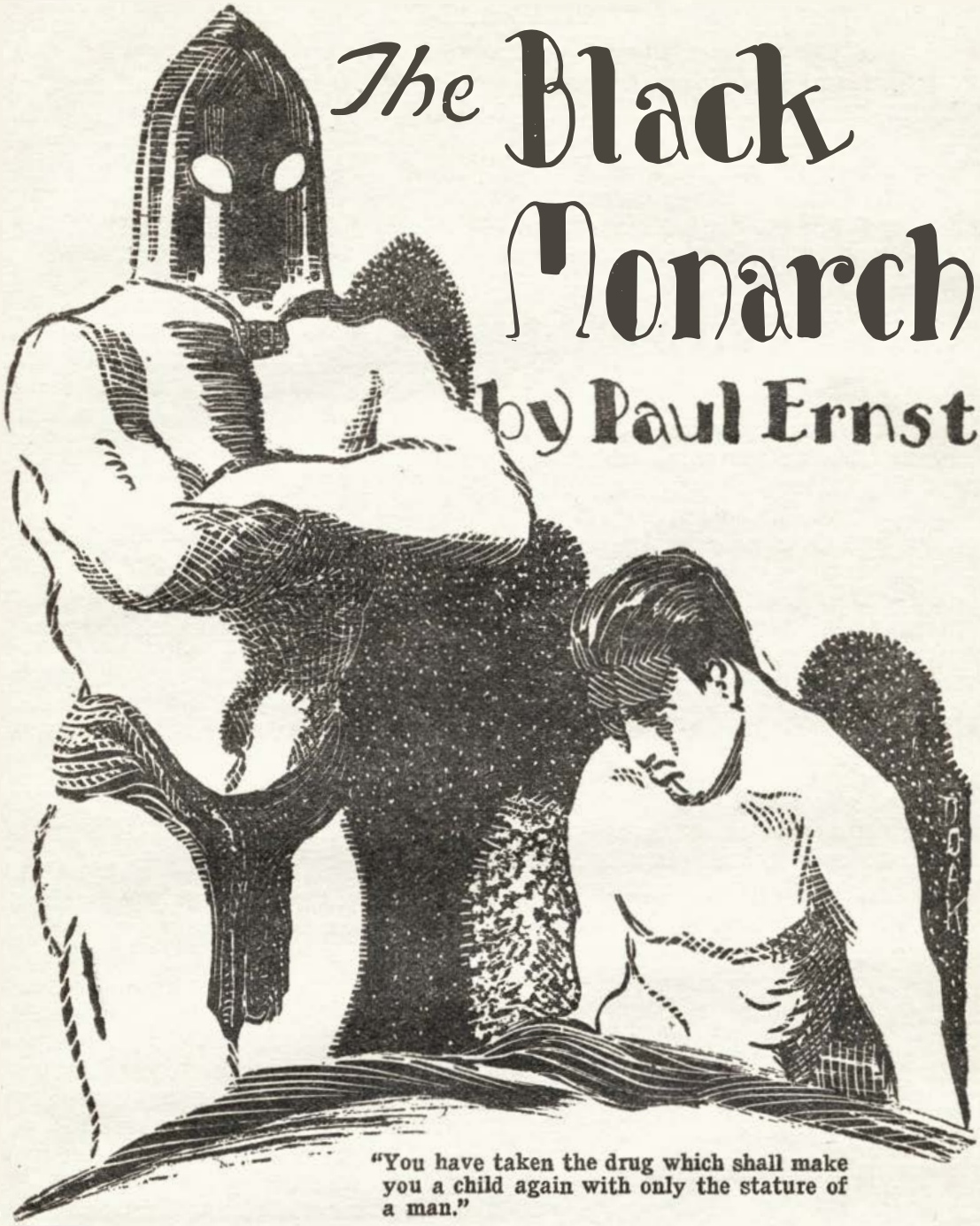
Malefic was the moonlight that revealed the maddening truth—that fell upon those shrouded, shrunken forms! And blasphemous the shout that shook that vast, miasmic marsh when all the devils voiced revolting joy!

The Ghoupires then began preparing for the Feast of Fiends. I watched, and saw the thing that rocked my reason! I saw their sorcery cause the cold cadavers to fill out—saw the corpses move, and heard them moan—saw them jerk their joints and leap to life—heard their shuddering shriek of hopeless horror—saw the gloating Ghoupires pounce upon the writhing wretches and make them ready for their red repast. . . .

Thank Heaven for the heavy cloud that dimed that awful orgy! Thank God for kind unconsciousness that hid the foul finale!

The Black Monarch

by Paul Ernst



"You have taken the drug which shall make you a child again with only the stature of a man."

The Story Thus Far

IN HIS distant laboratory Professor Eden photographs and locates a hitherto unsuspected Evil Genius who rules the world from an underground palace in North Africa. At his death he sends his adopted son, Professor Sanderson, on a crusade against him. Sanderson joins forces with Neal Emory, whose father has been murdered by the machinations of the Black Monarch. They enter the Black Kingdom and find a race of automatons ruled by the despot, Rez. They are captured and brought to the throneroom of Rez, where they are addressed by a beautiful feminine voice issuing from an enormous diamond disk. Later they decide that the power of the Black Monarch lies in the disk, and they steal back intending to break it. Behind it they find the lifeless body of a girl, and while they gaze at it they are caught by the monster, Rez. He taunts them with their helplessness, mockingly demonstrates his miraculous scientific abilities, and sends them back to their prison to wait the mysterious destiny for which they are being allowed to live.

13. The Ambition of Rez

RESTLESSLY Neal and Sanderson moved about their prison, sitting down only to get to their feet again, trying to resign themselves to waiting and finding it impossible. There was little

This story began in WEIRD TALES for February

with which to occupy themselves—nothing to read, nothing to talk about, since all conceivable methods of escape had been discussed and admitted hopeless, nothing to do but eat and sleep and gradually feel themselves breaking with the strain of suspense.

Neal especially was irritable and nervous. On him more than on the huge scientist was weighing the monotony of their imprisonment in the kingdom of Rez; and when at length the guard leader appeared with the inevitable platter of waxy vegetable stalks, he moved savagely toward the man as though to attack him out of sheer longing to express himself in violent action. Sanderson strode inoffensively between them and discouraged the senseless impulse with a glance. Neal sat down to the table in silence, and the professor began the regular course of exercising in which he indulged many times daily.

"Three times a day we eat this fodder!" Neal burst forth at last. "Always the same abominable stuff. And always, day and night, we have the same light from these infernal metal plates blinding us—even when we try to sleep. Hour after hour we walk around these rooms, always in the same frame of mind—wondering what Rez is going to do to us and how he is going to do it! Whatever it may be, I wish he would hurry and get it over with. Almost anything that could happen would be better than living in this hell!"

"Easy," soothed the professor, frowning a little at the rising inflection in the younger man's voice. "There's no use in wearing our nerves to rags about something we can't help."

He ceased finally from the bending and straightening exercises, and came to the table on which was set their meal.

"And always you go through that same set of training motions!" snapped Neal. "As though you were going to meet Rez in a test of strength!"

"Who knows? Perhaps I may."

"How? You can't move a hand unless he wills you to. And he certainly won't allow you the freedom to attack him!"

"Things happen," replied the professor equably. "I don't know how I can break the coma he settles over me whenever he desires it, and I don't know whether I could overcome him even if I could get free. Nevertheless, I want to keep myself ready for whatever may happen."

Neal said nothing more for a time, a little conscious of his state of nerves and not anxious to display them further before this man who could keep his own so well in hand. His restlessness continued, however, and even seemed to extend to his palate and make the food he was eating more unlikable than ever.

"How can men continue to eat this nauseating stuff day after day?" he said finally, pushing aside his portion before he had consumed half of it. "At first it's absolutely tasteless, which is bad enough. But after awhile it seems to sting the roof of your mouth and leave an acrid aftertaste. Pah!" He reached for water.

"Why, I don't notice it," answered Sanderson, glancing at him with surprize. "To me it seems neither more nor less unpleasant than usual."

Neal moodily watched him finish the rest of his meal.

"Wonder what time it is," he murmured after awhile. "We don't even know whether it's night or day, cooped up in this disgusting hole the way we are."

The professor leaned across the table and put his big hand on the other's shoulder a moment in a steadying gesture.

"Watch yourself, Neal," he urged. "It will do you no good to fret yourself to pieces."

Neal breathed deeply and made a perceptible effort to compose himself.

"Sorry. I guess I'm a little off my feed today—or tonight—or whichever it is. It's probably the eternal sameness of this evil-tasting food and these bare stone rooms."

Sanderson calmly caught his wrist and pressed his thumb to his pulse. The count was faster than normal, and he could feel a faint flush of fever. The disturbance of his mind had evidently tinged the functioning of his body to a slight extent. He did not tell Neal this, however.

"Nothing wrong with you but nerves," he said soothingly. "Try to smooth them down with a little applied patience until——"

The door was opened and the guard leader appeared, with the usual corps of men stationed outside. They were curtly commanded to go with them to the disk room.

ONCE more they walked up the broad incline, past the statuelike guards in the base of the tower, and toward the throneroom of Rez. As they climbed the broad steps, Neal felt tremulous, oddly weak. He felt actually ill, and he could hardly keep on his feet as they went under the drape the guard leader held aside for them and entered the room of the disk.

As before the room appeared to be empty, though the air was permeated with the intangible charge of evil magnetism that announced Rez to be not far off. With the exit of the guard leader, they found themselves moving automatically toward a metal bench that faced the disk, and seated themselves involuntarily in answer to the unspoken command of the devilish creature who controlled them relentlessly. An instant later the cylindrical head appeared from behind the curtains near the great disk, and Rez strode out and stood gigantic before them.

For a moment he faced them, his cold eyes glaring through the distorting glass lenses in the helmet. He seemed to gaze hardest at Neal. Then he nodded stiffly, and began to walk up and down the room, careless of turning his back to them, perfectly secure in the knowledge that they could not move unless he so willed it.

At length his featureless voice came to them, with equal clarity whether he was right beside them or thirty feet away.

"When you were here before I mentioned an ambition of mine—an ambition having to do with the outside world of men. I am now going to explain that reference to world rule." He paused for a moment near one of the ancient javelins that hung on the wall, and took it down to finger its massive blade.

"As I have told you, I was born in Egypt many thousands of years ago. Even then, during my natural life's span, I coveted supreme power; and when I got from the priest of Isis the secret of prolonged life, I knew that some day I would rule the world. From that distant hour till now I have been maturing my plans.

"All these centuries I have been preparing the world to accept my leadership. This preparation has consisted mainly of plunging it into chaos and war in order to foster hatred. Hatred! That is the key to my actions, the lever that shall let me control the earth. Men must hate each other—race for race, weak for powerful, the successful for the failures. Hatred alone can create destructive deeds and prevent the population of the world from joining in powerful peace and prosperity against me."

He faced Sanderson for a moment.

"You and your Professor Eden, in the retreat of your laboratory, discovered and tabulated some of the things I have done to gain my ends: The disrupting deeds of violence and greed performed by certain of the powerful ones of earth who were under the slavery of my disk, such as"—the grotesque head nodded briefly to Neal—"the chaos your father caused by

mismanagement of the power that was his.

"I have directed men to acquire criminally huge fortunes and sow disastrous discontent among thousands of poor by speculation and graft that further impoverished them. I have caused harmful laws to be passed, idiotic social conventions to be enforced, a thousand harassing measures to be crammed despotically down the throats of mankind by the fanaticism of those in power over them. And each false step of those in power has created more misery, further fertile ground for my ambition.

"Chiefest of all, however, in reducing the world to periodic chaos and leaving it divided against itself and ready for my dictatorship, have been the wars. For all of these I have been responsible. You know how it has been done—through the influence of the disk over all those near the emanations of any pieces chipped from its edge. The instant a man shows signs of coming leadership among his fellows, that instant he is singled out to be presented with a blue diamond. You can see how wars are started with kings and emperors in my bondage.

"In the sword hilt of the Kaiser in 1912, for example, placed where his left hand touched it constantly, was one of my blue diamonds. In the inkwell of the Emperor of Austria, dropped there by a visiting Balkan prince who was under my domination, was a blue diamond. Everywhere have been fragments of the disk, sewn in carpets of government conference rooms, worn as ornaments by unsuspecting financiers, replacing the regular jewels in the tiny bearings of watches and clocks, set in the snuff-box of a Napoleon, mounted in the crown of a Czar, everywhere. And by their means I have caused the wars of history, ever increasing in magnitude of disaster, and culminating in the great war of 1914.

"It is only during the last century, however, that I have actively approached my dream of ruling the earth in an open manner. Always I have realized that the race of mankind—because of its lamentable persistence in revolting against despotism no matter how well-meant it might be—might object to my benevolent but harsh rule. That has been my stumbling-block, and through the years I have been experimenting for a physical means of removing this stubbornness from the minds of the too independent human race.

"Those experiments are finally concluded—or will be with yourselves—and I am ready for the final step in attaining the world's throne." He paused before them again, still fingering the heavy javelin as though he had forgotten he held it.

"This last step is all planned. It will be a gigantic program of disaster. I shall break the race of mankind to pieces, and into the confusion of death I shall step forth as the supreme power able to bind the pieces together again into one whole pattern with myself at the head.

"The first disaster shall be a world war compared to which the war of 1914 shall seem insignificant. It shall be started by declaration of hostility between China and America, and into the conflict shall be drawn every nation on the face of the earth. It will last for over twenty years. Three-fourths of the adult male population will be killed or hopelessly crippled by it. Women and children shall be so oppressed that at its conclusion not one human being in ten will remain normal and capable of bringing healthy progeny into the world. Think of that for a moment and realize the consequences: After this great war only one life in ten shall remain to flicker uncertainly in a desolated world. And there shall be scarcely a dwelling left intact, hardly a field unpoisoned by the chemicals of warfare,

and neither food to eat nor fuel to lighten the cold of winter.

"The weapons of this war will be more destructive than it is now possible to imagine. Working under my unseen guidance in scores of secret government laboratories in the different countries are chemists with guarded formulæ of gases that can depopulate a continent in a month, rays that kill at a distance of hundreds of miles, explosive shells that can destroy half a city at a blow. Oh, it will be a great triumph of science, this next war of mine!

"Afterward, with the small remnant of humanity scarcely able to exist on their ruined earth, shall come the next step in my preparatory program.

"There will be a world-wide plague, such an epidemic as is considered impossible now. It is all in readiness, prepared by my hands. At this very moment, within half a mile of this room, there is a cave filled with hundreds of thousands of small tubes—in each tube disease for a thousand men. It is highly contagious and usually deadly, this new disease of mine whose germs are waiting inert for the moment they shall be unleashed. Few of those who escape the war shall escape the plague.

"Accompanying the epidemic there will be renewed physical disturbances of the earth's surface. All over the world inactive volcanoes shall act again and cover the land with lava and ashes—set in motion by the process of vibration of which you know I am master. Also, by the same means, I shall produce earthquakes, tidal waves, all the catastrophes of nature that have been feared by man since the dawn of history.

"Then I shall emerge from this hole that conceals me now. With men temporarily lowered into animal helplessness, with all the economic and intellectual achievements of the ages converted into a forgotten, charred mass, I shall assume control of the earth and proceed to rebuild it, through the centuries of life still to be mine, into whatever pattern I may desire."

Neal turned his aching eyes on the enormous figure that paced back and forth before him. He was in physical agony. His head felt as though it would crack in two; every muscle of his body ached; and the skin of his hands was alternately wet with cold perspiration and dry with fever. But ill as he was, he could not let such words as Rez had flung at them go unanswered.

"It's impossible!" he exclaimed, his voice hoarse. "You can't do such things. It's beyond the power——"

"Impossible?" was the imperious interruption. "Impossible—for *me?* There are few things Rez can not do. But I will show you. I told you that the first step in my program of disaster was a gigantic war, and I told you which nations would be the first to engage in it, later drawing all other nations into the struggle. Watch the disk and I will prove my words."

THE light was shut off, and on the huge diamond a picture formed showing a richly furnished conference room. In it was a long oval table covered with green felt, and about this were seated some twenty important-looking men. They were yellow-skinned, these men, with intelligent, alert black eyes. One of their number rose to address the rest, and instantly they prepared to hear his words with a deference that suggested he had great authority. On his left hand a blue diamond sullenly reflected the light from a great globe overhead.

He began to speak, emphasizing his words with soft raps against the green felt of the table with his clenched fist; and as his pictured lips moved his words were reproduced by the marvelous contralto voice. The unfamiliar language was translated by Rez in his telepathy so that it

should be intelligible to the two who sat watching the moving photograph.

With the first words it was apparent that the gathering was a war conference. Rapidly and succinctly a mobilization program was sketched out, appropriations for war funds suggested, and even a date set for the declaration of war that seemed already to have been voted for by the majority of those present. He sat down and another rose to take his place. This one deplored the war proposed, and tried to talk against it. A storm of hissing drowned him out, and in less than five minutes the proposition of the first was accepted verbatim. It was to be war—and at once!

The picture faded from the disk, to be replaced by another of similar nature. This showed men of a different race gathered about a conference table in another land. The faces seemed familiar, and Neal exclaimed aloud as the reason suddenly became apparent. He was gazing at the President of the United States and his cabinet members.

Even as they watched, the Secretary of War arose and began a speech. He urged approximately the same measures as had the Chinese statesman in the preceding picture, and he too proposed a war date. It coincided very nearly with the date determined upon by those in the country across the Pacific. And in the cravat of this recognized power among the cabinet members was a blue diamond pin.

With the unanimous vote to pass on the measures suggested and to agitate for war against China, the meeting closed; and the disk room was again flooded with light.

Rez turned toward them.

"You are satisfied now that I can do as I say? You see that I am fully able to disarm the world for my coming? As surely as it lives and breathes, the whole human race will soon come under my rule, a broken thing to be molded in my hands!"

SANDERSON stared squarely at the nightmare head, and, though his face was white and strained, there was in his light gray eyes a flicker of the indomitability that has set man above the animals since the race somehow began to exist.

"You're not able to do it! Powerful as you are, and entirely capable of bringing about this wholesale destruction as I believe you to be—you will be conquered in the end. As long as one man breathes with a spark of humanity in his heart, you will be defied!"

The glaring eyes were turned full on him.

"So I have thought," was the unexpected admission. "And it is with that realization in mind that I have been experimenting, as I mentioned to you, to remove the stubborn independence that man seems to keep even in the hour of his greatest degradation.

"The men of earth, I know, are not like the men of Rez. Here, by centuries of selective breeding and weeding out of children not conforming to the type I desired, I have formed a kind of subnormal man such as is a perfect subject for a ruler like myself. My people submit to discipline with the docility of beasts; they are efficient laborers, and they do not dare to think—even if enough intelligence were left them to think with, after generations of discarding the too intelligent ones who happen to be born.

"I was able to create this type I demand because I started with a very few who were held in check by my strength and superior mentality. As their numbers grew they were restrained by the increasing dominance of the inherent traits I caused to be bred into them. But, I repeat, this is an age-long process. It would be impossible to apply it to the men of the outer earth, even after their numbers had diminished to a twentieth by the disasters I have ready to unleash on them. Before I could reduce them all

to submission there would probably be a revolt against me that might succeed by sheer majority of numbers.

"There is an answer to this, however. If I could manage to mold the men of earth—quickly—into the same stupid pattern as the men of Rez, I should succeed in dominating them as easily as I do my own subjects here.

"I have found a way to do this. The answer lies in chemistry and surgery such as you know nothing of in the pitiful laboratories on earth. And you two are to be the final subjects of experimentation that will prove my theories to be sound.

"The solution of my problem has to do with memory.

"It is patriotism, love, ambition, such fiery sentiments, that make the men of earth different from the men of Rez, who have had such emotions carefully bred out of them. Therefore all that is necessary for me to do before I can control men of the outer earth is to force them to forget their patriotism, their loves, their ambitions. If an average man could be made to forget that he has a country, a wife, a desire to rise above his fellows, an urge to improve himself—and if he could still remember the dexterities of his trade—he would be a perfect man-machine, an excellent subject. He would have mind enough left to perform his appointed duties with precision, and not enough brain to remember that he is an individual.

"Assuming, then, that I could make him lose his memory as I describe—if I were master of controlled amnesia, in other words—I could dominate him as I chose, be as stern in my rule as I pleased, and he would be unable to recall that he had ever lived a different life." He paused as though expecting an answer, but the two could only stare at him.

"Well, I have found the way to control amnesia! Half of it is made possible by chemistry, as I have said.

"I have prepared a drug that kills all memory save that rooted in subconscious, instinctive habit. When it is taken it reacts on the brain in such a way that all is forgotten except such things as knowledge of mother language and automatic remembrance of any long-continued set of actions. Thus if a foundryman were treated with the drug he would continue to be an excellent foundryman—but in all other phases of life he would be nothing but an infant with the body of a man. He would be a machine of flesh and blood, able to perform the duties of his labor, but an unthinking animal in all other respects. And there you have some of my experimental result.

"After the war and the plague, the earthquakes and other disasters that shall reduce mankind to a small remnant of its original force, gallons of this drug will be poured by my men into every source of drinking-water. Every spring and fountain, every well and creek, shall be loaded with the agent of forgetfulness. Men will become automatons over night, and when I appear they will tolerate my rule as children give unthinking obedience to powerful adults.

"There is only one drawback to this plan of mine: The effects of the drug are not permanent. There is nothing to prevent these adult children from learning all over again, and becoming in time as they were before. Hence, I come to the second part of my plan.

"Through centuries of surgical experiments performed by myself and the Arab surgeon who shares my hospitality, I have been able to separate, physically, the segments of the brain devoted to performing the different mental functions. Among these is the segment of memory. This is divided into two parts—one which governs deep-seated, unconscious acts accomplished by established habit, and one which is responsible for conscious, remembered acts.

"You see what this means. If a brain could be exposed and dissected,

and the part of the memory segment removed that applied to conscious memory—you would have a creature capable only of continuing to perform acts of old habit such as routine of manual work, and incapable of remembering anything else or of ever learning over again. He would be a puppet.

"This operation I am able to perform. I have proved it again and again on the brains of the subjects whom I have commanded to be experimented on in the operating-room.

Thus by drug and surgery I shall dull the minds of the few who will continue to exist on earth, and will start there a new race such as I have created in Rez. For the administered drug shall hold men in bondage during the years necessary to train all remaining surgeons to the operation I have perfected, and during the ensuing years I will need before all are crippled by the knife. Before the effects of the drug have been overcome they shall have been made physically incapable of ever advancing from the state of infantile brain development.

"And now we come to yourselves."

THE monstrous figure stopped its pacing back and forth, and stood in front of them.

"My experiments through the centuries have necessarily been limited to my own subjects here. They are not normal as compared with the men of earth. They are small-brained, dull-witted, coarse-nerved. Therefore, while all my last experiments have been successfully performed on them, it is barely possible that the perfected operation might not be so satisfactory with the finer intelligence of other races. I do not think there can be a difference. After all, the brain is the brain, and difference of quality should not materially affect its treatment. Nevertheless, I want to make sure. And to that end you were allowed to find my kingdom.

"You two have excellent average minds. Whatever experiment might succeed in the dissection of your brains would also surely be successful with your brothers in the upper world.

"Therefore—you are both to be used as subjects for last experiments with knife and drug."

Under the terrible sentence finally pronounced upon them, Neal felt himself sway dizzily on the metal bench. His illness had increased throughout the ghastly enumeration of the plans of Rez. The final words, combined with his mysterious sickness, almost downed him. It was only by making a desperate effort that he managed to retain a remnant of consciousness.

Whatever it was that affected him did not extend to Sanderson. The giant professor was straining to move, to break the invisible chains that kept him from leaping at the throat of the devil who stood so maddeningly near him. The muscles corded and rippled on his arms and back, and perspiration stood out on his face as he tried to break the unseen grip. The effort was useless.

The emotionless voice went on.

"To you"—the grotesque head nodded at Sanderson—"shall be accorded the privilege of submitting to the surgical experiment. From your brain will be extracted the bit of nerve matter the loss of which will render you as helpless as a child with only the body and appearance of a man. I will show you how it is to be done."

Once more the light faded from the room and a picture appeared on the disk—a picture of the laboratory that was being prepared to receive this last victim of experimentation. There was the cylindrical vacuum-inducing machine connected with tubing to the glass bells, the odd array of strangely designed surgical instruments, the great glass block that should be the operating-table, all the paraphernalia deemed necessary to perform the operation perfected by Rez and the surgeon, who, eight hundred years before, had removed the top of the evil

monarch's own skull and re-covered it with the metal hood.

"There are many interesting devices in this room," came the voice of Rez in the darkness. "Notice the rinay plates, for example, how they are grouped about the operating-block and even placed to shine up through it. Those plates, because of the healing rays they give off, are my antiseptics and my instantaneous repairing agents. Under them, lensed as they are, an open wound begins to heal in from eight to fourteen seconds —a speed that admits of wonders in the way of rejoining sundered tissues before the blood has coagulated.

"Among the instruments you will observe an invention of mine that looks like a pair of forceps sharpened at the ends to a cutting edge. After the scalp has been laid back over the spot that covers the part of the brain we want removed, this device is placed against the skull. Then it is turned under pressure, cutting away a circular section of bone. With another specially curved knife the section of brain that possesses power of conscious memory is scooped out as one would cut a rotten spot from an apple. Immediately the blood is sponged clear for the few seconds required by the healing power of the rinay plates to form a surface over the hole. Then the circle of living bone is replaced in the skull, the scalp is sewn back — and in less than two hours there is only a scar left to show that the operation has taken place.

"All that is needed is a pair of deftly trained hands. I will let you see the man who is to operate on you."

The picture changed and they saw a room much like the two in which they themselves were confined. In this a man paced dully up and down. His eyes were alternately lusterless and gleaming. On his hands were fabric gloves. As he walked back and forth his lips moved tremulously with soundless words. Now his gloved hands were brandished as though he were being threatened by unseen things; then he would relapse into listlessness, pacing back and forth, shoulders stooped and lips mumbling aimlessly.

As he watched, Sanderson felt a further shock of horror. The wild eyes, the loose lips, the maniac brandishing of hands——

"He's insane!" he exclaimed. "Hopelessly insane! And this is the man who handles the knife?"

"He is the man," was the emotionless answer. "As for his insanity—what would you expect from a brilliant mind imprisoned solitarily for eight centuries? His insanity, however, does not prevent him from being a very fine surgeon. And he loves his work with the knives. . . ." The pause that followed was eloquent.

"So much for the surgical part of the experiment," resumed Rez. "Now for the drug."

He faced Neal. "You are the subject chosen for that. From you I shall learn if the drug reacts in as satisfactory a manner on the more intelligent men of earth as it has reacted on the men of Rez. And, later—say a year from now—you too will be put under the knife and will undergo the same operation. . . ."

Neal tried to rise to his feet. He seemed to be surrounded by a haze through which he could only dimly make out the hated form of Rez—the huge metal helmet, the glaring, cold eyes. Over his senses was fast descending the unconsciousness he had held off for so long. But he made a last effort.

"I'll never take your damned drug!" he said, trying to shout the words and only succeeding in whispering them. "You'll not experiment with me as though I were a rat in a dissecting-room! I'll kill myself before I'll swallow your stuff——"

For an instant Rez faced the swaying figure, noting the red-streaked

eyes and the purple tint of the lips. Then he delivered the sentence that was to be the last message Neal would ever hear from him. As he pronounced it, it is probable that he smiled behind his metal hood—if indeed he had a mouth to smile with.

"You have already taken it," came the soundless words. "In the meal you ate before I summoned you here, the drug was sprinkled which shall make you a child again with only the stature of a man. In about five hours the chemical will have run its full course. . . ."

For a moment Neal stared at him, trying to speak, to shout a last defiance. Then he slipped from the bench and sagged to the floor at the feet of his captor. Sanderson could only gaze at the limp figure and writhe in a rage that approached madness.

The glaring eyes were turned coldly on him.

"To insure that he will not make away with himself in case he should resume consciousness for an instant before the drug has fully reacted, he will be tied. As for you—there are still a few hours left you in the present possession of your mental faculties. The laboratory is not quite ready for your reception. I shall summon you when your time comes."

He turned abruptly and approached the curtains near the disk. Without a backward look he drew them aside, entered the room behind the jewel, and replaced them to cover the doorway.

In a moment, as though summoned, the guard leader appeared at the other doorway. With him were four of the automatons of Rez. They bound Sanderson with fabric cords while the spell of Rez still held him powerless; and then they bore him to the rooms that formed their prison. The bound body of Neal was placed in one room, and Sanderson, equally trussed, was thrown on the floor of the other. The heavy metal door between was closed, and the men withdrew.

14. The Drug of Forgetfulness

SANDERSON strained at his fabric bonds till the skin was torn from his wrists and ankles, but it was impossible for him to free himself. The knots had been tied too cunningly, and there was no slack in them for even his huge strength to expand. At length he lay still, listening for sounds of life from Neal. From the other room he could hear his heavy breathing and an occasional muffled struggle as though he too were straining at bonds too tight to loosen. Occasionally there was a groan; and now and then a mutter of indistinguishable words. Finally the infrequent struggling ceased, but the muttering grew louder until it was the raving of a man in delirium.

Incoherent phrases came to Sanderson's ears—of childhood reminiscence, of shouted defiance to Rez, of dreamy mumbling about the lovely voice that came from behind the disk. Now the drugged man was speaking earnestly to his father, advising him, imploring him against the execution of some disastrous idea. Now he was searching again for the crevice that should lead down to the kingdom of the evil genius. But most of all he was talking softly to the voice of the girl behind the diamond.

In his raving he endowed the voice with personality and soul, and worshiped it with glowing words. Forgotten was the lifeless body from which the voice was drawn, forgotten the rigid limbs and still, closed eyes. The voice remained, and it was only too apparent that the sick man had hopelessly lost his heart to the voice. Thoughts were repeated that he would never have spoken aloud in consciousness—prayers to death to release the spirit it held; vows that in death he would join her there, lying by her side; entreaties to the monster with the metal head to give her back to life. All other concerns were thrust aside in the infatuation for a voice is-

suing from a still, pallid throat. And then he was shouting defiance to Rez again, threatening him, laughing, planning to smash the jewel that was the secret of his power.

Shuddering, the professor tried to stop his ears to the insane raving of the man who had been sane and well until callously submitted to the scientific experiment of the devil who schemed to be king of the world. Then he too went mad for a few moments and struggled against the cords that held him and shouted aloud his hatred of the evil being who held them captive.

Let him come to grips with Rez but once, and after that they could do what they liked with him! In exchange for the pleasure of tearing at the muscular flesh under the monster's age-old skin, he would give his body to them for any torture they could devise!

He calmed himself with an effort and engaged again in the fruitless planning that had occupied him since their imprisonment.

To attack Rez, he must be able to break the iron clamp of inertia with which his enemy could freeze him at will. To break that immobility he must smash the diamond disk. But he could not smash the disk so long as he was held helpless by its hypnotic exaggeration of the will of Rez!

In memory he saw the screened hole in the great throat at the base of the metal skull. He heard the slight hiss of air inhaled and expelled with the monster's breathing. If he could free himself from the spell of Rez and clamp his hand over that airhole——

MEANWHILE the moaning and delirious raving from Neal in the next room had finally stopped. He was breathing heavily, but evenly, and after a time the breathing grew more and more peaceful until it could no longer be heard over the intervening distance. Neal was now untroubled by pain—physical pain, at least. He was sleeping soundly and normally after the ordeal through which he had passed. The drug of forgetfulness had run its course.

Sanderson tried to imagine what his comrade would be like when he woke. It all depended on the degree of efficiency of the drug. If he should be afflicted with complete loss of memory it would be terrible indeed! He would have to learn to walk again—to speak, to perform by conscious effort the things a child of five has learned to do. He would be a weakly sprawling new-born infant with the size and muscles of a man. Horrible!

This, however, was not in accordance with the plans of Rez. The infliction of so thorough an amnesia on him would defeat his own ends. He had indicated, rather, that Neal would wake to an ignorance of all his life save that of early childhood and those acts based on deep-rooted habit. He would be a harmless idiot, a placid case of arrested development. Or, perhaps——

Hope came to the professor for an instant. Perhaps—he would remain unchanged! Was not Rez confessedly experimenting with his drug? And would he trouble to experiment at all if he were sure of the drug's effects? Also—and the remembrance caused him to hope further—Neal had eaten less than half of the food in which the drug was mixed. It might be that the reaction would be correspondingly half as strong and not lasting!

It was a slender chance, but it was something to which to cling in this hour of the defeat of all their aims. Sanderson tried to believe that it would come true, and forced his thoughts away from the other, more dreadful surmises. He relaxed his bound muscles and waited to see if he should be released before the hour of his own fate in the weirdly designed dissecting-room or if he should be carried there still bound and helpless.

He was to have physical freedom to the last, it seemed. After a long time the outer door was unbarred and swung open; and the guard leader on duty appeared. He walked calmly to the professor's side and unloosed the cords. Then as calmly he turned his back and walked away.

It is probable that his life was saved by the fact that Sanderson's legs and arms were numb with the cramp of his bonds. As it was, while he was trying to rise to his feet and strike the man down in his murderous sorrow, the guard leader covered the distance to the door. The heavy metal barrier was swung shut, and the bars could be heard grating into place.

The professor clutched at a table to help support his uncertain body, and limped into the next room to see at last how great had been the change wrought by the fateful drug.

Neal was still sleeping, wound around by the cords, when he reached his side. With clumsy fingers he undid the knots, and as he fumbled with them his friend stirred. At length he opened his eyes. In them could be seen the first of the indications of his metamorphosis.

Their habitual blue seemed to have been lightened by several shades. The whites were clearer than the whites of maturity, and they were opened wide with curiosity. Expressionless, unrecognizing, they stared at the bearded face as though they had never seen it before.

On his countenance was further mark of the change. The faint lines of forehead and cheek, the lines that tell of adult experience as printed words tell a message, were gone—leaving the wondering look of a child. The drug had worked as Rez had promised!

Neal gazed perplexedly at the cords that bound him. Then his wide eyes came back to the big man who was bending anxiously over him.

"Who are you?" he asked, and even his voice was so altered that Sanderson would not have recognized it had he not known who was speaking.

"I am Sanderson," he replied, making his answer slow and distinct in the hope that some word should strike a wakening note and help recall the vanished memory. "Your name is Neal Emory. We are in the kingdom of Rez. Oh, my God! Can't you understand me?"

"Yes—I understand what you are saying, but what does it mean? What is the kingdom of Rez?"

For nearly an hour the professor fought to restore a shade of the mind that had been smothered by the drug. Every effort was useless. At the end of that time the blue eyes looked at him as perplexed as before, and the face was as expressionless as the face of a puppet of Rez.

There was only one ray of comfort in his actions: He parrotted the words Sanderson repeated, and seemed able to retain them in his mind. Thus at the end of an hour he had learned that his name was Neal Emory, that he was in the kingdom of Rez, and that Rez was an evil giant who had reduced him to his present state of helplessness.

"Reduced—me to my—present—state?" Like a child given a problem too abstruse for its ability to solve, he stumbled over the phrase. Sanderson tried to tell him what he had been like yesterday; but yesterday, and the yesterdays before that, were gone from the drugged brain. As Rez had said, in time he might have been taught over again. But time, of course, would be denied him—he was to undergo a further deadening operation in a year.

Sanderson jumped to his feet and strode around the room, hitting out with his fists as though he felt them sinking into the body of the inhuman monster who had wrought this change. And Neal watched him with wide, wondering eyes, as though puzzled by the violence of the big man with the

black beard who had been telling him about the queer place he called the kingdom of Rez.

Then, shortly, he picked up a piece of the cord that had bound him, and began to tie knots in it, smiling with pleasure when he succeeded in tying a more than usually intricate or amusing one.

It was while Sanderson was sadly watching the infantile gesture that he got the first glimmer of an idea that sent him pacing to a table where he could sit down, bury his head in his hands, and think it out step by step to a possible miraculous conclusion—an idea that seemed to hold a chance of snapping the thralldom of Rez!

The professor recommenced the hopeless-appearing circle of scheming: To attack Rez he must first destroy the hold of the disk. To destroy the disk he must break the hpnotic coma imposed on him by the will of Rez in conjunction with the jewel. Do this he could not. But—perhaps Neal could! And point for point he worked it out.

The power of Rez was dominion of mind—of intelligence. By imposing his will on the minds of others he made them move or stand motionless as he pleased. However—*he must have mind to work with!*

He had made the statement, casually, that he could not dominate animals because they had no intelligence to dominate. The lower in the mental scale a brain might be, the less chance Rez had of controlling it.

Here he looked at Neal again. In administering the drug to him, Rez had smothered all his fine intelligence. Had he not, perhaps, unwittingly prepared a creature capable of defying his rule? Here was a man with a brain temporarily no more acute than that of a kindergarten pupil or an advanced animal. Was it possible that this *absence* of a mind to control might be the undoing of Rez?

The theory was worth a try. Calling to Neal, he began to coach him, as one would an infant, in a task he wanted him to do.

It was some little while before Neal learned his lesson, and the professor groaned at the length of time required. Should Rez ever turn his attention to the new occupation of his prisoners he would learn the whole scheme. Perhaps even now he was watching them in the disk, reading his thoughts, laughing at the tenuous plan being prepared for his annihilation. But this was a chance that must be risked; and again and again Sanderson drilled his pupil in the course of action he must pursue.

"When we are in the room of the disk, you must stand perfectly still until I have given you the signal. When I say 'Now!' you will pick up a bench—a metal bench like this one I am sitting on, and ram it against the disk as hard as you can. Against the disk," he reiterated. "It is a large blue stone you will see at one end of the room. Like this." He traced a circle with his forefinger in the nap of the carpet. "Do you understand?"

"Yes," said Neal, frowning a little. "When you say 'Now,' I am to pick up a metal bench like the one you are sitting on, and ram it against the round blue stone at the end of the room." He frowned again. "What does 'ram' mean?"

Sanderson explained. "It means to hit as hard as you can."

"I am to hit the stone with the bench as hard as I can," Neal repeated dutifully.

"Yes. Now we'll try it here, to see if you know what to do."

He scratched a circle against one wall of the room. Then he led Neal to the door and acted as though they had just entered. "Pretend this is the room I have been telling you about," he urged. "There is the round stone"—he pointed to the circle—"that you are to break."

According to the coaching he had

received, Neal stood perfectly still beside the door. "Now!" said Sanderson, and at once Neal picked up a bench and moved placidly toward the circle.

"No, no! You must be more quick. And stand nearer the circle. As soon as you come in the door, go over near the circle. We'll try it again."

Once more they pretended to have entered the disk room. Neal walked over to the circle and stood gazing intently at it. Everything seemed right, but just before Sanderson gave the signal he paused to look at him and remarked to himself on the intensity of his staring.

"What are you thinking about?" he demanded suddenly.

"I am thinking about the circle I am to hit with the bench when you say 'Now'," answered Neal.

Sanderson sighed as he realized how many fatally weak points there were in this plan of his.

"But you mustn't think about it," he expostulated patiently. "If you think about it, Rez might know what you're thinking—and he wouldn't let you break the stone."

"If I don't think about it, how will I know when to break it?"

"Think about me, and then when I say the word you run straight to the disk."

"I will try," was the doubtful answer, and the rehearsal went on. By the time the guard leader came in with their meal, Sanderson was satisfied that Neal had learned his lesson as well as could be expected. There was a chance, of course, that all their work was for nothing. Rez might have turned his disk on them, learned their plans, and be ready to frustrate them. He might not allow Neal to accompany him when he went again to the tower room—if, indeed, he was to go again, and not be conducted directly to the laboratory without seeing his adversary! He might order that Neal be bound before he was admitted to his presence. It might even be—and this was his most persistent doubt—that Rez could continue to hold Neal helpless with his will in spite of the change in his brain power! However, they had done everything possible. There was now nothing left to do but to wait and see what happened.

He turned to the meal of the vegetable, and motioned Neal to do the same. But before he began to eat, he cautiously tasted the stuff to see if there were any of the drug in his own portion. As far as he could ascertain there was none; and methodically he fed himself to conserve every atom of his strength.

HARDLY had they finished eating when the guard leader appeared with the command that they present themselves in the disk room of Rez. The professor sighed with relief as he used the plural form. They! Neal was to go with him after all, and, apparently, unbound. One possible obstacle was thrust aside.

But as they ascended the ramp beside the stolid lieutenant, he could not help brooding over the other weak points in the plan that was their last chance. If Rez were prepared for the attack, or if he should be warned by Neal's thought of what he must do at the given signal, or if Neal should forget some point in the course of action he was to follow——

Hastily he switched his mind to other thoughts, realizing that he himself would be the one to give mental warning to Rez if he could not concentrate on some other subject. As they entered the draped doorway he was thinking resolutely what he would do to the evil monarch if he ever managed to close with him. Let Rez read that thought if he chose!

In the room of the disk they walked unhindered to a metal bench within ten feet of the great diamond. There Sanderson felt himself clamped by the familiar intangible bonds, as though the air around him had solidi-

fied and held him. He glanced at Neal out of the corner of his eye. He, too, was motionless. Was it because he was following instructions to stand perfectly still, or was he——

Desperately Sanderson turned his betraying thoughts to other channels lest Rez should read them and be warned of the attempt against him. And then the curtains were drawn aside, and he saw the detestable cylindrical head. Carelessly, serene in the knowledge that his prisoners could not move against his will, the great figure strode toward them and halted almost within reach.

ONE of the most difficult of all things to control is a man's own thoughts. Confronted with the necessity of thinking of anything else in the world but the plan which was about to be tried, the professor bit his lips in an effort to keep his mind on other subjects. Under the glare of those chill, distorted eyes as Rez stood before them, he must keep his brain a blank to the doubts and fears, the suspense of Neal's——

Here he stopped himself again. Even doubts and fears would expose to the mind of Rez their plot. . . .

"You are thinking of some plot," Rez snapped him up, still staring at his captive. "And you are thinking that you must not harbor its details in your mind for fear I will read the thought and be warned. Is that not right?"

Sanderson did not reply. He closed his eyes and, with attempted self-control, directed his thoughts on the disk and what he would do if it were broken.

"It will never be broken," Rez answered, as though he had spoken aloud. He turned his back to them and began to pace slowly up and down the big room while he flashed his words by telepathy.

"It is amazing how men of your caliber can cling to foolish hopes. You would accomplish the impossible, attain the unattainable, conquer the unconquerable. And with all your intelligence you are too stupid to know when you are beaten.

"For years you and Eden worked to discover me. You finally succeeded. At the same time you discovered unmistakably that I was far more powerful than any other on earth. Yet with the knowledge ever in your mind that you were hopelessly outclassed, you persisted in planning my destruction.

"Arrived near my subterranean kingdom, you searched for weeks to find an entrance. You failed day after day. You must have known that you would never find it if I chose to keep you from it. You must have decided that I knew your plans and your intentions of hunting me out, and that I should never let you accomplish those plans if I could help it. Yet you continued to search, refusing to admit that you were sure to be baffled.

"I caused an entrance to be laid bare to you. It must have been apparent that it was a trap. Yet you walked in and eventually came before me.

"You saw me as you see me now, and found out that you were not only my inferior physically—but that you were unable even to move in my direction! My will holds you firmly, yet, realizing to the full that you are beaten, you refuse to admit it. You stand there trying to keep your mind from some futile plot you have contrived!"

Up and down the room went the gigantic figure, the metal hood turning stiffly with the motion of the shoulders. Now he was right beside them, now thirty feet away. Sanderson, unable even to turn his head, followed his movements with his eyes. Thirty feet away. . . .

"And what is the result of your years of training, your life of self-denial, your labor to uncover my hiding-place?" the words rolled on. "The result is comic! As a reward you

stand before me on the brink of submitting to a brain operation that shall make you a pitiful, mindless thing—a machine, helpless until I tell you what tasks you shall perform for me. And your companion stands beside you reduced to the mental status of a five-year-old child, a victim of one of my chemical experiments!"

Hardly heeding the taunting words in his effort to control his thought, Sanderson gazed, fascinated, at the careless way the great figure moved about the room. Now almost in reach—now yards away. It would take several seconds to retrace that distance. . . .

"As for interfering with my world rulership ambition—your puny efforts have been even more amusing. This very day, from the time you were carried out of here until a moment before you returned in answer to my command, I have received fresh proof from the disk that my world war is almost ready to be inaugurated. I have reviewed the decisions of twenty conferences in as many different nations. Each has determined to declare war as soon as China or America shall touch a match to the powder pile."

The professor stared grimly at the airhole in the base of the heavy throat. Superman as Rez was in brain and body, he was yet mortal. A few seconds without air and he would twist and gasp as any lesser man might do.

And now he was coming toward them. In a moment he would be near—then he would wheel and walk to the other end of the room. . . .

"Soon you will be led from here to the laboratory which is now ready to receive you. After the operation and its confirmation of my brain theories, I shall start the cataclysm I have prepared. China shall open hostilities——"

He was nearly at the end of the chamber. A few more paces and he would turn again. Thirty feet away. . . .

The time had come!

"Now!" snapped Sanderson to Neal, his voice cracking on the word. "Now!"

The thrilling conclusion of this story will be told in next month's WEIRD TALES

LIGHT-ECHOES

by Everil Worrell

"A tall, broad-shouldered man-shadow was walking with ours."

MY FATHER would have been a great scientist if he had lived. My mother told me that, and thought so: but there were others who thought so, too—a man with keen eyes and a clipped beard who used to visit our house, and a carelessly dressed, short, stout woman whose name amounted to something, and one or two others. My father, who died when I was only a year old, had coined the phrase "light-echoes" in connection with some physical-chemical theories which had the Einstein theory for a jumping-off point. Those theories involving light-echoes were never proved, and they make rather heavy reading; but they stand back of the love story I am writing down, and I'll try to make them clear as I go along.

There can be no end to a story of true love—I have reason to know. Yet this particular love story would be said by most people to have ended six years before the time I have to write about, in that strangest year of my life when I was seven.

I remember sitting in my little room upstairs, and listening to my mother as she talked with a friend down on the porch below. I had stayed up there because I was in an indigo mood, which I wanted to hide from my mother. We two loved each other in a tender way that somehow hurt. It was as if we were forever trying to shield each other from some bitter pain of loss. That loss, I had understood for years, was the loss of my father. I might have forgotten the ache to have a father as other children had, if I hadn't always been reminded of it by Mother's smile.

That smile looked too much like what it was—a way to keep from crying. I had been far too young to understand when first she wore it for me—but now I did.

"Little Sheila is lonesome, since she's back from visiting her cousins. I always meant her to have at least one brother or sister—I've always pitied only children. Well, I've made a fight for it, haven't I, Helena? I've tried to. And I love Sheila inexpressibly. But to be separated from Michael, year after year after year! How can I make Sheila happy, when I'm not? God meant every child to have a happy mother.

"If I'd a nice sum of money to leave her, I think I'd—join Michael. Some way, I would. Only—only—if I killed myself, my punishment might be to lose my way—to lose him forever. And besides, if I can't make Sheila happy, at least I can work for her. I wish she were one of my sister's brood. She'd grow up happy like them—be more apt to marry happily, I believe—to find her soul's eternal mate, as I found mine in Michael."

My mother's friend was breaking in with little soothing sounds, and saying "Don't, Dinorah!" I squared my small shoulders and started down the stairs. As I passed the long mirror in the hall, I recognized the look on my childish face—a replica of that look of my mother's face that hurt my heart. I, too, was smiling to keep from crying.

After the friend had gone, I dragged my mother into the house to sing for me. She had a beautiful coloratura voice which she would use only for me. Already she was teaching me to sing—little tuneful songs that couldn't hurt a child's unformed voice. But she would sing all kinds of difficult things for me—the Polonaise from *Mignon*, and the Shadow Song from *Dinorah*, from which my grandmother had taken mother's name. I begged for the Shadow Song this afternoon, and got it.

It fired my imagination, and I didn't care to ask for other songs. Instead, I drew my mother out of doors to walk in the garden, and there I danced around her, pixy-like—pretending that I was the light flitting shadow in the song. I made myself dizzy and stopped at her side, clinging to her hand to steady myself; and after a minute my eyes must still have been swimming, for suddenly I cried out loudly and turned to look behind us, leaning across my mother and peering excitedly.

Her hand was on my tousled hair in its caressing, protecting way, and her voice was in my ear, and there was no one in the garden but us two. But to her questions I replied, half ashamed of my excitement, yet insistently:

"There was a man. Walking beside you, Mother, or else coming up from behind us on the other side from me. No, I didn't see him at all—just his shadow. Yes, it was as plain as our two shadows, going on before us. A tall, broad-shouldered man-shadow, walking with yours."

I can see my mother yet as she looked then. She had turned, too, and the late slanting sunlight fell upon her face and made a shining halo of her bobbed silver hair. How unusual she must have been, with her face of a child and her hair! But there was a new thing in her smile, something poignantly wistful and fearfully hopeful that made my heart beat hard with excitement.

"Sheila—you're sure—you're certain?" she kept saying. And then: "You're seven. You're old enough to understand, I think. And you and I should be so close together—out of all the world, we were his—we *are* his!" she corrected firmly. "I used to keep a diary, Sheila, and tomorrow I'm going to show it to you. And you've heard Professor Ambler and Miss

Weir speak of your father's theories? I'm going to tell you about some of them, too."

I remember that when I fell asleep that night I no longer missed my cousins. There was a new feeling in our house. It was as if all the clocks had been stopped ever since I could remember—and were set going again.

THE next evening my mother called me into her room. She took two books out of a drawer of her desk, and we sat down together on the floor. I could read, of course—I was far advanced for a child of seven, because mother had taught me evenings and holidays to read and write, paint and sing for the joy of it. But tonight she read to me, in a voice that was steady by an effort, by the light of her rose- and pearl-shaded light. I have the pages from which she read before me now as I write. She read first from her diary, and she read backward, beginning with the more recently written parts. I was surprized and thrilled to hear first a description of yesterday's scene in our garden.

Then she read a few brief descriptions of things I remembered, little doings and sayings of mine. She was leading my mind back through my earlier childhood, back toward my infancy.

"Do you remember?" she would ask; and I would nod or shake my head. It got so that I generally had to shake it, and she would sigh a little. But she had gone as far back as my second birthday now, and my memories were very slight. I thought I could remember a tiny cake with just two pink candles on it; but what followed I did not recall at all. I have the page before me.

"After Sheila blew out her two candles, a strange thing happened. My heart is singing. Dear Michael, is the veil wearing thin—is it to be rent at last, after this weary year?

"I was sitting a little while in the west window of my room, Sheila playing at my feet and running around the room. Her bedtime in a few moments—yet I must have fallen asleep.

"Sheila's cry woke me suddenly: 'Muvver—Muvver! Who is he? Why does he kiss your hair?'

"Startled and dazed, I looked at Sheila. She wasn't looking at me. She seemed to be staring at my reflection in the window. But as I followed her gaze she ran to me, and so I could see our two reflections there, bright in the light of my lamp. It was a pretty picture, too; but Sheila saw something else—something that I didn't see, for she cried again: 'He likes to see us together like this—doesn't he, Muvver? As he goes away, he smiles.'

"I looked—I strained my eyes. Michael—could it be—your 'light-echoes'? But why couldn't I see you, too? *Why?* Once when you were living, I saw you with something like what the Scotch call second sight. Can't I see you now because I'm grief-blinded? Or because, if I saw you, I *must* go to you?

"And I must stay with Sheila. Dear little Sheila. Yours, and like you. Mine to keep safe for you, till she doesn't need me so much.

"But if only you could come to me. So that I could see you, Michael. Oh, Michael, my love."

I have written it as my mother had written it. In reading it to me that night she improvised as she did when she read blood-curdling nursery tales—making her pitiful little diary sound less sad.

And after that she skipped quite a section of pages, turning them over as though she herself could not bear to look at them. Her face was pale.

"I'm going back to the time before your father's death," she explained quickly. "Here's the thing I was looking for. About seeing him with second sight."

And this next she read in a happier

tone, a tone which seemed to belong to happier days.

"Last night a strange thing happened. Michael and I had been on the way to having a quarrel. No use putting down the reason; but I felt quite worked up, and it might have been a serious quarrel—but all at once a phrase came into my mind as though someone had said it to me: 'The heart in my bosom is not my own.' I think I had read it somewhere; but only those words came to my mind, without their context.

"Well, they seemed to describe my marriage to Michael, as no other words could. When we were first married, I dreamed one night that, somehow, we exchanged souls. Afterward, we often dreamed the same dream together—and even things of a stranger nature were always happening to us. I was away on a visit once, and had a cinder in my eye; but I didn't mention it in writing to Michael, for fear that it would worry him. One night, at last, I 'slept it out'; and after that I wrote him about it, and how I had feared that I would have to go to an optician. It developed that on the night when the cinder disappeared from my eye, Michael had dreamed of me, and—of taking something out of my eye!

"The quarrel between us vanished like a wisp of cloud before the sun. I was in the kitchen that night, just before I went to bed. Suddenly I saw a very clear reflection of Michael in the kitchen window. He was in bed, reading; and as I looked at his reflection he put down the book, turned on his elbow toward me, and smiled. The light seemed to shift, somehow, and the reflection vanished. But in the moment of its vanishing, I was conscious of an odd sensation; a feeling as though I had been spying on Michael in some unusual and very out-of-the-ordinary way. That was the more peculiar, because in all our married life I was never at any other time conscious of such a feeling.

"I stood there thinking. I couldn't see how the reflection had gotten there, anyway. The kitchen and bedroom windows were parallel—we were occupying a small apartment—and any windows opposing them didn't seem to be rightly placed to throw the image.

"At any rate Michael would be interested. He knew all about reflections. He would explain this one. He had smiled in my direction, as I saw him in the window. But had his eyes met mine? Had he seen me, too?

"I ran into the bedroom. 'Michael!' I cried: 'Did you see me in the window—my reflection? As I saw yours?' 'In what window?' Michael asked, quietly. 'A reflection thrown in some roundabout way from the bedroom into the kitchen window,' I explained. Michael said, gently: 'Look at the bedroom windows. They are as they have been all evening.'

"I looked at the windows. *They were shuttered on the inside.* I began to tremble. I felt as though I were losing my mind. 'But Michael! I saw you——' I told him how he had laid down his book, and turned in my direction, and smiled. 'Michael! I'm —scared. Am I crazy? What was it? What does it mean?'

"Michael smiled—as he had smiled at me from the window. 'I think,' he said softly, 'I think it means that you love me very much—so much that your senses are quickened. For I did exactly what you saw me do. I heard your footstep in the kitchen, and from somewhere I heard a scuffling noise. Perhaps a rat inside the walls, or something. Anyhow, I turned to listen—wondering if you were all right. Then somehow I felt that you were—and I remember that I smiled—thinking how much I loved you!'

"'The heart in my bosom is not my own.' Michael, how I love you—how you love me! If one of us were to die, I know the other could not live."

MY MOTHER closed the book quickly. "I won't read you about the light-echoes. No one understands them, except a little bit. I'll try to explain the little I understand myself by drawing some pictures," she said.

She drew a straight line, and tried to make me understand it as a one-dimensional world; then she drew a square and a circle—two-dimensional figures; and then sketched in a cube. By rolling a ball smoothly and making it skip, she tried to show me how a thing could vanish by passing into a new dimension: "You see, where the ball would have *rolled* to, there's no ball; but the ball passed exactly over that spot—through the air. If you lived in just two dimensions on the floor there, you'd say there was no ball; but it was existing all the time. Do you understand that?"

"I—think so!" I said doubtfully.

"Well, do you understand that if there is a *fourth* dimension—and if we aren't fitted out with the senses, or the understanding, or something, to see into that fourth dimension—do you see it's the same thing—sort of?"

Mother and I might have been two little girls puzzling over a knotty problem in home-work. Her pretty silver hair might have been tow-hair. Supposing she weren't my mother at all, but the sister I knew in the bottom of my heart I'd rather have now? (Gang age, my mother called me, didn't she?)

I snapped back to the question of the dimensions. I thought intensely, hastily. Yes, of course, if there were a fourth dimension and we couldn't see into it or understand it——

"Yes, we'd think things *weren't,* when maybe they *were.* Even when they were quite near."

"You're quick and clever like your father," Mother approved. "And here's something more, Sheila. At night you can't see things. But even at night, there's some light, and there are the things. Your eyes can't see them, that's all—because they are too crude. And there are more colors in the rainbow than you can see. Your eyes don't understand how to see them."

I twisted my foot inside my shoe, and ran my fingers through the back of my hair. My mother understood that I was interested, and yet that it was hard for me to listen long and think hard. Her hand joined my hand in ruffling my hair.

"Sheila," she whispered, "I don't think people die. I think consciousness—individuality—deep thought—love, most of all—those are the real things, and—they *can't* die. This floor we sit on is an illusion, really—a great emptiness filled with tiny moving specks of energy—those aren't just the right words, but they'll do. When your father died, the part of him that people saw with their crude eyes—*that* part was destroyed—it became——" She shivered. There was a dark look on her face, but then a light shone through.

"Your father—my Michael," she went on, "was a being made of other things than carbon and hydrogen. Brilliant intellect—humor—love—his dark eyes with the love in them, the mouth with its firm and tender look and its little twists of happiness and laughter—*they still must be.* So I believe in an astral body—and I don't know exactly what I mean by that, except that it lives on. The Bible says: 'When this corruption puts on incorruption.' Your father believed in immortality, and he was a very clever man and a sound physicist of the new school.

"Now, the light-echoes. Your father believed that everything that exists for us in three dimensions exists also in four; and that on rare occasions, when people see things that simply 'aren't there,' they are really seeing queer reflections from that fourth dimension. He called these reflections *light-echoes,* to distinguish them from ordinary reflections or ordinary light. According to Einstein and other

physicists, nothing can travel faster than light—but your father thought that some matter vibrations and some light vibrations do travel faster than that maximum known speed, and can not be perceived or detected because they are projected by their very speed—or *bounced*, as the ball was bounced, into the fourth dimension. Light-echoes travel faster than light as we know it in our three dimensions.

"I saw your father's image through closed shutters and in a way no ordinary reflection could be seen because my senses were quickened by love, and I caught a fleeting glimpse of his image as it was projected in the fourth dimension, and for an instant reflected or 'echoed' back into the dimensions I knew.

"And it should be possible to see him now in that way. Though I can't do it. It should be possible; for he isn't dead; he has slipped away into that fourth dimension—into that unknown dimension of Einstein's that reforms space, so that it is boundless but not limitless; where the spiral courses of the planets round their suns are the shortest paths between two points . . ."

My childish brain was reeling—and surely no wonder. I am conscious that I have helped out the recording of this last tremendously from later knowledge; but I remember well the thrill of that night. I seemed to see a great, dark emptiness, which was space, managing to conceal its queer shape and strange dimensions—yet in which I caught glimpses—great balls of fire swinging along, and glowing smaller balls going in circles to go straight—and somewhere in the mighty mystery were the deathless dead, near and yet far from us, vividly vital in some mysterious way we couldn't comprehend. And the deathless dead still loved and smiled—yes, they must. I seemed now to remember a tender, manly, dark face in that west window long ago—seeing me in my mother's arms—loving us both with dear, dark eyes. . . .

I stirred.

Mother still knelt on the floor, facing me. She might have been kneeling to me.

"Sheila—you *did* see him that time, when you were a baby. And lately you saw—I think you saw *his* shadow. You seem to see things I've forgotten how to see, though when he lived——

"Anyway, you'll tell me—the least little thing, won't you—little love? I feel he's come near to us again. And maybe if *I* saw him, I'd die of joy—but it wouldn't be that way with you, so perhaps that's why it is permitted you to see him. You'll tell me anything you don't understand—big or little? You won't forget?"

IT HAS happened in the later years that I followed in my father's footsteps, for I, like my mother, married a brilliant physicist, and, unlike her, I have worked with my husband. I could help out more fully from later knowledge my childish remembrance of my mother's attempt to explain her Michael's theories to me—but why should I? Those theories would make dull reading, and they were never proved. Always they came against an unknown factor that made them unprovable. But with regard to the speed of light, I will quote part of a paragraph and a sentence from a very fascinating book—*The Nature of the Physical World*, by Eddington:

"The speed of 299,796 kilometers per second which occupies a unique position in every measure-system is commonly referred to as the speed of light. But it is much more than that; it is the speed at which the mass of matter becomes infinite, lengths contract to zero, clocks stand still. . . .

". . . We almost feel it a challenge to find something that goes faster."

The light-echoes, then, were glimpses caught and reflected in terms of light rays of the speed we comprehend, from those unfound vibrations which *do* move faster. And the life that goes

on after a thing has died is lived in faster tempo, and more vibrantly than we can imagine life to live. It may also be indestructible—on the principle that a brightly burning flame burns on as long as there is anything to feed it, while a slow and murkily burning light gutters and goes out.

As I see it now, the life of the liberated soul is anything but the dim and shadowy existence of the ancient conception of ghosts in Hades. And into that more vivid and vital life *he* had gone. . . .

I see it so now. But at that age I should not have been plunged so suddenly into speculations of this order, and I was to suffer for it for a while.

ON THE day after that serious talk with my mother she went back to her work in the office in which she was employed as a secretary; and I sneaked into her room and took the diary out of the private drawer of her desk and fell to poring over those portions of it which I knew she did not want me to see.

I make no excuses, I am simply narrating facts. I was a child, and I was curious. And at the same time I think I had some idea of standing in my vanished father's place, of penetrating into the secret, lonely places of my mother's soul, of learning to shield her from her unhappiness.

That diary is before me again now, but I will quote only one section of it—the first that was written after my father's sudden death.

It reads like a letter. *No, like an exchange of letters:*

"Michael—how could you leave me? How can you not have waited for me? To go from me while I visited my old home—if I had been with you in *our* home, surely I could have somehow held you.

"But I was coming to you the next week, and you didn't wait. Michael, do you forgive me because you died alone?

"And do you live—somewhere—somehow? The ground is cold—you loved sunlight and warmth. Is there another *you*—a living, eternal, indestructible you—as all good people believe—or do they? 'Lord, I believe; help Thou my unbelief.' Michael, if there could be one word from you—one word out of the black emptiness. . . .

"And Michael, why haven't I followed you? The ground wouldn't be cold, if we were together. Only to be together! In death, as in life. Our baby—oh, yes—but what is even she to me, beside that which we were to each other?

"*I don't belong with the living.* That is not an idle sentence. I know that my heart is dead. Heart failure took you from me. But the heart in my bosom is not my own. That is as true now as it was before this awful thing happened.

"When they told me you were gone —*I felt my heart die.* There is no feeling like that. Then I went on, as I've heard a man may run shot through the heart. But I don't stop. And yet my heart is dead. How can this be? And I feel as though even my soul must die, without one sign from you. . . ."

There was a space; and then a different handwriting—a strongly characterized, eccentric hand; before reading on I sat still studying it. Where had I seen that writing? Those t's and the tails to the g's and y's? I thought—on the backs of some envelopes of letters mother kept in a box —the letters my father had written her.

"You will finish what I had to leave undone. To leave—loving as I love you and little Sheila! And yet—don't think me cruel—but I see so clearly the rapture of the meeting—and time does not appear to me as it appears to you.

"Yes, there is a living Michael who loves you. Do you know the 'Elsewhere' of Einstein's space-time? Maybe you don't, little love; you left

that heavy stuff for me; but in another dimension where broken things are joined together, that 'Elsewhere' is not far from you.

"Do you remember my light-echoes? They flash rare signals from that 'Elsewhere'.

"When you sing Tosti's *Vorrei,* think of me then; seeing you, bending down to you—*and to be seen by you again, little love;* but not for a while yet.

"When lights paint images against dark window-panes, or colors slant across a still water surface, or when a crystal or a prism flashes its fire—think of my light-echoes. Maybe, after all, you can catch a glimpse of me watching over you and loving you. The things seen in crystals by mediums with their quickened vision are light-echoes; why shouldn't you sometime see—unless, then, you couldn't stay with Sheila.

"You say it is hard to live, when your heart is dead. You and I are one, and so I know. But Sheila. How we have loved her—and how she needs you now!

"Be patient, Dinorah. Hope."

After that there was a long empty space—whole blank pages; and then one little sentence: "Michael—won't you write again?"

Then more blank pages; and after a while, the diary taken up again, mostly with entries of my baby ways and doings.

I closed the book softly, and put it away again in the drawer of my mother's desk. And for a long while I sat there on the floor.

I THINK my mother saw, somehow, that her diary had been tampered with, for after all she made no more confidences to me. And on my side I had nothing to tell her. I never saw an unaccounted-for shadow again; day after day, I saw nothing at all out of the ordinary.

But I thought more than was good for me, and one day I overheard her talking about me again, this time to the stout Miss Weir, who was a physical chemist of some distinction and who had known my father.

"I saw I had made a mistake in talking to her about—about the things I think over so much. She must be a child—all child. I wish she had children around her. I'll not try to draw too near to her again; I'm sure it isn't right."

Miss Weir stayed with us that evening to dinner, and that was the last time I ever saw her; for she was taken ill with acute appendicitis a week afterward, and she died under the knife.

I was terribly distressed and oppressed by all this. My childish thoughts had already been dwelling too much upon death, and now I had the feeling that death was all around—invisible, but reaching after people Charybdis-like—or was it Scylla who reached, and Charybdis who sucked? Either simile would have described my childish horrors well enough, and either simile might describe well enough to any mind the pitiless warfare of death against mortal existence. At any rate I grew afraid to enter a dark room alone.

And it was just at that time, with my mother brooding over me and me brooding over her and both of us sensing the barrier between us, as though indeed my mother herself belonged more to that unseen world of my fear than to the world in which we lived, that we had our great surprize.

Miss Weir had died possessed of quite a little fortune, and she had been quite alone in the world. The fortune was left to my mother, and after her to me.

Mother was delighted, for me. And I wondered, child fashion and hopefully, if this spurt of material good fortune might be miraculously the beginning of an era of real happiness for us both. But that very first night of the good news, when she tucked me into bed, I knew better.

"I'm so glad for you, Sheila. True, you'll still be too alone, little only child. But money makes you safe. *I wonder*—but there are so many ways in which a child—a girl, even a grown woman, may need her mother very badly."

She was so transparent, and honestly without meaning to be; trying to hide her unhappiness from me, yet letting me see into the depths of it as you can count the pebbles at the bottom of a deep, clear pool.

I knew what that *"I wonder"* meant. It meant: *"Now,* couldn't I go to him? And is it such a dreadful thing to enter that next world without an invitation?"

Half the night, a most unchildlike insomnia claimed me. My mother loved me, but she would always love my father more—and he wasn't alive, as we were. I wished I had someone —or some ones—near me who were all-alive; who, like myself, shrank from that other world instead of yearning toward it.

THE days passed slowly. My mother had stopped her work, and stayed at home with me. But we weren't happy at all; we tried too hard to be.

And then came the twenty-sixth of October. The date was the anniversary of my father's death.

Again I had slept very badly. I had spent the day before with the flock of cousins I adored, and the oldest boy had told the rest of us ghost stories. Then Sari, the oldest girl, had seen my fear and comforted me. Sari was the image of my mother, if you could have imagined my mother's prematurely whitened hair turned back to coppery brown, and her face lit by the healthy happiness children love. It seems to me, much as I hated myself for the disloyalty, that Sari was more like my mother as she ought to be, somehow, than my mother herself —and that if I were always near Sari I would be always happy. One of those strange and strong child attractions drew me to her.

After coming home to our house, the glow of well-being fell away from me and the terror of the ghost stories came back. In my bed I mused upon them. There was the tale of *The Golden Arm.* In it, a corpse had crept out of the graveyard mold and come after the arm which had been stolen from it. And that reminded me of the writing in my mother's little book—the writing just before the blank pages and her entry: "Michael, won't you write again?"

Horror of horrors! Did my father's corpse leave its coffin, perhaps, and creep out of the ground, and come hovering near her—and near me? Had it written in that book, with its dead hand?

The dreams that followed my waking thoughts were nightmarish, too, but at last daylight came.

And all that day—how I hate to remember it!—I stayed as far from my mother as I could. I had come to associate her with the dead, and with death; and I was in that phase which sometimes smites children with a sick nausea, of connecting the idea of death closely and entirely with the horrors of the grave.

All that day I shunned my mother, and I think she saw it. And yet in the lamplit hour—how gladly I remember *that!*—I was drawn back to her. It was, almost, as though a kindly influence led me to her; as though someone who understood the mainsprings of my being better than I did had touched me with a tender hand and somehow allayed all my morbid misery.

I have seen a child cross and peevish and unreconciled to its mother after a long and wearing day, newly enraptured with her and with life on the return of its father in the evening —because of the sense of completeness that filled the home with his coming; and looking back I seem to have behaved that night like such a child. I

felt happy again; as I had felt on the afternoon when I had seen the shadow —and never since.

But let me write now carefully what is to follow: because in that newer, fuller science which is just dawning on the minds of men, such rare data are of the greatest value.

I had come into my mother's room. She sat by the closed west window, reading. The rose- and pearl-tinted shade of the lamp beside her blossomed like a flower in the dark window-pane, where she too was reflected in a mellow glow.

I sat upon the floor. I had a school text-book which I was pretending to study—but I was really watching her. I loved her in that moment, tremendously. I felt as though we were completed—happy, as other mothers and children. There was a happy light upon her face. It was a moment of rare and perfect beauty—and, child that I was, I had learned a sad wisdom which whispered to me that the moment could not last.

And then I heard my mother singing very softly, though her lips did not seem to move. The song, which I thought was the loveliest thing I had ever heard, seemed to come from a long way off—almost like an echo. She must be humming *very* softly, and yet somehow words reached my ears too—and I wondered how she could say them without moving her lips:

"The winter may come, and the spring may die . . .
God bless thee, whene'er at his feet thou dost kneel . . .
. . . if thou come not soon, love, then I shall meet thee there."

My voice sounded crude and shrill, after that: "Mother! *What* were you singing?"

"Nothing, dear. I wasn't singing at all."

"I thought it was your voice. But it sounded far away. Someone else, somewhere, maybe."

"What did it sound like?"

I tried to sing what I remembered. Mother's head bent down, so that I couldn't see her face. Her voice trembled ever so slightly, but I thought not with unhappiness.

"That was Michael's favorite song, Sheila. It is Solveig's Song, from *Peer Gynt*. Some day you must see and hear *Peer Gynt*. I have never had the heart to sing it since he died —but I used to sing it just as you did now—with a certain odd little mistake in the refrain." After a pause she added: "Michael believed—too—that sound vibrations never die —that sometimes they may circle around in space, and come back like a homing bird—or like that boomerang you made in handicraft class."

I was greatly touched and awed. All those horrors were forgotten. My father had been a wonderful man to have known such things as that; wonderful, even to have thought them.

Mother's face was still bent down and turned away, but I could see it shining dimly in that dark window-pane. I sat still, gazing at that window-picture, thinking long, child thoughts.

The light seemed stronger in that reflected world. It seemed to focus on my mother's face and figure, yet somehow to be broken up like light from a prism, but there was no prism in the room. Anyhow it made a sort of rainbow-misty brightness, clear behind a veil.

And—now—if cold chills coursed up my spine, they were not chills of fright, but of the most exquisite excitement. I was seeing something very strange indeed—a thing that instantly recalled that passage in my mother's diary, describing how in a pane of window-glass she had seen a thing that took place, but which she couldn't possibly see there.

Only I was seeing something which —wasn't taking place. *Or was I?* There was that other diary passage, about my own baby vision.

There, now, sat my mother in her willow rocking-chair. I noticed that

her hand was pressed against her left side—was there a pain there?

Anyhow, there was nothing in her arms—her arms were empty, and so was her lap.

But her reflected image in the window held a baby in its arms, snuggled a small dark head close against its breast!

"Mother!" I breathed. "What baby ever had hair growing in a little downward point on its forehead? Did I ever see one?"

Mother answered absently, and a little jerkily. "It isn't—common. But you had a little 'widow's peak'. Your bangs hide it, and you seemed to—outgrow it, too."

The picture in the window trembled, as though a light had shifted. Or did excitement blur my eyes? Now I was straining them. And I saw—I saw——

May I not live long enough to forget the love I glimpsed for an instant in two reflected faces — a woman's, and—a man's!

In the window, my mother's face was upturned. And her hair was dark as my cousin Sari's. Dark, too, was the hair of the tall man who bent to her, and dark his eyes, yet like two stars——

Did I hear or think I heard that one soft whisper: "Michael!"

I was trying to explain something to myself: "I'm seven. But my father left my mother with me a baby in her arms. There must be a *me* still that is just a baby in her arms. And they'd want that baby——"

And then I realized that while I thought about it, the window picture had changed—dimmed—faded——

There was just the lamp blossoming against blackness; and my mother's figure looking dim, and somehow—collapsed.

She *had* collapsed in her willow chair. She didn't move or speak to me. After a while I ran out into the night, crying for help.

Looking back from happy years of personal fulfilment into that long ago, I know one thing: that I'd sacrifice everything that has come to me rather than that one memory. Because that night when I was seven, I saw a lover's meeting—the meeting of two who—*lived*. What could life matter if at the core it were rotten with a futile emptiness? To me, life is pregnant with meaning; because I have seen.

But from the scientific viewpoint, there is a word to add. Years afterward I was told that an autopsy had been performed upon my mother's body. It was required by the terms of Miss Weir's will, in order that I might inherit, the clause having been included to prevent my mother from contemplating suicide once my future was assured. I inherited; and the cause of my mother's death was described by examining doctors as unique in medical history.

My mother's heart had failed. But it was so atrophied that it appeared as a muscle which has not been used for many years.

"I don't belong to the living . . . I know that my heart is dead. . . . If one of us should die, I know the other could not live. . . . The heart in my bosom is not my own."

Michael had willed his beloved wife to guard the first years of their child's earth-life, and so she had remained to guard them. Weakness had overcome him once, and he had died; but in that other life there was no more dying, and no more weakness. He could command her; and she needed only his love and his command, and it was done.

Or in medical terms: "Did *will* work here an unparalleled marvel—so that the circulation was maintained in the veins by some unprecedented nervous action without the functioning of the heart, which became a mere passive part of the circulatory system? This case will remain forever unexplained."

A Brief Tale of African Witchcraft

THE WHISTLER

By AUGUST W. DERLETH

MAJOR SIR MARK FORTESCUE stood for a moment on the veranda staring into the jungle blackness. Then he turned and entered the bungalow. The three men in the living-room looked up at him.

"Well?" said Marsh.

"Everything quiet," said Fortescue, lighting his pipe. "Too damned quiet. I don't like it." He tossed the match toward a waste-basket.

"Nothing doing tonight then?" asked Marsh again.

"I wish I knew, old man." The major slumped into a chair. "There are only four of us, and ten of the men that we can depend upon if it comes to a battle—but it won't."

Marsh nodded. The other two men sat silently by.

"I say," said young Kent suddenly, "we can pick off the whole mob with our machine-gun."

Major Fortescue grunted. "If they come close enough. You've got a lot to learn about warfare in this country, Kent."

Kent drew himself up proudly. "You'll pardon me, major, but I haven't got a trepanned skull for nothing, you know."

"You'll never have occasion to get a trepanned skull here in the Veldt."

"God!" said the fourth man, "I wish they'd come at us."

"We all do, Grayson."

"It would be better than this damned waiting—waiting. Nothing to do but play bridge, for a week now. And the news from home isn't due for a month yet—almost two."

"If," said Major Fortescue curtly, "we get it then!"

"Those damned natives! Not one of 'em's to be trusted."

Kent turned suddenly. "What about this man Abou?"

The major took his pipe from his mouth and looked at him. "So you've seen old Abou, eh? If you value your life, Kent, you'll not see him again."

"That old fellow? Why, he's almost childish."

"Far from it," snapped the major.

"Isn't he a sort of chief?" asked Kent.

"No," said the major, "he isn't a chief. He's a witch doctor."

"Oh!" exclaimed Kent, and stared. "I've heard about them."

"I daresay you have," said the major. "I don't mind telling you," he continued, "that the fellow Grayson replaced was picked up by Abou. I don't care to talk about what happened to him."

Marsh nodded. "You'll listen," he said in a low voice, "or you'll pay for it."

"But he seems so damned harmless."

"That's just it," said the major dryly. "He does seem harmless."

For a while the men sat silent. Then Kent spoke again.

"I'm told," he said, "that these witch doctors have a great deal of influence over the natives."

"Yes," nodded the major.

"Why couldn't we buy Abou off?"

The major looked at him coldly.

"Was there anything that led you to believe I was joking about Abou?"

Kent shook his head.

"Then shut up. And get any idea of saving this place by buying off the natives out of your head."

Silence fell over the group. After a while the major looked at his wrist.

"I'm going to bed," he said. "It's Grayson's watch until midnight; then I'll be out."

AT MIDNIGHT the major stood on the veranda with Grayson.

"They're fighting us with weapons we can't combat," Major Fortescue was saying. "You know what I mean. I don't believe in witchcraft, but I've seen some funny things here. I'm not so sure of myself after that."

"I know," said Grayson shortly. "These out-of-the-way places have a way about them. In India once, during the Sepoy Rebellion, I was stationed far to the north. We got a native dervish and threw him into the guard-house. In an hour he was dead —no one knew how. But there was not a question about the matter; our doctor pronounced him dead as a six weeks' corpse. We dragged him out, intending to bury him. We laid him on the ground, turned our backs for a moment, and he was gone. We supposed his natives had made off with the body. Next day he was walking around again."

Major Fortescue nodded slowly. "By the way," he asked suddenly, "who are Kent's nearest relatives?"

"A brother, I think; an M. P., if I'm not mistaken." Grayson glanced at him curiously.

"That all? No wife—mother?"

"No. Both dead. His wife died just before he came here. That's why he came."

"I see. I wonder how we can best notify the brother."

"Why, what do you mean?" Grayson stared at him.

The major's eyes were steely behind his pince-nez. "Because," he said evenly, "within twenty-four hours after anyone meets Abou that man vanishes. He will in all probability never again be seen alive. I daresay you've heard of African animal magnetism—Lamia sorcery?"

Grayson did not answer. The major shrugged his shoulders.

"I do not dare to doubt that Kent has been under this influence ever since his meeting with Abou. He must return to Abou—and God knows what that hellish tribe will do to him!"

Grayson made a curious choking sound in his throat.

"I take it that you've been awake every moment of the watch, Grayson?"

Grayson nodded.

"And that you haven't seen anything—unusual?"

Grayson shook his head. The major took a revolver from about his waist.

"Well," he said, "you'd better go and wake Marsh. Kent's not in the house—bed hasn't been slept in. We'll have to go out there and look for him."

GRAYSON vanished in the blackness of the doorway, and shortly after the three men were pushing their way silently through the jungle beyond the bungalow.

"Stop," whispered the major suddenly. "We've got to stay within sight of the bungalow. Did you get the men up?" He turned to Marsh.

"Yes. They're on guard, major."

"We can't stand here all night, major," Grayson protested.

"I know it," snapped Fortescue; then, "Listen! I'm going to call. Kent!" he shouted, and again, "Kent!"

The three men stood in silence. Presently, as if from a distance, came an echo.

"There they are," said the major grimly. "There is never an echo here. Listen!"

In the darkness rang another cry. "Help, major! Help, major!"

"My God!" said Grayson under his breath.

"Quiet," warned the major.

Again the cry came, closer this time. Then for a long time there was silence. All of the men were shifting around when it came. At first a low, vague sound, as of someone whistling far away. Then it changed abruptly, and sounded immediately before them.

Grayson gripped the major's arm. "That's Kent. It's Drdla's *Souvenir* he's whistling. Kent always whistles that!"

The major nodded. "I recognized it at once," he said.

The whistling came again, louder this time.

"Get your revolvers ready. When I give the word, fire."

"But Kent——" said Grayson.

"You follow my orders," snapped the major.

Again came the whistling—now behind them, now before. Then, far away, the cry, "Help, major!" followed by a long-drawn-out "Ah!" Then the whistle again, just before them.

"Fire!" said the major harshly.

Three shots rang out as one. There was a momentary silence. Then something came crashing through the trees toward them. A round something bounded out of the brush and against the major's foot. Fortescue turned his flash on it, but turned it off at once. He reached down, picked it up, and put it under his jacket.

"Lights!" ordered the major.

Three lights flashed into the jungle. Just ahead of them lay an old native, clothed in a single bizarre strip of cloth about the loins. Around his neck hung many beads, some of bone. His face was streaked with paint.

"Abou!" said the major in a stifled voice. "Examine him."

The two men stepped forward.

"Got it in the abdomen," said Marsh. "He won't last."

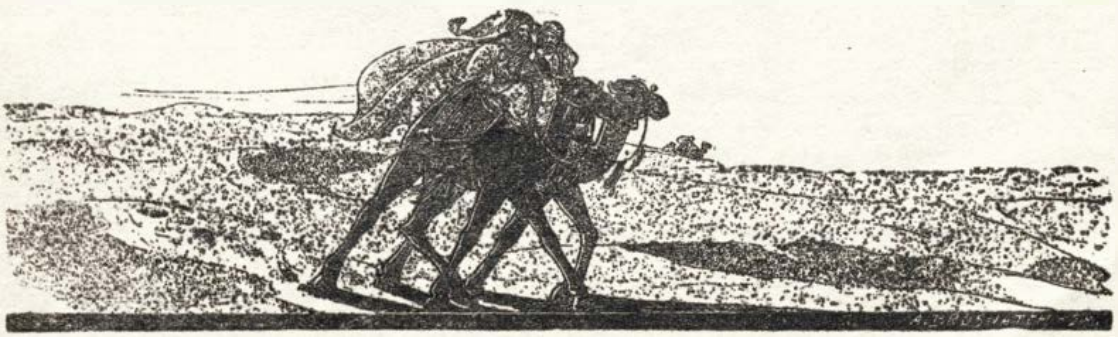
"No," said the major, stepping forward. "He won't." Very deliberately he placed the barrel of his revolver against the negro's temple and pulled the trigger. The lights went out.

"We may expect relief of some kind," said the major on the way to the bungalow. "The natives will most likely be gone by morning, or they may attack at once, now that Abou is dead. Either way it is better."

IN THE house Grayson turned to the major. "What was it you picked up, major?"

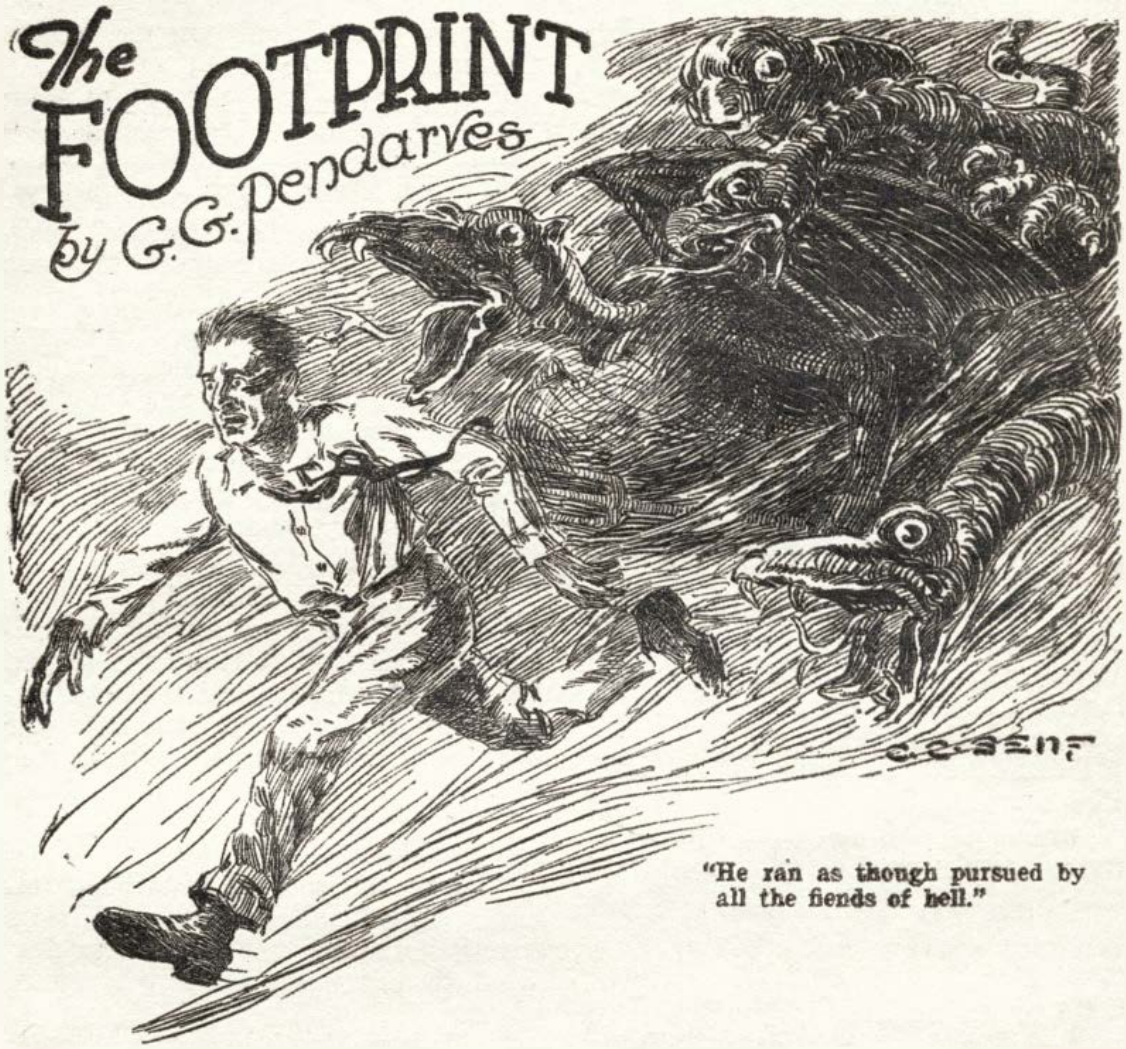
Without a word the major placed the object upon the table. It was a human skull, totally devoid of all flesh. Slightly toward the back of the head was a triangular silver plate. Grayson whirled; the major's face was grim, his eyes were mere pinpoints.

"My God!" said Grayson in a choking voice. *"Who was it—out there?"*



The FOOTPRINT

by G. G. Pendarves



"He ran as though pursued by all the fiends of hell."

I HAVE very little hope that you will understand, still less believe this incredible adventure that poor Jerry and I went through only a year ago. But if I write it all down perhaps the memory that haunts me, sleeping or waking, will fade from my tortured mind. They think here that I am mad! And I am afraid that I really shall go mad soon, if no one will believe this true and frightful story.

Jerry Nicholls and I were at Dawlish University together, as close pals as two young enthusiasts could be, and shared everything from our views on evolution to a teapot with a broken spout.

It was in our third year that Jerry's grandfather died; and, being the last of the Nicholls and the sole heir to the old man's property, of course Jerry was bound to appear at the funeral.

I heard nothing from him until two weeks later, when this letter arrived on the last day of term:

> For the Lord's sake, Frank, come down to this beastly hole! I can't start with you immediately for Switzerland, according to plan, because of all the business connected with this rotten old estate. Come at once. A few more nights alone in this howling wilderness will turn me gray.
>
> JERRY.

That was enough for me. I stuffed a wet sponge and a few more pairs of socks into an already bursting suitcase, tied an extra bit of string

round it, and caught the next train going north.

Jerry was waiting at Doone station, and his face lit up with a grin of delight as he gripped my hand. We walked home across the marshland, and poor Jerry fairly babbled all the way. He had been so lonely that he couldn't talk fast enough.

Doone House was the center and soul of a gray, solitary world. Built of the dark ironstone peculiar to that dreary district, it stood at one entrance to a long, narrow ravine known as Blackstone Cut, whose frowning rocky walls opened out at the farther end on a limitless waste of moor and bog.

The first time I saw it, Blackstone Cut looked to me like a road to hell. It looked like a road to hell, and so it was . . . for Jerry and I trod that road, and Jerry still . . .

I can't tell this story as I should. The horror of it is too vivid, the hell of which I speak too near for me to write calmly and clearly. But try, *try* to believe me!

2

"You've noticed it too!" Jerry said a few days later. "Nasty atmosphere in this house, isn't there?" He hesitated, then went on abruptly. "I'm not proud of my progenitors, and Grandfather—well, dead or not, he was as near a devil as any human being could be, and still be human."

I laughed with some embarrassment and murmured something about the old man being gone now.

Jerry got up from the luncheon table and stared moodily, hands in his pockets, at the driving rain against the window-panes. "Grandfather may be gone, but he's not gone far!"

"What on earth——" I began.

"No, not on earth—in hell!" Jerry replied. "He's waiting there for his dutiful grandson to join him. It would spoil his pleasure completely to know that I had escaped him in the end."

I stared dumfounded at this outburst from Jerry. The suppressed bitterness of years was in his voice, and his face was a mask of hate. He came back to the table and sat heavily down in his chair again, his dark eyes smoldering.

"You don't know—you can't understand what it has been all these years. On the one hand, Dawlish; on the other hand, Grandfather! The long fight to hold out against him! The knowledge deep down within me that some day, sooner or later, he would win."

"Win!" I echoed feebly.

"Win, yes, win out against the college and all that it stood for to me. He was forced to send me to Dawlish; my father's will provided for that, but he meant to win in the end."

"Your grandfather wanted you to be—to be—er——"

"To be the sort of beast he himself was," finished Jerry. "That's exactly what he wanted. I was destined to carry on his experiments, you see."

I didn't see in the least, and waited dumbly for Jerry to explain. However, he jumped up suddenly, his face lit with his old familiar grin.

"Come on, Frank! I've got the blues today, and you'll be pushing off on the next train if I'm not careful! I've got something to show you—come on!"

He hooked his arm in mine affectionately and steered me up dismal stairways and along endless corridors, whose closed doors made me shiver; I felt that each door opened as we passed and that leering faces peeped after us.

Jerry caught me looking back and tightened his grip on my arm.

"Horrid sensation, isn't it? That's an old trick of my grandfather's. He used to punish me when I was a youngster by making me walk up

and down these corridors at dusk. There's no one there, really! I'm used to it; the performance is for your benefit now."

"My benefit!" I gasped. "Look here, Jerry, what's come over you? What kind of tricks do you mean?"

"What kind of tricks? Oh, hypnotism partly, and partly—something else!" said Jerry. "I tell you he was a devil—a devil! And he's still here trying to get me."

"He's dead, Jerry!" I protested, "If you get to imagining things like this you'll be in a straitjacket before you know it! He's dead and gone now."

"He's not gone far," repeated Jerry obstinately.

"You're talking absolute rot," I answered hotly. "The sooner you get out of this damned hole the better! What do you suppose the fellows would say if they knew you believed such bunkum?"

"It may be rot," he said slowly. "I try to persuade myself that I think so too."

"Of course it is," I assured him heartily. "Wait till you're climbing the Alps next month! You'll laugh at all these nightmares."

His face cleared still more. "Two weeks more and we shall be in Switzerland! I shall have escaped once and for all from this old dungeon, and—him." His voice sank involuntarily, and he glanced round as if he expected to see a visible challenge to his words.

"Free!" he repeated in a defiant voice, and only the moan of the wind and the dripping rain answered him.

3

"THIS is what I wanted to show you." Jerry's voice was eager as he opened a door at the top of the house and led the way into a huge, dim room under the roof, where great rafters stretched overhead, and a shining wood floor mirrored them in its polished surface.

The walls, from ceiling to floor, were lined with books.

"My word, Jerry!" I said, in an awed voice. "What a stunning library!"

"Thought you'd appreciate it," he said, enjoying my surprize. "The Nicholls' were famous for their love of learning, among other less pleasing vices. This little lot has taken some hundreds of years to collect."

For some time I browsed among the shelves, bewildered at the immense choice they offered. Jerry left me to my own devices, and it was some hours later when I looked up to see him in a distant corner of the vast attic room.

"What's your latest fairy-tale?" I called out as I went over to him.

Poor old Jerry! I can see him now, as he looked up at me, his eyes blazing with excitement and interest. He was dangerously enthusiastic, and liable to get right off his track when anything gripped him really hard.

"I've never noticed this book before!" and his voice was queer and husky. "It's not even catalogued; but here it is cheek by jowl with good old Fabre!" He laughed on a high, excited note. "Bit of a contrast—what?"

I took the book from him. If I had known—oh, if I had only guessed what that harmless-looking book was going to mean to Jerry and me, I'd have cut off my hand before touching it. Instinct indeed! Why, our instincts simply lay down and went to sleep, while Jerry and I gamboled light-heartedly across the threshold to hell.

The book was written by a certain Count von Gheist, and at first it appeared to be a sort of skit on various dreamers and mystics of past centuries.

That was the trap—the cynical baffling style in which von Gheist approached his subject. Jerry and I sat side by side in one of the deep window-seats and chuckled delight-

edly over the early chapters—the gay malicious way in which the author exposed the ignorance of famous charlatans of old.

Subtly and imperceptibly, by cunning, devious routes, von Gheist merged his style from the cynical to one of deadly earnestness, which finally gripped me as strongly as it had Jerry.

The book is burned to ashes now; I did that after Jerry—after Jerry—— No, that comes later!

What a blind, ignorant fool I was! For him, with his grim childhood in that cursed house, there was a reason and excuse for weakness. For me there was no such excuse. I might have warned and guarded him from that seeking devil that reached up out of hell.

Jerry! Jerry! Where are you now?

4

It was Jerry who first put our thoughts into words, as we sat one evening before the red glow of a log fire, after a prolonged discussion of von Gheist's theories.

"It's a full moon on Friday, you know!"

I nodded; the same idea had been in my mind all day.

"It would be rather a joke, wouldn't it?" he went on, trying hard to camouflage his real earnestness.

Again I nodded; the same consuming desire burnt in my breast as in his. To try it out! To prove von Gheist's words—to test that final superb claim of his!

In cold blood, reading this, you will say we were fools, and worse than fools. But you have never lived at Doone House, never heard the voices that whisper and call when night falls on Blackstone Cut, never seen the faces in the dim corridors that vanish at a look or cry.

Above all, you have never imagined a creature as vile as Jerry's grandfather, or been caught in the mesh of his deviltries. And here I warn you, as you value your immortal soul, never to enter Doone House, for you can not hope to escape him there.

He is dead and gone—but he is not gone far! Jerry was right, horribly right, when he said that.

"After all, there *is* no reason why such experiments should be out of reach," Jerry continued. "We can project sight and sound to vast distances, and these are purely human and physical attributes. Why not the intelligence which directs our bodies? If we could direct our minds as von Gheist did his, we could give a tremendous jolt to science!"

"It appears to be chiefly a matter of concentration."

"Yes," replied Jerry. "That more or less spectacular ceremony he mentions is merely a means von Gheist suggests to fix the will-power."

"I don't quite see——" I began.

"Of course not," interrupted Jerry. "That's why we ought to experiment! Von Gheist says plainly that *his* experiences may only serve to baffle other experimenters. Reaction varies according to the intelligence and will. Fear, he says, is the one great deterrent."

My mind went off suddenly at a tangent. "What kind of experiments did your grandfather make?" I asked.

Jerry frowned, and kicked a log into flame. "Why, he believed in all the people that von Gheist ridicules—Paracelsus, Lully, Count Raymond, Dr. Dee and all the rest. His experiments were all along their lines, more or less. I think——"

"Well, go on! What do you think?"

"I think he really did achieve unholy power by some means or other. But since reading this book I don't feel quite the same about Grandfather as I did. He seems farther away now; it's like a weight slipping from my neck."

As he spoke, my glance caught a very strange effect of light and shadow cast by the dancing flames of the log fire—a tall, wavering outline beside Jerry's chair, which swayed in a horrible semblance of mirth, while the rain and wind hissed savagely in the old chimney.

The dog saw something there too; for he got to his feet, growling, his teeth bared, as he stared at that moving shadow.

"Quiet!" said Jerry, lightly cuffing the animal's head. "There aren't any rats here, old fellow!" Then catching sight of my face, "Why, what's wrong, Frank? You're absolutely green!"

I blinked my eyes, feeling remarkably foolish as a great log broke and roared in an upward stream of flame and sparks, and the shadow I had seen vanished in the clear red light which bathed the hearth. Inwardly I cursed myself for an imaginative fool, and told Jerry I had a rather bad twinge of neuralgia.

"No wonder, in this damp old tomb of a house," he said. "Poor old chap, this is no picnic for you!"

"Oh, don't rot!" I answered gruffly, my nerves still jumping from the effect of that momentary terror I had experienced.

5

We spent the next few days like two kids in expectation of Christmas. Looking back now, I see so clearly the warnings given me that we were on a dangerous road, but at the time I purposely ignored them; for I was dull and bored at Doone House, and our coming experiment promised relief from the monotony of the long wet days and quiet nights.

Friday night came at last. A high wind drove off the rain-clouds, and a full moon lit Blackstone Cut from end to end, as we climbed up the stairs to the library, shut out the terrier, locked all the doors, and prepared to follow the directions given by von Gheist.

Jerry won the toss, and was therefore first to make the experiment.

I sat in a window-bay to watch. In the stillness of the great library every sound was exaggerated, and the howl of the wind and the whining of the dog outside the locked door got on my nerves at first. Then Jerry's preparations absorbed all my attention.

I laughed inwardly at his child-like absorption in drawing the circles and figures on the wood floor, referring with frowning intentness to von Gheist's diagrams, but nevertheless I was impressed when all was ready and Jerry stood, erect and triumphant, in the midst of his braziers and touched the alderwood in each to flame with the burning torch in his hand.

All this mummery, I reflected, was childish in itself, but, taken as a means to absorb and concentrate the faculties, it certainly worked well.

Jerry was as completely withdrawn from his physical surroundings as a Buddhist who has attained Nirvana. I heard his low muttering voice repeat the words:

> Phlagus! Taram! Zoth!
> Founts of all knowledge, will, and power!
> By the Wandering Bull, and the Four Horns of the Altar,
> Pierce the veil of my darkness. . . .

The wind dropped outside, and a queer heat began to invade the room. My skin felt dry as parchment; and when I saw Jerry raise a great goblet to his lips and drink deep, my own thirst tortured me.

Then I forgot everything as fear gripped me, for the things that were happening in that brazier-lit circle were not things of which von Gheist had written in his book!

Hell and heaven were to him merely fabrications of primitive man! Ghosts and devils he derided as the sick fancies of the unintelligent!

What, then, was it that Jerry saw as he stood with face convulsed with terror, and blazing eyes fixed on something within the circle—something from which he retreated step by step to the very edge of the fiery barrier he had made, and halted there like a man with his back to a wall?

"No! no! no!" I heard his low, agonized voice. "Not that, Grandfather!—not that!"

Panic seized me as I watched the despairing fear and loathing on Jerry's face. What in the name of all that was evil did he see? Although I did not know what I feared, insensate terror shook the heart out of me and left me as helpless to move or speak as if I were paralyzed.

I tried to call out; my brain shrieked the words: "Jerry! Jerry! Hold on! hold on, I'm coming, Jerry!" But my cold, shaking lips refused to utter a syllable.

Dumb and powerless, I watched as he tried to beat off his enemy and escape from the maze of circles and pentacles he had drawn about himself, the net his own hands had made!

Within the glow of his fiery barrier, I saw his desperate eyes—his face wet with hideous effort, as he ran doubling here and there across his narrow prison, gasping, fighting, struggling blindly with the deadly Thing which pursued.

His eyes met mine, and from his twisted mouth came a hoarse, desperate appeal: "Break it! Break the circle!"

Something burst in my brain. I lurched forward and fell right across the outer circle of his prison, knocking over two braziers and smearing the diagrams in blind, clumsy haste.

The fires leaped up into sudden flame with a sound like crackling laughter, then died out completely, and Jerry and I found ourselves in a dark, silent room, our hands holding one another fast.

6

Next morning, after pacing restlessly up and down the long avenue to Doone House, Jerry came to sit beside me on a low, crumbling wall.

"You don't understand, even now, Frank," he said. "I can't escape because I have brought this on myself. It was all a trap—and I chose to enter the trap of my own free will; that's what puts me within his grasp! I *called* him back to me. I opened the gate between the dead and the living with my own hands, last night."

I rubbed my red hair fretfully and scowled.

"I don't believe it! You're letting the past hypnotize you. You'll soon forget all this when you get away from this cursed place."

"Can you forget?" he asked in a low, strange voice, his dark eyes burning into mine.

I hesitated for a moment and he took me up with passionate earnestness.

"You don't—you can't forget! You never will forget! It's no use, Frank, old chap, I'm done!"

"Rot—absolute rot, you priceless fool! I don't pretend to understand our experience last night, but I'm sure we worked ourselves up unnecessarily. There are some experiments one is wiser not to make, and apparently ours was one of them."

"Experiment!" echoed Jerry. "You realize, don't you, who von Gheist was—and why he wrote that book?"

"He's a most convincing rascal, at all events," I said. "And fooled us pretty thoroughly."

"My grandfather wrote that book! He left it as a last weapon for me to turn on myself!"

"Von Gheist—your grandfather!"

"Of course," Jerry replied, staring out over the desolate wind-swept

garden. "That book was a trick after his own heart."

"I don't know what you mean," I said, feeling surly and baffled by my own new thoughts and fears. "But you'll go right off the deep end if you're not jolly careful. Come away with me today and let that damned old lawyer whistle for you."

"I can't." His voice was low and sullen.

"Meaning——?"

"I'm not allowed," he continued. "I'm not sure yet—if there's a way out for me—I'm trying to discover."

"Well, for heaven's sake let's *do* something, not mope about the place like a couple of wet owls!"

"You won't understand, I know," he answered reluctantly. "But I think—I feel pretty certain that I can't pass the gates."

I stared at him, then broke out impatiently.

"What's to prevent you walking out of your own gates? For the Lord's sake, Jerry, are you quite off your head? I'm not going to stay if you don't buck up. There is a limit, you know."

He looked as though I had struck him.

"Not stay with me!" He came close and stared wildly into my face. "I'm going mad, d'you hear? *Mad* with fear! You can't go! I won't be left alone!" Tears softened the wild glare of his eyes, and I stood like the embarrassed fool that I was, pretending not to notice his emotion.

"Oh, all right!" I managed to blurt out at last. "Don't lose your wool about it. I'll stay; but its pretty thick if you're going to moon round like this all the time."

"I know—oh, I *know* whataputrid time you're having! I'll make it up to you later—in Switzerland. If I can get there!" he added in an undertone.

Then he took my arm with a strange air of resolution, saying, "After all, now or later, it will be all the same in the end. We'll go over to Hightown."

How little I guessed of the horror he was facing or of the ghastly effort it needed for him to leave that house and garden! I saw that he went white to the lips as we passed through the gates at the end of the long avenue, but I pretended not to notice his frequent glances over his shoulder.

He walked closer and closer to me, making no response to anything I said, edging me all the time against the wall on my other side. At last I offered to change places with him.

"You try the wall!" I laughed. "It's a good hard one."

Then I glanced at the muddy road and stood staring in bewilderment. Jerry saw it at the same moment, and with a choking cry he lurched up against the wall.

For long we stared in fascinated horror at the colossal footprint there before us. I was shaken and puzzled, but Jerry's fear was something beyond all words.

"He's winning . . . winning! You *see* it now!" His voice rose to a wild note of hysteria. "If I don't go back he'll torment me for hours. It's no use . . . no use."

He began slowly to drag himself back along the road, while I protested and argued hotly, until I turned to see that the impress of that infernal foot followed us back to the very gateway of Doone House.

My heart stood still as we walked up the gloomy avenue to see those awful footprints following—following to the hateful threshold of the house itself. And over the threshold they followed on. I saw how the dust of the neglected corridors rose and swirled in little eddies behind poor Jerry, as that vast Evil swept on in his wake.

He made for the library—that dim gorgeous antechamber to hell—and there, strangely enough, whatever it was that haunted Jerry withdrew.

For a long time the horror slid from his soul, leaving him cheerful and sanguine once more. Possibly certain hours were more favorable for the thing's manifestation than others; but Jerry put aside his fears, and even made light of the visible signs of his grandfather's power we had both witnessed so recently.

"It's another of his tricks! I hope he's exhausted himself this time. There is a limit to what he can do. I'll come away with you tomorrow, and not give him another chance to get me!"

WE WENT late to bed, and I was just dropping off to sleep when I heard Jerry's cry. Without stopping even for shoes, I dashed off along the corridor to his room. As I reached his door, he burst out with mad terror on his face, and ran past me like the wind.

I felt a suffocating sense of heat, and staggered back as from an open furnace door. Then, with no courage at all, but simply a blind instinct to follow, I went after Jerry.

As I ran, I saw that the carpet under my feet was scorched and blackened, and that the marks were identical in shape and size with those we had seen in the muddy road earlier that day.

On raced Jerry, a mad flying figure ahead! Down the big central staircase he went, across the tiled hall, and I heard the groan of bolts and bars as he tore open the great double-doors and fled out into the night.

And as I followed, I felt the burning heat under my bare feet—smelled the odor of charred wood as I stumbled over the threshold, and vaguely wondered if the house were on fire.

Outside, in the dark night, I saw Jerry running as though pursued by all the fiends of hell. And so he was . . . so he was! I know that now; but, then, I did not understand, and I ran after him, panting and cursing because he would not stop, or listen to my assurance that he was running from his own fears and nothing else!

On and on through the darkness raced Jerry. On and on I stumbled behind him—farther and farther behind, as the road grew rougher and steeper.

He headed for Blackstone Cut, and rushed on between its somber walls, keeping up an incredible speed until he approached the head of the ravine, where its rocky walls rose to great frowning crags—two grim guardians at the portals of hell.

To my amazement, Jerry began to climb the rocky face of one of the crags. His speed and sureness of foot were nothing short of miraculous, and only the madness of overmastering fear could have lent him wings to take that terrible way.

He looked like some crazy little insect crawling over the bare face of the rock, blindly seeking safety where none was to be found, clinging—leaping—running—scrambling on hands and knees, until he stood at last on the topmost height, a tiny frenzied figure against the sky.

But whatever pursued him, had pursued him even to his giddy eyrie; for I was near enough to see his wild gestures—his frantic repulsion of something at his side.

Oh, Jerry, if I had only overtaken you!—if I had not left you to fight that last awful fight up there alone!—alone with *him!*—it would be easier for me to think of you now.

But you were alone—most awfully alone—and so you lost, Jerry! Had I been there, perhaps you would have won—perhaps you would have won! That thought is driving me mad—perhaps you would have won!

A high, thin scream of agony floated down to me from the heights. I saw Jerry leap out into the darkness and fall, turning and twisting with outflung limbs to the floor of the ravine.

His body was never found. The whole of Doone village turned out to hunt for him, but he was never found, and they said he had fallen into a bog and been swallowed up in the black ooze.

But I know better, for I found and followed the trail of those colossal footprints, and they led to a grassy hollow under the crag from which Jerry had flung himself down. The green of the hollow was charred and burned to the black earth itself, and there was no trace of Jerry—no trace of flesh or bone!

But there was something else which I recognized with terror. On the flat surface of a piece of granite, lying in the hollow, was a peculiar and significant mark roughly cut in the stone. It was the mark of von Gheist—the key to von Gheist's great experiment with which poor Jerry had unlocked the door between the dead and the living.

The villagers of Doone shook their heads over me pityingly when I showed them the mark. They saw nothing in it, save the furrows caused by the fret of time and weather!

But I recognized it, and I remembered. I am going mad with remembering . . . and no one will believe me!

Jerry's grandfather had won!

RECAPTURE

By H. P. LOVECRAFT

The way led down a dark, half-wooded heath
Where moss-gray boulders humped above the mold,
And curious drops, disquieting and cold,
Sprayed up from unseen streams in gulfs beneath.
There was no wind, or any trace of sound
In puzzling shrub, or alien-featured tree,
Nor any view before—till suddenly,
Straight in my path, I saw a monstrous mound.

Half to the sky those steep sides loomed upspread,
Rank-grassed, and cluttered by a crumbling flight
Of lava stairs that scaled the fear-topped height
In steps too vast for any human tread.
I shrieked—and *knew* what primal star and year
Had sucked me back from man's dream-transient sphere!

A Story of a Revivified Corpse

SEVEN DROPS OF BLOOD

By H. F. JAMISON

THE scourge of Death—the parting of loved ones forever—has been the one great sorrow of the ages. Saint and sinner alike have shared its devastating power. Men of science have sought to conquer the destroyer but have hopelessly failed. Superstition, in an array of mystic rites and ceremonies which included the slaying of goats and bullocks, the beating of tom-toms in weird devil-dances, the laying on of hands and the sprinkling of holy-water, has promised immunity from death. Human puppets have crossed continents and seas, braving every known peril of the wilderness and jungle in search of the fabled Fountain of Youth in which they might bathe and be young again; but at last that insatiable monster—the Rider of the Pale Horse—has stretched forth his talons of bone and has dragged them down—down—into his endless embrace!

Life is but a vapor: a few days here and a man is gone, and in multitudinous cases, even his memory, after a moment of time compared to eternity, is obliterated entirely.

Whence came Man? Why was he created? What is his purpose? Why such a short and feeble existence? Is life worth the misery entailed upon him? Why a "Somewhere beyond this vale of tears?" Why not a perpetual existence here? Why look forward after his passing to a chimerical and doubtful resurrection of the dead?

These and many similar thoughts surged through the brain of Stanton J. Eldon, millionaire, dreamer, and master of weird experiments, as he sat alone in his private laboratory.

Somewhere in this world—he believed it with all his being—there was a force mighty enough to scoff at death and the grave if one could only find it. Was that force in chemistry? Was it electro-magnetic? What? Where?

Why should man let the motor of the body—the human heart—stop at all? And, in the event that it did stop, why not start it again?

He wondered if the experiment of the great scientists of which he had just been reading—where vitality had been momentarily re-established in the human body after death had been in undisputed possession of it for twenty-nine hours—was really a success. Was it a forecast of greater things to come? Or was it merely a case of the use of a high-pressure drug so potent that even lifeless clay could not withstand the terrific onslaught; for example, an effect similar to that produced upon the muscles of a frog when salt is placed upon them? He did not know.

From another standpoint he reasoned: If the believers in what he termed superstition—the so-called Bible myths—were correct, even they had not taken advantage of their alleged unlimited possibilities; for had not Jesus broken the bonds of death and declared: "He that believeth in

me shall never die"; and, "Death shall have no more dominion over you"?

What was the secret of the Nazarene's power? The fools! After seeing his actual demonstration—a return from the tomb—they mocked him, and didn't even attempt to learn the truth; so, for that reason, he let them "go their way".

But after a careful reading and rereading of their traditions, Eldon saw beneath the surface a startling ray of light—through lightning, and serpent's venom, and blood!

"I saw Satan, as lightning, fall from Heaven," the sacred writer declares. Satan is still here, Eldon reasoned: invisible, all-powerful—still here. All adherents to the sacred scriptures freely admit this regardless of their respective creeds. They acknowledge that His Satanic Majesty is the one great foe of humanity, for he is supposed to control death—infernal nemesis of mankind.

Again: Satan is the original Serpent of Eden's Garden, and the Creator had said that the seed of the woman should bruise the Serpent's head: therefore, any man who could conquer death, even momentarily, would fulfil that prophecy. Satan being lightning, personified, and virgin blood being a cleanser from the Adamic sin, why not make use of one of the fallen Archangel's own weapons—fight fire with fire, so to speak—and bring about a perpetual existence here?

SEVEN—mystic number! The golden candlesticks were seven upon the altar: there were seven lean and seven plenteous years of King Pharaoh's reign; the seven-word vow of eternal celibacy must be chanted by a novitiate of twice seven years with one hand upon a crucifix, the other upraised toward the Seven Stars; the seven drops of blood must be taken from the virgin's side—electrify those precious drops of consecrated blood with a voltage, the middle number of which must be seven—God! He saw it all as clearly as he could see the sun at noonday!

News item—Artificial lightning has just been produced; anywhere from 250,000 to one million volts.

Eldon smiled in a pitying way as he mused, "They are making a great to-do over their 'new' discovery. That is a year-old successful experiment with me, else I would not now attempt this demonstration.

THE morgue—cold, cruel repository of silent forms.

"How long has this man been dead?" Eldon inquired, indicating a glass-topped refrigerating-case.

"About thirty hours, sir," the keeper answered. "Unidentified, too, as you see by the blue tag. Guess the county will have him to bury. Looks like suicide to me."

"Not embalmed yet, of course, or he wouldn't be under refrigeration."

"No. Nobody in sight to pay the bill. If the county gets him, he'll go in 'cold'," the keeper replied grimly.

Eldon leaned over and placed a bill in the other's hand. "Lay off the embalming and send the body to my laboratory. I'll fix it with Mr. Rothe."

"Yes, sir, coming up, sir." The keeper already knew the color of Eldon's money. It was always yellow.

ONCE more Stanton J. Eldon was in his element. He was nearly ready for the greatest experiment of his career.

The body of the unknown had been electrically heated to 77 degrees; the seven drops of virgin blood had been injected, together with the venom of the species of serpent by which the Israelites were bitten and later healed by the serpent of brass upon the pole; and the scientist stood with his hand upon a controlling rheostat from which led four high-tension wires: one of them to an ankle of the corpse; another to the top of his head, and the

others directly into a dynamic aerial-fluid generator capable of producing artificial lightning up to one million volts!

A greenish-blue light enshrouded the silent subject. Now, if Eldon's preposterous formula to offset the terrible voltage—yet to be applied—was correct, all would be well; if not, an electrical cremation would result instead of a prospective resurrection.

Gruesome? Stanton J. Eldon knew no such word. Why should the dead body of a man excite any emotions different from those which might be occasioned by the sight of a fowl slain for dinner? It was all in the state of mind. Ghosts, spooks, and hobgoblins held no terrors for him. He had never known of the presence of an ogre at the advent of a human being into this world; why should there be any at one's exit? The fear of death, he said to himself, has been fostered by religious fanatics since the dawn of Creation, and civilization has paid dearly for it—is still paying.

One of Eldon's friends had told him that if there was any such thing as spirit return, if Eldon would go and sit on his friend's grave at midnight on the day following his demise, he would make himself manifest if possible. The instructions had been carried out, not only once, but for seven successive nights, and nothing had happened; so Eldon had smoked his black cigars in vain.

If there was anything on the Other Side, he wanted first-hand information concerning it. In his heart of hearts he might consider the possibility of another life; but scoffed at the idea of a spirit's return from that life to this mundane sphere. (Secretly, he may have been like the old negro, Hambone, who said: "No, sah. I don't bleeb in ghosts, but I don't want no truck wid 'em.")

ELDON turned the knob of the rheostat slowly, almost imperceptibly, and, familiar though he was with nearly every sort of crazy experiment, he gave a little grunt of approval as the body before him moved slightly according to his imagined schedule, when the voltmeter showed the 257,000 mark.

Was there any merit to words of incantation? Well—they were supposed to be the very foundation of all hocus-pocus, exorcism, magic and mystery; so they must form a part of his own conjury in this case.

"Peace, be still," the Supreme Magician of the Universe had commanded, and the winds and the waves had obeyed. He could have calmed them just as easily with never a word.

"In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk," said his Apostle, and a cripple, lame from his mother's womb, arose and began leaping and praising.

Furthermore, the Supreme Magician had promised: "If ye believe, greater things than these ye shall do."

Well—Eldon never doubted the Master's ability to do those things, but he was just a little skeptical regarding his own personal powers. However, he wouldn't dispute the Master's word; so his fingers clutched the rheostat knob a little tighter, and he intoned a sacred formula from the Old Testament which he had selected as best suited for the occasion: "Thou of the Valley of Dry Bones, rise up and salute." . . .

A long pause. Once more he chanted: "As I passed by Thee . . . I said while Thou wast in thy blood; yea, I said while Thou wast in thy blood, live."

The clammy thing upon the table slowly opened its eyes, its tongue moistened its lips; a smacking sound followed, and it spoke in ghastly unnatural tones such as might have come forth from the tomb itself!

"Gladys, you're all I've ever cared for, and now to think that you would betray me—would be unfaithful. . . . See this gun? I've always said that no wife of mine could ever betray me

and get away with it! No! I won't let go of your arm. I don't give a damn if I do break it, for I'm going to send your cheating soul to Hell anyway. . . .

"Oh, my God! Gladys—I didn't intend to do that! Gladys! Gladys! speak to me!"

The frightful guttural cry which came from the living-dead Frankenstein-monster before Eldon was music to his scientific ears: For he had bruised the Serpent's head! He had conquered death!

The horrid spokesman upon the table continued: "Why, hello, Jim. Yes; I shot her and then killed myself! . . . What a beautiful grove of trees! . . . And over there is the River of Life and the Sea of Glass! . . . Where is that music coming from? . . . Gee, I'm thirsty! That was certainly a glorious drink. Is one's slightest wish gratified here? I wish I could see Gladys. . . . Why, there she is now! How radiantly beautiful she appears! . . . But she deceived me, Jim. . . . I wish I knew the truth! . . . Oh, Jim! I do know the truth! Gladys is coming toward me. I worship her, Jim. Then I 'saw through a glass, darkly,' but now I see 'face to face.' . . . She's gone! . . . She was tempted. . . . I understand. . . . The Master forgave her as he forgave the woman they would have stoned. . . . And now—*look! Look!* Those two are together! See, they embrace! . . . The Magdalene came to meet Gladys to tell her she need have no fears. . . . Gladys will be transformed, too; made pure and holy. . . . And I will join Gladys after I go through a slight purgatorial fire. . . . Jim! Jim! tell me more! . . . Quick! Jim—I've started back to earth and I don't want to go! The world is such a hell! Nothing there but misery and wo. . . . Heaven much better than even this? . . . This only Paradise, you say? . . . Oh, Jim! I'm going back . . . Yes, yes—I see who is doing it! I know many things now. Death, which I dreaded so much, I find to be but the open door to complete happiness. . . . Yes, yes, I'll make that scientist——"

THE hideous form half arose from the table and turning, looked straight at Eldon with a gaze so all-seeing in those dead yet living orbs, that for a moment the scientist ceased chewing his black cigar.

"You fool!" The words burned the very air. "You miserable, contemptible, experimenting fool! Interfering with the plans of the gods! Why, I wouldn't be back on your accursed planet if you were to deed me the worthless thing! If a murderer, even as I, has a chance over Yonder, what will it mean to one who has always played square! . . . *Open that switch!*"

Eldon shifted the cigar to the other side of his mouth and chewed vigorously upon it for several seconds. Then he spoke:

"Not so fast, Brother. It's been some time since I've conversed with anybody with one foot over the Borderline, so to speak; and, as this will doubtless be my last opportunity to do so, I would like to ask a few questions. The first one is: 'Is your corporeal body suffering any pain?' "

"The torture is intolerable!" the other cried vehemently.

"One truth!" Eldon ejaculated. "There has been some doubt as to whether restored dead flesh has any feeling. That point is settled. Now I want to slip just a little more current to you. Perhaps I can be able to give you the eternal life possessed by the Fallen Archangel. How's that?" He shot the needle around to the 500,000 mark!

The monster was jerked violently backward a distance of eighteen inches, then sat bolt upright. A moment in that position and one foot was lifted outward and downward to the floor. The other followed, and the indescribable cadaver arose from the table, and with short, jerky steps—its progress impeded by the heavy copper

electrodes and the large insulated wires—it started toward Eldon, pointing a curved, rigid finger into his face! The scientist backed away. One touch from the tips of those fingers of destruction and he would be in possession of full information regarding the Other Shore.

An ear-blighting shriek came from the lips of the walking remains.

"You fiend! You damnable hellion! Look at my hands—the flesh is beginning to roast! You are destroying my body and soul! My body will be consumed to ashes, and my soul consigned to oblivion! *Open that switch!*"

Eldon saw—heard—and smelled the diabolical scene of his own making; saw the flesh beginning to shrivel like cracklings; heard the blood seething; his nostrils were filled with the nauseating odor, and he knew that the virgin blood was being overcome by the terrible voltage—an improper mixture somewhere! He couldn't reach the rheostat for the death-dealing fingers before him, so he ran to the master switch and kicked it open.

The burning carcass wavered back and forth, then laughed—a hideous, vultural croak which came from melting vocal chords!

"Has-iss—heiss—awk! Great news for you—Eldon." The spark of life still talked, though going fast. "You'll join me—May 21st—1930—ten a. m.—auto wreck—awk-hiss-hiss!" The uncanny volcanic manikin slumped down, sack-like. . . . Eldon wiped the cold sweat from his brow.

Two hours later he entered the morgue. "Heard anything yet about our unknown?" he inquired.

"Yes; I was just going to phone you. We have learned his name. He's a guy from up Slayton way. Killed himself after croakin' his wife. I think they said her name was Gladys. They were found out on a country road by the side of an old Ford car. . . . Why, what's the matter—you sick?"

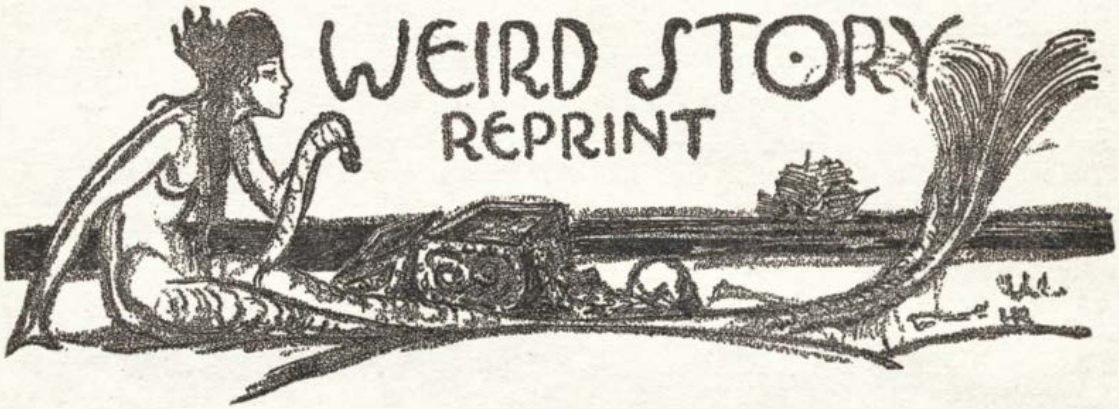
Eldon had swallowed his cigar stub at the sudden confirmatory words of his experiment!

"No need to embalm the body when I return it," he said. His voice was weak and he was very pale. "It has been electrically embalmed. You may charge them for the job, however, if they want embalming done, and keep the money."

The keeper rubbed his chin in a thoughtful way. "Embalmed by electricity. That's a new one. Must be your latest, eh?"

Eldon walked slowly toward the front. "Yes," he replied, "and I think it will be my last."

When he reached the door he turned and called back: "Say, by the way; do you want to buy a good automobile, cheap?"



The Magic Egg*

By FRANK R. STOCKTON

THE pretty little theater attached to the building of the Unicorn Club had been hired for a certain January afternoon by Mr. Herbert Loring, who wished to give therein a somewhat novel performance to which he had invited a small audience consisting entirely of friends and acquaintances.

Loring was a handsome fellow about thirty years old, who had traveled far and studied much. He had recently made a long sojourn in the far East, and his friends had been invited to the theater to see some of the wonderful things he had brought from that country of wonders. As Loring was a clubman, and belonged to a family of good social standing, his circle of acquaintances was large, and in this circle a good many unpleasant remarks had been made regarding the proposed entertainment — made, of course, by the people who had not been invited to be present. Some of the gossip on the subject had reached Loring, who did not hesitate to say that he could not talk to a crowd, and that he did not care to show the curious things he had collected to people who would not thoroughly appreciate them. He had been very particular in regard to his invitations.

At three o'clock on the appointed afternoon nearly all the people who had been invited to the Unicorn theater were in their seats. No one had stayed away except for some very good reason, for it was well known that if Herbert Loring offered to show anything it was worth seeing.

About forty people were present, who sat talking to one another, or admiring the decoration of the theater. As Loring stood upon the stage—where he was entirely alone, his exhibition requiring no assistants—he gazed through a loophole in the curtain upon a very interesting array of faces. There were the faces of many men and women of society, of students, of workers in various fields of thought, and even of idlers in all fields of thought, but there was not one which indicated a frivolous or listless disposition. The owners of those faces had come to see something, and they wished to see it.

For a quarter of an hour after the time announced for the opening of the exhibition Loring peered through the

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hole in the curtain, and then, although all the people he had expected had not arrived, he felt it would not do for him to wait any longer. The audience was composed of well-bred and courteous men and women, but despite their polite self-restraint Loring could see that some of them were getting tired of waiting. So, very reluctantly, and feeling that further delay was impossible, he raised the curtain and came forward on the stage.

Briefly he announced that the exhibition would open with some fireworks he had brought from Korea. It was plain to see that the statement that fireworks were about to be set off on a theater stage, by an amateur, had rather startled some of the audience, and Loring hastened to explain that these were not real fireworks, but that they were contrivances made of colored glass, which were illuminated by the powerful lens of a lantern which was placed out of sight, and while the apparent pyrotechnic display would resemble fireworks of strange and grotesque designs, it would be absolutely without danger. He brought out some little bunches of bits of colored glass, hung them at some distance apart on a wire which was stretched across the stage just high enough for him to reach it, and then lighted his lantern, which he placed in one of the wings, lowered all the lights in the theater, and began his exhibition.

As Loring turned his lantern on one of the clusters of glass lenses, strips, and points, and, unseen himself, caused them to move by means of long cords attached, the effects were beautiful and marvelous. Little wheels of colored fire rapidly revolved, miniature rockets appeared to rise a few feet and to explode in the air, and while all the ordinary forms of fireworks were produced on a diminutive scale, there were some effects that were entirely novel to the audience. As the light was turned successively upon one and another of the clusters of glass, sometimes it would flash along the whole line so rapidly that all the various combinations of color and motion seemed to be combined in one, and then for a time each particular set of fireworks would blaze, sparkle, and coruscate by itself, scattering particles of colored light, as if they had been real sparks of fire.

This curious and beautiful exhibition of miniature pyrotechnics was extremely interesting to the audience, who gazed upward with rapt and eager attention at the line of wheels, stars, and revolving spheres. So far as interest gave evidence of satisfaction, there was never a better satisfied audience. At first there had been some hushed murmurs of pleasure, but very soon the attention of everyone seemed so completely engrossed by the dazzling display that they simply gazed in silence.

For twenty minutes or longer the glittering show went on, and not a sign of weariness or inattention was made by any one of the assembled company. Then gradually the colors of the little fireworks faded, the stars and wheels revolved more slowly, the lights in the body of the theater were gradually raised, and the stage curtain went softly down.

Anxiously, and a little pale, Herbert Loring peered through the loophole in the curtain. It was not easy to judge of the effects of his exhibition, and he did not know whether or not it had been a success. There was no applause, but, on the other hand, there was no sign that anyone resented the exhibition as a childish display of colored lights. It was impossible to look upon that audience without believing that they had been thoroughly interested in what they had seen, and that they expected to see more.

For two or three minutes Loring gazed through his loophole and then, still with some doubt in his heart, but with a little more color in his cheeks,

he prepared for the second part of his performance.

At this moment there entered the theater, at the very back of the house, a young lady. She was handsome and well-dressed, and as she opened the door—Loring had employed no ushers or other assistants in this little social performance—she paused for a moment and looked into the theater, and then noiselessly stepped to a chair in the back row, and sat down.

This was Edith Starr, who, a month before, had been betrothed to Herbert Loring. Edith and her mother had been invited to this performance, and front seats had been reserved for them, for each guest had received a numbered card; but Mrs. Starr had a headache, and could not go out that afternoon, and for a time her daughter had thought that she too must give up the pleasure Loring had promised her. and stay with her mother. But when the elder lady dropped into a quiet sleep, Edith thought that, late as it was, she would go by herself, and see what she could of the performance.

She was quite certain that if her presence were known to Loring he would stop whatever he was doing until she had been provided with a seat which he thought suitable for her, for he had made a point of her being properly seated when he gave the invitations. Therefore, being equally desirous of not disturbing the performance and of not being herself conspicuous, she sat behind two rather large men, where she could see the stage perfectly well, but where she herself would not be likely to be seen.

In a few moments the curtain rose, and Loring came forward, carrying a small, light table, which he placed near the front of the stage, and for a moment stood quietly by it. Edith noticed upon his face the expression of uncertainty and anxiety which had not yet left it. Standing by the side of the table, and speaking very slowly, but so clearly that his words could be heard distinctly in all parts of the room, he began some introductory remarks regarding the second part of his performance.

"The extraordinary, and I may say marvelous, thing which I am about to show you," he said, "is known among East Indian magicians as the magic egg. The exhibition is a very uncommon one, and has seldom been seen by Americans or Europeans, and it was by a piece of rare good fortune that I became possessed of the appliances necessary for this exhibition. They are indeed very few and simple, but never before, to the best of my knowledge and belief, have they been seen outside of India.

"I will now get the little box which contains the articles necessary for this magical performance, and I will say that if I had time to tell you of the strange and amazing adventure which resulted in my possession of this box, I am sure you would be as much interested in that as I expect you to be in the contents of the box. But, in order that none of you may think this is an ordinary trick, executed by means of concealed traps or doors, I wish you to take particular notice of this table, which is, as you see, a plain, unpainted pine table with nothing but a flat top, and four straight legs at the corners. You can see under and around it, and it gives no opportunity to conceal anything." Then, standing for a few moments as if he had something else to say, he turned and stepped toward one of the wings.

Edith was troubled as she looked at her lover during these remarks. Her interest was great—greater, indeed, than that of the people about her—but it was not a pleasant interest. As Loring stopped speaking, and looked about him, there was a momentary flush on his face. She knew this was caused by excitement, and she was pale from the same cause.

Very soon Loring came forward, and stood by the table.

"Here is the box," he said, "of which I spoke, and as I hold it up I think you can all see it. It is not large, being certainly not more than twelve inches in length and two deep, but it contains some very wonderful things. The outside of this box is covered with delicate engraving and carving which you can not see, and these marks and lines have, I think, some magical meaning, but I do not know what it is. I will now open the box, and show you what is inside. The first thing I take out is this little stick, not thicker than a lead-pencil, but somewhat longer, as you see. This is a magical wand, and is covered with inscriptions of the same character as those on the outside of the box. The next thing is this little red bag, well filled, as you see, which I shall put on the table, for I shall not yet need it.

"Now I take out a piece of cloth which is folded into a very small compass, but as I unfold it you will perceive that it is more than a foot square, and is covered with embroidery. All those strange lines and figures in gold and red, which you can plainly see on the cloth as I hold it up, are also characters in the same magic language as those on the box and wand. I will now spread the cloth on the table, and then take out the only remaining thing in the box, and this is nothing in the world but an egg—a simple, ordinary hen's egg, as you all see as I hold it up. It may be a trifle larger than an ordinary egg, but then, after all, it is nothing but a common egg—that is, in appearance; in reality it is a good deal more.

"Now I will begin the performance," and as he stood by the back of the table over which he had been slightly bending, and threw his eyes over the audience, his voice was stronger, and his face had lost all its pallor. He was evidently warming up with his subject.

"I now take up this wand," he said, "which, while I hold it, gives me power to produce the phenomena which you are about to behold. You may not all believe that there is any magic whatever about this little performance, and that it is all a bit of machinery; but whatever you may think about it, you shall see what you shall see.

"Nowwiththiswand I gently touch this egg which is lying on the square of cloth. I do not believe you can see what has happened to this egg, but I will tell you. There is a little line, like a hair, entirely around it. Now that line has become a crack. Now you can see it, I know. It grows wider and wider! Look! The shell of the egg is separating in the middle. The whole egg slightly moves. Do you notice that? Now you can see something yellow showing itself between the two parts of the shell. See! It is moving a good deal, and the two halves of the shell are separating more and more! And now out tumbles this queer little object. Do you see what it is? It is a poor, weak, little chick, not able to stand, but alive—alive! You can all perceive that it is alive. Now you can see that it is standing on its feet, feebly enough, but still standing.

"Behold, it takes a few steps! You can not doubt that it is alive, and came out of that egg. It is beginning to walk about over the cloth. Do you notice that it is picking the embroidery? Now, little chick, I will give you something to eat. This little red bag contains grain, a magical grain, with which I shall feed the chicken. You must excuse my awkwardness in opening the bag, as I still hold the wand; but this little stick I must not drop. See, little chick, there are some grains. They look like rice, but, in fact, I have no idea what they are. But he knows, he knows! Look at him! See how he picks it up! There! He has swallowed one, two, three. That will do, little chick, for a first meal.

"The grain seems to have strengthened him already, for see how lively he is, and how his yellow down stands out on him, so puffy and warm! You

are looking for some more grain, are you? Well, you can not have it just yet, and keep away from those pieces of egg-shell, which, by the way, I will put back into the box. Now, sir, try to avoid the edge of the table, and to quiet you, I will give you a little tap on the back with my wand. Now, then, please observe closely. The down which just now covered him has almost gone. He is really a good deal bigger, and ever so much uglier. See the little pin-feathers sticking out over him! Some spots, here and there, are almost bare, but he is ever so much more active. Ha! Listen to that! He is so strong that you can hear his beak as he pecks at the table. He is actually growing bigger and bigger before our very eyes! See that funny little tail, how it begins to stick up, and quills are showing at the end of his wings.

"Another tap, and a few more grains. Careful, sir! Don't tear the cloth! See how rapidly he grows! He is fairly covered with feathers, red and black, with a tip of yellow in front. You could hardly get that fellow into an ostrich egg! Now, then, what do you think of him? He is big enough for a broiler, though I don't think anyone would want to take him for that purpose. Some more grain, and another tap from my wand. See! He does not mind the little stick, for he has been used to it from his very birth. Now, then, he is what you would call a good half-grown chick. Rather more than half grown, I should say. Do you notice his tail? There is no mistaking him for a pullet. The long feathers are beginning to curl over, already. He must have a little more grain. Look out, sir, or you will be off the table! Come back here! This table is too small for him, but if he were on the floor you could not see him so well.

"Another tap. Now see that comb on the top of his head; you scarcely noticed it before, and now it is bright red. And see his spurs beginning to show—on good thick legs, too. There is a fine young fellow for you! Look how he jerks his head from side to side, like the young prince of a poultry-yard, as he well deserves to be!"

The attentive interest which had at first characterized the audience now changed to excited admiration and amazement. Some leaned forward with mouths wide open. Others stood up so that they could see better. Ejaculations of astonishment and wonder were heard on every side, and a more thoroughly fascinated and absorbed audience was never seen.

"Now, my friends," Loring continued, "I will give this handsome fowl another tap. Behold the result—a noble, full-grown cock! Behold his spurs; they are nearly an inch long! See, there is a comb for you; and what a magnificent tail of green and black, contrasting so finely with the deepred of the rest of his body! Well, sir, you are truly too big for this table. As I can not give you more room, I will set you up higher. Move over a little, and I will set this chair on the table. There! Up on the seat! That's right, but don't stop; there is the back, which is higher yet! Up with you! Ha! There, he nearly upset the chair, but I will hold it. See! He has turned around. Now, then, look at him. See his wings as he flaps them! He could fly with such wings. Look at him! See that swelling breast! Ha, ha! Listen! Did you ever hear a crow like that? It fairly rings through the house. Yes; I knew it! There is another!"

At this point, the people in the house were in a state of wild excitement. Nearly all of them were on their feet, and they were in such a condition of frantic enthusiasm that Loring was afraid some of them might make a run for the stage.

"Come, sir," cried Loring, now almost shouting, "that will do; you have shown us the strength of your lungs. Jump down on the seat of the chair, now on the table. There, I will

take away the chair, and you can stand for a moment on the table, and let our friends look at you, but only for a moment. Take that tap on your back. Now do you see any difference? Perhaps you may not, but I do. Yes; I believe you all do. He is not the big fellow he was a minute ago. He is really smaller; only a fine cockerel. A nice tail that, but with none of the noble sweep that it had a minute ago. No; don't try to get off the table. You can't escape my wand. Another tap. Behold a half-grown chicken, good to eat, but with not a crow in him. Hungry, are you? But you need not pick at the table that way. You get no more grain, but only this little tap. Ha! Ha! What are you coming to? There is a chicken barely feathered enough for us to tell what color he is going to be.

"Another tap will take still more of the conceit out of him. Look at him! There are his pin-feathers, and his bare spots. Don't try to get away; I can easily tap you again. Now, then. Here is a lovely little chick, fluffy with yellow down. He is active enough, but I shall quiet him. One tap, and now what do you see? A poor feeble chicken, scarcely able to stand, with his down all packed close to him as if he had been out in the rain. Ah, little chick, I will take the two halves of the egg-shell from which you came, and put them on each side of you. Come now, get in! I close them up; you are lost to view. There is nothing to be seen but a crack around the shell! Now it has gone! There, my friends, as I hold it on high, behold the magic egg, exactly as it was when I first took it out of the box, into which I will place it again, with the cloth and the wand and the little red bag, and shut it up with a snap. I will let you take one more look at this box before I put it away behind the scenes. Are you satisfied with what I have shown you? Do you think it is really as wonderful as you supposed it would be?"

At these words the whole audience burst into riotous applause, during which Loring disappeared; but he was back in a moment.

"Thank you!" he cried, bowing low, and waving his arms before him in the manner of an Eastern magician making a salaam. From side to side he turned, bowing and thanking, and then with a hearty, "Good-bye to you, good-bye to you all!" he stepped back, and let down the curtain.

For some moments the audience remained in their seats as if they were expecting something more, and then they rose quietly and began to disperse. Most of them were acquainted with one another, and there was a good deal of greeting and talking as they went out of the theater.

When Loring was sure the last person had departed, he turned down the lights, locked the door, and gave the key to the steward of the club.

He walked to his home a happy man. His exhibition had been a perfect success, with not a break or a flaw in it from beginning to end.

"I feel," thought the young man, as he strode along, "as if I could fly to the top of that steeple, and flap and crow until all the world heard me."

THAT evening, as was his daily custom, Herbert Loring called upon Miss Starr. He found the young lady in the library.

"I came in here," she said, "because I have a good deal to talk to you about, and I do not want interruptions."

With this arrangement the young man expressed his entire satisfaction, and immediately began to inquire the cause of her absence from his exhibition in the afternoon.

"But I was there," said Edith. "You did not see me, but I was there. Mother had a headache, and I went by myself."

"You were there!" exclaimed Loring, almost starting from his chair.

Thrillers Prove Good Nerve Tonic

Editorial in the New York Times

Detective Stories as Nerve Tonic

Many big business men, lawyers and statesmen have admitted a fondness for detective stories because of the distraction which they afford. Now it appears that there is still another good reason for indulging a taste for thrilling mystery tales. According to a prescription being worked out in the psychological laboratories of the University of Chicago, blood-and-thunder fiction is an ideal sedative for the high-pressure worker.

A research worker is demonstrating this theory by thoroughly scientific means, using graphs of pulse, charts of respiration and other exact data. After an hour's reading of a thriller, the subjects invariably show "a quieter pulse, a slower respiration and greater self-control." The experimenter hopes to prove that the reading of absorbing fiction is one of the best of nerve tonics.

Devoted readers of detective stories are ready to agree with almost anything in praise of their favorite brand of fiction. But they will find it hard to believe that when the thief pockets the pearls and dashes the lamp to the floor their pulses beat slower, or that when the Unknown Terror lurks in the dark just outside the heroine's door they breathe easily and calmly.

There is little likelihood, however, that many readers will check up on their own reactions. A violent thriller concentrates attention on the story and leaves no margin for graphs and charts.

"I don't understand. You were not in your seat."

"No," answered Edith; "I was on the very back row of seats. You could not see me, and I did not wish you to see me."

"Edith!" exclaimed Loring, rising to his feet, and leaning over the library table, which was between them. "When did you come? How much of the performance did you see?"

"I was late," she said; "I did not arrive until after the fireworks, or whatever they were."

For a moment Loring was silent, as if he did not understand the situation.

"Fireworks!" he said. "How did you know there had been fireworks?"

"I heard the people talking of them as they left the theater," she answered.

"And what did they say?" he inquired, quickly.

"They seemed to like them very well," she replied, "but I do not think they were quite satisfied. From what I heard some persons say, I inferred that they thought it was not very much of a show to which you had invited them."

Again Loring stood in thought, looking down at the table; but before he could speak again, Edith sprang to her feet.

"Herbert Loring," she cried, "what does all this mean? I was there during the whole of the exhibition of what you called the magic egg. I saw all those people wild with excitement at the wonderful sight of the chicken that came out of the egg, and grew to full size, and then dwindled down again, and went back into the egg, and, Herbert, there was no egg, and there was no little box, and there was no wand, and no embroidered cloth, and there was no red bag, nor any little chick, and there was no full-grown fowl, and there was no chair that you put on the table! There was nothing, absolutely nothing, but you and that table! And even the table was not what you said it was. It was not an unpainted pine table with four straight legs. It was a table of dark polished wood, and it stood on a single post with feet. There was nothing there that you said was there; everything was a sham and a delusion; every word you spoke was untrue. And yet everybody in that theater, excepting you and me, saw all the things that you said were on the stage. I know they saw them all, for I was with the people, and heard them, and saw them, and at times I fairly felt the thrill of enthusiasm which possessed them as they glared at the miracles and wonders you said were happening."

Loring smiled. "Sit down, my dear Edith," he said. "You are excited, and there is not the slightest cause for it. I will explain the whole affair to you. It is simple enough. You know that study is the great object of my life. I study all sorts of things, and just now I am greatly interested in hypnotism. The subject has become fascinating to me; I have made a great many successful trials of my power, and the affair of this afternoon was nothing but a trial of my powers on a more extensive scale than anything I have yet attempted. I wanted to see if it were possible for me to hypnotize a considerable number of people without anyone suspecting what I intended to do. The result was a success. I hypnotized all those people by means of the first part of my performance, which consisted of some combinations of colored glass with lights thrown upon them. They revolved, and looked like fireworks, and were strung on a wire high up on the stage.

"I kept up the glittering and dazzling show—which was well worth seeing, I can assure you—until the people had been straining their eyes upward for almost half an hour; and this sort of thing—I will tell you if

Are You Bashful?

NERVOUS? EMBARRASSED? SHY?

NO WONDER YOU ARE A "STAY-AT-HOME"

DO YOU ever feel embarrassed in the presence of strangers? Are you always bashful and confused when you meet people for the first time or when you are in company of the opposite sex?

ARE you missing all the good things and good times in life just because you are **BASHFUL** and **SHY?**

Girls and Boys, Men and Women who are timid, nervous, self-conscious and easily embarrassed never have much fun. How do you expect anybody to seek your acquaintance and companionship if you lack confidence in yourself? It is not always the good looking attractive men and women that are showered with all the attention.

To be popular—always in demand at parties, and affairs and social gatherings one must be a good mixer and possess a pleasant personality. Why should you sit at home, feeling blue and out of sorts—no place to go—nobody to see? Stop being bashful and embarrassed when you meet people for the first time or when you are in the company of the opposite sex.

You Are Self-Conscious!

Shame on you! There is no need for you to be nervous and embarrassed. Stop being shy. You can learn how to conquer the terrible fear of your superiors.

DO NOT BE DISCOURAGED!

Every individual now suffering from *Bashfulness* (Self-Consciousness) will welcome this good news. Remarkable discovery used with great success—whereby you can quickly and easily overcome your faults. **Be cheerful and confident of your future!** If you're Bashful — don't wait another day — Send 25c for my fascinating, amazing book. Tells how to master and overcome Self-Consciousness. Write today.

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you do not know it—is one of the methods of producing hypnotic sleep.

"There was no one present who was not an impressionable subject, for I was very careful in sending out my invitations, and when I became almost certain that my audience was thoroughly hypnotized, I stopped the show, and began the real exhibition, which was not really for their benefit, but for mine.

"Of course, I was dreadfully anxious for fear I had not succeeded entirely, and that there might be at least some one person who had not succumbed to the hypnotic influences, and so I tested the matter by bringing out that table, and telling them it was something it was not. If I had had any reason for supposing that some of the audience saw the table as it really was, I had an explanation ready, and I could have retired from my position without anyone supposing that I had intended making hypnotic experiments. The rest of the exhibtion would have been some things that any one could see, and as soon as possible I would have released from their spell those who were hypnotized. But when I became positively assured that everyone saw a light pine table with four straight legs, I confidently went on with the performances of the magic egg."

Edith Starr was still standing by the library table. She had not heeded Loring's advice to sit down, and she was trembling with emotion.

"Herbert Loring," she said, "you invited my mother and me to that exhibition. You gave us tickets for front seats, where we would be certain to be hypnotized if your experiment succeeded, and you would have made us see that false show, which faded from those people's minds as soon as they recovered from the spell; for as they went away they were talking only of the fireworks, and not one of them mentioned a magic egg, or a chicken, or anything of the kind. Answer me this: Did you not intend that I should come and be put under that spell?"

Loring smiled. "Yes," he said, "of course I did; but then your case would have been different from that of the other spectators, for I should have explained the whole thing to you, and I am sure we would have had a great deal of pleasure, and profit too, in discussing your experiences. The subject is extremely——"

"Explain to me!" she cried. "You would not have dared to do it! I do not know how brave you may be, but I know you would not have had the courage to come here and tell me that you had taken away my reason and my judgment, as you took them away from all those people, and that you had made me a mere tool of your will—glaring and panting with excitement at the wonderful things you told me to see where nothing existed. I have nothing to say about the others; they can speak for themselves if they ever come to know what you did to them. I speak for myself. I stood up with the rest of the people. I gazed with all my power, and over and over again I asked myself if it could be possible that anything was the matter with my eyes or my brain, and if I could be the only person there who could not see the marvelous spectacle that you were describing. But now I know that nothing was real, not even the little pine table, not even the man!"

"Not even me!" exclaimed Loring. "Surely I was real enough!"

"On that stage, yes," she said; "but you there proved you were not the Herbert Loring to whom I promised myself. He was an unreal being. If he had existed he would not have been a man who would have brought me to that public place, all ignorant of his intentions, to cloud my perceptions, to subject my intellect to his own, and make me believe a lie. If a man should treat me in that way once he would treat me so at other times, and in other ways, if he had the chance. You have treated me in the

past as today you treated those people who glared at the magic egg. In the days gone by you made me see an unreal man, but you will never do it again! Good-bye."

"Edith," cried Loring, "you don't——"

But she had disappeared through a side door, and he never spoke to her again.

Walking home through the dimly lighted streets, Loring involuntarily spoke aloud:

"And this," he said, "is what came out of the magic egg!"

The Brain-Thief

(Continued from page 605)

pose of the all-conquering West. Frenziedly he clutched at his maimed arm, shrinking from de Grandin's blazing eyes and menacing steel as a beaten dog might flinch from an angry master.

He was a pitiable object as he crouched and cowered in his chair, and despite the heartless cruelties he had confessed, I felt a wave of compassion for him.

"Mercy!" he implored, shrinking still further from the Frenchman. "Have pity, *sahib,* you have conquered; be merciful!"

Jules de Grandin's little blue eyes, hot as molten lava from a volcanic crater, cold and hard as polar ice, never changed expression as he glared down upon the cringing man. "Make no mistake, *Monsieur le Serpent,*" he answered in a voice one tone above a whisper. "I am come not as foeman unto foeman, but as executioner to criminal. Vile, stinking swine, your boastings to Madame Abbot were your confession, and your confession was your doom. Such mercy as you showed to the draper of Lyons, and to Madame Betty, now dead by her own

hand, and to her innocent babe, slain by your devilishness as surely as though your accursed hands had done the deed—such mercy as that you may expect from Jules de Grandin.

"Trowbridge, my good one," he called over his shoulder, "take them out. Lead Messieurs Norton and Abbot, and Madame Marjorie, to the front gate and await me. I have one damnably pleasant duty to perform here, and can not be annoyed by your mistakenly merciful expostulations. *Allez-vous-en—tout vite!*"

We turned and left him, for there was a look of command in his face which would not be denied; but as we left I cast a single backward look, then hurried on, for in that fleeting glance I saw de Grandin seize the Hindoo's neck between his slim, strong hands and force his writhing face toward the glowing barrel of the red-hot stove.

A scream of unsupportable anguish echoed through the night as we reached the gate, but I pushed my companions before me. "Don't go back," I urged. "He's getting only what he deserves, but we couldn't bear to watch it, even so."

IT WAS some ten minutes later as we trudged along the turnpike toward the nearest interurban bus station that Marjorie Abbot, who walked stiffly as a robot beside her husband, suddenly threw her hand to her brow and burst into a fit of wild, uncontrollable weeping. "Homer—oh, Homer!" she cried. "My dear, I can tell you, now. I love you, dear; I love you—I didn't mean to do it, Homer, truly, I didn't, but he made me! Oh, my dear, dear love, I don't understand it; but I'm free; *I'm free!* My lips aren't sealed any longer!"

Jules de Grandin chuckled delightedly. *"Mais oui; mais certainement, Madame,"* he laughed. "And never again shall that butter-faced son of a most unsavory and entirely immoral pig hold you, or any woman, in his thrall. No, by damn it, Jules de Grandin has made entirely certain of that. Yes. To be sure!"

A few minutes more we walked, Homer and Marjorie holding hands as frankly as country sweethearts, while they murmured soft, foolish little endearments in each other's ears. Then:

"Tiens, Monsieur, look not so downhearted!" de Grandin ordered Kit Norton. "Tomorrow morning you and I—yes, and the good, slow-witted Trowbridge, too—shall seek out Madame Isabel and tell her the true state of affairs. She loves you, *mon vieux,* I'll swear to it, and when she learns that what you did was not of your doing, but because of the black magic of that most damnable time-thief whom I have just sent to his proper place, I bet me your life she will understand and forgive, and you and she shall once more be happy in each other's company.

"Not here," he added after a moment's thought. "The townsfolk would never understand, and your remarriage to Madame Isabel so soonly after poor Madame Betty's tragic death—it would make fresh scandal for gossiping tongues to fondle. But there are other places, and I damn think one place is good as another, or better, when love is your companion. *N'est-ce-pas,* Friend Trowbridge?" he dug a sharp elbow into my ribs.

5

"SEE here, de Grandin," I remarked next morning at breakfast as I scanned the headlines of my paper, "that house we visited last night burned down. Here's the story:

Man Dies in Mystery Blaze

Fire of undetermined origin completely destroyed the old Spencer homestead, five miles from Harrisonville, late last night. The house, a frame structure, has been occupied by an East Indian gentleman, Mr. Chunda Lal, for the past several years. It contained no modern improvements, and it

is thought the flames started from an overheated coal stove or an overturned oil lamp.

The blaze was first noticed by neighbors who lived a mile or more away, about one o'clock this morning, but the place was practically demolished before they could arrive on the scene. Search of the still smoking ruins today revealed a human body, charred past possibility of recognition, among the debris. It is feared the unfortunate tenant perished in the fire. The loss, amounting to $4,500, was covered by insurance.

"U'm," murmured Jules de Grandin as he returned the paper, "the account is graphic, though a trifle inaccurate. Howeverly, I fear I shall not point out the errors to the excellent journalist who wrote the story. No; it would be better not."

"But it's strange the house should have burned last night," I returned. "I suppose it's one of those fortunate accidents which——"

"*Non,* not at all; by no means!" he cut in. "It would have been strange had it been otherwise, my friend, for I took greatest pains that things should be exactly as they were. After I had impressed on this Monsieur Chunda Lal that it is extremely poor policy to trifle with other people's wives and husbands—that hot stove proved of greatest help in the process, I assure you—I carefully bound him in his chair, then arranged an alarm clock in such a way that it would spring the stove door open when one o'clock arrived. The door once open, a flood of glowing coals fell outward on the floor, which I had previously drenched with kerosene—and the inevitable process of combustion took place. However, the 'East Indian gentleman' of whom the paper speaks suffered no inconvenience thereby, since his soul had gone to the subcellar of hell some hours earlier.

"You remember how poor Madame Marjorie suddenly regained mastery of herself as we proceeded down the road last night?" he asked.

"Yes, of course."

"Very good. It was at that moment

the rascally one departed this world for a place of everlasting torment. I had been at particular pains not to bind his wound, and—one can not bleed for long and remain alive, you know, my friend. The entirely unlamented Chunda Lal and his power over Madame Marjorie expired at the same happy instant. Yes."

"But do you mean he actually did all those things he boasted of?" I demanded. "Is it possible a man, no matter how clever he might be as a hypnotist, could so entirely change people's natures as he claimed to have done? Why, it seems incredible!"

"I agree," the Frenchman nodded, "but nevertheless, it are true. Consider: In India, where he came from, the fakirs perform certain tricks which are explicable only by hypnotism. The rope trick, by example. He declared he could perform it, and it is one of the few unexplained Eastern illusions. They apparently throw a cord into the air, make it fast to nothing at all, then climb it until they are lost to sight. No one has ever explained that. Your own Monsieur Herman, the magician, tells in his memoirs how he offered much money to anyone who would show him the technique of the illusion, but no one came forward to claim the reward. Why? Because it is a mere illusion of the eye—a piece of superhypnotism.

"Consider the evidence here: Monsieur Norton tells how, just before he apparently became a knave of the first water, he encountered this evil time-thief in a theater lobby and how the despicable one waved a bright-set ring before his eyes. That single flash was enough to center the victim's attention. Just what the relationship between the optic nerves and the brain centers of ratiocination is we do not certainly know, but all psychologists are agreed that shining objects, or swiftly whirling objects which confuse or blind the eyes, put the subject in ideal condition for quick and easy hypnosis. In any event, while Monsieur Norton's thought-guards were overwhelmed by the flashing of that ring, the brain-thief leaped in and took complete possession of his consciousness, captured his will and made him break the heart of the wife he loved.

"How the villain captured poor Madame Betty's mind we do not know; but we have the young Abbot's story of how his wife was overcome by the quick flash of a bright object in the night club, and we have the evidence of the complete control the miscreant established over Madame Marjorie. Certainly. It is all most unusual, and instances of such hypnotism are fortunately rare, but we have seen what we have seen in this case; two lives were destroyed and the happiness of Madame Betty's first husband demolished completely. Had it not been for Jules de Grandin, both Monsieur Norton and Madame Isabel, as well as Monsieur and Madame Abbot, might also have been made helpless victims of the vile one's plottings.

"*Parbleu,* when I recall the evil that one wrought it makes me entirely ill. Quick, Trowbridge, my friend, assist me. My mouth is filled with a most unpleasant taste at the very thought of that never-enough-to-be-accursèd man with the yellow face. Nothing but a drink—a nobly large drink—of brandy will remove it!"

The Sun People

(Continued from page 624)

doom in the fires about them that we could turn on the vibrations. At once, though, those vibrations halted our plunge, since they instantly annihilated the pull of all the galaxy's suns upon our worlds and upon each other!

"With that pull destroyed, our ring of worlds halted at the very edge of doom. Were the pull of those suns restored, they would jerk us into those fires at once. we knew, but we knew too that with their attraction upon each other nullified the galaxy's suns were already separating and moving out of its great swarm. Even now, indeed, the outermost of your galaxy's suns are almost out of their fellows' grip forever, and soon all the stars of your universe will have separated for all time, each plunging out into space alone, with great Canopus alone remaining here. So you see how useless, how amusing even, it is to ask me how to turn off the vibration that is disintegrating your galaxy. Your single ship could never get near the central control of the vibrations, through the swarms of squares and of my cube-creature races that have answered the alarm by now, that guard it. And even at this moment those great vibrations are breaking up your universe, forever!"

The mechanical, metallic voice from the cabinet ceased, and the cube-creature whose thoughts it had spoken contemplated us with cool contempt and amusement flickering in his alien eyes. J'han Jal, Mirk En, myself and all our crew-members about us were silent for the moment. Then J'han Jal pointed slowly toward the time-dial on the wall.

"Those vibrations that we can't halt—and it's the twentieth hour!" he said. "Less than an hour left now before the galaxy's suns start to pass

forever out of the reach of its swarm. The twentieth hour—and never can we reach the cube of controls through the swarms of squares that guard it! We've failed!"

"Not failed!" I cried. "There's a chance yet to halt those vibrations—a chance to get down through those guarding squares, with this square of the cube-creatures bound to our cruiser——"

Swiftly I explained to J'han Jal and Mirk En the plan that had suggested itself to me, and their eyes gleamed with sudden hope. Our crew rushing to its stations, Mirk En and I guarding for the moment the cube-creature, J'han Jal raced up to the control room and sent our cruiser and the square bound to it humming back toward the world from which we had fled. Just inside its atmosphere we halted, and though we could see great swarms of squares crowded with cube-creatures, they did not glimpse us high above them. And then Mirk En and I with the crew's help swiftly made ready for our wild feat. Opening the space-door, we gathered the dead of our own crew on the square beside our cruiser and brought them inside the ship. The cube-creature dead we stripped of their space-suits, and arranged them in natural positions here and there on the surface of the square. When we had finished, it seemed to all appearances that the square beside our ship was crowded with living cube-creatures like those below, since they had died for the most part by the piercing of their space-suits and bore but few marks of battle. They seemed crouching there on the square's surface as when living.

And now Mirk En and I with the captured little cube-creature walked out onto the surface of the square, toward the bulge that held its simple button-controls. I held a thick metal bar sharpened at one end and Mirk En held in his tentacles four of the same bars. We had shown these bars to the cube-creature before leaving the cruiser, and through the thought-speech machine had told him that if he followed our orders his life would be spared, but that if he attempted to discover to the other squares and cube-creatures our stratagem, instant death would be his. Then, crouching before that bulge's buttons, the cube-creature seemed to all eyes the operator of the great square, the dozens of posed dead creatures behind him his fellows, and Mirk En and I, our bars hidden, two captives!

The great band of metal that secured our cruiser to the square we left in place, but beside us was the device by which a thrown lever would release that band instantly. So now, with J'han Jal making a final gesture toward us from the cruiser's transparent-walled control room, we started downward, our propulsion-mechanisms silent now, the cube-creature beside us operating the great square's propulsion-mechanism and sending it smoothly downward. With our cruiser attached to it, with Mirk En and me apparently captives among the dozens of cube-men on the square, it seemed that our cruiser had been captured by the square and its cube-creatures, and that they were returning with their prize! It was upon that appearance, at least, that we were depending to prevent the break-up of the galaxy, to turn off the great vibrations before the last minutes of the twentieth hour had passed.

Downward toward the surface of the gleaming world we shot, the cruiser pulled down with the sinking square, none inside that cruiser showing, its space-door open. With pounding heart I crouched there, gazing across the metal-burnished surface of the world beneath, across the giant cube-buildings and the great masses of squares loaded with

cube-creatures that came and went still above them. Those squares, we saw, had collected in great swirling masses above and around the green-glowing square of force and the cube of controls beside that glowing square. Could we penetrate down through them to that control-cube? Already scores of those squares were rushing up toward us, and I turned to Mirk En as the cube-creature beside us sent square and cruiser dropping still lower.

"Kill him instantly if he tries to signal to the cube-creatures on these squares!" I muttered to the Vegan, and he nodded.

"Now's the moment!" he breathed. "If we can pass these squares we'll have a chance; if not——"

But now those uprushing squares were flashing all around us, their cube-creature occupants gazing intently toward us as they saw square and cruiser come down thus toward their world together. For a moment I held my breath, a moment in which they gazed down and across our square, its dead cube-creatures posed behind us, its cube-creature operator and Mirk En and I crouching as though helpless beside him—and in that moment a single eye that discovered our deception would send a blast of green crumpling force toward us, I knew. But no green beam came. Deceived by the life-like appearance of the dead things behind us, by the lifeless and captured appearance of our cruiser, they never doubted apparently that their fellow-square had captured our ship. We sank swiftly among them, and they dropped down in great swarms all about us.

DOWN — down — for tense seconds we shot through their great masses of flying squares, down toward the green force-square and the cube of controls, above which swarmed still greater masses of guarding squares. Moments more

and we would be within striking distance of that cube, I knew; moments more and the crimson rays of our cruiser would whiff it from existence. From the time-dial on my arm I saw that the last few minutes of our last hour were fleeting now, but even those minutes would be enough, I knew, if we were not discovered. And still we were dropping lower through the swarms of squares that swirled as though in exultation at our capture about and beneath us. I saw the hope in my own eyes reflected in Mirk En's, and at that moment came the catastrophe. One of the squares about us brushed close for a moment to the edge of our own, and as it did so, the cube-creature between Mirk En and me leaped upward and uttered a strange, throaty cry.

Even as that cry left the cube-creature's mouth-aperture Mirk En's metal bars had crashed down through its body, and he whirled toward me. "It's all up, Nort Norus!" he yelled. "The thing's given us away!"

But in that same instant, as the cube-creatures on the squares all about us gazed stupefiedly toward us, I flung loose the great band that held our cruiser to the square, and then with my hands on that square's buttons I sent it whirling downward. "The cube-control!" I cried. "We'll fight our way down to it or die trying!"

In that moment our square was crashing through the swarming squares about it, whose cube-creatures seemed stunned by the sudden revelation of our stratagem, but in the next moment a hundred green beams were cleaving toward our square and toward the cruiser a little above. With a wild sidewise swoop of the square I sought to avoid those beams in that crazy moment, and at the same time saw Mirk En's tentacles flashing over the little levers beside me, and from our own square's bulges similar green deadly shafts were stabbing back in answer. Outward they drove from us in blind destruction through the masses of squares about and beneath us. As those squares crumpled and fell in scores, as a mighty waxing roar of alarm went over the surface of the world beneath, I glimpsed our cruiser above with J'han Jal at its controls stabbing out lightning-like to right and left with its crimson rays as it plunged down above us.

Down through the wildly whirling masses of squares, laden with cube-creatures, our own square shot as I pressed upon the buttons that controlled it, as Mirk En sent its green beams driving outward. My only memory of the next moments is of a wild confusion of tossing, rushing squares, a sea of metal shapes covered with crowding cube-creatures, of other squares rushing from far away as the great alarm went forth. It seemed incredible to me even in that moment of awful action that we could escape the beams that drove thick about us, but it was the very numbers of the squares about us that saved us from annihilation. Impeded as they were by the rushing numbers behind them, the squares on all sides of us could hardly in that wild moment distinguish between our own square and those about us; so that for the moment it seemed almost that all the rushing squares about us were loosing their beams at each other in a wild panic of confusion.

Crash! — crash! — crash! — down through the mass of squares I drove, crashing into and through them like a mighty battering-ram of metal, down toward the cube of controls that loomed close now beneath us, the great green force of the square glowing beside it! Through the opening in the side of that upraised cube I could glimpse the myriad

intricate switches and instruments inside it, the half-dozen cube-creatures in it. And then as Mirk En sent our beams smashing through the squares beneath us, I drove down through the opening the beams had made for us, until we hung for a split-second beside the cube of controls.

A hundred green rays darted down toward our square as we hung there, but in the instant before they reached us Mirk En and I had leaped, great bars in our grasp, into the cube beside us. And as the square from which we leaped crumpled and fell, as the cube-creatures on the ground ran madly toward the ladder that led up to the raised cube, not daring to loose their rays upon their great control, the half-dozen creatures inside leapt toward us. But as they did so there towered before them the terrific spectacle of Mirk En, the fighting Vegan's great octopus-tentacles upraised in air, and then his bars and my own crashed down upon those creatures and left them dead. Up the ladder were springing other creatures, but Mirk En beat them down with terrific blows of his great arms, while our cruiser above fought and whirled still with the down-rushing squares, and I turned toward the switches about me.

Scores upon scores in numbers those switches were, unthinkably intricate combinations of levers and buttons and dials, and for the moment I gazed at them in despair, then raising my great bar sent it smashing through them. Blow after blow I let fall upon them, wrecking the cube-control's interior, but still the green force of the great square was glowing, and now in despair at sight of what I was doing the swarming cube-creatures on the ladder were pressing Mirk En back upward, had jerked the bars from two of his tentacles and were pouring in upon us. But as they did so I sent a final

great blow smashing through the last of the intricate switches, and the green force in the great square abruptly vanished. And at sight of that the cube-creatures on the ladder, those on the crowding squares above, over all this world, seemed to stop, stunned, stupefied!

The great vibration that had been disintegrating our galaxy was halted, at last!

In that instant, down through the motionless, stupefied creatures on the squares above, our cruiser was rushing, down beside the opening of our cube for a second, and in that second Mirk En and I flung ourselves through the cruiser's open space-door, and it was stabbing upward! Was flashing away from that world's surface through the hordes of stunned cube-creatures, as they stared motionless toward the cube whose glowing force had been so suddenly snapped out! Were staring uncomprehendingly as now, at last, the gravitational attraction of the galaxy's suns was restored to them; as those suns exerted again their pull upon each other and upon this ring of worlds inside Canopus; as they pulled back into the galaxy's swarm those outermost moving suns that but now had hovered on the verge in space; as they exerted again their pull upon this ring of worlds within Canopus, *and as that ring began to spread still farther toward Canopus' encircling fires!*

For as our cruiser shot up, the great ring of worlds was spreading! One by one, slowly, majestically, the great worlds of that ring were moving off from its circle in a tangent toward the fires of Canopus, and one by one as we watched we saw them go to that stunning, stupefying doom that had gripped them once more with the halting of the vibration, saw them vanishing with all their cube-creatures and squares and works in great bursts of flaming vapor as they passed into the mighty encircling fires! And in the great hollow at Canopus' center our cruiser was left alone!

Stunned ourselves in that moment, J'han Jal and Mirk En and I there in the cruiser stared out incredulously into that tremendous space at Canopus' center that lay empty now forever, empty of those inner planets whose cube-creatures had been annihilated before our eyes. We could not speak, could not move, in that moment, swaying there in the control room, until at last J'han Jal sent our ship racing toward those fires in turn, until my hands opened again the control of its heat-nullifying generators, of its protective ray-sheath. And then we were rushing again into great Canopus' colossal mass of white flame, even as there sounded beside us the twentieth hour's ending; were rushing outward through those fires with all the cruiser's power in that hour that was to have been the cube-creatures' highest hour of triumph, and that had been instead for them their hour of death.

6

"NORT NORUS, Chairman of the Council of Suns!"

Once again that cry was ringing forth from the attendants on the great dais, and once again, with J'han Jal and Mirk En behind me, I was stepping up onto that dais, facing the thousands of members of the Council about us. But now it was not with silence that those members greeted us but with a wild roar of cheers that reverberated thunderously through the great hall, and that seemed echoed by the distant cheers that came to us from the rejoicing crowds in the cities outside. Earthman, Sirian and Vegan, we three stood there facing those shouting thousands of dissimilar forms, and then slowly and reluctantly their

wild cheers died as I raised a hand for silence.

"Members of the Council of Suns," I spoke to them, "again we gather here, not this time to consider a doom hanging over us, but to celebrate a doom lifted from us. There at the center of Canopus, J'han Jal and Mirk En and I, with our cruiser and its crew, found the cube-creatures who had loosed that doom upon our galaxy, who were even then breaking up our galaxy with their great vibrations. And we were able at the last to thrust back that doom, to pull back into the galaxy its farthest out-wandering suns, even as a more terrible doom was loosed upon the cube-creatures themselves. This we were able to do, and for it you give us your cheers and gratitude now. Yet it is not to us that you should give them, but to those who, ages ago, laid the foundations of our great Federation of Suns.

"For it is through our Federation of Suns alone that we have thrust back this doom, and every doom that has menaced our universe. Around this galaxy of ours, which our ancestors of the far past thought so mighty and which we know to be so small, there stretch all the mysteries of space, and out of those mysteries there have come upon us once and again terrors of which we dreamed nothing, great dooms that have taken all our power and our wisdom to withstand. But we have withstood them always, and though none can doubt that out of the eternal vastnesses of the void in which we move there will come other dooms as mighty, other horrors as terrible, by massing their power and knowledge our galaxy's unlike races shall meet and withstand those also. For if our races but hold to that great compact sworn by them ages ago, if our mighty Federation of Suns but continues to reign, we shall hold against all comers till the end of time this, our universe!"

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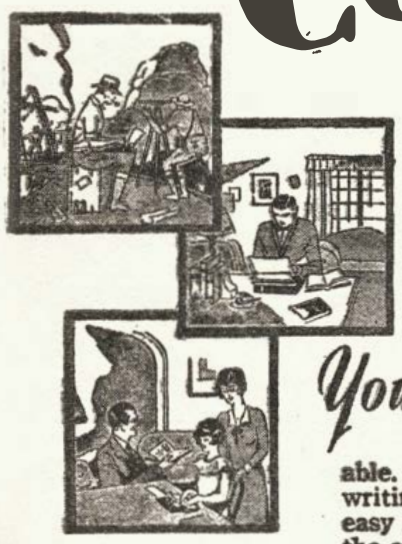

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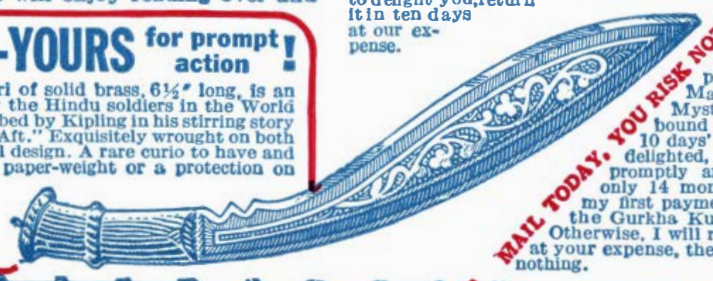

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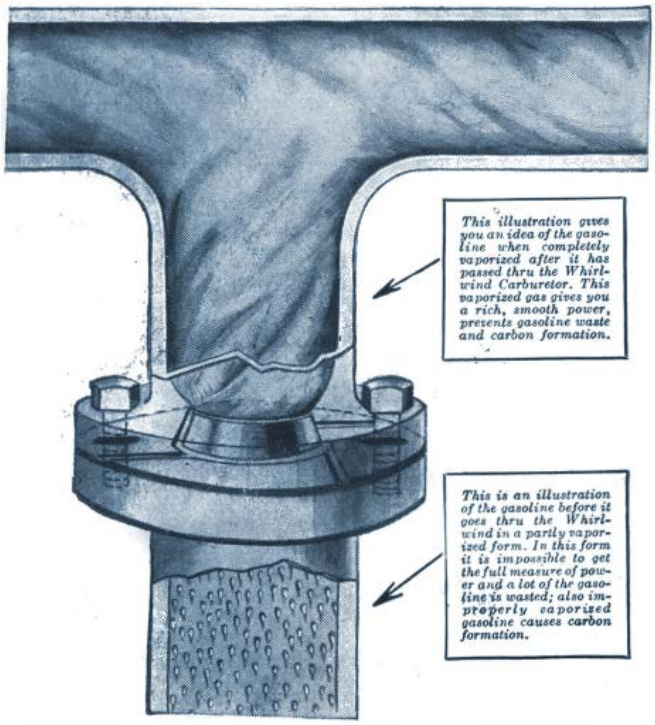

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