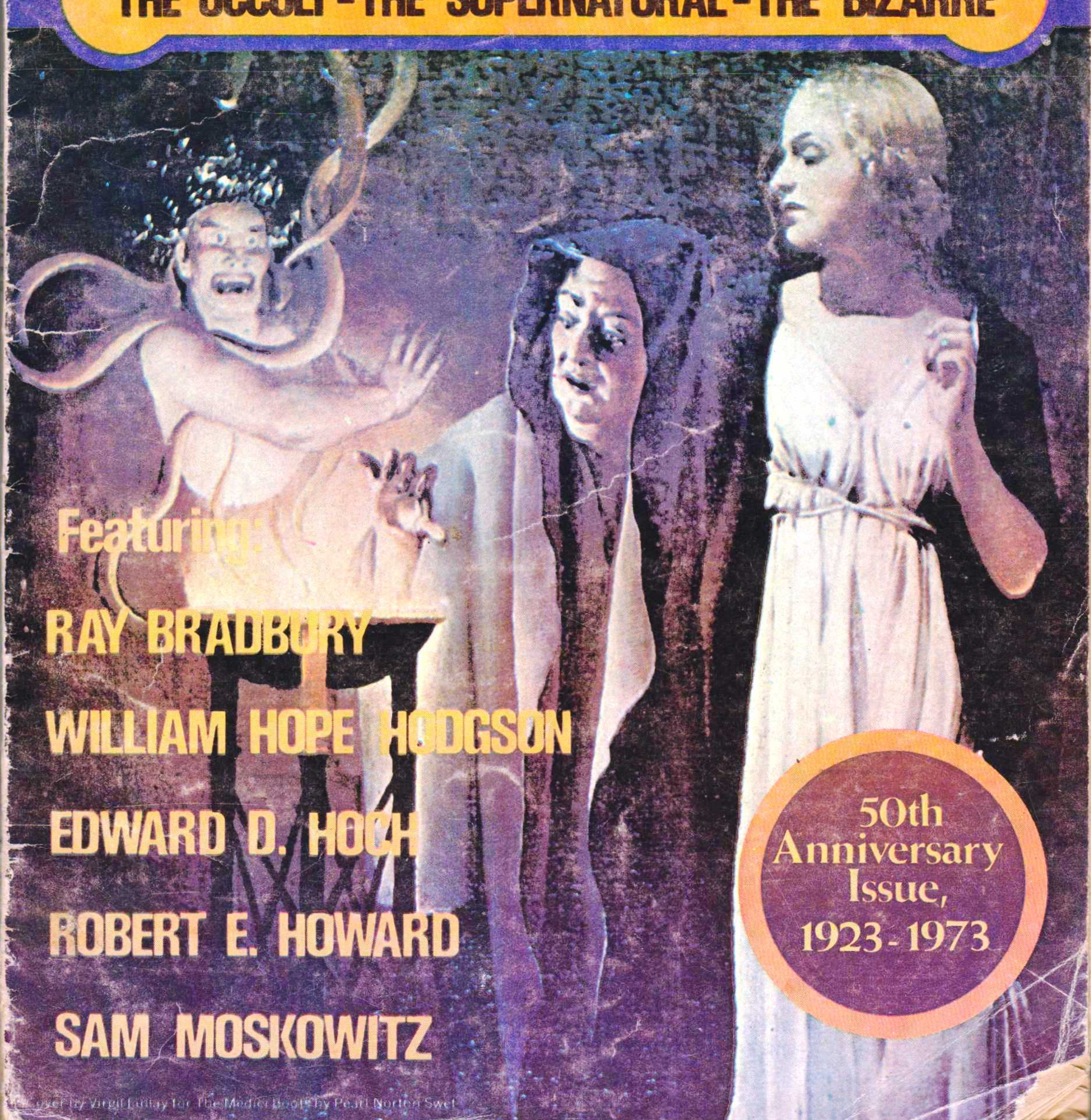
47961 75¢ SUMMER 1973

Weird Tales

THE OCCULT - THE SUPERNATURAL - THE BIZARRE



Featuring:

RAY BRADBURY

WILLIAM HOPE HODGSON

EDWARD D. HOCH

ROBERT E. HOWARD

SAM MOSKOWITZ

50th Anniversary Issue, 1923-1973

Cover by Virgil Finlay for The Medici Boots by Pearl Norton Swet

FIFTY YEARS YOUNG

HALF A CENTURY AGO, with the issue dated March 1923, an enterprising publisher, Jacob Clark Henneberger, launched *Weird Tales*. Thirty years later it suspended publication with the September 1954 issue, having survived the depression and World War II. But, during those glorious years, it left an indelible impression as one of the great literary landmarks in the popular magazine field.

It discovered and popularized writers who fashioned fiction so amazingly well that many of the stories have become modern classics in fantastic literature. In all publishing history few magazines have had a higher percentage of stories honored and reprinted; and certainly no magazine has been collected and treasured so much as *Weird Tales*.

The towering figures of modern supernatural and heroic fantasy (even sciencefiction) have very largely been associated with this publication—such as, Ray Bradbury, H.P. Lovecraft, Clark Ashton Smith, Robert E. Howard, C.L. Moore, Henry Kuttner, A. Merritt, Robert Bloch, Ted Sturgeon, Manly Wade Wellman, among many others.

And when *Weird Tales* suspended publication there were thousands who felt that something had gone out of their lives. Several times in recent years serious consideration was given to reviving the magazine, but the circumstances never seemed propitious. With the advent of the 50th anniversary of *Weird Tales* the moment became just right.

At first there was the thought of *only* using reprints from back issues, but this policy really had no future or vitality to it. Too many of the best from *Weird Tales* have been anthologized over and over again. The precious few that escaped reprinting are the ones you'll see in our pages. The first issues of the new *Weird Tales* will be composed chiefly from reprint sources so little known and so difficult to find, that for all intents and purposes they could be considered new stories. Superb and neglected works will be presented from the files of the finest magazines of their time, both British and American.

Also, brand new stories will appear in every issue, as well as articles on the genre and its famed writers. Initial publication frequency will be quarterly. This will provide a maximum on-sale period for interested readers to learn that the magazine is back on the newsstands. If you know a friend who might like *Weird Tales*, don't fail to tell him about it; word of mouth promotion can turn us into a monthly soon.

SAM MOSKOWITZ
Editor

Weird Tales

The Occult – The Supernatural – The Bizarre

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It is most appropriate we revive WEIRD TALES with a Ray Bradbury weird tale. For there never has been a writer so uniquely wonderful as the truly remarkable Ray Bradbury. How fortunate for us that his earliest fiction was almost exclusively in this magazine. Can it actually be they were published as far back as 30-odd years ago? They are still loved to this day for their sheer story-telling charm and excellence. Ray sold his first story, *The Candle,* to the magazine for the munificent sum of $25.00; and it appeared in the November 1942 issue. Ray soon penned his way, of course, to true greatness.

From his early initial encouragement he went on to write a series of extraordinarily original and imaginative horror tales that mark him as one of the great figures in the genre. His collection of weird fiction, his very first book *Dark Carnival* published by Arkham House in 1947, was predominantly made up of stories from this magazine, and today the volume brinks $65 without any difficulty on the collector's market. However, one very outstanding story from this magazine which was not included in *Dark Carnival* was *The Watchers* published in the May, 1945 issue. It has not yet appeared in any other Bradbury collection and those of you who read it for the first time are in for a rare experience.

The Watchers

By RAY BRADBURY

IN THIS room the sound of the tapping of the typewriter keys is like knuckles on wood, and my perspiration falls down upon the keys that are being punched unceasingly by my trembling fingers. And over and above the sound of my writing comes the ironical melody of a mosquito circling over my bent head, and a number of flies buzzing and colliding with the wire screen. And around the naked filament-skeleton of the yellow bulb in the ceiling a bit of torn white paper that is a moth flutters. An ant crawls up the wall; I watch it—I laugh with a steady, unceasing bitterness. How ironical the shining flies and the red ants and the armoured crickets. How mistaken we three were: Susan and I and William Tinsley.

Whoever you are, wherever you are, if you do happen upon this, do not ever again crush the ants upon the sidewalk, do not smash the bumblebee that thunders by your window, do not annihilate the cricket upon your hearth!

That's where Tinsley made his colossal error. You remember William Tinsley, certainly? The man who threw away a million dollars on fly-sprays and insecticides and antpastes?

There was never a spot for a fly or a mosquito in Tinsley's office. Not a white wall or green desk or any immaculate surface where a fly might land before Tinsley destroyed it with an instantaneous stroke of his magnificent flyswatter. I shall never forget that instrument of death. Tinsley, a monarch, ruled his industry with that flyswatter as a scepter.

I was Tinsley's secretary and right-hand man in his kitchenware industry; sometimes I advised him on his many investments.

Tinsley carried the flyswatter to work with him under his arm in July, 1944. By the week's end, if I happened to be in one of the filing alcoves out of sight when Tinsley arrived, I could always tell of his arrival when I heard the swicking, whistling passage of the flyswatter through the air as Tinsley killed his morning quota.

As the days passed, I noted Tinsley's preoccupied alertness. He'd dictate to me, but his eyes would be searching the north-south-east-west walls, the rug, the bookcases, even my clothing. Once I laughed and made some comment about Tinsley and Clyde Beatty being fearless animal trainers, and Tinsley froze and turned his back on me. I shut up. People have a right, I thought, to be as damned eccentric as they please.

"Hello, Steve." Tinsley waved his flyswatter one morning as I poised my pencil over my pad. "Before we start, would you mind cleaning away the corpses."

Spread in a rumpled trail over the thick sienna rug was the fallen conquered, the flies; silent, mashed, dewinged. I threw them one by one in the waste-bin, muttering.

"To S.H. Little, Philadelphia. Dear Little: Will invest money in your insect spray. Five thousand dollars—"

"Five thousand?" I complained. I stopped writing.

Tinsley ignored me. "Five thousand dollars. Advise immediate production as soon as war conditions permit. Sincerely." Tinsley twisted his flyswatter. "You think I'm crazy," he said.

"Is that a p.s., or are you talking to me?" I asked.

The phone rang and it was the Termite Control Company, to whom Tinsley told me to write a thousand-dollar check for having termite-proofed his house. Tinsley patted his metal chair. "One thing I like about my offices—all iron, cement, solid; not a chance for termites."

He leaped from his chair, the swatter shone swiftly in the air.

"Damn it, Steve, has THAT been here all this time!"

Something buzzed in a small arc somewhere, into silence. The four walls moved in around us in that silence, it seemed, the blank ceiling stared over us and Tinsley's breath arched through his nostrils. I couldn't see the infernal insect anywhere. Tinsley exploded. "Help me find it! Damn you, help me!"

"Now, hold on—" I retorted.

Somebody rapped on the door.

"Stay out!" Tinsley's yell was high, afraid. "Get away from the door, and stay away!" He flung himself headlong, bolted the door with a frantic gesture and lay against it, wildly searching the room. "Quickly now, Steve, systematically! Don't sit there!"

Desk, chairs, chandelier, walls. Like an insane animal, Tinsley searched, found the buzzing, struck at it. A bit of insensate glitter fell to the floor where he crushed it with his foot in a queerly triumphant sort of action.

He started to dress me down but I wouldn't have it. "Look here," I came back at him. "I'm a secretary and right-hand stooge, not a spotter for high-flying insects. I haven't got eyes in the back of my head!"

"Neither have they!" cried Tinsley. "So you know what They do?"

"They? Who in hell are They?"

He shut up. He went to his desk and sat down, warily, and finally said, "Never mind. Forget it. Don't talk about this to anyone."

I softened up. "Bill, you should go see a psychiatrist about—"

Tinsley laughed bitterly. "And the psychiatrist would tell his wife, and she'd tell others, and then They'd find out. They're everywhere, They are. I don't want to be stopped with my campaign."

"If you mean the one hundred thousand bucks you've sunk in your insect sprays and ant pastes in the last four weeks," I said. "Someone should stop you. You'll break yourself, me, and the stockholders. Honest to God, Tinsley—"

"Shut up!" he said. "You don't understand."

"I guess I didn't, then. I went back to my office and all day long I heard that damned flyswatter hissing in the air.

I HAD supper with Susan Miller that evening. I told her about Tinsley and she lent a sympathetically professional ear. Then she tapped her cigarette and lit it and said, "Steve, I may be a psychiatrist, but I wouldn't have a tinker's chance in hell, unless Tinsley came to see me. I couldn't help him unless he wanted help." She patted my arm. "I'll look him over for you, if you insist, though, for old time's sake. But half the fight's lost if the patient won't cooperate."

"You've got to help me, Susan," I said. "He'll be stark raving in another month. I think he has delusions of persecution—"

We drove to Tinsley's house.

The first date worked out well. We laughed, we danced, we dined late at the Brown Derby, and Tinsley didn't suspect for a moment that the slender, soft-voiced woman he held in his arms to a waltz was a psychiatrist picking his reactions apart. From the table, I watched them, together, and I shielded a small laugh with my hand, and heard Susan laughing at one of his jokes.

We drove along the road in a pleasant, relaxed silence, the silence that follows on the heels of a good, happy evening. The perfume of Susan was in the car, the radio played dimly, and the car wheels whirled with a slight whisper over the highway.

I looked at Susan and she at me, her brows going up to indicate that she'd found nothing so far this evening to show that Tinsley was in any way unbalanced. I shrugged.

At that very instant, a moth flew in the window, fluttering, flickering its velvety white wings upon the imprisoning glass.

Tinsley screamed, wrenched the car involuntarily, struck out a gloved hand at the moth, gabbling, his face pale. The tires wobbled. Susan seized the steering wheel firmly and held the car on the road until we slowed to a stop.

As we pulled up, Tinsley crushed the moth between tightened fingers and watched the odorous powder of it sift down upon Susan's arm. We sat there, the three of us, breathing rapidly.

Susan looked at me, and this time there

was comprehension in her eyes. I nodded.

Tinsley looked straight ahead, then. In a dream he said, "Ninety-nine percent of all life in the world is insect life—"

He rolled up the windows without another word, and drove us home.

Susan phoned me an hour later. "Steve, he's built a terrific complex for himself. I'm having lunch with him tomorrow. He likes me. I might find out what we want to know. By the way, Steve, does he own any pets?"

Tinsley had never owned a cat or dog. He detested animals.

"I might have expected that," said Susan. "Well, good-night, Steve, see you tomorrow."

The flies were breeding thick and golden and buzzing like a million intricately fine electric machines in the pouring direct light of summer noon. In vortexes they whirled and curtained and fell upon refuse to inject their eggs, to mate, to flutter, to whirl again, as I watched them, and in their whirling my mind intermixed, I wondered why Tinsley should fear them so, should dread and kill them, and as I walked the streets, all about me, cutting arcs and spaces from the sky, omnipresent flies hummed and sizzled and beat their lucid wings. I counted darning needles, mud-daubers and hornets, yellow bees and brown ants. The world was suddenly much more alive to me than ever before, because Tinsley's apprehensive awareness had set me aware.

BEFORE I knew my action, brushing a small red ant from my coat that had fallen from a lilac bush as I passed, I turned in at a familiar white house and knew it to be Lawyer Remington's, who had been Tinsley's family representative for forty years, even before Tinsley was born. Remington was only a business acquaintance to me, but there I was, touching his gate and ringing his bell and in a few minutes looking at him over a sparkling good glass of his sherry.

"I remember," said Remington, remembering. "Poor Tinsley. He was only seventeen when it happened."

I leaned forward intently. "It happened?" The ant raced in wild frenzies upon the golden stubble on my fingers backs, becoming entangled in the bramble of my wrist, turning back, hopelessly clenching its mandibles. I watched the ant. "Some unfortunate accident?"

Lawyer Remington nodded grimly and the memory lay raw and naked in his old brown eyes. He spread the memory out on the table and pinned it down so I could look at it, with a few accurate words:

"Tinsley's father took him hunting up in the Lake Arrowhead region in the autumn of the young lad's seventeenth year. Beautiful country, a lovely clear cold autumn day. I remember it because I was hunting not seventy miles from there on that selfsame afternoon. Game was plentiful. You could hear the sound of guns passing over and back across the lakes through the scent of pine trees. Tinsley's father leaned his gun against a bush to lace his shoe, when a flurry of quail arose, some of them, in their fright, straight at Tinsley senior and his son."

Remington looked into his glass to see what he was telling. "A quail knocked the gun down, it fired off, and the charge struck the elder Tinsley full in the face!"

"Good God!"

In my mind I saw the elder Tinsley stagger, grasp at his red mask of face, drop his hands now gloved with scarlet fabric, and fall, even as the young boy, struck numb and ashen, swayed and could not believe what he saw.

I drank my sherry hastily, and Remington continued:

"But that wasn't the least horrible of details. One might think it sufficient. But what followed later was something indescribable to the lad. He ran five miles for help, leaving his father behind, dead, but refusing to believe him dead. Screaming, panting, ripping his clothes from his body, young Tinsley made it to a road and back with a doctor and two other men in something like six hours. The sun was just going down when they hurried back through the pine forest to where the father lay." Remington paused and shook his head from side to side, eyes closed. "The entire body, the arms, the legs, and the shattered contour of what was once a strong, handsome face, was clustered over and covered with scuttling, twitching, insects, bugs, ants of every and all descriptions, drawn by the sweet odor of blood. It was impossible to see one square inch of the elder Tinsley's body!"

MENTALLY, I created the pine trees, and the three men towering over the small boy who stood before a body upon which a tide of small attentively hungry creatures ebbed and flowed, subsided and returned. Somewhere, a woodpecker knocked, a squirrel scampered, and the quail beat their small wings. And the three men held onto the small boy's arms and turned him away from the sight. . .

Some of the boy's agony and terror must have escaped my lips, for when my mind returned to the library, I found Remington staring at me, and my sherry glass broken in half causing a bleeding cut which I did not feel.

"So that's why Tinsley has this fear of insects and animals," I breathed, several minutes later, settling back, my heart pounding. "And it's grown like a yeast over the years, to obsess him."

Remington expressed an interest in Tinsley's problem, but I allayed him and inquired, "What was his father's profession?"

"I thought you knew!" cried Remington in faint surprise. "Why the elder Tinsley was a very famous naturalist. Very famous indeed. Ironic, in a way, isn't it, that he should be killed by the very creatures which he studied, eh?"

"Yes." I rose up and shook Remington's hand. "Thanks, Lawyer. You've helped me very much. I must get going now."

"Good-by."

I stood in the open air before Remington's house and the ant still scrambled over my hand, wildly. I began to understand and sympathize deeply with Tinsley for the first time. I went to pick up Susan in my car.

Susan pushed the veil of her hat back from her eyes and looked off into the distance and said, "What you've told me pretty well puts the finger on Tinsley, all right. He's been brooding." She waved a hand. "Look around. See how easy it would be to believe that insects are really the horrors he makes them out to be. There's a Monarch butterfly pacing us." She licked a fingernail. "Is it listening to our every word? Tinsley the elder was a naturalist. What happened? He interfered, busybodied where he wasn't wanted, so They, They who control the animals and insects, killed him. Night and day for the last ten years that thought has been on Tinsley's mind, and everywhere he looked he saw the numerous life of the world and the suspicions began to take shape, form and substance!"

"I can't say I blame him," I said. "If my father had been killed in a like fashion—"

"He refuses to talk when there's an insect in the room, isn't that it, Steve?"

"Yes, he's afraid they'll discover that he knows about them."

"You can see how silly that is, yourself, can't you. He couldn't possibly keep it a secret, granting that butterflies and ants and houseflies are evil, for you and I have talked about it, and others too. But he persists in his delusion that as long as he himself says no word in Their presence. . .well, he's still alive, isn't he? They haven't destroyed him, have they? And if They were evil and feared his knowledge, wouldn't they have destroyed him long since?"

"Maybe they're playing with him?" I wondered. "You know it is strange. The Elder Tinsley was on the verge of some great discovery when he was killed. It sort of fits a pattern."

"I'd better get you out of this hot sun," laughed Susan, swerving the car into a shady lane.

THE next Sunday morning, Bill Tinsley and Susan and I attended church and sat in the middle of the soft music and the vast muteness and quiet color. During the service, Bill began to laugh to himself until I shoved him in the ribs and asked him what was wrong.

"Look at the Reverend up there," replied Tinsley, fascinated. "There's a fly on his bald spot. A fly in church. They go everywhere, I tell you. Let the minister talk, it won't do a bit of good. Oh, gentle, Lord."

After the service we drove for a picnic lunch in the country under a warm blue sky. A few times, Susan tried to get Bill on the subject of his fear, but Bill only pointed at the train of ants swarming across the picnic linen and shook his head, angrily. Later, he apologized and with a certain tenseness, asked us to come up to his house that evening, he couldn't go on much longer by himself, he was running low on funds, the business was liable to go on the rocks, and he needed us. Susan and I held onto his hands and understood. In a matter of forty minutes we were inside the locked study of his house, cocktails in our midst, with Tinsley pacing anxiously back and forth, dandling his familiar flyswatter, searching the room and killing two flies before he made his speech.

He tapped the wall. "Metal. No maggots, ticks, woodbeetles, termites. Metal chairs, metal everything. We're alone, aren't we?"

I looked around. "I think so."

"Good." Bill drew in a breath and exhaled. "Have you ever wondered about God and the Devil and the Universe, Susan, Steve? Have you ever realized how cruel the world is? How we try to get ahead, but are hit over the head every time we succeed a fraction?" I nodded silently, and Tinsley went on, "You sometimes wonder where God is, or where the Forces of Evil are. You wonder how these forces get around, if they are invisible angels. Well, the solution is simple and clever and scientific. We are being watched constantly. Is there ever a minute in our lives that passes without a fly buzzing in our room with us, or an ant crossing our path, or a flea on a dog, or a cat itself, or a beetle or moth rushing through the dark, or a mosquito constantly skirting around a netting?"

Susan said nothing, but looked at Tinsley easily and without making him self-conscious. Tinsley sipped his drink.

"Small winged things we pay no heed to, that follow us every day of our lives, that listen to our prayers and our hopes and our desires and fears, that listen to us and then tell what there is to be told to Him or Her or It, or whatever Force sends them out into the world."

"Oh, come now," I said impulsively.

To my surprise, Susan hushed me. "Let him finish," she said. Then she looked at Tinsley. "Go on."

Tinsley said, "It sounds silly, but I've gone about this in a fairly scientific manner. First, I've never been able to figure out a reason for so many insects, for their varied profusion. They seem to be nothing but irritants to we mortals, at the very least. Well, a very simple explanation is as follows: the government of Them is a small body, it may be one person alone, and It or They can't be everywhere. Flies can be. So can ants and other insects. And since we mortals cannot tell one ant from another, all identity is impossible and one fly is as good as another, their set-up is perfect. There are so many of them and there have been so many for years, that we pay no attention to them. Like Hawthorne's 'Scarlet Letter,' they are right before our eyes and familiarity has blinded us to them."

"I don't believe any of that," I said directly.

"Let me finish!" cried Tinsley, hurriedly. "Before you judge. There is a Force, and it must have a contactual system, a communicative set-up, so that life can be twisted and adjusted according to each individual. Think of it, billions of insects, checking, correlating and reporting on their special subjects, controlling humanity!"

"Look here!" I burst out. "You've grown worse ever since that accident back when you were a kid! You've let it feed on your mind! You can't go on fooling yourself!" I got up.

"Steve!" Susan rose, too, her cheeks reddening. "You won't help with talk like that! Sit down." She pressed against my chest. Then she turned rapidly to Tinsley. "Bill, if what you say should be true, if all of your plans, your insect-proofing your house, your silence in the presence of their small winged creatures, your campaign, your ant pastes and pitifully small insect sprays, should really mean something, why are you still alive?"

"Why?" shouted Tinsley. "Because, I've worked alone."

"But if there is a They, Bill, They have known of you for a month now, because Steve and I have told them, haven't we Steve, and yet you live. Isn't that proof that you must be wrong."

"You told them? You told!" Tinsley's eyes showed white and furious. "No, you didn't, I made Steve promise!"

"Listen to me." Susan's voice shook him, as she might shake a small boy by the scruff of his neck. "Listen, before you scream. Will you agree to an experiment?"

"What kind of experiment?"

"From now on, all of your plans will be above-board, in the open. If nothing happens to you in the next eight weeks, then you'll have to agree that your fears are baseless."

"But they'll kill me!"

"Listen! Steve and I will stake our lives on it, Bill. If you die, Steve and I'll die with you. I value my life greatly, Bill, and Steve values his. We don't believe in your horrors, and we want to get you out of this."

Tinsley hung his head and looked at the floor. "I don't know. I don't know."

"Eight weeks, Bill. You can go on the rest of your life, if you wish, manufacturing insecticides, but for God's sake don't have a nervous breakdown over it. The very fact of your living should be some sort of proof that They bear you no ill-will, and have left you intact?"

TINSLEY had to admit to that. But he was reluctant to give in. He murmured almost to himself, "This is the beginning of the campaign. It might take a thousand years, but in the end we can liberate ourselves."

"You can be liberated in eight weeks, Bill, don't you see? If we can prove that insects are blameless? For the next eight weeks, carry on your campaign, advertise it in weekly magazines and papers, thrust it to the hilt, tell everyone, so that if you should die, the word will be left behind. Then, when the eight weeks are up, you'll be liberated and free, and won't that feel good to you, Bill, after all these years?"

Something happened then that startled us. Buzzing over our heads, a fly came by. It had been in the room with us all the time, and yet I had sworn that, earlier, I had seen none. Tinsley began to shiver. I didn't know what I was doing, I seemed to react mechanically to some inner drive. I grabbed at the air and caught the tight buzzing in a cupped hand. Then I crushed it hard, staring at Bill and Susan. Their faces were chalky.

"I got it," I said crazily. "I got the damned thing, and I don't know why."

I opened my hand. The fly dropped to the floor. I stepped on it as I had seen Bill often step on them, and my body was cold for no reason. Susan stared at me as if she'd lost her last friend.

"What am I saying?" I cried. "I don't believe a damn word of all this filth!"

It was dark outside the thick-glassed window. Tinsley managed to light a cigarette and then, because all three of us were in a strange state of nerves, offered to let us have rooms in the house for the night. Susan said she would stay if: "you promise to give the eight-week trial a chance."

"You'd risk your life on it?" Bill couldn't make Susan out.

Susan nodded gravely. "We'll be joking about it next year."

Bill said, "All right. The eight-week trial it is."

My room, upstairs, had a fine view of the spreading country hills. Susan stayed in the room next to mine, and Bill slept across the hall. Lying in bed I heard the crickets chirping outside my window, and I could hardly bear the sound.

I closed the window.

Later in the night I got no sleep so I began imagining that a mosquito was soaring freely about in the dark of my room. Finally, I robed myself and fumbled down to the kitchen, not actually hungry, but wanting something to do to stop my nervousness. I found Susan bending over the refrigerator trays, selecting food.

We looked at one another. We handed plates of stuff to the table and sat stiffly down. The world was unreal to us. Somehow, being around Tinsley made the universe insecure and misty underfoot. Susan, for all her training and mind-culture, was still a woman, and deep under, women are superstitious.

To top it all, we were about to plunge our knives into the half-shattered carcass of a chicken when a fly landed upon it.

We sat looking at the fly for five minutes. The fly walked around on the chicken, flew up, circled, and came back to promenade a drumstick.

We put the chicken back in the ice-box, joking very quietly about it, talked uneasily for awhile, and returned upstairs, where we shut our doors and felt alone. I climbed into bed and began having bad dreams before I shut my eyes. My wrist-watch set up an abominable loud clicking in the blackness, and it had clicked several thousand times when I heard the scream.

I DON'T mind hearing a woman scream occasionally, but a man's scream is so strange, and is heard so rarely, that when it finally comes, it turns your blood into an arctic torrent. The screaming seemed to be borne all though the house and it seemed I heard some frantic words babbled that sounded like, "Now I know why They let me live!"

I pulled the door wide in time to see Tinsley running down the hall, his clothing drenched and soaked, his body wet from head to foot. He turned when he saw me, and cried out, "Stay away from me, oh God, Steve, don't touch me, or it'll happen to you, too! I was wrong! I was wrong, yes, but near the truth, too, so very near!"

Before I could prevent him, he had descended the stairs and slammed the door below. Susan suddenly stood beside me. "He's gone mad for certain this time, Steve, we've got to stop him."

A noise from the bathroom drew my attention. Peering in, I turned off the shower which was steaming hot, drumming insistently, scaldingly, on the yellow tiles.

Bill's car thundered into life, a jerking of gears, and the car careened down the road at an insane speed.

"We've got to follow him," insisted Susan. "He'll kill himself! He's trying to run away from something. Where's your car?"

We ran to my car through a cold wind, under very cold stars, climbed in, warmed the motor, and were off, bewildered and breathless. "Which way?" I shouted.

"He went east, I'm certain."

"East it is, then." I poked up the speed and muttered, "Oh, Bill, you idiot, you fool. Slow down. Come back. Wait for me, you nut." I felt Susan's arm creep through my elbow and hold tight. She whispered, "Faster!" and I said, "We're going sixty now, and there are some bad turns coming!"

The night had gotten into us; the talk of insects, the wind, the roaring of the tires over hard concrete, the beating of our frightened hearts. "There!" Susan pointed. I saw a gash of light cutting through the hills a mile away. "More speed, Steve!"

More speed. Aching foot pressing out the miles, motor thundering, stars wheeling crazily overhead, lights cutting the dark away into dismembered sections. And in my mind I saw Tinsley again, in the hall, drenched to the skin. He had been standing under the hot, scalding shower! Why? Why?

"Bill, stop, you idiot! Stop driving! Where are you going, what are you running away from, Bill?"

We were catching up with him now. We drew closer, yard by yard, bit by bit, around curves where gravity yanked at us and tried to smash us against hugh granite bulwarks of earth, over hills and down into night-filled valleys, over streams and bridges, around curves again.

"He's only about six hundred yards ahead, now," said Susan.

"We'll get him." I twisted the wheel. "So help me God, we'll get to him!"

Then, quite unexpectedly, it happened.

TINSLEY'S car slowed down. It slowed and crept along the road. We were on a straight length of concrete that continued for a mile in a firm line, no curves or hills. His car slowed to a crawling, puttering pace. By the time we pulled up in back of him, Tinsley's roadster was going three miles an hour, just poking along at a pace like a man walking, its lights glaring.

"Steve—" Susan's fingernails cut my wrist, tight, hard. "Something's—wrong."

I knew it. I honked the horn. Silence. I honked again and it was a lonely, blatant sound in the darkness and the emptiness. I parked the car. Tinsley's car moved on like a metal snail ahead of us, its exhaust whispering to the night. I opened the door and slid out. "Stay here," I warned Susan. In the reflected glare her face was like snow and her lips were trembling.

I ran to the car, calling, "Bill, Bill—!"

Tinsley didn't answer. He couldn't.

He just lay there behind the wheel, quietly, and the car moved ahead, slowly, so very slowly.

I got sick to my stomach. I reached in and braked the car and cut the ignition, not looking at him, my mind working in an agonizingly slow kind of new and frightened horror.

I looked once more at Bill where he slumped with his head back.

It didn't do any good to kill flies, kill moths, kill termites, kill mosquitoes. The Evil ones were too clever for that.

Kill all the insects you find, destroy the dogs and the cats and the birds, the weasels and the chipmunks, and the termites, and all animals and insects in the world, it can be done, eventually by man, killing, killing killing, and after you are finished, after that job is done you still have—microbes.

Bacteria. Microbes. Yes. Unicellular and bi-cellular and multi-cellular microscopic life!

Millions of them, billions of them on every pore, on every inch of flesh of your body. On your lips when you speak, inside your ears when you listen, on your skin when you feel, on your tongue when you taste, in your eyes when you see! You can't wash them off, you can't destroy all of them in the world! It would be an impossible task, impossible! You discovered that, didn't you, Bill. I stared at him. We almost convinced you, didn't we, Bill, that insects were not guilty, were not Watchers. We were right about that part of it. We convinced you and you got to thinking tonight, and you hit upon the real crux of the situation. Bacteria. That's why the shower was running at home just now! But you can't kill bacteria fast enough. They multiply and multiply, instantly!

I looked at Bill, slumped there. "The flyswatter, you thought the flyswatter was enough. That's a—laugh."

Bill, is that you lying there with your body changed by leprosy and gangrene and tuberculosis and malaria and bubonic all at once? Where is the skin of your face, Bill, and the flesh of your bones, your fingers lying clenched to the steering wheel. Oh, God, Tinsley, the color and the smell of you—the rotting fetid combination of disease you are!

Microbes. Messengers. Millions of them. Billions of them.

God can't be everywhere at once. Maybe He invented flies, insects to watch his peoples.

COMING SOON: ANOTHER RAY BRADBURY HAUNTING CLASSIC

The entire world knows of the great genius of Nathaniel Hawthorne, and his name is everywhere associated with the gloomier aspects of literature. His great works of supernatural, gothic, science fiction and horror are constantly in print. Fewer are aware of the life-long preoccupation of his son Julian Hawthorne with supernatural, fantasy and science fiction though there have been times when individual short stories of his have achieved classic stature. Almost no one seems to remember the daughter of Julian Hawthorne, who continued the tradition of family writing in the realm of the supernatural, though she had a scholarly bent and achieved far greater distinction as a biographer.

Her name was Hildegarde Okison Hawthorne and she was born in New York City in 1871, and died December 10, 1952. She did a great deal of writing of short stories and books for young readers, even conducting the book review column for ST. NICHOLAS MAGAZINE at the turn of the century. She was extremely versatile, and in addition to fiction and reviews wrote good verse, essays, and most important, biographies. Her full-length biographies cover such prominent figures as Ralph Waldo Everson, Oliver Wendell Holmes, John C. Fremont and Matthew Fontaine Maury.

A collection of ghost stories, edited by William Dean Howells for Harper's under the title of *Shapes That Haunt the Dusk* in 1907, included her brief story from the March, 1897 HARPER'S NEW MONTHLY MAGAZINE titled *Perdita.* It is a poignant tale, very modern in the telling and is enhanced by the fact that it is told by a woman. Even more important, it adds a third generation of Hawthornes to the tradition of telling of the strange and unusual.

Perdita

By HILDEGARDE HAWTHORNE

ALFALFA RANCH, low, wide, with spreading verandas all overgrown by roses and woodbine, and commanding on all sides a wide view of the rolling alfalfa-fields, was a most bewitching place for a young couple to spend the first few months of their married life. So Jack and I were naturally much delighted when Aunt Agnes asked us to consider it our own for as long as we chose. The ranch, in spite of its distance from the nearest town, surrounded as it was by the prairies, and without a neighbor within a three-mile radious, was yet luxuriously fitted with all the modern conveniences. Aunt Agnes was a rich young widow, and had built the place after her husband's death, intending to live there with her child, to whom she transferred all the wealth of devotion she had lavished on her husband. The child, however, had died when only three years old, and Aunt Agnes, as soon as she recovered sufficient strength, had left Alfalfa Ranch, intending never to visit the place again. All this had happened nearly ten years ago, and the widow, relinquishing all the advantages her youth and beauty, quite as much as her wealth, could give her , had devoted herself to work amid the poor of New York.

At my wedding, which she heartily approved, and where to a greater extent than ever before she cast off the almost morbid quietness which had grown habitual with her, she seemed particularly anxious that Jack and I should accept the loan of Alfalfa Ranch, apparently having an old idea that the power of our happiness would somehow lift the cloud of sorrow which, in her mind, brooded over the place. I had not been strong, and Jack was overjoyed at such an opportunity of taking me into the country. High as our expectations were, the beauty of the place far exceeded them all. What color! What glorious sunsets! And the long rides we took, seeming to be utterly tireless in that fresh sweet air!

One afternoon I sat on the veranda at the western wing of the house. The veranda here was broader than elsewhere, and it was reached only by a flight of steps leading up from the lawn on one side, and by a door opposite these steps that opened into Jack's study. The rest of this veranda was enclosed by a high railing, and by wire nettings so thickly overgrown with vines that the place was always very shady. I sat near the steps, where I could watch the sweep of the great shadows thrown by the clouds that were sailing before the west wind. Jack was inside, writing, and now and then he would say something to me through the open window. As I sat, lost in delight at the beauty of the view and the sweetness of the flower-scented air, I marvelled that Aunt Agnes could ever have left so charming a spot. "She must still love it," I thought, getting up to move my chair to where I might see still further over the prairies, "and some time she will come back—" At this moment I happened to glance to the further end of the veranda, and there I saw, to my amazement, a little child seated on the floor, playing with the shifting shadows of the tangled creepers. It was a little girl in a daintily embroidered white dress, with golden curls around her baby head. As I still gazed, she suddenly turned, with a roguish toss of the yellow hair, and fixed her serious blue eyes on me.

"Baby!" I cried. "Where did you come from? Where's your mamma, darling?" And I took a step towards her.

"What's that, Silvia?" called Jack from within. I turned my head and saw him sitting at his desk.

"Come quick, Jack; there's the loveliest baby—" I turned back to the child looked, blinked, and at this moment Jack stepped out beside me.

"Baby?" he inquired. "What on earth are you talking about, Silvia dearest?"

"Why, but—" I exclaimed. "There *was* one! How did she get away? She was sitting right there when I called."

"A *baby!*" repeated my husband. "My dear, babies don't appear and disappear like East-Indian magicians. You have been napping, and are trying to conceal the shameful fact."

"Jack," I said, decisively, "don't you suppose I know a baby when I see one? She was sitting right there, playing with the shadows, and I— It's certainly very queer!"

Jack grinned. "Go and put on your habit," he replied; "the horses will be here in ten minutes. And remember that when you have accounted for her disappearance, her presence still remains to be explained. Or perhaps you think Wah Sing produced her from his sleeve?"

I laughed. Wah Sing was our Chinese cook, and more apt, I thought, to put something up his sleeve than to take anything out.

"I suppose I *was* dreaming," I said, "though I could almost as well believe I had only dreamed our marriage."

"Or rather," observed Jack, "that our marriage had only dreamed us."

About a week later I received a letter from Aunt Agnes. Among other things, chiefly relating to New York's slums, she said:

"I am in need of rest, and if you and Jack could put up with me for a few days, I believe I should like to get back to the old place. As you know, I have always dreaded a return there, but lately I seem somehow to have lost that dread. I feel that the time has come for me to be there again, and I am sure you will not mind me."

Most assuredly we would not mind her. We sat in the moonlight that night on the veranda, Jack swinging my hammock slowly, and talked of Aunt Agnes. The moon silvered the waving alfalfa, and sifted through the twisted vines that fenced us in, throwing intricate and ever-changing patterns on the smooth flooring. There was a hum of insects in the air, and the soft wind ever and anon blew a fleecy cloud over the moon, dimming for a moment her serene splendor.

"Who knows?" said Jack, lighting another cigar. "This may be a turningpoint in Aunt Agnes's life, and she may once more be something like the sunny, happy girl your mother describes. It may mean the beginning of a new life for her."

"Yes," I answered. "It isn't right that her life should always be shadowed by that early sorrow. She is so lovely, and could be so happy. Now that she has taken the first step, there is no reason why she shouldn't go on."

"We'll do what we can to help her," responded my husband. "Let me fix your cushions, darling; they have slipped." He rose to do so, and suddenly stood still, facing the further end of the veranda. His expression was so peculiar that I turned, following the direction of his eyes, even before his smothered exclamation of "Silvia, look there!" reached me.

Standing in the fluttering moonlight and shadows was the same little girl I had seen already. She still wore white, and her tangled curls floated shining around her head. She seemed to be smiling, and slightly shook her head at us.

"What does it mean, Jack?" I whispered, slipping out of the hammock.

"How did she get there? Come!" said he, and we walked hastily towards the little thing, who again shook her head. Just at this moment another cloud obscured the moon for a few seconds, and though in the uncertain twilight I fancied I still saw her, yet when the cloud passed she was not to be found.

Aunt Agnes certainly did look as though she needed rest. She seemed very frail, and the color had entirely left her face. But her curling hair was as golden as ever, and her figure as girlish and graceful. She kissed me tenderly, and kept my hand in hers as she wandered over the house and took long looks across the prairie.

"Isn't it beautiful?" Aunt Agnes asked, softly.

"Just the place to be happy in! I've always had a strange fancy that I should be happy here again some day, and now I feel as though that day had almost come. You are happy, aren't you, dear?"

I looked at Jack, and felt the tears coming to my eyes. "Yes, I am happy. I did not know one could be so happy," I answered, after a moment.

Aunt Agnes smiled her sweet smile and kissed me again. "God bless you and your Jack! You almost make me feel young again."

"As though you could possibly feel anything else," I retorted, laughing. "You little humbug, to pretend you are old!" and slipping my arm round her waist, for we had always been dear friends, I walked off to chat with her in her room.

We took a ride that afternoon, for Aunt Agnes wanted another gallop over that glorious prairie. The exercise and the perfect afternoon brought back the color to her cheeks.

"I think I shall be much better tomorrow," she observed, as we trotted home. "What a country this is, and what horses!" slipping her hand down her mount's glossy neck. "I did right to come back here. I do not believe I will go away again." And she smiled on Jack and me, who laughed, and said she would find it a difficult thing to attempt.

We all three came out on the veranda to see the sunset. It was always a glorious sight, but this evening it was more than usually magnificent. Immense rays of pale blue and pink spread over the sky, and the clouds, which stretched in horizontal masses, glowed rose and golden. The whole sky was luminous and tender, and seemed to tremble with light.

We sat silent, looking at the sky and at the shadowy grass that seemed to meet it. Slowly the color deepened and faded.

"There can never be a lovelier evening," said Aunt Agnes, with a sigh.

"Don't say that," replied Jack. "It is only the beginning of even more perfect ones."

Aunt Agnes rose with a slight shiver. "It grows chilly when the sun goes," she murmured, and turned lingeringly to enter the house. Suddenly she gave a startled exclamation. Jack and I jumped up and looked at her. She stood with both hands pressed to her heart, looking—

"The child again," said Jack, in a low voice, laying his hand on my arm.

He was right. There in the gathering shadow stood the little girl in the white dress. Her hands were stretched towards us, and her lips parted in a smile. A belated gleam of sunlight seemed to linger in her hair.

"Perdita!" cried Aunt Agnes, in a voice that shook with a kind of terrible joy. Then, with a stifled sob, she ran forward and sank before the baby, throwing her arms about her. The little girl leaned back her golden head and looked at Aunt Agnes with her great, serious eyes. Then she flung both baby arms round her neck, and lifted her sweet mouth—

Jack and I turned away, looking at each other with tears in our eyes. A slight sound made us turn back. Aunt Agnes had fallen forward to the floor, and the child was nowhere to be seen.

We rushed up, and Jack raised my aunt in his arms and carried her into the house. But she was quite dead. The little child we never saw again.

"WEIRD TALES" NEEDS FRIENDS — TALK ABOUT US TO YOURS

One of the most popular and appreciated literary discoveries WEIRD TALES ever made in its long and distinguished life, was that of Robert E. Howard whose works appear everywhere on the paperback stalls, whose characters are featured in a number of comic magazines and whose followers have become a cult. It is a simple matter to read his works and determine the basis for his posthumous success. For this first issue of the newly-revived WEIRD TALES, we have decided to bring our readers the first story he ever sold this or any other magazine, *Spear and Fang.* It appeared in the July, 1925 issue when Howard was 19 years old and in that issue he was already in the company of the greats. H. P. Lovecraft poured one of his favorite monstrosities out of an ancient house in *The Unamable,* Henry S. Whitehead told of a man and a woman who simultaneously at a distance dreamed the same dream in *The Wonderful Thing,* H. Warner Munn's classic *The Werewolf of Ponkert* was featured on the cover, and Seabury Quinn was playing the part of a reporter of New England witchcraft in *The End of the Horror.* Howard's story, though not a masterpiece to ring down the ages, showed the basic elements of primitive civilizations, bloody combat and erotic implication that would be hallmarks of so many of his works in the years ahead. There would not be many years, for Howard would commit suicide on June 11, 1936 on learning that his mother would never regain consciousness from a coma she had lapsed into.

Psychological and psychiatric explanations of Howard's behavior have been given and they seem to make sense except for the ommission of one factor. All reports of Howard tell of a lusty 195 pound man, of ready temper, big fists, and gun-carrying proclivity. His fictional characters are nothing if not extraordinarily robust. His appearance and his fiction give the impression that there could be no physical reason why he would ever want to take his own life. However, there is reference in one of his letters to a heart condition. Perhaps Howard's medical record *prior* to his death should be explored as well as his fiction to determine if there were physical as well as mental reasons for his suicide.

In a letter to Farnsworth Wright, editor of WEIRD TALES in 1931 Howard did make a prophetic statement when he wrote: "Every now and then one of us finds the going too hard and blows his brains out, but it's all in the game, I reckon."

Spear and Fang

By ROBERT E. HOWARD

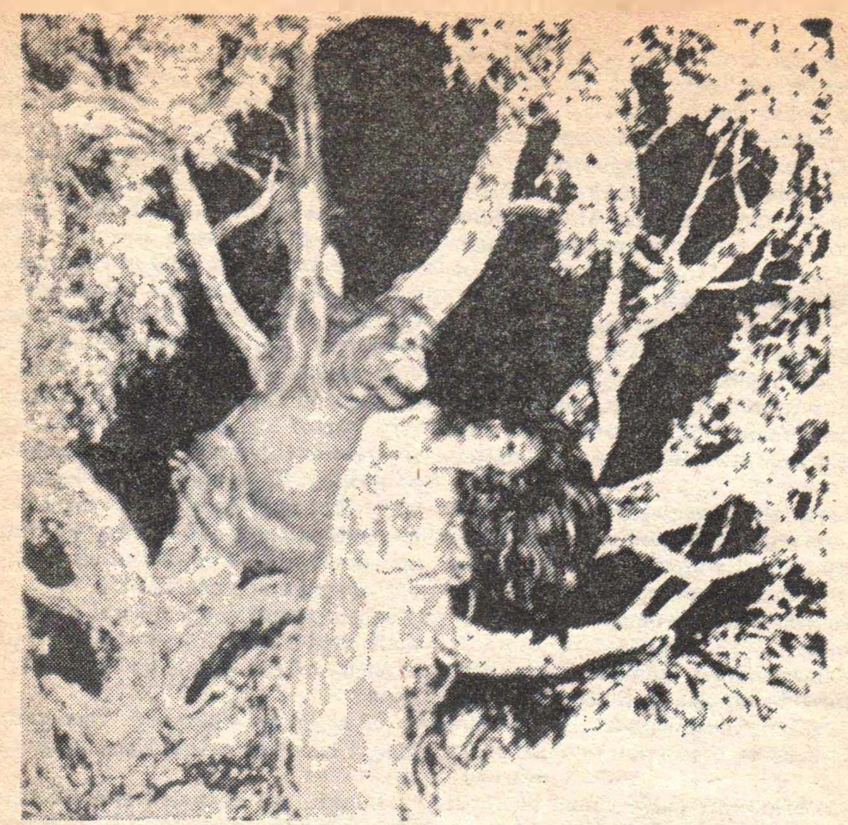
A-AEA crouched close to the cave mouth, watching Ga-nor with wondering eyes. Ga-nor's occupation interested her, as well as Ga-nor himself. As for Ga-nor, he was too occupied with his work to notice her. A torch stuck in a niche in the cave wall dimly illuminated the roomy cavern, and by its light Ga-nor was laboriously tracing figures on the wall. With a piece of flint he scratched the outline and then with a twig dipped in ocher paint completed the figure. The result was crude, but grave evidence of real artistic genius, struggling for expression.

It was a mammoth that he sought to depict, and little A-aea's eyes widened with wonder and admiration. Wonderful! What though the beast lacked a leg and had no tail! It was tribesmen, just struggling out of utter barbarism, who were the critics, and to them Ga-nor was a past master.

However, it was not to watch the reproduction of a mammoth that A-aea hid among the scanty bushes by Ga-nor's cave. The admiration for the painting paled beside the look of positive adoration with which she favored the artist. Indeed, Ga-nor was not unpleasing to the eye. Tall he was, towering well over six feet, leanly built, with mighty shoulders and narrow hips, the build of a fighting man. Both his hands and his feet were long and slim; and his features, thrown into bold profile by the flickering torchlight, were intelligent, with a high, broad forehead, topped by a mane of sandy hair.

A-aea herself was very easy to look upon. Her hair, as well as her eyes, was black and fell about her slim shoulders in a rippling wave. No ocher tattooing tinted her cheek, for she was still unmated.

Both the girl and the youth were perfect specimens of the great Cro-Magnon race



"And the girl, half fainting, knew he was taking her to his lair."

which came from no man knows where and announced and enforced their supremacy over beast and beast-man.

A-aea glanced about nervously. All ideas to the contrary, customs and taboos are much more narrow and vigorously enforced among savage peoples.

The more primitive a race, the more intolerant their customs. Vice and licentiousness may be the rule, but the appearance of vice is shunned and condemned. So if A-aea had been discovered, hiding near the cave of an unattached young man, denunciation as a shameless woman would have been her lot, and doubtless a public whipping.

To be proper, A-aea should have played the modest, demure maiden, perhaps skillfully arousing the young artist's interest without seeming to do so. Then, if the youth was pleased, would have followed public wooing by means of crude love-songs and music from reed pipes. Then barter with her parents and then — marriage. Or no wooing at all, if the lover was wealthy.

But little A-aea was herself a mark of progress. Covert glances had failed to attract the attention of the young man who seemed engrossed with his artistry, so she had taken to the unconventional way of spying upon him, in hopes of finding some way to win him.

Ga-nor turned from his completed work, stretched and glanced toward the cave mouth. Like a frightened rabbit, little A-aea ducked and darted away.

When Ga-nor emerged from the cave, he was puzzled by the sight of a small, slender footprint in the soft loam outside the cave.

A-aea walked primly toward her own cave, which was, with most of the others, at some distance from Ga-nor's cave. As she did so, she noticed a group of warriors talking excitedly in front of the chief's cave.

A mere girl might not intrude upon the councils of men, but such was A-aea's curiosity, that she dared a scolding by slipping nearer. She heard the words "footprint" and "gur-na" (man-ape).

The footprints of a gur-na had been found in the forest, not far from the caves.

"Gur-na" was a word of hatred and horror to the people of the caves, for creatures whom the tribesmen called "gur-na", or man-apes, were the hairy monsters of another age, the brutish men of the Neanderthal. More feared than mammoth or tiger, they had ruled the forests until the Cro-Magnon men had come and waged savage warfare against them. Of mighty power and little mind, savage, bestial and cannibalistic, they inspired the tribesmen with loathing and horror — a horror transmitted through the ages in tales of ogres and goblins, of werewolves and beast-men.

They were fewer and more cunning now. No longer they rushed roaring to battle, but cunning and frightful, they slunk about the forests, the terror of all beasts, brooding in their brutish minds with hatred for the men who had driven them from the best hunting grounds.

And ever the Cro-Magnon men trailed them down and slaughtered them, until sullenly they had withdrawn far into the deep forests. But the fear of them remained with the tribesmen, and no woman went into the jungle alone.

Sometimes children went, and sometimes they returned not; and searchers found but signs of a ghastly feast, with tracks that were not the tracks of beasts, nor yet the tracks of men.

And so a hunting party would go forth and hunt the monster down. Sometimes it gave battle and was slain, and sometimes it fled before them and escaped into the depths of the forest, where they dared not follow. Once a hunting party, reckless with the chase, had pursued a fleeing gur-na into the deep forest and there, in a deep ravine, where overhanging limbs shut out the sunlight, numbers of the Neanderthalers had come upon them.

So no more entered the forests.

A-aea turned away, with a glance at the forest. Somewhere in its depths lurked the beast-man, piggish eyes glinting crafty hate, malevolent, frightful.

Someone stepped across her path. It was Ka-nanu, the son of a councilor of the chief.

She drew away with a shrug of her shoulders. She did not like Ka-nanu and she was afraid of him. He wooed her with a mocking air, as if he did it merely for amusement and would take her whenever he wished, anyway. He seized her gently by the wrist.

"Turn not away, fair maiden," said he. "It is your slave, Ka-nanu."

"Let me go," she answered. "I must go to the spring for water."

"Then I will go with you, moon of delight, so that no beast may harm you."

And accompany her he did, in spite of her protests.

"There is a gur-na abroad," he told her sternly. "It is lawful for a man to accompany even an unmated maiden, for protection. And I am Ka-nanu," he added, in a different tone; "do not resist me too far, or I will teach you obedience."

A-aea knew somewhat of the man's ruthless nature. Many of the tribal girls looked with favor on Ka-nanu, for he was bigger and taller even than Ga-nor and more handsome in a reckless, cruel way. But A-aea loved Ga-nor and she was afaid of Ka-nanu. Her very fear of him kept her from resisting his approaches too much. Ga-nor was known to be gentle with women, if careless of them, while Ka-nanu, thereby showing himself to be another mark of progress, was proud of his success with women and used his power over them in no gentle fashion.

A-aea found Ka-nanu was to be feared more than a beast, for at the spring just out of sight of the caves, he seized her in his arms.

"A-aea," he whispered, "my little antelope, I have you at last. You shall not escape me."

In vain she struggled and pleaded with him. Lifting her in his mighty arms he strode away into the forest.

Frantically she strove to escape, to dissuade him.

"I am not powerful enough to resist you," she said, "but I will accuse you before the tribe."

"You will never accuse me, little antelope," he said, and she read another, even more sinister intention in his cruel countenance.

On and on into the forest he carried her, and in the midst of a glade he paused, his hunter's instinct alert.

From the trees in front of them dropped a hideous monster, a hairy, misshapen, frightful thing.

A-aea's scream re-echoed through the forest, as the thing approached. Ka-nanu, white-lipped and horrified, dropped A-aea to the ground and told her to run. Then, drawing knife and ax, he advanced.

The Neanderthal man plunged forward on short, gnarled legs. He was covered with hair and his features were more hideous than an ape's because of the grotesque quality of the man in them. Flat, flaring nostrils, retreating chin, fangs, no forehead whatever, great, immensely long arms dangling from sloping, incredible shoulders, the monster seemed like the devil himself to the terrified girl. His apelike head came scarcely to Ka-nanu's shoulders, yet he must have outweighed the warrior by nearly a hundred pounds.

On he came like a charging buffalo, and Ka-nanu met him squarely and boldly. With flint ax and obsidian dagger he thrust and smote, but the ax was brushed aside like a toy and the arm that held the knife snapped like a stick in the misshapen hand of the Neanderthaler. The girl saw the councilor's son wrenched from the ground and swung into the air, saw him hurled clear across the glade, saw the monster leap after him and rend him limb from limb.

Then the Neanderthaler turned his attention to her. A new expression came into his hideous eyes as he lumbered toward her, his great hairy hands horridly smeared with blood, reaching toward her.

Unable to flee, she lay dizzy with horror and fear. And the monster dragged her to him, leering into her eyes. He swung her over his shoulder and waddled away through the trees; and the girl, half-fainting, knew that he was taking her to his lair, where no man would dare come to rescue her.

Ga-nor came down to the spring to drink. Idly he noticed the faint footprints of a couple who had come before him. Idly he noticed that they had not returned.

Each footprint had its individual characteristic. That of the man he knew to be Ka-nanu. The other track was the same as that in front of his cave. He wondered, idly as Ga-nor was wont to do all things except the painting of pictures.

Then, at the spring, he noticed that the footprints of the girl ceased, but that the man's turned toward the jungle and were more deeply imprinted than before. Therefore Ka-nanu was carrying the girl.

Ga-nor was no fool. He knew that a man carries a girl into the forest for no good purpose. If she had been willing to go, she would not have been carried.

Now Ga-nor (another mark of progress) was inclined to meddle in things not pertaining to him. Perhaps another man would have shrugged his shoulders and gone his way, reflecting that it would not be well to interfere with a son of a councilor. But Ga-nor had few interests, and once his interest was roused he was inclined to see a thing through. Moreover, though not renowned as a fighter, he feared no man.

Therefore, he loosened ax and dagger in his belt, shifted his grip on his spear, and took up the trail.

On and on, deeper and deeper into the forest, the Neanderthaler carried little A-aea.

The forest was silent and evil, no birds, no insects, broke the stillness. Through the overhanging trees no sunlight filtered. On padded feet that made no noise the Neanderthaler hurried on.

Beasts slunk out of his path. Once a great python came slithering through the jungle and the Neanderthaler took to the trees with surprising speed for one of his gigantic bulk. He was not at home in the trees, however, not even as much as A-aea would have been.

Once or twice the girl glimpsed another such monster as her captor. Evidently they had gone far beyond the vaguely defined boundaries of her race. The other Neanderthal men avoided them. It was evident that they lived as do beasts, uniting only against some common enemy and not often then. Therein had lain the reason for the success of the Cro-Magnard's warfare against them.

Into a ravine he carried the girl, and into a cave, small and vaguely illumined by the light from without. He threw her roughly to the floor of the cave, where she lay, too terrified to rise.

The monster watched her, like some demon of the forest. He did not even jabber at her, as an ape would have done. The Neanderthalers had no form of speech whatever.

He offered her meat of some kind — uncooked, of course. Her mind reeling with horror, she saw that it was the arm of a Cro-Magnard child. When he saw she would not eat, he devoured it himself, tearing the flesh with great fangs.

He took her between his great hands, bruising her soft flesh. He ran rough fingers through her hair, and when he saw that he hurt her he seemed filled with a fiendish glee. He tore out handfuls of her hair, seeming to enjoy devilishly the torturing of his fair captive. A-aea set her teeth and would not scream as she had done at first, and presently he desisted.

The leopard-skin garment she wore seemed to enrage him. The leopard was his hereditary foe. He plucked it from her and tore it to pieces.

And meanwhile Ga-nor was hurrying through the forest. He was racing now, and his face was a devil's mask, for he had come upon the monster's tracks, leading away from it.

And in the cave in the ravine the Neanderthaler reached for A-aea.

She sprang back and he plunged toward her. He had her in a corner but she slipped under his arm and sprang away. He was still between her and the outside of the cave.

Unless she could get past him, he would corner her and seize her. So she pretended to spring to one side. The Neanderthaler lumbered in that direction, and quick as a cat she sprang the other way and darted past him, out into the ravine.

With a bellow he charged after her. A stone rolled beneath her foot, flinging her headlong; before she could rise his hand seized her shoulder. As he dragged her into the cave, she screamed, wildly, frenziedly, with no hope of rescue, just the scream of a woman in the grasp of a beast.

Ga-nor heard that scream as he bounded down into the ravine. He approached the cave swiftly but cautiously. As he looked in, he saw red rage. In the vague light of the cave, the great Neanderthaler stood, his piggish eyes on his foe, hideous, hairy, blood-smeared, while at his feet, her soft white body contrasting with the shaggy monster, her long hair gripped in his blood-stained hand, lay A-aea.

The Neanderthaler bellowed, dropped his captive and charged. And Ga-nor met him, not matching brute strength with his lesser might, but leaping back and out of the cave. His spear leaped and the monster bellowed as it tore through his arm. Leaping back again, the warrior jerked his spear and crouched. Again the Neanderthaler rushed, and again the warrior leaped away and thrust, this time for the great hairy chest. And so they battled, speed and intelligence against brute strength and savagery.

Once the great, lashing arm of the monster caught Ga-nor upon the shoulder and hurled him a dozen feet away, rendering that arm nearly useless for a time. The Neanderthaler bounded after him, but Ga-nor flung himself to one side and leaped to his feet. Again and again his spear drew blood, but apparently it only seemed to enrage the monster.

Then before the warrior knew it, the wall of the ravine was at his back and he heard A-aea shriek as the monster rushed in. The spear was torn from his hand and he was in the grasp of his foe. The great arms encircled his neck and shoulders, the great fangs sought his throat. He thrust his elbow under the retreating chin of his antagonist, and with his free hand struck the hideous face again and again; blows that would have felled an ordinary man but which the Neanderthal beast did not even notice.

Ga-nor felt consciousness going from him. The terrific arms were crushing him, threatening to break his neck. Over the shoulder of his foe he saw the girl approaching with a great stone, and he tried to motion her back.

With a great effort he reached down over the monster's arm and found his ax. But so close were they clinched together that he could not draw it. The Neanderthal man set himself to break his foe to pieces as one breaks a stick. But Ga-nor's elbow was thrust under his chin, and the more the Neanderthal man tugged, the deeper drove the elbow into this hairy throat. Presently he realized that fact and flung Ga-nor away from him. As he did so, the warrior drew his ax, and striking with the fury of desperation, clove the monster's head.

For a minute Ga-nor stood reeling above his foe, then he felt a soft form within his arms and saw a pretty face, close to his.

"Ga-nor!" A-aea whispered, and Ga-nor gathered the girl in his arms.

"What I have fought for I will keep," said he.

And so it was that the girl who went forth into the forest in the arms of an abductor came back in the arms of a lover and a mate.

In the Next Issue. . .A Classic Never Previously Reprinted

THE MAN ON THE GROUND

An eerie story of a feud to the death between two cowpunchers

By ROBERT E. HOWARD

The trappings of the supernatural, satanism, witchcraft and the occult fascinate Edward D. Hoch, whose characters dabble in them far more frequently than is respectable in detective stories. Certainly, one of the most unregenerate in this respect is Simon Ark, a detective familiar to enthusiasts of mayhem and murder. Since WEIRD TALES intends to run occult stories in each issue, this new story which had been purchased for our companion publication, MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAGAZINE, was eagerly appropriated by your editor as "more suitable."

Despite the fact that Edward D. Hoch has established an important reputation in the mystery field running as many as three series alternately in one magazine—Rand, Nick Velvet and Captain Leopold—and contributing to literally every extant publication devoted to that genre, he always has had a leaning towards horror and the supernatural. When Robert A. W. Lowndes launched THE MAGAZINE OF HORROR with the August, 1963 issue, Edward D. Hoch was a contributor in that first number and several that followed.

Hoch's splendid knowledge of the field of fantastic literature may be discerned from his various references within the context of *Funeral in the Fog,* which in the form of Simon Ark presents us with a remarkable occult detective with a truly modern outlook.

Funeral In The Fog

By EDWARD D. HOCH

AT TIMES Simon Ark was a difficult person to find. He might just as easily be halfway around the world in Egypt or Poland or India as in the little 10th Street apartment he sometimes used. So I wasn't really surprised when my secretary was unable to locate him for me on that misty November morning. I wasn't even surprised when the day ended with her still shaking her head over the telephone.

A day passed, two days, and then Simon Ark returned to New York. He didn't phone the office, but turned up at my home in Westchester on the evening of his return, shaking the rain from the great black coat he always wore when autumn came.

"Simon! My secretary's been trying to reach you everywhere!" I motioned him into the living room where Shelly was catching up on her reading. "Simon Ark's here, honey," I announced.

My wife was always happy to see Simon, perhaps because he had helped to bring us together. But she was a bit frightened of him at times too, as people often were.

"Hello, Simon," she said, rising to greet him. "It's good to see you again."

"You grow younger with every visit," he told Shelly.

She blushed nicely, perhaps considering him something of an expert on the subject of age. "Can I get you fellows something to drink?"

Simon Ark nodded and settled his big frame into a chair. "Anything will do—a little wine, perhaps."

"Just where have you been?" I asked him. "Egypt again?"

"No, only California this time. It's hardly the same, though they do have some interesting Ra cults springing up near Los Angeles." He smiled slightly at some memory. "The weather out there makes it difficult to return to New York. But why were you trying to reach me?"

"It's about your book on Satanism," I began as Shelly reappeared with the drinks. "We received an interesting letter about it last week."

"After all this time!" Simon marveled. "Surely it must be eight years since you published my little study."

"Books on Satanism and witchcraft are big these days. It's one of our stronger backlist items. Of course we always get the usual number of crank letters, and I know you do too, but this one seems more interesting than most. It's from a man upstate who claims the Devil is threatening to kill him."

"Very possible," Simon admitted with a slight frown, "although Satan usually works in a more indirect manner. What is this man's name?"

"Jason Bloomer is what he calls himself."

He nodded as if the name meant

something to him. "Oh, yes. He's written a few little pamphlets which he publishes himself. Full of half forgotten incantations and the like. I fear he's a bit obsessed with the subject of Satan."

This seemed an odd criticism for someone as obsessed as Simon to offer, but I let it pass. "Do you think it's worth running up there? He might have an interesting story, at least. He's in Putnam County, across the river from West Point. We could drive it in an hour or so."

"We could drive up on Saturday if you'd like," Simon said, smiling. "Perhaps Shelly would like to come with us."

I glanced at her and she nodded. "It might be fun, if you'll promise there'll be no murders."

"I never promise that," Simon said quietly. He was no longer smiling.

SATURDAY DAWNED with a light drizzle of misty November rain. It was a terrible day for a drive up the Hudson, but Simon seemed anxious to go, and after a week of puttering around the house Shelly was eager too. So at ten o'clock we were on our way up the Taconic State Parkway with wheels splashing through shallow puddles. Presently we turned off the Parkway and drove past the gate of a little cemetery shrouded in mist. We continued down the road for about a mile, until we came to an old two-story house surrounded by fields overgrown with brush. Perhaps once it had been a farm, long ago. In the yard a little wooden sign bore the single word *Bloomer.*

"This is the place," I said. "You want to wait for us, Shelly?"

"Never! And miss meeting this Jason Bloomer?" Simon had told us a bit about him on the trip up, about his occasional writings and his interest in Satanism.

We went up the walk, all three of us, and I pressed the bell. After a moment the door was opened by a tall, slim man with a bald head and gray-streaked beard.

"I'm from Neptune Books." I began, extending my card. "You wrote us recently."

"And this would be the famous Simon Ark," he said, ignorning Shelly and me to turn his attention to Simon. "I'm honored. You must come in."

The living room was in casual disarray, like so many bachelor quarters, but there was a touch of the bizarre in exotic hand-carved masks that hung from the walls. There was a small totem pole, too, and an incongruous model of an oil derrick. The crowded bookshelves, which both Simon and I inspected, held well-thumbed copies of witchcraft books by Montague Summers, Willy Ley's *Exotic Zoology*, *The Golden Bough*, Charles Fort, Alister Crowley, and even an ancient bound volume of the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* for 1837.

Jason Bloomer made a slight bow. "You honor my house."

Simon extended his hand. "I am pleased to meet you, Mr. Bloomer. Writings such as yours always interest me, and your letter to my friend here was of special interest."

Jason Bloomer nodded. "Your book was good. When I began to receive these threats, you were the first person I thought to turn to. One does not ring up the police to say that Satan is threatening his life." He stroked his beard as he talked, and Shelly and I could only watch from the sidelines.

"But you think I can help?"

"Certainly," Bloomer insisted. "In your book you state that the devil once appeared to the Duchess of Gloucester while she and the astrologer Bolingbroke were in the midst of bewitching Henry VI to death. That is the sort of knowledge very few men share."

Simon Ark shrugged it off. "The scene is depicted in a painting by Fuseli. My only special knowledge comes in knowing that the scene is a true one."

"Exactly! And your special knowledge can protect me!"

I cleared my throat. "If you want protection from a murder threat, Mr. Bloomer, wouldn't it be easier to hire a private detective?"

He turned on me, eyes blazing. "I could not hire a private detective to protect me from a man—or devil—who can strangle a person without even touching them!"

That was all he needed to hook Simon. I saw the sudden flicker of interest in his eyes. "Really? And the police did nothing?"

"There were no police. It happened on an island halfway around the world—on Java, to be exact. I saw it happen."

"And that's why he wants to kill you?"

"That and other reasons which needn't concern you. But mainly it's because I saw him murder this girl without ever laying a finger on her."

"And how long has he been threatening your life?"

"For a month now, ever since he discovered where I was living."

Beneath the beard and the deep, searching eyes, he was a man afraid. I knew it, and Simon knew it too. "My experience has been that true murderers do not give their victims that much warning."

"He—he wants something from me."

"Suppose you tell me the whole story," Simon urged. "That's the only way I can help you."

And the bearded man sank back in his chair, and began to talk.

"I suppose it really started about six years ago, in Vietnam. It was during the early days of the American troop buildup, and with war staring us in the face a good many people like me left the country. I'd been there for several months, studying the modes of devil—worship among the tribesmen back in the hills, but now I knew it was time to get out fast.

"I heard of a small private plane that was flying two passengers south to Java, one of the islands of Indonesia, and I bargained for a seat on the plane. That was when I met Rolf Dagon. I was attracted to the man immediately, for two reasons. His name—Dagon—was that of a fish god of the Philistines. He was, in addition, perhaps the strangest-looking man I had ever seen. Tall, very tall, thinner than me, but with great powerful hands. I could easily imagine him strangling someone, but not, certainly, the girl he was traveling with. Her name was Li Chow, and she was obviously Dagon's mistress.

"We landed on Java at Jogjakarta, a fairly large city near the south coast of the island. They were still having trouble with Communists, and I was a bit timid about being left on my own. So I stuck pretty close to Dagon and Li Chow. He claimed to be French, left over after his country's collapse in Indo-China, but that seemed unlikely to me. I was more willing to believe him a soldier of fortune or a mercenary of some sort. Finally, one night over drinks in a little side street bar, he told me what he was really after. The Japanese had occupied Java during World War II—it was about as far south as they ever got—and he had learned from a Japanese veteran that when the war suddenly ended they'd been forced to leave nearly a million dollars in gold on the island, wealth originally intended for certain island rulers further along.

"Well, Dagon claimed to know the location of this twenty-year-old horde of gold, and the three of us set out for the place. It was said to be in a little valley near the town of Baturetno, deep in the southern jungle.

"It was a strange country, with half-covered patches of volcanic ash and trees that twisted their limbs to the sky while sending off snake-like roots from their branches. We traveled that last part mainly by foot, until at last we reached the place Dagon sought. There was a little hill, a low, grassy mound that stretched upward some thirty feet. It was a hard climb, especially for the little Chinese girl, but finally we reached the top and stood looking down into a circular valley, like a bowl, some 300 yards across.

"We found the remains of the Japanese camp along the crest of the hill, and we settled there ourselves. The camp itself was deserted, of course, but down in the lowest point of the valley, in a singularly barren area, we could see two skeletons.

"We inspected them as one would a skeleton in a museum or doctor's office. There is nothing really horrible about a pile of bleached bones, you know. A body with skin still attached is much more horrible than a bare skeleton. There was no sign of violence to the bones, no clue as to how they'd died.

"The next morning I detected a growing tension between Dagon and Li Chow. When he was away, exploring the floor of the valley by himself, the little Chinese girl spoke to me. She said he was a devil, and that he planned to kill us both as soon as he found the gold. She showed me a knife she carried to defend herself, but I doubted it would be much protection against Dagon. He was a full head taller and had a good eighty pounds on her.

"They argued again that afternoon, and he took her for a walk in the valley. I watched them through binoculars from the crest of the hill because I feared what he might do to her. But even with me watching, he still did it. They were walking together in the valley, near where we'd found the skeletons, when suddenly she started to gasp for breath, as if some invisible hands were choking the life from her.

"I looked for a cord or wire of some sort, but there was nothing. After a moment she collapsed to the ground, and seemed to lose consciousness. Rolf Dagon merely stood there watching, unharmed himself. After another moment he began waving his arms slowly in the air above her, like some ancient high priest summoning the powers of darkness. In that instant I remembered what Li Chow had said about him being a devil.

"Presently, after he'd stood watching her in the act of dying, he bent and lifted her body in his arms. He brought her back to the crest of the hill where I waited, and said that she'd simply died. I looked her over very closely, but there was not a mark on her body. She'd simply stopped breathing, as if some giant hand had strangled her without leaving a trace. Naturally I suspected poison, but all three of us had eaten the same packaged food. I even wondered if he'd killed her with a poison gas of some sort, but when I walked carefully through the valley myself I found no traces of it.

"After that, I was anxious to leave. We abandoned our search for the Japanese gold, and made our way back to the airport at Jogjakarta. We obtained passage on a commercial airliner to Australia, but at the last minute I slipped away from Dagon and flew to Hong Kong instead. I was taking no chances ending up the way Li Chow did."

We'd sat there listening to his story, while the skies outside began to brighten. I don't think either Shelly or I believed a word of it. But now, as he finished talking, I saw that Simon Ark was deeply intent on the man's story.

"And now," he asked, "Rolf Dagon has reappeared?"

"Exactly. The threats began about a month ago. Letters at first, and then telephone calls."

"Do you have any of the letters?"

Bloomer shook his head. "I threw them away."

"If he's telephoned, you must have some idea of his whereabouts."

"Not really, except that he's getting closer. That's why I wrote to Neptune Books to contact you. I knew if anyone could save me, Simon Ark could."

Simon nodded, thought for a moment, and then asked, "Tell me, sir, how tall are you?"

"Me? Why, I'm just six feet."

"And you described Rolf Dagon as being quite tall. Just how tall?"

"Oh, he must be six-four or five."

Simon seemed satisfied, but he had one more question. "You said he was a head taller than the girl, but since she was small and Chinese, she might have been only about five feet in height. Correct?"

"Yes, I suppose he was more than a head taller."

"As much as sixteen or seventeen inches?"

"That's possible. Why?"

Simon Ark let his breath out slowly. "I believe I can help you, even though you have lied about a very important point in your story."

"I—"

Simon waved a hand. "I will return tomorrow. Perhaps then you will be ready with the truth, Mr. Bloomer."

He would say no more, and we left Jason Bloomer standing in the doorway as we departed. Though the weather had cleared, there was a decided November chill to the air.

I started driving back the way we had come, and Shelly said, "What a strange man! Do you really believe any of that story, Simon?"

"That is the problem," he answered, turning up the collar of his black topcoat. "What to believe and what not to believe. He lies in part, but does he lie entirely? Are we simply the victims of some quite elaborate hoax, or are we up against an evil genius who really threatens Bloomer's life?"

Shelly snorted and took out a cigarette. "Well, I for one don't believe a word of it! There's no reason why we should! How could this Rolf Dagon kill that Chinese girl without touching her or leaving a mark, while Bloomer was watching? And more important, why should he kill her? Just because they had a little argument? It just doesn't make sense."

I joined in then. "But if it's not true, why should Bloomer get us all the way out here just to tell us a crazy story?"

"It may be true," Simon said. "There is one explanation that would fit the facts, provided we assume a single lie on Mr. Bloomer's part."

I turned back onto the parkway and headed for home. "So what do we do now?"

"Would you be willing to bring me up here again tomorrow, when our friend has had time to consider his story and make a slight correction in it?"

"Only if you stop being so mysterious, Simon. What lie did Bloomer tell? What fact would make it all clear?"

"All right," Simon said with a smile. "I won't keep you in the dark. Consider—Why did they abandon their search for the gold after the death of the girl? If Dagon killed her, why did he do so? And most important, when Bloomer saw her dying, why didn't he run down the hill and try to save her?"

"I give up," Shelly said. "Why?"

"Because, my friends, Bloomer left out one little fact. They found the gold."

We were silent for a moment, taking that in, and then Shelly said, "You can't be sure of that."

"I can be sure. They found the gold, and Dagon killed the girl to keep from splitting with her."

"Why didn't he kill Bloomer too?" I asked him.

"Because I think our Mr. Bloomer made good use of the time while Dragon was killing the girl. I think he stayed at the top of the hill so he could do something with the gold—hide it, or dispose of it in some way. When Dagon returned, Bloomer had him just where he wanted him. He must have promised Dagon his share only when they were safely out of that place. Dagon had to agree, but when they reached the airport, Bloomer double-crossed him. He flew off with the gold, or the secret of it. Dagon has been searching for him all these years. Bloomer won't show us his messages because they mention the gold."

"All right," I granted. "It fits the facts as we know them, but it still doesn't explain this Satan business, or how Dagon killed the girl."

"That, my friend, has to do with the height of the people involved."

"You mean Dagon used a method of murder that would kill only short people?"

"Exactly."

"Then Jason Bloomer is safe. He's six feet tall." I couldn't help being a bit sarcastic.

"Jason Bloomer is not safe," Simon said quietly. "I only hope he is at least safe until tomorrow."

On Sunday morning Simon and I drove back up the Hudson to the graying house where Jason Bloomer had lived in hiding for all these years. Shelly had not joined us this time. She said that one day of weirdos like Bloomer was all she could stomach at a time. So we went alone, driving over the familiar road through little wind-gathered piles of damp leaves. It was trying hard to be a sunny day, but there was a mist in the air that wouldn't quite give up, casting a sort of haze over everything in sight.

The house seemed deserted when we reached it, and I was beginning to think that the whole thing had been some product of our imaginations. But then Simon tried the door and it opened inward. The main floor was unchanged from our visit of the previous day, except that now a pen and paper lay on a little writing desk in one corner. Jason Bloomer had started to write a letter, or at least a message of some sort.

Rolf—It will do you no good to come here and threaten me. The gold will never be found. If you kill me, I will take it with me to the grave. To settle our accounts once and for all, I offer you a fair share of

The message stopped there, as if Bloomer had been interrupted at that point. "Bloomer!" I shouted. "Bloomer! Are you home?"

"Come on," Simon said. "Quickly!"

We went through the house, every room of it, but there was no sign of Jason Bloomer. There was only more evidence of his strange way of life, the paraphernalia of mysticism, the accessories of the Satanic. Then, from the second-floor bedroom, I happened to spot something out the window.

"Simon! There, across the field, near the woods!"

There were two men, walking. One was certainly Jason Bloomer, and the other was taller—slim and straight and somehow evil. There could be no doubt as to his identity.

"Come on," Simon breathed. We were down the stairs and out of the house in a moment, running across the open field toward the spot where we'd seen the two men. It was a good two hundred yards away, and once on the ground the gently rolling terrain effectively shielded the two figures from our eyes.

But then, topping a small rise, we saw Jason Bloomer once again. He was stretched out on the ground, arms outflung as if to ward off the beat of some giant wings. There was no one else in sight. The tall figure with whom he'd been walking had vanished into the nearby woods.

"He's dead, Simon," I said, moving closer.

Simon bent to feel for a pulse and then rose, nodding. "Dead. And no marks on his body."

I remembered the story Bloomer had told us. "Just like the Chinese girl. My God, Simon; maybe Rolf Dagon really is the devil!"

Jason Bloomer was buried two days later, on a foggy Tuesday morning when even the heavens seemed to be in mourning. Simon and I had spent most of Monday searching the old house, but there was no gold hidden in it anywhere. There was also no evidence of a safe deposit box or any other hiding place large enough to hold a small fortune in gold. All we found was the name of an undertaker with whom Bloomer had made arrangements for his burial, as well as the name of a married sister in New York whom we notified of his death.

The funeral procession was a skimpy one, moving from the undertaking parlor to the little tree-lined cemetery we'd observed on our first visit. Behind a uniformed motorcycle escort, there was only the hearse and three cars—one for the hired pallbearers, one for the sister and her husband, and one for Simon and me. Bloomer had no neighbors close enough, or interested enough, to journey to the cemetary on that foggy morning.

"What do you think, Simon?" I asked as we kept pace with the cars ahead. "Does Rolf Dagon really exist, or did Bloomer make the whole thing up?"

"Oh, he exists, my friend. I spent all day Saturday checking that out. He's a former French mercenary who was indeed in Vietnam six years ago. His description fits what Bloomer told us, too."

"And the Chinese girl?"

"I have no reason to doubt Bloomer's story."

"Then how did Dagon kill her? And how did he kill Bloomer?"

"The medical examiner says that Jason Bloomer died of something as simple as a heart attack."

"Do you believe that, Simon?"

"It seems likely."

"But we saw him with Dagon!" I insisted.

"It could be that Jason Bloomer read too many books on Satanism for his own good," Simon said. Ahead, the motorcycle escort had turned into the cemetery gate, and the little line of mourners followed along. The fog was thicker here, all but obscuring the road at times. When at last the handful of cars halted, Simon did not immediately leave our vehicle. Instead, he sat watching the pallbearers as they unloaded the coffin.

"You seem disappointed," I observed, hearing the sigh escape his lips.

"I am."

"About the funeral?"

"About the height of the pallbearers. They are quite average."

"You expected Dagon to show up here?"

Simon got out of the car without answering, and started up the little hill to the side of the freshly-dug grave. I saw that a gravestone was already in place, with the family name *Bloomer*. The funeral director guided the coffin into place while the dead man's sister and her husband stood to one side. Back on the winding road, the motorcycle driver sat astride his machine, smoking a cigarette.

A minister of some uncertain faith appeared to say a few words, and then the group scattered to move off through the mist to their cars. It had been as simple as that. Later, sometime, the gravediggers would appear to complete the job.

"Ready to go, Simon?" I asked.

"In a moment, my friend."

He waited until the others had departed, their cars swallowed up by fog, and then he acted. "Quickly! Into the grave!"

"*Simon! Have* you gone mad?"

"We only have a few minutes. Hand me that shovel and use the other one yourself."

"But—"

Moving with more agility than I would have dreamed possible, Simon dropped into the open grave, edging past the waiting coffin. I had no choice but to follow. He drove the shovel down, digging a bit in one spot and then moving to another. Above and around us, all seemed muffled in fog.

"Simon, could you tell me what we're looking for?"

"The gold, my friend. Remember Bloomer's unfinished note to Dagon? He said he'd take the gold to the grave with him, and I think he meant it literally. He'd made funeral arrangements, and even ordered the tombstone for this plot in advance. I think—"

He paused, staring up at the great marble block with the word *Bloomer* on its face.

"What now, Simon?"

"Help me out of here, quickly!"

"I thought you said the gold was in here."

"He wouldn't have buried it in the earth, where any incautious gravedigger might have found it. Much more likely it's hidden in this gravestone."

We tugged and pulled at it, but nothing moved. Then, as we were about to give up, something happened. The upper block edged away from its base, and we saw that the base was hollow. There was a metal box visible inside.

"My God, Simon, I think you're right!"

But he was cluthing my arm. He had heard something, some sound which had not yet reached my fog-muffled ears. "Quiet! He's coming back!"

"Who?"

"Rolf Dagon, unless I'm mistaken."

"But how could he come back when he wasn't even here? Simon. There was no one at the funeral taller than six feet."

And then I heard it. A low, gradually rising sound that at first I couldn't identify. Simon turned to face the fog-laden road, gripping the shovel in his hands.

Suddenly a motorcycle broke through the curtain of mist, heading straight for us. I recognized the uniformed man who'd escorted the funeral procession, only now he seemed different. In a blur of movement almost too fast to follow, I saw the gun in his right hand. Simon shoved me to one side as the shot tore between us into the marble gravestone, then hurled his shovel at the motorcycle's wheels as it tore past us up the hill.

His aim was good. Out of control, with one hand still gripping his pistol, the rider tumbled off his machine as it crashed into a nearby headstone. Before he could rise, Simon and I were on him, disarming him, pinning him to the damp earth.

"That's all, Dagon," Simon said.

The tall, thin man under us cursed and tried to roll over. I kicked away his gun and held him fast.

Later, back home over drinks, Shelly said, "But Simon—I still don't understand how you know Dagon was the motorcycle rider."

Simon Ark took a sip of his wine and replied, "He was the only one there who never stood up, never got off his cycle. If Dagon was at the funeral, as I believed him to be, the motorcycle escort was the only one who could have been tall enough."

"How did you know he'd be at the funeral?"

"If Bloomer really had hidden the gold in or around his grave, I knew Dagon would want to find it. The most likely time was at the funeral, rather than searching through the cemetery at a later date. I imagine he bribed the real motorcycle rider to take his place. Then, after the funeral, he came back for the gold and tried to kill us."

"And the Chinese girl?" Shelly asked. "What about her?"

"That part was simple, really, once I concluded the story was true. You remember Bloomer's mention of volcanic ash? That was the key to it, that and his description of the valley. It was round, remember—like a bowl. Isn't it obvious that the valley was really the long-dead crater of an extinct volcano?"

"Even so," I argued, "it certainly didn't erupt, Simon?"

"No," he agreed, "it didn't erupt. It simply gave off quantities of carbon dioxide gas from time to time. The gas, passing through fissures in the floor of the inactive volcano, accounted for the skeleton of the Japanese soldier. And it killed the Chinese girl, Li Chow."

"Wait a minute," I objected. "Since when is carbon dioxide gas poisonous? I always thought carbon monoxide was the deadly one."

"And why didn't Dagon die too?" Shelly added.

"Because the carbon dioxide built up only in the valley's low points, displacing the vital oxygen. The soldier and Li Chow simply suffocated for lack of air. She was led to the low spot deliberately, and drowned in a sea of carbon dioxide as surely as she might have drowned in the ocean. Her killer, being a head taller, was able to keep his nose above the deadly layer and breath fresh air."

"I find that hard to believe," Shelly said.

Simon Ark shrugged. "It is true, nevertheless. There is a cave in Italy where a layer of carbon dioxide near the floor makes it fatal to dogs and other small animals, but humans of avarage height can walk through without feeling a thing."

Shelly still shook her head. "And you mean to tell me that Dagon killed the girl and then killed Bloomer, all for the gold you two found hidden in the tombstone?"

Simon sipped his wine and smiled. "Ah, dear Shelly, I fear I have misled you. There was no gold in the tombstone—only an empty metal box. And Rolf Dagon killed no one, though he came close with us. It was Jason Bloomer who killed the Chinese girl, and Jason Bloomer who would have killed Dagon if fate had not intervened."

I'd heard some of it on the ride down, but I could see that Simon's words were a shock to my wife. "Bloomer? But how could you know that?"

"The key to Bloomer's supposed belief in Dagon's Satanic powers was the death of the girl, which seemed a complete mystery to him. And yet on his bookshelves we saw well-thumbed copies of *Willy Ley's Exotic Zoology* and the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* for 1837—both of which carry detailed accounts of such deadly valleys on Java. Certainly Bloomer knew what really killed the girl, and thus his whole fear of Dagon was a skillful bit of acting."

"But you say he killed Li Chow."

"Quite right. His story had it that Dagon stood over the fallen girl waving his arms. It conjures up quite a Satanic picture, but hardly one in keeping with the facts. If Li Chow was drowning in a sea of carbon dioxide, the last thing her killer would do would be to wave his hands in the air and disperse the deadly layer. If he lied about that, he lied about Dagon killing her. Remember, Bloomer was also a foot taller than the girl. He could have lured her to her death as easily as the taller man."

"And the gold?"

"Could we really believe that Bloomer stole the gold and hid it from Dagon, smuggling it back to America? It was much easier to believe the gold never existed, that it was merely a ploy to lure Dagon to his destruction. Bloomer walked with him in that field, awaiting our arrival. He planned to wait till we were on the scene, and then appear to kill Dagon in self-defense, before witnesses."

"And if we hadn't come?" I asked Simon Ark.

"Then he would have used his graveyard scheme—luring Dagon to the hiding place in the tombstone and then killing him, probably burying his body right there."

"But *why?*" Shelly asked.

"Dagon told us a little of that after we disarmed him. He was a soldier of fortune with whom Bloomer fell in. There was money involved and some talk of Japanese gold, but none ever appeared. Something else did appear, though—evidence of oil deposits. Remember the somewhat incongruous little oil derrick in Bloomer's study? In any event, Bloomer felt he had to kill Dagon and the girl so any oil discovery would be all his. He succeeded with Li Chow. But it was Dagon who escaped from him, rather than the other way around. So the long charade began, to lure Dagon back here to his death. Dagon, for his part, was enough of a mercenary to be attracted by the possibility of gold. Bloomer told him about the gravestone before he died, or hinted at it, and Dagon took part in the funeral to observe it close up. When he returned and saw us, he tried to kill us, thinking we'd been paid by Bloomer to finish him."

"And Bloomer?"

"A simple heart attack in a field, as the medical examiner ruled it. The pressure, the anticipation of killing Dagon, was too much for him. Dagon told me Bloomer actually had the gun out when the seizure hit him. Dagon took the gun himself and ran into the woods."

"Then all this Satanism business was just a ruse to get you up there as a witness, Simon?"

But Simon Ark merely shrugged and reached for his wine glass. He might have been a kindly uncle instructing Shelly and me on the proper care of our garden. "That, my friend, we will not ever know. Perhaps, in his twisted mind, Jason Bloomer had truly become Rolf Dagon, the man he intended to kill. Perhaps, in that final moment with the gun, facing the supreme evil which was really himself, all the Satanic trappings became too real for him. Perhaps that is why his heart gave out—because the evil he had to destroy was the evil within himself."

Weird Tales

In the Next Issue—Believe it or Not—First Publication in America—

ELOI ELOI LAMA SABACHTANI

Modern science recreates the darkening effect at
the time of the death of Christ!

Another Masterpiece by the Incomparable

WILLIAM HOPE HODGSON

Frank Norris is recognized as the young genius who freed the American novel of its overgreat preoccupation with sentimentality and bathos with a series of brilliant works climaxing with *The Octopus* published in 1901. His place in history is secure as one of the great pivotal American authors including Stephen Crane and Theodore Dreiser who championed realism in fiction.

Ironically, there was a strong strain of mysticism in the man which faintly interpenetrated even his realistic volumes. Following his death at the age of 32 from appendicitis, many of his short stories began to appear posthumously and incredibly they were heavily weighted in the direction of the occult, the supernatural and the effects of abnormal psychology.

His novelette *The Ship That Saw A Ghost* is a most effective supernatural story of the sea that may have influenced the work of William Hope Hodgson. His *Grittir at Thorhall-stead* originally published in *Everybody's Magazine* for April, 1903 adumbrates the grimmer side of the Icelandic personality in a manner that marks it a masterpiece. Little known is his gentle story of the face of death, *The Guest of Honour* which originally appeared in THE PILGRIM MAGAZINE for July and August, 1902, and which depicts another astonishing aspect of his writing virtuosity.

The Guest Of Honour

By FRANK NORRIS

I.

THE doctor shut and locked his desk drawer upon his memorandum book with his right hand, and extended the left to his friend Manning Verrill, with the remark:

"Well, Manning, how are you?"

"If I were well, Henry," answered Verrill, gravely, "I would not be here."

The doctor leaned back in his deep leather chair, and having carefully adjusted his glasses, tilted back his head and looked at Verrill from beneath them. He waited for him to continue.

"It's my nerves—I *suppose*," began Verrill. "Henry," he declared, suddenly leaning forward, "Henry, I'm scared; that's what's the matter with me—I'm frankly scared!"

"Scared," echoed the doctor. "What nonsense! What of?"

"Scared of death, Henry," broke out Verrill, "scared *blue!*"

"It *is* your nerves," murmured the doctor. "You need travel and a bromide, my boy. There's nothing the matter with you. Why you're good for another forty years—yes, or even for another fifty years. You're sound as a nut. You, to talk about death!"

"I've seen thirty—twenty-nine, I should say, twenty-nine of my best friends go."

The doctor looked puzzled a moment; then—"Oh! you mean that club of yours," said he.

"Yes," said Verrill. "Great heavens! to think that I should be the last man, after all—well, one of us had to be the last. And that's where the trouble is, Henry. It's been growing on me for the last two years—ever since Curtice died. He was the twenty-sixth. And he died only a month before the annual dinner. Arnold, Brill, Steve—Steve Sharrett, you know, and I—just the four—were left then; and we sat down to that big table alone; and when we came to the toast of 'The Absent Ones—'. . . .Well, Henry, we were pretty solemn before we got through. And we knew that the choice of the last man—who would face those thirty-one empty covers and open the bottle of wine that we all set aside at our first dinner, and drink 'The Absent Ones'—was narrowing down pretty fine. Next year there was only Arnold, Steve, and myself left. Brill—well, you know all about his death. The three of us got through dinner somehow. The year after that we were still three, and even the year after that. Then poor old Steve went down with the *Dreibund* in the Bay of Biscay, and four months afterwards Arnold and I sat down to the table at the annual, alone. I'm not going to forget that evening in a hurry. Why, Henry—oh! never mind. Then—"

"Well," prompted the doctor as his friend paused.

"Arnold died three months ago. And the day of our annual—I mean my—the club's," Verrill changed his position. "The date of the dinner, the annual dinner, is next month, and I'm the only one left."

"And, of course, you'll not go," declared the doctor.

"Oh, yes," said Verrill. "Yes, I will go, of course. But—" He shook his head with a long sigh. "When the Last Man Club was organized," he went on, "in '68, we were all more or less young. It was a great joke. At least, I felt that way about it. I didn't believe that thirty young fellows could persist in anything—of this kind—very long but no member of the club died for the first five years, and the club met once every year and had its dinner without much idea of—of consequences, and of the inevitable. We met just to be sociable."

"Hold on," interrupted the doctor, "you are speaking now of thirty. A while ago you said thirty-one."

"Yes, I know," assented Verrill. "There were thirty in the club, but we always placed an extra cover—for—for the Guest of Honour."

The doctor made a movement of impatience, then in a moment, "Well," he said, resignedly, "go on."

"That's about the essentials," answered Verrill. "The first death was in '73. And from that year on the vacant places at the table have steadily increased. Little by little the original bravado of the thing dropped out of it all for me; and of late years—well, I have told you how it is. I've seen so many of them die, and die so fast, so regularly—one a year, you might say—that I've kept saying 'Who next, who next, who's to go this year?'. . .And as they went, one by one, and still I was left. . .I tell you, Henry, the suspense was. . .the suspense is. . .You see, I'm the last now, and ever since Curtice died I've felt this thing weighing on me. *By God, Henry, I'm afraid; I'm afraid of death. It's horrible?* It's as though I were on the list of 'condemned,' and were listening to hear my name called every minute."

"Well, so are all of us, if you come to that," observed the doctor.

"Oh, I know, I know," cried Verrill, "it is morbid and all that. But that fact doesn't help *me*. Can you imagine me one month from to-morrow night. Think now. I'm alone, absolutely, and there is the long empty table, with the thirty places set, and the extra place, and those places are where all my old friends used to sit. And at twelve I get up and give first 'The Absent Ones,' and then 'The Guest of the Evning.' I gave those toasts last year, but there were two of us, then, and the year before there were three. But ever since Curtice died and we were narrowed down to four, this thing has been weighing on me—this idea of death, and I've conceived a horror of it—a—a dread. And now I am the last. I had no idea this would ever happen to me; or if it did, that it would be like this. I'm shaken, Henry, shaken. I've not slept for three nights. So I've come to you. You must help me."

"So I will, by advising you. You give up the idiocy. Cut out the dinner this year; yes, and for always."

"You don't understand," replied Verrill, calmly. "It is impossible. I could not keep away. I *must* be there."

"But it's simple lunacy," expostulated the doctor. "Man, you've worked upon your nerves over this fool club and dinner, till I won't be responsible for you if you carry out this notion. Come, promise me you will take the train for, say, Scotland, to-morrow, and *I'll* give you stuff that will make you sleep. Oban is heaven at this time of year, and I hear salmon fishing is in full swing. Shall—"

Verrill shook his head.

"You don't understand," he repeated. "You simply don't understand. No, I shall go to the dinner. But of course I'm—I'm nervous—a little. Did I say I was scared? I didn't mean that. Oh, I'm all right; I just want you to prescribe for me, something for the nerves. Henry, death is a terrible thing—to see 'em all struck down, twenty-nine of 'em—splendid boys. Henry, I'm not a coward. There's a difference between cowardice and fear. For hours last night I was trying to work it out. Cowardice—that's just turning tail and running; but I shall go through that annual dinner, and that's ordeal enough, believe me. But fear—it's just death in the abstract that unmans me. *That's* the thing to fear. To think that we all go along living and working and fussing from day to day, when we *know* that this great monster, this horror, is walking up and down the streets, and that sooner or later he'll catch us—that we can't escape. Isn't it the greatest curse in the world? We're so used to it we don't realize the thing. But suppose one could eliminate the monster altogether. *Then* we'd realize how sweet life was, and we'd look back at the old days with horror—just as I do now."

"Oh, but this is rubbish," cried the doctor, "simple drivel, Manning; I'm ashamed of you. I'll prescribe for you; I suppose I've got to. But a good ramble on the Continent would do more good for you than a gallon of drugs. If you won't go abroad, get out of town, if it's only over Sunday. Here's your prescription, and do take a week-end trip. Tramp in the woods, get tired, and *don't go to that dinner!*"

"You don't understand," repeated Verrill, as the two stood up. He put the prescription into his pocket-book. "You don't understand. I couldn't keep away. It's a duty, and besides—well, I couldn't make you see. Good-bye. This stuff will make me sleep, eh? And do my nerves good, too, you say. I see. I'll come back to you if it don't work. Good-bye again. *This* door is it? Not through the waiting-room, eh? Yes, I remember. . .Henry, did you ever—did you ever face death yourself—I mean—"

"Nonsense, nonsense, nonsense," cried the doctor.

But Verrill persisted. His back to the closed door, he continued:

"*I* did. *I* faced death once—so you see I should know. It was when I was a lad of twenty. My father had a line of "tramps," and I often used to make the trip as supercargo. One October day we were caught in the equinox off the Lizard, and before we knew it we were wondering if she would last another half-hour. Along in the afternoon there came a sea aboard, and caught me unawares. I lost my hold and felt myself going, going. . .I was sure for ten seconds that it was the end—*and I saw death then, face to face!*

"And I've never forgotten it. I've only to shut my eyes to see it all, hear it all—the naked spars rocking against the grey-blue of the sky, the wrench and creak of the ship, the threshing of rope ends, the wilderness of pale green water, the sound of rain and scud. . . .No, no, I'll not forget it. And death was a horrid spectre in that glimpse I got of him. I—I don't care to see him again. Well, good-bye once more."

"Good-bye, Manning, and believe me, this is all hypochondria. Go and catch fish. Go and shoot something, and in twenty-four hours you'll believe there's no such thing as death."

The door closed. Verrill was gone.

II.

The banquet hall was on the top floor of one of the oldest buildings in the West End. Along the eastern wall was a row of windows reaching from ceiling to floor, and as the extreme height of the building made it unnecessary to draw the curtains, whoever was at the table could look out and over the entire city in that direction. Thus it was that Manning Verrill, on a certain night some four weeks after his interview with the doctor, sat there at his walnuts and black coffee and, absorbed, abstracted, looked out over the panorama beneath him, where the life of a great nation centred and throbbed.

To the unenlightened the hall would have presented a strange spectacle. Down its center extended a long table. The chairs were drawn up, the covers laid. But the chairs were empty, the covers untouched; and but for the presence of the one man the hall was empty, deserted.

At the head of the table Verrill, in evening dress, a gardenia in his lapel, his napkin across his lap, an unlighted cigar in his fingers, sat motionless, looking out over the city with unseeing eyes. Of thirty places around the table, none was distinctive, none varied. But at Verrill's right hand the thirty-first place, the place of honour, differed from all the rest. The chair was large, massive. The oak of which it was made was black, while instead of the usual array of silver and porcelain, one saw but two vessels—an unopened bottle of wine and a large silver cup heavily chased.

From far below in the city's streets eleven o'clock struck. The sounds broke in upon Verrill's reverie and he stirred, glanced about the room, and then, rising, went to the window and stood there looking out.

At his feet beneath lay the city twinkling with lights. Towards the city all was dark, but from the district of theatres and restaurants there arose a glare into the night, ruddy, vibrating, with here and there a ganglia of electric bulbs upon a "fire sign" emphasizing itself in a whiter radiance. 'Buses and cabs threaded the streets with little starring eyes of coloured lights, while underneath all this blur of illumination, the people debouching from the theatres filled the pavements with tiny ant-like swarms, minute, bustling.

Verrill raised the window. At once a subdued murmur, prolonged, monotonous—the same murmur as that which disengages itself from forests, from the sea, and from sleeping armies—rose to meet him. It was the mingling of all the night noises into one great note that came simultaneously from all quarters of the horizon, infinitely vast, infinitely deep—a steady diapason strain like the undermost bourdon of a great organ as the wind begins to thrill the pipes.

It was the stir of life, the breathing of the Colossus, the push of the nethermost basic force, old as the world, wide as the world, the murmur of the primeval energy, coeval with the centuries, blood-brother to that spirit which, in the brooding darkness before creation, moved upon the face of the waters.

Across his face, like the passing of a long breath, Verrill felt the abrupt sensation of life, indestructible, persistent.

But, absorbed in other things, Verrill unmoved, and only dimly comprehending, closed the window and turned back into the room. At his place stood an unopened bottle and a glass as yet dry. He removed the foil from the neck of the bottle, but after looking at his watch, set it down again without drawing the cork. It lacked some fifteen minutes to midnight.

Once again, as he had already done so many times that evening, Verrill wiped the moisture from his forehead. He shut his teeth against the slow, thick labouring of his heart. He was alone. The sense of isolation, of abandonment, weighed down upon him intolerably as he looked up and down the empty table. Alone, alone; all the rest were gone, and he stood there, in the solitude of that midnight; he, last of all that company whom he had known and loved. Over and over again he muttered.

"All, all are gone, the old familiar faces. Then slowly Verrill began to make the circuit of the table, reading, as if from a rollcall, the names written on the cards which lay upon the place-plates. "Anderson . . .Evans. . .Copeland—dear old 'crooked-face' Copeland, his camp companion in those salmon-fishing trips of the old days, dead now these ten years. . .Stryker—'Buff' Stryker they had called him, dead—he had forgotten how long—drowned in his yacht off the Irish coast; Harris, died of typhoid somewhere in Italy; Dick Herndon, killed in a mine accident in Wales; Rice, old 'Whitey Rice,' a suicide at Monte Carlo; Curtice, carried off by fever in Durban, South Africa." Thus around the whole table he moved, telling the beadroll of death, following in the foot steps of the monster who never relented, who never tired, who never, never, never forgot.

His own turn would come some day. Verrill, sunken into his chair, put his hands over his eyes. Yes, his own turn would come. There was no escape. That dreadful face would rise again before his eyes. He would bow his back to the scourge of nations, he would roll helpless beneath the wheels of the great car. How to face that prospect with fortitude! How to look into those terrible grey eyes with calm! Oh, the terror of that gorgon face, oh, the horror of those sightless, lightless grey eyes!

But suddenly midnight struck. He heard the strokes come booming upward from the city streets. His vigil was all but over.

Verrill opened the bottle of wine, breaking the seal that had been affixed to the cork on the night of the first meeting of the club. Filling his glass, he rose in his place. His eyes swept the table, and while for the last time the memories came thronging back, his lips formed the words:

"To the absent ones: to you Curtice, Anderson, Brill, to you, Copeland, to you Stryker, to you, Arnold, to you all, my old comrades, all you old familiar faces who are absent to-night."

He emptied the glass, but immediately filled it again. The last toast was to be drunk, the last of all. Verrill, the glass raised, straightened himself.

But even as he stood there, glass in hand, he shivered slightly. He made note of it for the moment, yet his emotions had so shaken him during all that evening that he could well understand the little shudder that passed over him for a moment.

But he caught himself glancing at the windows. All were shut. The doors of the hall were closed, the lights in the chandeliers were steady. Whence came then this certain sense of coolness that so suddenly had invaded the air? The coolness was not disagreeable, but none the less the temperature of the room had been lowered, at least so he could fancy. Yet already he was dismissing the matter from his mind. No doubt the weather had changed suddenly.

In the next second, however, another peculiar circumstance forced itself upon his attention. The stillness of the banquet hall, placed as it was at the top of one of the highest buildings in the West End, was no matter of comment to Verrill. He was long since familiar with it. But for all that, even through the closed windows, and through the medium of steel and brick and marble that composed the building, the indefinite murmur of London's streets had always made itself felt in the hall. It was faint, yet it was distinct. That bourdon of life to which he had listened that very evening was not wholly to be shut out, yet now, even in this supreme moment of the occasion, it was impossible for Verrill to ignore the fancy that an unusual stillness had all at once widened about him, like the widening of unseen ripples. There was not a sound, and he told himself that stillness such as this was only the portion of the deaf. No faintest tremor of noise rose from the streets. The vast building itself had suddenly grown as soundless as the unplumbed depth of the sea. But Verrill shook himself. All evening fancies such as these had besieged him; even now they were prolonging the ordeal. Once this last toast drunk and he was released from his duty—. He raised his glass again, and then in a loud, clear voice he said:

"*Gentlemen, I give you the toast of the evening.*" And as he emptied the glass, a quick, light footstep sounded in the corridor outside the door.

Verrill looked up in great annoyance. The corridor led to but one place—the door of the banquet hall, and anyone coming down the corridor at so brisk a pace could have but one intention—that of entering the hall. Verrill frowned at the idea of an intruder. His orders had been of the strictest. That a stranger should thrust himself upon his company at this of all moments was exasperating.

But the footsteps drew nearer, and as Verrill stood frowning at the door at the far end of the hall, it opened.

A gentleman came in, closed the door behind him and faced about. Verrill scrutinised him with an intent eye.

He was faultlessly dressed, and just by his manner of carrying himself in his evening clothes, Verrill knew that here was breeding distinction. The newcomer was tall and slim. Also he was young; Verrill, although he could not have placed his age with any degree of accuracy, would none the less have disposed of the question by setting him down as a young man. But Verrill further observed that the gentleman was very pale—even his lips lacked colour. However, as he looked closer he discovered that this pallor was hardly the result of any present emotion, but was rather constitutional.

There was a moment's silence as the two looked at each other the length of the hall; then, with a peculiarly pleasant smile, the stranger came forward, drawing off his white glove and extending his hand. He seemed so at home, so perfectly at ease, and at the same time so much of what Verrill was wont to call a "thoroughbred fellow," that the latter found it impossible to cherish any resentment. He preferred to believe that the stranger had made some readily-explained mistake which would be rectified in their first-spoken words. Thus it was that he was all the more nonplussed when the stranger took him by the hand with the words "This is Mr. Manning Verrill, of course. I am very glad to meet you again, sir. Two such as you and me who have once been so intimate, should never forget each other."

Verrill had it upon his lips to inform the other that he had something the advantage of him; but at the last moment he was unable to utter the words. The newcomer's pleasure in the meeting was so hearty, so spontaneous, that he could not quite bring himself to jeopardise it—at the outset at least—by a confession of implied unfriendliness; so, instead, he clumsily assumed the other's manner, and, though deeply perplexed, managed to attain a certain heartiness as he exclaimed "But you have come very late. I have already dined, and, by the way, let me explain why you find me here alone in a deserted banquet hall, with covers laid for so many."

"Indeed, you need not explain," replied the stranger. "I am a member of your club, you know."

A member of the club, this total stranger! Verrill could not hide a frown of renewed perplexity; surely this face was not one of any friend he had ever had! "A charter member, you might say," the other continued; "but, singularly enough, I have never been able to attend one of the meetings until now. Of us all I think I have been the busiest—and the one most widely travelled. Such must be my excuses."

At the moment an explanation occurred to Verrill. It was within range of the possible that the newcomer was an old member of the club, some sojourner in a foreign country whose death had been falsely reported. Possibly Verrill had lost track of him. It was not always easy to "place" at once every one of the thirty. The two sat down but almost immediately Verrill exclaimed:

"Pardon me, but—that chair. The omen would be so portentous! You have taken the wrong place. You are a member of the club. You must remember that we reserved that chair—the one you are occupying." But the stranger smiled calmly.

"I defy augury, and I snap my fingers at the portent. Here is my place, and here I choose to remain."

"As you will," answered Verrill, "but it is a singular choice. It is not conducive to appetite."

"My dear Verrill," answered the other, "I shall not dine, if you will permit me to say so. It is very late and my time is limited. I can stay but a short while at best. I have much to do to-night after I leave you—much good, I hope, much good. For which," he added rather sadly, "I shall receive no thanks, only abuse, only abuse, my dear Verrill." Verrill was only half listening. He was looking at the other's face, and as he looked he wondered; for the brow was of the kind fitted for crowns, and from beneath glowed the glance of a king. The mouth seemed to have been shaped by the utterance of the commands of Empire. The whole face was astonishing, full of majesty, full of power tempered by a great kindliness. Verrill could not keep his gaze from those wonderful, calm grey eyes. Who was this extraordinary man met under such strange circumstances, alone and in the night, in the midst of so many dead memories, and surrounded by that inexplicable stillness, that sudden, profound peace. And what was the subtle magnetism that, upon sight, drew him so powerfully to the stranger? Kingly he was, but Verrill seemed to feel that he was more than that. He was—could be—a friend; such a friend as in all their circle of dead companions he had never known. In his company he knew he need never be ashamed of weakness, human, natural, ordained weakness, need not be ashamed because of the certainty of being perfectly and thoroughly understood. Thus it was that when the stranger had spoken the words "—only abuse, only abuse, my dear Verrill," Verrill, starting from his muse, answered quickly: "What, abuse you! in return for good! You astonish me."

" 'Abuse' is the mildest treatment I dare expect; it will no doubt be curses. Of all personages, I am the one most cruelly misunderstood. My friends are few, few—oh, so pitiably few." "Of whom may I be one?" exclaimed Verrill. "I hope," said the stranger gravely, "we shall be the best of friends. When we met before, I am afraid, my appearance was too abrupt and—what shall I say—unpleasant to win your goodwill." Verrill in some embarrassment, framed a lame reply; but the other continued:

"You do not remember; ah, I can easily understand. My manner at that time was against me. It was a whim, but I chose to be most forbidding on that occasion. I am a very Harlequin in my moods; Harlequin, did I say, my dear fellow, I am the Prince of Masqueraders."

"But a Prince in all events," murmured Verrill, half to himself.

"Prince and slave," returned the other; "slave to circumstance."

"Are we not all—" began Verrill, but the stranger continued:

"Slave to circumstance, slave to time, slave to natural laws, none so abject as I in my servility. When the meanest, the lowest, the very weakest, calls I must obey. On the other hand, none so despotic as I, none so absolute. When I summon, the strongest must respond; when I command, the most powerful must obey. My profession, my dear Verrill, is an arduous one."

"Your profession is, I take it," observed Verrill, "that of a physician."

"You may say so," replied the other, "and you may also say an efficient one. But I am always the last to be summoned. I am a last resource; my remedy is a heroic one. But it prevails—inevitably. No pain, my dear Verrill, so sharp that I cannot allay, no anguish so great that I cannot soothe."

"Then, perhaps, you may prescribe for me," said Verrill. "Of late I have been perturbed. I have lived under a certain strain, certain contingencies threaten, which, no doubt unreasonably, I have come to dread. I am shaken, nervous, fearful. My own doctor has been unable to help me. Perhaps you—."

The stranger had already opened the bottle of wine which stood by his plate, and filled the silver cup. He handed it to Verrill.

"Drink," he said

Verrill hesitated:

"But this wine," he protested. "This cup—pardon me, it was reserved—."

"Drink," repeated the stranger. "Trust me."

He took Verrill's glass in which he had drunk the toasts and which yet contained a little wine. He pressed the silver cup into Verrill's hands.

"Drink," he urged for a third time.

Verrill took the cup, and the stranger raised his glass.

"To our better acquaintance," he said.

But Verrill, at length, at the end of all conjecture, cried out, the cup still in his hand:

"Your toast is most appropriate, sir. A better acquaintance with you, I assure you, would be most pleasing to me. But I must ask your pardon for my stupidity. Where have we met before? Who are you, and what is your name?"

The stranger did not immediately reply, but fixed his grave grey eyes upon Verrill's. For a moment he held his gaze in his own. Then, as the seconds slipped by, the first indefinite sense of suspicion flashed across Verrill's mind, flashed and faded, returned once more, faded again, and left him wondering. Then the stranger said:

"Do you remember—it was long ago. Do you remember the sight of naked spars rocking against a grey, torn sky, a ship wrenching and creaking, wrestling with the wind, a world of pale green surges, the gale singing through the cordage, and then, as the sea swept the decks—ah! you *do* remember."

For Verrill had started suddenly, and with the movement full recognition, complete, unequivocal, gleamed suddenly in his eyes. There was a long silence while he returned the gaze of the other, now no longer a stranger. At length Verrill spoke, drawing a long breath.

"Ah!. . .it is you. . .at last."

"Well!"

Verrill smiled.

"It *is* well; I had imagined it would be so different—when you did come. But as it is—" he extended his hand, "I am very glad to meet you."

"Did I not tell you," said the other "that of all the world I am the most cruelly misunderstood?"

"But you confessed to the masquerade."

"Oh, blind, blind, not to see behind the foolish mask. Come, we have not yet drunk."

He placed the cup in Verrill's hands, and once again raised the glass.

"To our better acquaintance," he said.

"To our better acquaintance," echoed Verrill. He drained the cup.

"The lees were bitter," he observed.

"But the effect?"

"Yes, it is calming—already, exquisitely so. It is not—as I have imagined for so long—deadening; on the contrary, it is invigorating, revivifying. I feel born again."

The other rose: "Then there is no need," he said, "to stay here any longer. Come, shall we be going?"

"Yes, yes, I am ready," answered Verrill. "Look," he exclaimed, pointing to the windows. "Look—it is morning."

Low in the east, the dawn was rising over the city. A new day was coming; the stars were paling, the night was over.

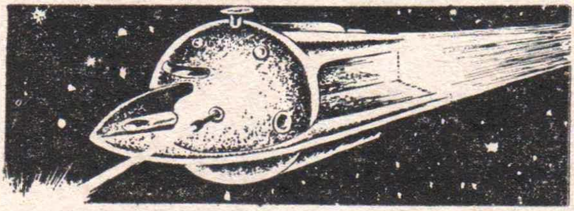
"That is true," said Verrill's new friend. "Another day is coming. It is time we went out to meet it."

They rose and passed down the length of the banquet hall. He who had called himself the great Physician, the Servant of the Humble, the Master of Kings, the Prince of Masqueraders, held open the door for Verrill to pass. But when the man had gone out, the Prince paused a moment, and looked back upon the deserted banquet hall, lit partly by the steady electrics, partly by the pale light of morning, that now began with ever-increasing radiance to stream through the eastern windows. Then he stretched forth his hand and laid his touch upon a button in the wall. Instantly the lights sank, vanished; for a moment the hall seemed dark.

He went out quietly, shutting the door behind him.

And the banquet hall remained deserted, lonely, empty, yet it was neither dark nor lifeless. Stronger and stronger grew the flood of light that burned roseate toward the zenith as the sun came up. It penetrated to every corner of the room, and the drops of wine left in the bottom of the glasses flashed like jewels in the radiance. From without, from the city's streets, came the murmur of increasing activity. Through the night it had droned on, like the low-pitched diapason of some vast organ, but now as the sun rose, it swelled in volume. Louder it grew and ever louder. Its sound-waves beat upon the windows of the hall. They invaded the hall itself.

It was the symphony of energy, the vast orchestration of force, the palan of an indestructible life, coeval with the centuries, renascent, ordained, eternal.



YOU CAN BUY "WEIRD TALES" EVERYWHERE

No one who has read Robert W. Chambers' masterpieces of horror and beauty from his collections *The King in Yellow* and *The Maker of Moons,* can entertain any doubts that he was one of the greatest imaginations and literary stylists operating in fantastic literature that the United States has ever produced. Long before Chambers died, even while he was at the pinnacle of financial success, his harshest critics recognized that there was something akin to genius in his first books. Charles C. Baldwin, writing in *The Men Who Make Our Novels,* originally written in 1919 and published in revised editions through to 1928 said of him: "The best of Chambers was his youth, his running on wherever the notion took him, his apparently inexhaustible ingenuity, his high spirits, his admiration for beautiful but empty-headed girls, his interest in the man who is not tied down to some tiresome job. But now that he wants to discuss divorce and the failure of most marriages, the brutality of the Germans, the God-fearing heroics of America, he is a bore. . .Mr. Chambers knows how to tell a story; and if you want to have the hair raised on your head, read *The King in Yellow*— or *The Maker of Moons. . .*"

Robert W. Chambers had spent seven years learning to be an artist and illustrator, and then when he found he could sell anything that flowed from his facile pen, moved into fiction. Through World War I, he was regarded as one of our leading novelists and short story writers. Shortly thereafter, the critics realized that". . .he sold out early to ephemeral fancy and he made for himself, as he believes, a good bargain. He is well satisfied. He has not tried to do anything of enduring worth—and he never will."

It is painful to admit it, but they were right on both counts. First, that his popular bestsellers were dross. Secondly, that his early work showed immense promise.

The dredging job must commence. Most of what was worthwhile in his total production was his fantasy and horror. The present story, *The Sign of Venus,* appeared in HARPER'S MAGAZINE for December 1903. This is Chambers in transition from the almost unbearable horror and transcendental beauty and poignancy of *The King in Yellow* and *Maker of Moons.* The style is the polished, slick, urbane method that would make his fortune. The light banter, the frivolous love interest has entered, and so has a valid and well-developed sense of humor; but all the great imagination, the incredible powers of invention, the originality are also here, and finally, so is the *artist.*

The Sign Of Venus

By ROBERT W. CHAMBERS

IN the card-room the game, which had started from a chance suggestion, bid fair to develop into an all-night séance: the young foreign diplomat had shed his coat and lighted a fresh cigar; somebody threw a handkerchief over the face of the clock, and a sleepy club-servant took reserve orders for two dozen siphons and other details.

"That lets me out," said Hetherford, rising from his chair with a nod at the dealer. He tossed his cards on the table, settled side obligations with the man on his left, yawned, and put on his hat.

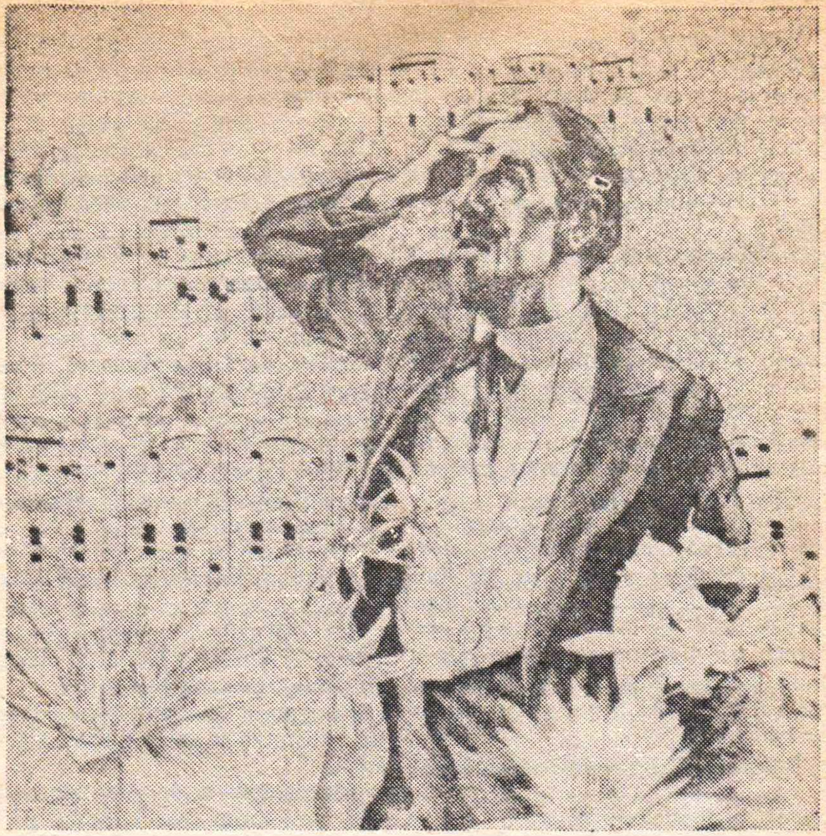
Somebody remonstrated. "It's only two o'clock, Hetherford; you have no white man's burden sitting up for you at home."

But Hetherford shook his head, smiling. So a servant removed his chair, another man cut in, the dealer dealt cards all around. Presently from somewhere in the smoke haze came a voice, "Hearts." And a quiet voice retorted, "I double it."

Hetherford lingered a moment, then turned on his heel, sauntered out across the hallway and down the stairs into the court, refusing with a sign the offered cab.

Breathing deeply, yawning once or twice, he looked up at the stars. The night air refreshed him; he stood a moment, thoughtfully contemplating his half-smoked cigar, then tossed it away and stepped out into the street.

The street was quiet and deserted; darkened brownstone mansions stared at him through sombre windows as he passed; his footsteps echoed across the pavement



"It is I who is mad, not she," he muttered as he entered the garden.

like the sound of footsteps following him.

His progress was leisurely; the dreary monotony of the house fronts soothed him. He whistled a few bars of a commonplace tune, crossed the deserted avenue under the electric lamps, and entered the dimly lighted street beyond.

Here all was silence; the doors of many houses were boarded up—sign that their tenants had migrated to the country. No shadowy cat fled along the iron railings at his approach; no night-watchman prowled in deserted dooryards or peered at him from obscurity.

Strolling at ease, thoughts nowhere, he had traversed half the block, when an opening door and a glimmer of light across the sidewalk attracted his attention.

As he approached the house from whence the light came, a figure suddenly appeared on the stoop—a girl in a white ball-gown—hastily descending the stone steps. Gaslight from the doorway tinted her bared arms and shoulders. She bent her graceful head and gazed earnestly at Hetherford.

"I beg your pardon," she almost whispered,—"might I ask you to please help me?"

Hetherford stopped and wheeled short.

"I—I really beg your pardon," she said,—"but I am in such distress. Could I ask you to find me a cab?"

"A cab!" he repeated, uncertainly;—"why, yes—I will with pleasure—" He turned and looked up and down the deserted street, slowly lifting his hand to his short mustache. "If you are in a hurry," he said, "I had better go to the nearest stables—"

"But there is something more," she said, in a tremulous voice:—"could you get me a wrap,—a cloak—anything to throw over my gown?"

He looked up at her, bewildered. "Why, I don't believe I—" he began, then fell silent before her troubled gaze. "I'll do anything I can for you," he said, abruptly. "I have a rain-coat at the club—if your need is urgent—"

"It is urgent;—but there is something else,—something more urgent—more difficult for me to ask you. I must go to Willow

Brook—I must go now, to-night! And I—I have no money."

"Do you mean Willow Brook in Westchester?" he asked, astonished. "There is no train at this hour of the morning!"

"Then—then what am I to do?" she faltered. "I cannot stay another moment in that house."

After a silence he said, "Are you afraid of anybody in that house?"

"There is nobody in the house," she said, with a shudder; "my mother is in Westchester; all the household are there. I—I came back—a few moments ago—unexpectedly—" She stammered, and winced under his keen scrutiny; then the pallor of utter despair came into her cheeks, and she hid her white face in her hands.

Hetherford watched her for a moment.

"I don't exactly understand," he said, gently, "but I'll do anything I can for you. I'll go to the club and get my raincoat; I'll go to the stables and get a cab; I haven't any money with me, but it would take only a few minutes for me to drive to the club and get some. . .Please don't be distressed; I'll do anything you desire."

She dropped her arms with a hopeless gesture.

"But you say there is no train!"

"You could drive to the house of some of your friends—"

"No, no! Oh, my friends must never know of this!"

"I see," he said, gravely.

"No, you don't see," she said, unsteadily. "The truth is that I am almost frightened to death."

"Can you not tell me what has frightened you so?"

"If I tried to tell you, you would think me mad—you would indeed—"

"Try," he said, soothingly.

"Why—why, it startled me to find myself in this house," she began. "You see, I didn't expect to come here; I didn't really want to come here," she added, piteously. "Oh, it is simply dreadful to come—like this!" She glanced fearfully over her shoulder at the lighted doorway above, then turned to Hetherford as though dazed.

"Tell me," he said, in a quiet voice.

"Yes—I'll tell you. At first it was all dark—but I must have known I was in my own room, for I felt around on the dresser for the matches and lighted a candle. And when I saw that it was truly my own room, and when I caught sight of my own face in the mirror, it terrified me—" She pressed her fingers to her cheeks with a shudder. "Then I ran down-stairs and lighted the gas in the hall and peered into the mirror; and I saw a face there—a face like my own—"

Pale, voiceless, she leaned on the bronze balustrade, fair head dropping, lids closed.

Presently, eyes still closed, she said. "You will not leave me alone here—will you—" Her voice died to a whisper.

"No—of course not," he replied, slowly.

There was an interval of silence; she passed her hand across her eyes and raised her head, looking up at the stars.

"You see," she murmured, "I dare not be alone; I *dare* not lose touch with the living. I suppose you think me mad, but I am not; I am only stunned. Please stay with me."

"Of course," he said, in a soothing voice. "Everything will come out all right—"

"Are you sure?"

"Perfectly. I don't quite know what to say—how to reassure you and offer you any help—"

He fell silent, standing there on the sidewalk, worrying his short mustache. The situation was a new one to him.

"Suppose," he suggested, "that you try to take a little rest. I'll sit down on the steps—"

She looked at him in wide-eyed alarm. "Do you mean that I should go into that house—alone!"

"Well—you oughtn't to stand on the steps all night. It is nearly three o'clock. You are frightened and nervous. Really you must go in and—"

"Then you must come too," she said, desperately. "This nightmare is more than I can endure alone. I'm not a coward; none of my race are. But I need a living being near me. Will you come?"

He bowed. She turned, hastily gathering her filmy gown, and mounted the shadowy steps without a sound; and he followed, leisurely, even perhaps warily, every sense alert.

He was prepared to see the end of this encounter—see it through to an explanation if it took all summer. Of the situation, however, and of her, he had so far ventured no theory. The type of woman and the situation were perfectly new to him. He was aware that anything might happen in New York, and, closing the heavy front door, he was ready for it.

The hall gas-jets were burning brightly, and in the darkened drawing-room he could distinguish the heavy outlines of furniture cased in dust-coverings.

She asked him to strike a match and light the sconces in the drawing-room, and he did so his curiosity now thoroughly aroused.

As the gas flared up, shrouded pictures and furniture sprang into view surrounding him, and in the dusk of the room beyond he saw a ray of light glimmering on the foliated carving of a gilded harp.

Slowly he turned to the girl beside him. A warm shadow dimmed her delicate features, yet they were the loveliest he had ever looked upon.

Suddenly he understood the mute message of her eyes: "My imprudence places me at your mercy."

"Your helplessness places me at yours," he said, aloud, scarcely conscious that he had spoken.

At that a bright flush transfigured her. "I trusted you the moment I saw you," she said, impulsively. "Do you mind sitting there opposite me? I shall take this chair—rather near you—"

She sank into an armchair; and, touched and a trifle amused, he seated himself, at a little nod from her, awaiting her further pleasure.

She lay there for a minute or two without speaking, rounded arms resting on the gilt arms of the chair, eyes thoughtfull studying him.

"I've simply got to tell you everything," she said, at length.

"It can do no harm, I think," he replied, pleasantly.

"No; no harm. The harm has been done. Yet, with you sitting there so near me, I am not frightened now. It is curious," she mused, "that I should feel no apprehension now. And yet—and yet—"

She leaned toward him, dropping her linked fingers in her lap.

"Tell me, did you ever hear of the Sign of Venus?—the *Signum Veneris?*" she asked.

"I've heard of it—yes," he replied, surprised. And as she said nothing, he went on: "The distinguished gentleman who occupies the chair of Applied Psychics at the university lectures on the Sign of Venus, I believe."

"Did you attend the lectures?" she asked, calmly.

He said he had not, smiling a trifle.

"I did."

"They were probably amusing," he ventured.

"Not very. Psychic phenomena bored me; I went during Lent. Psychic phenomena—" She hesitated, embarrassed at his amusement. "I suppose you laugh at that sort of thing."

"No, I don't laugh at it. Queer things occur, they say. All I know is that I myself have never seen anything happen that could not be explained by natural laws."

"I have," she said.

He bent his head in polite acquiescence.

"I went to the lectures," she said. "I am not very intellectual; nothing he said interested me very much—which was, of course, suitable for a lenten amusement."

She leaned a little nearer, small hands tightly interlaced on her knee.

"His lecture on the Sign of Venus was the last." She lifted a white finger, drawing the imaginary Signum Veneris in the air. Hetherford nodded gravely.

"The lecture," she continued, "ended with an explanation of the Sign of Venus—how, contemplating it by starlight, one might pass into that physical unconsciousness which leaves the mind free to control the soul."

She held out her left hand toward him. On a stretched finger a ring glistened, mounted with the Sign of Venus blazing in brilliants.

"I had this made specially," she said; "not that I had any particular desire to test it—no curiosity. It never occurred to me that here in New York one could—could—"

"What?" asked Hetherford, dryly.

"—could leave one's own body at will."

"I don't believe it could be accomplished in New York," he said, with great gravity. "And that's a pretty safe conclusion to come to, is it not?"

She dropped her eyes, silent for a moment, resting her delicate chin on the palm of her hand. Then she lifted her eyes to him calmly, and the direct beauty of her gaze disturbed him.

"No, it is not a safe conclusion to come to. Listen to me. Last night they gave a dance at the Willow Brook Hunt. It was nearly two o'clock this morning when I left the club-house and started home across the lawn with my mother and the maid—"

"But how on earth could—" he began, then begged her pardon and waited.

She continued, serenely: "The night was warm and lovely, and it was clear starlight. When I entered my room I sent the maid away and sat down by the open window. The scent of the flowers and the beauty of the night made me restless; I went down-stairs, unbolted the door, and slipped out through the garden to the pergola. My hammock hung there, and I lay down in it, looking out at the stars."

She drew the ring from her finger, holding it out for him to see.

"The starlight caught the gems on the Sign of Venus," she said, under her breath; "that was the beginning. And then—I don't know why—as I lay there idly turning the ring on my finger, I found myself saying, 'I must go to New York: I must leave my body here asleep in the hammock and go to my own room in Fifty-eighth Street.' "

A curious little chill passed over Hetherford.

"I said it again and again—I don't know why. I remember the ring glittered; I remember it grew brighter and brighter. And then—and then! I found myself up-stairs in the dark, groping over the dresser for the matches."

Again that faint little chill touched Hetherford.

"I was stupefied for a moment," she said, tremulously; "then I suspected what I had done, and it frightened me. And when I lighted the candle, and saw it was truly my own room—and when I caught sight of my own face in the mirror—terror seized me;—it was like a glimpse of something taken unawares. For, do you know that although in the glass I saw my own face, the face was not looking back at me." She dropped her head, crushing the ring in both hands. "The reflected face was far lovelier than mine; and it was mine, I think, yet it was not looking at me, and it moved when I did not move. I wonder—I wonder—"

The tension was too much. "If that be so," he said, steadying his voice—"if you saw a face in your mirror, the face was your own." He made an impatient gesture, rising to his feet at the same moment. "All that you have told me can be explained," he said.

"How can it? At this very moment I am asleep in my hammock."

"We will deal with that later," he said, smiling down at her. "Where is there a looking-glass?"

"There is one in the hallway." She rose, slipping the ring on her finger, and led the way to where an oval gilt mirror hung partly covered with dust-cloths.

He cast aside the coverings. "Now look into the glass," he said, gayly.

She raised her head and faced the mirror for an instant.

"Come here," she whispered; and he stepped behind her, looking over her shoulder.

In the glass, as though reflected, he saw her face, but *the face was in profile!*

A shiver passed over him from head to foot.

"Did I not tell you?" she whispered. "Look! See the other face is moving while I am still!"

"There's something wrong about the glass, of course," he muttered—"it's defective."

"But who is that in the glass?"

"It is you—your profile. I don't exactly understand. Good Lord! It's turning away from us!"

She shrank against the wall, wide-eyed, breathing rapidly.

"There is no use in our being frightened," he said, scarcely knowing what he uttered. "This is Fifty-eighth Street, New York, 1903." He shook his shoulders, squaring them, and forced a smile. "Don't be frightened; there's an explanation for all this. You are not asleep in Westchester; you are here in your own house. You mustn't tremble so. Give me your hand a moment."

She laid her hand in his obediently; it shook like a leaf. He held it firmly, touching the fluttering pulse.

"You are certainly no spirit," he said, smiling; "your hand is warm and yielding. Ghosts don't have hands like that, you know."

Her fingers lay in his, quite passive now, but the pulse quickened.

"The explanation of it all is this," he said: "You have had a temporary suspension of consciousness, during which time you, without being aware of what you were doing, came to town from Willow Brook. You believe you went to the dance at the Hunt Club, but probably you did not. Instead, during a lapse of consciousness, you went to the station, took a train to town, came straight to your own house—" He hesitated.

"Yes," she said, "I have a key to the door. Here it is." She drew it from the bosom of her gown; Heatherford took it triumphantly.

"You simply awoke to consciousness while you were groping for the matches. That is all there is to it; and you need not be frightened at all!" he announced.

"No, not frightened," she said, shaking her head, "only—only I wonder how I can get back. I've tried to fix my mind on my ring—on the Sign of Venus—I cannot seem to—"

"But that's nonsense!" he protested, cheerfully. "That ring has nothing to do with the matter."

"But it brought me here! Truly I am asleep in my hammock. Won't you believe it?"

"No; and you mustn't, either," he said,

impatiently. "Why, just now I explained to you—"

"I know," she said, looking down at the ring on her hand, "but you are wrong—truly you are."

"I am not wrong," he said, laughing. "It was only a dream—the dance, the return, the hammock,—all these were parts of a dream so intensely real that you cannot shake it off at once."

"Then—then *who* was that we saw in the mirror?"

"Let us try it again," he said, confidently. She suffered him to lead her again to the mirror; again they peered into its glimmering depths, heads close together.

A second's breathless silence, then she caught his hand in both of hers with a low cry; for the strange profile was slowly turning toward them a face of amazing beauty—her own face transfigured, radiantly glorified.

"My soul!" she gasped, and would have fallen at his feet had he not held her and supported her to the stairs, where she sank down, hiding her face in her arms.

As for him, he was terribly shaken; he strove to speak, to reason with her, with himself, but a stupor chained body and mind, and he only leaned there on the newel-post, vaguely aware of his own helplessness.

Far away in the night the bells of a church began striking the hour—one, two, three, four. Presently the distant rattle of a wagon sounded. The city stirred in its slumbers.

He found himself bending beside her, her passive hands in his once more, and he was saying: "As a matter of fact, all this is quite capable of an explanation. Don't be distressed—please don't be frightened or sad. We've both had some sort of hallucination, that's all—really that is all."

"I am not frightened now," she said, dreamily. "I am quite sure that—that I am not dead. I am only asleep in my hammock. When I awake—"

Again, in spite of himself, he shivered.

"Will you do one more thing for me?" she asked.

"Yes—a million."

"Only one. It is unreasonable, it is perhaps silly—and I have no right to ask—"

"Ask it," he begged.

"Then—then, will you go to Willow Brook? Now?"

"Now?" he repeated, blankly.

"Yes." She looked down at him with the shadow of a smile touching lips and eyes. "I am asleep in the hammock; I sleep very, very soundly—and very, very late into the morning. They may not find me there for a long while. So would you mind going to Willow Brook to awaken me?"

"I—I—but you do not expect me to leave you here and find you in Westchester!" he stammered.

"You need not go," she said, quietly.

"No," he said, "I will go;—I will go anywhere on earth for you."

"Thank you," she said, sweetly. "When you awake me, give me this." She held out the Signum Veneris; and he took it, and bending his head slowly, raised it to his lips.

It was almost morning when he entered his own house. In a dull trance he dressed, turned again to the stairs, and crept out into the shadowy street.

People began to pass him; an early electric tram whizzed up Forty-second Street as he entered the railway station. Presently he found himself in a car, clutching his ticket in one hand, her ring in the other.

"It is I who am mad, not she," he muttered as the train glided from the station, through the long yard, dim in morning mist, where green and crimson lanterns still sparkled faintly.

Again he pressed the Signum Veneris to his lips. "It is I who am mad—love-mad!" he whispered as the far treble warning of the whistle aroused him and sent him stumbling out into the soft fresh morning air.

The rising sun smote him full in the eyes as he came in sight of the clubhouse among the still green trees, and the dew on the lawn flashed like the gems of the Signum Veneris on the ring he held so tightly.

Across the club-house lawn stood another house, circled with gardens in full bloom; and to the left, among young trees, the white columns of a pergola glistened.

There was not a soul astir as he crossed the lawn and entered the garden.

Suddenly, at a turn in the path, he came upon the pergola, and saw a brilliant hammock hanging in the shadow.

Over the hammock's fringe something light and fluffy fell in folds like the billowy frills of a ball gown. He stumbled forward, dazed, incredulous.

Then, speechless, he sank down beside her, and dropped the ring into the palm of her half-closed and unconscious hand.

A ray of sunlight fell across her hair; slowly her blue eyes unclosed. And in her partly open palm the Sign of Venus glimmered like dew.

Within the past year William Hope Hodgson's epic work *The Night Land* has been issued in two paperback volumes by Ballantine Books, who preceded it with his novel *The Boats of the "Glen Carrig."* This constitutes a new resurgence of interest in the work of a man who is beginning to be recognized as possibly a true genius in the field of supernatural, horror and science fiction. When Arkham House published in a single volume his fantasies of the sea, *Deep Waters* in 1967, August W. Derleth said of him: "No other writer—not Joseph Conrad or Herman Melville or any other—has so consistently dealt with the eternal mystery of the sea; others have written unforgettably of its beauty and grandeur, but none has so effectively depicted its brooding terror."

It would be difficult to refute that statement. There is virtually no question that William Hope Hodgson's horror tales of the sea are the finest ever written. Yet, since 1946 when Arkham House issued his four novels as *The House on the Borderland and Other Novels,* the only biographical and bibliographical information available have been variations on the Introduction by H. C. Koenig and the bibliography by A. Langley Searles contained in that volume.

In 1968 the editor of this magazine set out to write a biography and criticism of Hodgson's work. The research required a special trip to England where the remaining papers of his estate were found. The discovery of a brother still living in the United States who was able to supply basic information was very fortunate indeed. Then a thorough search through the pages of British and American periodicals through World War I helped discover the original publication appearances of practically all of his works.

It took four years and many thousands of dollars but the result, this three-installment appraisal is the most definitive work on Hodgson ever attempted and has resulted in portraying the life and works of a most extraordinary literary figure, colorful and unusual in any context.

Now, kindly turn to page 66 and enjoy a rare Hodgson story unread since its original appearance in a London magazine in 1905.

William Hope Hodgson--The Early Years

By SAM MOSKOWITZ

THE supreme master of imaginative horror in science fiction was William Hope Hodgson and his *tour de force* was the apocalyptic novel *The Night Land*, a 200,000 word epic first published by Everleigh Nash, London, in 1912.

The setting is uncounted millions of years in the future. The place in that future is The Last Redoubt, a metal pyramid nearly eight miles high, but built in a valley one thousand miles long and 100 miles deep. About the valley the rest of the world is dark and cold. Like an iceberg, only a fraction of the building's size is visible to the eye for its base spreads an incredible one hundred miles into the interior of the earth.

The sun is dead and night is eternal. The world is heated by the fires from volcanoes and the warmth that rises from chasms which plunge a thousand miles towards the earth's center.

The Redoubt is an oasis of sanity in a nightmare world, possibly the remaining bastion of civilized humanity. To the North, the glare from The Red Pit illuminates the North-West Watcher, "That which Hath Watched from the beginning." There are four watchers, monumental slugs of titanic bulk, "The Watching Thing of the South," is the hugest visible monster in all The Night Land, a living hill that first came into sight a million years earlier. It has moved gradually closer to The Redoubt for 20,000 years after its first sighting, when it was abruptly stopped by the rays of a glowing dome which rose from the ground. For the

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remainder of a million years it has continued to stare unblinkingly at The Redoubt.

The progress of the South-West Watcher was stayed by a grey beam which shot up from the ground and played upon the right eye. This was the first evidence that though there were utterly alien forces of evil out in The Night Land, there were other forces, even less understood by the remaining humans, which appeared to be forces for good.

To the right of the North-West Watcher is the Vale of Red Fire, a long sinuous glare. The blackness of The Night Land stretches endlessly in that direction, relieved only by the cold light from the Plain of Blue Fire.

To the North is The House of Silence, set upon a low hill. There are many lights in that strange structure, but no sound is to be detected even by the sensitive microphones of The Last Redoubt. Past that House is The Road Where the Silent Ones Walk. A road believed to have been originally built by humans, possibly to reach another redoubt. The Silent Ones walk that road surrounded by a green mist, quiet, shrouded figures, looking neither to the right nor left. They do not go out of their way to harm humans, but those who come too close are drawn by a siren call into their House and are never seen again.

Near them is the place of the Ab-Humans, where a degenerate part-monster race abides.

To the East is the Valley of the Hounds, horrendous bellowing creatures, gigantic and deadly. Beyond them is "The Country whence Comes the Great Laughter." from which issues a continuous menacing mockery.

To the South are the Giant's Pits, where huge manlike creatures work at kilns. Back of the Giant's Pits, between the Valley of the Hounds, is "The Headland From which Strange Things Peer."

Beyond the Red Pit are the Unknown Lands, a range of low volcanoes which light up the black hills where "Shine the Seven Lights Which Neither Move Nor Falter Through Eternity," and of which not even the great spy-glass could bring into focus, nor had any adventurer come back to tell what they are.

The fearful changes had begun even before the sun had died, spawned by man's misuse of science and speeded by a catastrophe that split a chasm in the earth thousands of miles long, into which the oceans of the world spilled. For untold periods a mist rained on the land from the evaporation of the oceans as their waters struck the furnace heat of the inner earth. Finally, man followed the waters down into the cooled chasm and built new civilizations, but slow decadence and the arrival of creatures from other dimensions forced the remaining "sound" men to band together and build The Last Redoubt.

Out into this phantasmagorical Night Land ventures a telepathically sensitive youth, whose thoughts are received and actions penned by a 17th-century man who remembers the future, and will someday reside in the body of that hero of the earth's last days. In that bedlamnite land of terror, the youth "remembers" a previous incarnation and a much-loved wife, whose spirit has appeared in the body of a young girl in another redoubt.

The 200,000 word epic is written in a "seventeenth century style," which William Hope Hodgson may have invented. It is artificial, contrived, repititious and awkward. The introductory portions are both tedious and absurd as they relate the background of the 17th century storyteller. With the shift to The Last Redoubt in that world at the end of time, that same impossible style succeeds in paining a canvas of that milieu with awesome literary strokes, inspired by imaginative genius. Possibly no other writer has written fiction which succeeds in sustaining a mood of true horror over so long a work as had William Hope Hodgson. The sense of horror never falters, the fascination never slackens, and the subject matter never sickens.

The evidence is very convincing that William Hope Hodgson was a possible inspiration for Olaf Stapledon's method as displayed in *Last and First Men*, *Last Men in London* and *The Star Maker*, those staggering speculative philosophical feats that tried to present the entire future history of mankind and the universe, and served as a major inspiration of a large part of modern science fiction. *The Night Land* impressed C.S. Lewis strongly enough so that in a talk titled *On Science Fiction*, delivered before the Cambridge University English Club on November 24, 1955, he said that works of science fiction "are actual additions to life; they give, like certain rare dreams, sensations we never had before, and enlarge our conception of the range of possible experience. . . .W. H. Hodgson's *The Night Land* would have made it in eminence from the unforgettable sombre splendour of the images it presents, if it were not disfigured by a sentimental and irrelevant erotic interest and by a foolish and flat archaism of style." S. Flowler Wright, in *The World Below*, particularly, mirrors reflections of Hodgson's method.

The Night Land is an awkward, sprawling, and in places mawkish novel, but in the words of H. P. Lovecraft: "Allowing for all its faults, it is one of the most potent pieces of macabre imagination ever written."

The travel of the young hero across the berserk terrain of a world that has forgotten its past and has no tomorrow is an unforgettable odyssey into nightmare. Rarely has an author conveyed to the reader a landscape so alien as that in *The Night Land*. This is no grown-up *Wizard of Oz* where the strange encounters, thrill, amaze and delight, but never become real. Every obstacle and menace encountered is so ominous and formidable that the reader is never certain for a page that the story will not end in tragedy. Some of the forces extant are unfathomable and there is no way the hero can plan to survive a direct confrontation.

The men of that distant night are the heirs of mighty science, but so overwhelming are the powers arrayed against them that to hold the darkness at bay is a great achievement, and to prevail is impossible. Even the most pedantic among them realizes that in defeat they will suffer more than the death of their physical bodies, and the reader is forced to concur with that knowledge.

The author of this utterly unique and influential work, William Hope Hodgson, was born November 15, 1877 in Blackmore End, Wethersfield, Finchingfield, Essex, England, the son of Samuel Hodgson and Lissie Sarah Brown. His father was an Anglican priest ordained in Lichfield Cathedral in 1871.

William Hope was the second of 12 children, three of whom died in infancy. In order of birth, the survivors were Chad, William Hope, Hillyard, Mary, Frank, Bertha, Lissie, Eunice, and Christopher.

The father was a small man but strong minded and disagreed with many doctrinal matters of the church. A superb speaker, capable of delivering a rousing inspirational sermon extemporaneously, this very quality accentuated his differences with the church and caused him to be shifted from place to place serving 11 parishes in 21 years, one in Ardrahan, County Galway, Ireland. As a result, the family frequently lived on the thin edge of poverty.

He loved the children and was unfailingly kind to them, as was the mother, a good-natured woman, extremely devout, who felt that she was married to a God and when she spoke to the children about her father it was *literally* in hushed whispers. It was her wish that William Hope would someday become a clergyman. He had other ideas.

As a youngster, he was entranced by the mystical and the supernatural, and delighted in playing ghost and frightening the other children. Living in a seafaring nation, a sailor's life seemed a romantic one and held an imaginative lure for him. At the age of 13, he ran away from Margaret's Boarding School in Margate, hoping to get to sea. He was caught and that was the end of his formal education. Finally, not being able to prevail upon him, his father apprenticed him as a cabin boy. The mother was not happy about this because her father had been a wanderer who disappeared in the direction of Sheffield shortly after her marriage, and she was fearful that William Hope might have inherited some of his characteristics.

Even in those days, English shipowners were sailing their vessels under foreign flags, and it was frequently necessary to *pay* the owner a premium for *accepting* the apprentice. Sometimes it required an additional sum slipped to the Captain *per voyage* to keep the boy aboard ship. Whatever the arrangements were, Rev. Samuel Hodgson made them, and in 1891 William Hope was embarked upon a four-year apprenticeship, and a total of eight years at sea that would shape his writings the rest of his life.

Then, tragedy struck. Samuel Hodgson began to lose his voice. The diagnosis was cancer of the throat, and he died on November 11, 1892 at the age of 46.

William Hope Hodgson was no problem. His apprenticeship had several years to run, and despite the dismal drudgery and humiliation of shipborad life, he was assured bed and board for that time. The immediate problem was the rest of the still-sizable family, which had been left nothing to subsist upon and now had to throw themselves at the mercy of a church in which Samuel Hodgson had not been too popular. The entire family was off-beat and eccentric, a non-conformist group; and to add to the suspicion with which they were viewed was the fact that many of them were of dark complexion.

In time of crisis the strong member of the group moves to the fore, and unexpectedly in the Hodgson family, it proved to be Lissie, the third youngest. She coaxed a well-to-do clergyman's sister into building a house for the family in Borth, Wales, and in acknowledgment of her remarkable feat the house was named after her, "Lisswood," in Borth, S.O., Cardiganshire. Borth was a resort town on the ocean. In this home, the family subsisted on hand-outs and hand-me-downs from co-religionists in the area, until the older sons were able to contribute more substantially.

Completing his apprenticeship in 1895, William Hope Hodgson realized that he would have to find some way to make a living. The four years before the mast made him eligible to study for and take the tests for his mates certificate. He spent two years going to school in Liverpool, which was the closest thing to a higher education he ever had, and passed his tests for a mate's papers.

While at sea he had experienced the brutality handed out to seamen generally and to apprentices in particular. In a 1901 interview with a Blackburn newspaper he recalled a shipboard experience that changed the course of his life:

> *You see, I was driven to the development of my muscles at a very early age. I went to sea when thirteen, and being a little chap with a very ordinary physique, had the misfortune to serve under a second mate of the worst possible type. He was brutal, and although I can truthfully say I never gave him just cause, he singled me out for ill-treatment. He made my life so miserable that in the end I summoned sufficient courage to retaliate, and 'went for him.' It was for all the world like a fight between a mastiff and a terrier, for he was power and knew how to punish. Of course I took a merciless thrashing, but I remember how proud I was the next day when I was arraigned before the captain for insubordination to see that I had left my mark."*

The great Eugene Sandow, "the world's strongest man," was then entering the limelight. He successfully launched a muscle publication called SANDOW'S MAGAZINE, and Hodgson took up weight lifting and body development in earnest. He did not stop at mere exercise, but delved into the interaction of muscles and made body development an obsession. The primary motivation of his body development was not health, but self defense. His relatively short height and sensitive, almost beautiful face made him an irresistible target for bullying seamen. When they moved in to pulverize him, they would learn too late that they had come to grips with easily one of the most powerful men, pound for pound, in all England. Additionally, he was an advanced student of Judo! There is strong evidence that throughout his life one of his most delightful diversions was to pound seamen to jelly at the slightest provocation.

Another hobby he developed while at sea was photography, and he became a master of the art, photographing cyclones and storms at sea.

Hodgson kept a log of part of one of his longest stints at sea, a 10-month voyage on a windjammer which began when he left Glasgow aboard the *Euterpe.* This must have been in the late 1890's, when he was an experienced seaman, for he was permitted to set up a darkroom for his photography aboard the ship. On this voyage he took hundreds of the superb photos which were to brand him one of the great amateur photographers of his day. He did muscle-building exercises daily, worked out on the punching bag, and boxed with members of the crew. At that time, stamp collecting was a hobby of his and he spent large parts of his earnings on it. He was also proficient at making house mats out of ship's rope, and worked constantly on them. Work was cruel and hard, and a major part of the protein of the meals was maggots. Hodgson took numerous photographs of the maggots squirming on the plates of food served to the sailors on that trip. Hodgson not only caught sharks at sea, but brought back photographic evidence to prove it! The *Euterpe* was sold in New Zealand. While waiting for a ship back, Hodgson, who had taken his rifle with him, went hunting rabbits. The return to England was made in another sailing vessel, the *Canterbury.* On the return trip he suffered from toothaches for *weeks* at a time, frequent stomach cramps, and from the bitter cold until the ship reached warmer latitudes. He notes at one point that he did 160 dumbbell exercises, topping the Second Mate's record by 30. He records that he could punch the bag 10 minutes straight without a miss.

By 1899, he was convinced that the sea was a "dog's life," and only a man with an inborn sense of masochism or mental weakness would pursue it. He had to make a living and the only other things he knew were photography and physical culture.

In the Fall of 1899, he opened in Blackburn, England, a small industrial city of 100,000 north of Liverpool where his father had died trying to uplift the cotton spinners, "W. H. Hodgson's School of

Physical Culture." Hodgson was, at the age of 22, one of the most splendid physical specimens in the world. Postcards, printed by himself, carried front and back views of his extraordinary muscular development. Quite literally his muscles had muscles. Yet he was only five foot five or five foot six and so handsome that his features seemed unreal. His body was the big attraction and when he pulled off his shirt and tensed his muscles, any doubting prospects signed up. Located on Ainsworth Street, his facilities were comparable to the best in large cities. He had 1,200 square feet of space, including dressing rooms, showers, anterooms, with scientific ventilation, and boasting the fact that they were lit by electricity.

Hodgson would carefully question and examine each recruit and tailor a regime which suited that person's age, physical condition and constitution. The students were photographed before they began their training and then afterward to show their physical improvement. Among Hodgson's best customers were the Blackburn police, whom he helped keep in condition. When Harry Houdini, the world-famous magician escaped from the Blackburn jail with embarrassing ease, to promote publicity for an appearance in town, the chagrined police put their heads together and approached William Hope Hodgson.

Houdini had a standard offer going for anyone who could bind, handcuff or chain him in a manner in which he could not release himself. The amout offered was the U. S. equivalant of $125, and each night hopefuls mounted the stage with a wide assortment of shackles and binders and each night Houdini easily released himself from them to the wild acclaim of the audience. On October 24, 1902, William Hope Hodgson climbed to the stage of the Blackburn Palace Theatre with six pairs of handcuffs and a sundry array of other man-retaining devices, most supplied by the Blackburn police department.

Hodgson, who had an implicit knowledge of the interaction of muscles, scientifically latched Houdini in a manner which would give him the minimal play of sinew. Summoning all the strength of his great biceps he deliberately forced and bruised Houdini's arms so severely, that the magician questioned in anger and agony whether Hodgson was attempting to break his arms.

Previous to accepting Hodgson's challenge, Houdini told the audience that the locks had been worked on and that there had been string introduced to the closures of the cuffs. He said that as a result, it would take him more time than usual to escape from them.

Trussed and manacled by Hodgson, Houdini was placed in a box. Periodically, the box was opened and he was found to be making no progress at freeing himself. After 35 minutes there seemed to be interference with his circulation and he requested that the irons be opened for a few minutes to restore his blood flow. Hodgson refused to allow this, asserting that there were stakes involved here that did not permit him to give any quarter.

After two hours, a nearly exhausted Houdini, with blood on his arms and wrists and torn clothes, finally completed his escape amid the wild exhultation of the audience. Houdini claimed that the holes in the locks had been stuffed, so as to prevent the entrance of a key and asserted that Hodgson's treatment of him was the cruelest he had ever experienced.

THE BLACKBURN STAR was quoted as stating that Hodgson left the theatre and ran to the police station, fearful of the temper of the crowd who felt he had been un-British in his handling of Houdini. Since Hodgson had borrowed his manacles and chains from the Blackburn police, it was only logical he should return them there. It is also probable that a sizeable delegation of the Blackburn police were on hand to see him work on Houdini, so the literal acceptance of the newspaper story as to Hodgson's motives for returning to the station house may be to misinterpret the events.

Hodgson was an excellent publicist, and had received illustrated write-ups from the local newspaper for his Physical Culture establishment. He was well liked in the city of Blackburn because he was never reluctant to share some stirring saga of his adventures abroad with whomever stopped to chat with him. He lived with his mother and the remaining children at home and helped support the family. His mother liked him and his relationship with her was excellent. He did not smoke or drink and though the opposite sex interested him, he was not a lady chaser.

To the townspeople he showed two moods. He would take lengthy walks in the country, usually alone. He could be observed standing still for the longest time, just thinking, and when questioned his thoughts were always imaginatively odd. He scoured the second-hand book shops and read omnivorously. Among his favorites were

Edgar Allan Poe, H. G. Wells, Jules Verne, Lord Bulwer-Lytton, and a little later Rudyard Kipling and A. Conan Doyle. He preferred their fantastic works primarily, and in reviews would single them out for commendation for their qualities of imagination even when he felt that from a literary standpoint they were lacking. A powerful stylistic influence was inherited from his father's profession, *The Holy Bible*, particularly *The Old Testament*, and words like "thou," "art," "verily," and "lo!" interpenetrate his fiction and poetry and make it hard to believe that certain of his stories were actually written by a twentieth century author.

That was the introspective and literary side of his nature. The other was the eccentric, harmless madcap, and frequently his escapades were reported in the local papers. In THE BLACKBURN WEEKLY TELEGRAPH for Saturday, August 30th, 1902, a reporter gives an unusual eyewitness account of an event involving Hodgson. It seemed that in Blackburn, there was one street, Brantfell Road, so steep that no vehicles could ascend or descend, and it was made up of sixty steps, several feet wide. This street provided access to Park Mount, Revidge, Blackburn, where Hodgson was residing at the time. A series of posts at the top prevented any carriage or cart from accidentally trying to descend it, however, they allowed enough space for a bicycle to slip through. "Prudence would, of course, dictate a very wide detour," the newspaper volunteered, but "There are some men, however, to whom fear is an unknown quantity and danger merely an element to be conquered and one of these is Mr. W. H. Hodgson, the well-known professor of physical culture, who has this week cycled down the 'steppy' precipice without breaking his neck.

". . .Breathlessly one and all watched him as he calmly hopped from ledge to ledge, every bound full of dire possibility. . . . Among the watchers was a good lady resident in the street and just before the rider reached her dwelling, she rushed out of her garden gate and with outstretched arms, barred the path. . . .Happily Mr. Hodgson had his machine so completely under control that—most wonderful part of the performance, he had no difficulty in throwing himself from the saddle and landing on his feet. This on the 58th step and having safely navigated the steep thus far, Mr. Hodgson determined not to be beaten, mounted again and proceeded on his way rejoicing."

He had a good, deep voice and carried a tune nicely, and when people asked him why he didn't take up singing he would reply: "The timbre is all there but there's too much bark!" He was a hypochondriac, always gargling because his father had died of cancer of the throat. After opening letters and reading them, he would wash his hands to kill any germs received in the mail. When, years later, his youngest brother, Chris, was leaving for Canada and asked for a word of advice from his brilliant older brother, he received in dead seriousness: "Advice? Well, yes, never sit on a public toilet seat."

The problem with the physical culture business was its seasonality. Virtually no one showed up for classes in the summer, but the rent and expenses had to be maintained. Neither was Blackburn the mecca of England. Finally, after two years, the youthful Hodgson had to shut down, and figure out some other way to make a living.

Employing his knowledge of physical culture, he wrote an article titled *Physical Culture versus Recreative Exercises*, particularly stressing the value of proper breathing as a cure for tuberculosis, which he sent to the British edition of SANDOW'S MAGAZINE, the magazine published by strong man Eugene Sandow, the international celebrity he most desired to emulate. They took and published it in the February, 1903 issue, with an impressive muscle pose of the author, and William Hope Hodgson's writing career was launched! To add to the thrill, he sold SANDOW'S MAGAZINE some photographs on the use of vibration in physical culture and received the equivalent of $5.50 for them. A briefer second article *Hints on Physical Culture*, emphasizing the role of exercise in good blood circulation appeared in August, 1903.

Heartened by his success with SANDOW'S MAGAZINE, Hodgson set out for greater literary worlds to conquer and wrote an article titled *Health from Scientific Exercise*, illustrated it with 14 time exposures of himself demonstrating the exercises. The feature was accepted by CASSELL'S MAGAZINE, among the five or six leading popular publications in England, in a class with THE STRAND, PEARSON'S MAGAZINE, PALL MALL MAGAZINE and WINDSOR'S MAGAZINE. It was published in the October, 1903 issue, and he received $28 for it. Among the benefits of exercise he claimed: "As a further result the appetite improves, food is better assimilated, and there is a general gain in health and strength. The numerous muscles gain tone, a better carriage is acquired, the chest and lungs are enlarged and strengthened, while the limbs increase in size, shapeliness, and power. In short, exercise, properly carried out develops the whole frame and imparts new life not to the body only, but to the brain itself."

Hodgson was ecstatic. He had discovered a profession that utilized all his talents. He had displayed his musculature and knowledge of body building in prominent magazines, and utilized his outstanding ability as a photographer to illustrate them. Beyond that, he had experienced the heady thrill of seeing his byline beneath stories and reading the words in type.

Hodgson got to work on another series of pictures to illustrate an article on physical culture. This one did not do sell at the better magazines, so gradually it worked its way down to PENNY PICTORIAL WEEKLY, a magazine for the masses published by Alfred Harmsworth, who owned the prestigious LONDON MAGAZINE. PENNY PICTORIAL WEEKLY had been started with the issue of June 10, 1899. It was not the first of its type, there haveing been THE NEW PENNY MAGAZINE previously, and competitor GOLDEN PENNY MAGAZINE. These publications ran human-interest features on a broad range of topics, as well as short stories, and all of them illustrated, many with photographs. THE PENNY PICTORIAL WEEKLY varied from 40 to 72 pages an issue, depending upon the amount of advertisement included, and was a popular seller. This magazine accepted and published in its June 25, 1904 issue the article *Chair Exercises* with 18 time-exposure photographs by Hodgson, for which they paid $28.

Already convinced that he was on his way to becoming an author, William Hope Hodgson had joined the Society of Authors, Incorporated, which included on its roster such illustrious names as H. G. Wells, A. Conan Doyle and George Meredith. It was founded in 1883 for "The maintenance, definition, and defense of literary property," and published the monthly magazine for members, THE AUTHOR, which also encompassed the playwright and composer. Through this magazine Hodgson would eventually write to Wells and several times meet him, but its greatest value to him was its advice on how a professional author should conduct his business, including copyright, as well as preparation of manuscript. All of Hodgson's works were typewritten double-spaced, and from the very first he sold first serial rights only and copyrighted each story separately in the United States. In later years he would sell a story up to three times in England, plus the United States, and get paid for every sale.

It was early apparent to Hodgson that he could not hope to make a living just writing physical culture pieces. His decision to make a try at fiction was a logical move and how he came to write his first saleable story is remembered by brother Chris Hodgson. In Blackburn Park there was a pond, and in the center of that pond was a statue of Flora, the Greek goddess of flowers. Utilizing the statue as his focus, he wrote a short story of a town in which a dozen people had been murdered in a small park, by something which resembed the statue in the center of the pond. The statue in the story had been shipped to England from Calcutta by a colonel and was the personification of Kali, the goddess of death. The narrator and a friend investigating the matter find the eight-foot statue missing from its pedestal. It emerges from the shrubbery and chases them out of the park. There are further deaths and investigations and finally a group of townspeople converge on a turbanned figure running through the park, shooting him as he leaps into the lake. The statue is found to have a room and tunnel under it, and the murderer apparently a Hindu assassin who is revenging the removal of his god from India, is found dead in the water. The story was far-fetched, improbable, but reasonably competent in its writing. It appeared as *The Goddess of Death* in the April, 1904 ROYAL MAGAZINE, and Hodgson was paid $28. This was the magazine which had first serialized M. P. Shiel's *The Purple Cloud* in 1900, and it was published by the same company as PEARSON'S MAGAZINE, but selling at about half the price, the American equivalent of five cents, to reach the modest-income reading working class. Since a British working man did not make more than $6 to $10 a week at the turn of the century, Hodgson's pay must be viewed in that perspective.

Probably the leading magazine in all England at that time was THE STRAND MAGAZINE, which had revolutionized magazine publishing in 1891 when it made available a top-quality, slick paper magazine with an illustration on every page, to be supported by advertising, for the price of roughly 10 cents. The publisher, George Newnes, was renowned for his achievement, which had a score of imitators. Possibly irked by the repeated suggestion that his success had been due to the fact that THE STRAND MAGAZINE was "beautifully printed on art paper, and with a picture on nearly every page," he launched, with the first issue dated February, 1905, THE GRAND MAGAZINE (with an American edition printed one month later than the British), which would be solid text, predominantly fiction, with no pictures, to prove he could repeat his success on the merit of the content alone.

While THE GRAND MAGAZINE never achieved the circulation of THE STRAND, it was well-received and profitable from the beginning. It used some reprints, but took the onus off them by asking famous authors to select "My Best Story and Why I Think So." H. G. Wells' favorite was *The Star*, a superb short story of a near collision of the earth with a wandering body from space, which lead off the April, 1905 issue. There was also a quasi-bit of science fiction by George Bernard Shaw, *The Theatre of the Future*, in its first issue, and reprints of *The Mysterious Card* by Cleveland Moffett, the famous short story from America's BLACK CAT MAGAZINE, and *The Room in the Dragon Volant* by Sheridan Le Fanu, both in the June, 1905 number.

William Hope Hodgson's second published story, *A Tropical Horror*, was published in that issue and the editor said of it: "Though this story, a terrible tale of the sea, may be too gruesome for some tastes, it is written in a masterly manner and with an air of reality that holds and rivets the attention of the reader in a way that recalls some of the best efforts of Defoe." The narrator, on shipboard in the Pacific, chatting with a young apprentice seaman, Joky, is almost paralyzed to see:

". . .Rising above the bulwarks, seen plainly in the bright moon light, is a vast slobbering mouth a fathom across. From the huge dripping lips hang great tentacles. As I look the Thing comes further over the rail. It is rising, rising, higher and higher. There are no eyes visible; only that fearful slobbering mouth set on the tremendous trunklike neck; which, even as I watch, is curling inboard with the stealthy celerity of an enormous eel. Over it comes in vast heaving folds. Will it never end? The ship gives a slow, sullen roll to starboard as she feels the weight. Then the tail, a broad, flatshaped mass, slips over the teak rail and falls with a loud slump on the deck."

A vast sea serpent has actually slithered aboard the vessel. Then ensues a dramatic struggle of sustained horror unmatched by all but the greatest literary masters. A great tongue flips out and a crew member disappears, followed by a "Glut! Glut!" Every time that sound is repeated, another man had died. The thing has a huge barrel head with a pig face, and a body weighing at least 100 tons. The eyes are alight with "diabolical intelligence." From the center of its "chest" protrudes a long tentacle with a giant claw on the end.

Caught by surprise, dispersed and disorganized, nevertheless the men fire a signal cannon at the monster. It wounds the creature but does not finish it, and the grim battle of wits and brute force continues hour after hour. Finally, the last two men barricade themselves into a steel cabin. The monster smashes through the window and its tongue comes searching in for prey. One of them is killed. An axe in the hands of the other chops off a huge mass of the searching tongue.

When the ship is found, the narrator is the only man alive, though unconscious. The evidence supports his story, and there is no denying "a huge curled-up mass of whitish flesh, weighing about half a ton, one end of which appeared to have been hacked through with a sharp instrument."

The quality of the writing is not merely good, it is superb. A half-dozen styles are interposed to achieve special effects, many of them far in advance of the popular standards of the day. The story is horror science fiction that can only be described as masterly.

How could it have happened? From what source did a self-educated seaman, strong man and photographer draw the techniques and skills to produce so dramatically effective a work of horror in what apparently was his second attempt at fiction, written at the age of 27! The only answer is that in William Hope Hodgson there was a spark of genius.

This story gained William Hope Hodgson not only $56, but respect and status among the professional writers and editors. J. Greenhough Smith, the editor of THE GRAND MAGAZINE, had been the editor of THE STRAND from its first issue and had printed most of A. Conan Doyle's short stories. He ran in each issue a department called "Both Sides" in which he took a controversial issue and got two opponents to debate it in print. Sea commerce was the pride of England, and when he selected for his September, 1905 topic "Is the Mercantile Navy Worth Joining," William Hope

Hodgson was the man who was willing to say "Certainly Not," under his own name. The piece had originally been titled *Why I am Not at Sea*, and Hodgson opened: "I am not at sea because I object to bad treatment, poor food, poor wages, and worse prospects. I am not at sea because very early I discovered that it is a comfortless, weariful and thankless life—a life compact of hardness and sordidness such as shore people can scarcely conceive. I am not at sea because I dislike being a pawn with the sea for a board and the shipowners for players."

He then launched into precise facts and figures, actual salaries paid for career seamen. He wrote his argument lucidly, stressing the utter hopelessness of meaningfuladvancement, a normal life pattern or any prestige for the seaman. As he neared his summation he said: "Of the actual wretchedness of the life I have said nothing. It is a life of hardness, broken sleep, loneliness, separation and discomfort. It is indeed a thankless life, without even the common rewards of industry. It leads neither to fame nor wealth, nor save in exceptional cases, to a sufficiency upon which to retire; and finally the officers of the mercantile marine have not that poor consolation of their Naval brethren, a certain social position."

An anonymous individual, characterized only as a "Marine Superintendent," gave the "Other side" of the story, but no matter how he phrased it, his words seemed to damningly confirm everything Hodgson had said.

The result was a minor sensation. Hodgson was not to stop there, bearding the lion in its den he had published anonymously in the September, 1906 issue of THE NAUTICAL MAGAZINE an article titled *The Trade in Sea Apprentices*, which exposed, without any possibility of ever whitewashing, the scandal in apprenticeships. Parents *paid* to have boys apprenticed for four years as seamen, where they were used as common laborers, vilely treated and learning nothing. They had to acquire a new trade when their four years were up. He actually gave a day-by-day menu of the fare, which was appalling. The editor of the magazine, in a footnote, *supported* him by stating that the Mercantile Marine Committee in 1902 had drawn up a recommendation for a "Scale of Provisions" which had never been implemented.

Hodgson's bitterness against seafaring was not in the least ameliorated by the Royal Humane Society medal awarded him for heroism. While outside of New Zealand, the First Mate fell from the mast, hitting the side of the ship as he plunged into shark infested waters. Unhesitatingly, Hodgson dived into the sea, and kept the man afloat until they could be drawn aboard.

His mother was immensely proud of her son's literary ambitions, encouraging and assisting him in every way she could. She would work with him night after night coloring slides of photos taken at sea, which he would show in conjunction with his lectures. He had inherited his father's ability to speak in public and his action photos of typhoons and storms at sea enchanced his lectures, which were an important supplement (and at times mainstay) to his meagre income during the early years of writing.

One of his earliest lectures was *A Sailor and His Camera*, and it is quite probable that the composition of these lectures was actually his first "commercial" writing. He fictionized *A Sailor and His Camera*, which was illustrated by 13 slides. The lecture, 2,050 words long, was lively and anecdotal. One of his most popular lectures was *Through the Heart of a Cyclone*, reworked in several forms and many of the photos from it published. A related lecture was *When the Sea Gets Cross*, and his longest was *Ten Months at Sea*, which described his trip on the *Euterpe* to Denedin, New Zealand, including a visit ashore, and involved 53 slides, and was 4,000 words long. These lectures were advertised and delivered as by William Hope Hodgson, "The Man at the Wheel," and the first slide would always be a picture of him in sailors' dress at a gigantic ship's wheel.

Though his mother had nine living children, she never ceased to mourn the three that had died during infancy. To comfort her, Hodgson wrote a short fantasy titled *The Valley of Lost Children*, which appeared in the February, 1906 issue of *The Cornhill Magazine*, a prestige publication that had survived the trend towards illustrated magazines. The story brought Hodgson nearly $60, the largest amount he had yet earned as a writer.

A middle-aged farm couple lose their four-year-old son, the only bright spot in their harsh lives. As they bury him, an old man appears and asks permission to say a prayer over the grave. He had lost a child, and once dreamt he entered a valley of light, where hundreds of children, including his own, romped in happiness. He hoped that God would grant him the wish to someday enter it again. Twenty years of hardship and toil find the aged couple evicted from their home, and packing their meagre belongings, including their son's baby clothes. After a brief visit at the mound of their baby, they start out on a trek towards the shanty of a distant relative. Sleeping out at night, the woman is awakened by the sound of children's voices. She hurries towards them, and descends into a great valley of light and finds her lost son. She fumbles to untie his baby clothes to cover his nakedness and he impishly goes running off with her after him.

When her husband awakes in the morning, he finds her dead, "chased by a chubby baby-boy in the Valley of Lost Children." Overly sentimental by today's standards, the story nevertheless shows no compromise with the harsh realities of life.

William Hope Hodgson's "bible" in literary affairs was the writer's magazine, THE AUTHOR. Its columns frequently contained a letter from Hodgson on some topic or another, but the one which raised the greatest interest was his suggestion that authors have "totems" or trademarks so that the reader could instantly identify their favorite when they saw two authors with similar names. A glaring example of the problem were the two Winston Churchills, one an American, the other British, and both internationally famous. These trademarks should be registered, he felt, to prevent infringement and should be carried along with every story, book and advertisement. He went into great detail on the question in his piece *Regarding Similar Names* in the January, 1906 issue of THE AUTHOR and replied to many letters in a communication titled *A Review of the Totem Question* in THE AUTHOR for April, 1906. Hodgson had wasted a good idea on a non-paying magazine, for the editor of THE STRAND read Hodgson's material and commissioned the drawing of totems as trademarks for 35 prominent authors, including such prominent writers of science fiction as H. G. Wells (who had Saturn as his trademark), A. Conan Doyle, H. Rider Haggard, Robert Hichens, E. F. Benson, Eden Phillpotts, A. T.Quiller-Couch, Cutcliffe Hyne, William LeQueux, Max Pemberton, Rudyard Kipling, Arthur Morrison and Morley Roberts. These he published in his July, 1906 issue under the title of *Totems for Famous Authors*, with explanatory text by Stephen Hallett.

Deploring the difficult time poets had making a living, Hodgson's article *The Poet v. the Stonemason; or, Why Not a New Market for Poetry?* in the March, 1906 issue of THE AUTHOR suggested that in some way a market be created for poets by commercializing the demand for inscriptions on monuments, tombstone, placques, and similar momentos. All his life Hodgson would write poetry and succeed in selling only two pieces!

It was in THE AUTHOR that he learned of the appearance in America of a new all-fiction publication, heavily stressing adventure, titled THE MONTHLY STORY MAGAZINE. This publication was actually a pulp magazine, in direct competition to THE ARGOSY, ALL-STORY MAGAZINE and THE POPULAR MAGAZINE, and had begun publication with its May, 1905 issue, running fantasy and science fiction consistently from the very first. Its willingness to accept such material was a great attraction to Hodgson.

The story Hodgson sent them, *From the Tideless Sea*, which they accepted and published in their April, 1906 issue, was a landmark in Hodgson's career. Not because its publication there brought him special attention, to the contrary it went virtually unnoticed, but because it was the first story creating the Sargassso Sea Mythos which would become an even more potent element in Hodgson's career than the Cthulhu Mythos was for H. P. Lovecraft. A major portion of Hodgson's literary production concerning horror at sea would thereafter be concentrated on the legendary Sargasso. He would stay with it most of his writing life, weaving in new elements in a consistent manner and creating not only a mythos, but an imaginary world just as vivid as Edgar Rice Burroughs' Mars or L. Frank Baum's Oz.

From the Tideless Sea was also a short story adventure horror masterpiece of the first magnitude. A Captain and his cabin boy fish a small wooden keg out of the ocean with the name of the ship "Homebird" printed on it. Inside, wrapped in oilskin, they find a diary. The diary tells of the ship caught in "the heart of the dread Sargasso Sea—The Tideless Sea of the North Atlantic. From the stump of the mizzen mast, one may see, spread out to the far horizon, an interminable waste of wood—a treacherous, silent vastitude of slime and hideousness."

Immense Octopi, and hinted-at other things, pull men who venture out in small boats one by one beneath the weed, then they reach onto the very deck of the ship, until finally only the bedridden Captain, his daughter, and one man remain. In the distance can be seen the worn hulks of other ships that have wandered into the green trap, and there is no sign of life on any of them.

The remaining man builds a superstructure covered with canvas and tar, completely enclosing the deck of the ship, to save them from the swift sorties of the monsters that lurk in the water below. Before he does, the Captain marries the remaining man to his daughter. A child is born to them, and they try to make a life despite the fact that they are constantly beseiged by the horrors about them. When the diary ends, it is stated that there is roughly 17 years of food for the three of them, and it is hoped that someone will find the keg which has been lifted beyond the Sargasso by a fire balloon, and send rescue before that time.

The Captain, as he concludes reading the note to the cabin boy, is quiet, then:

"Seventeen years pervisions," he muttered thoughtfully. "An this 'ere were written sumthin' like twenty nine years ago!" He nodded his head several times. "Poor creatures!! he exclaimed."

"'It'd be er long while, Jock—a long while!'"

The sale, for which he received $40, opened up the American market to Hodgson, which he sold regularly from then on.

Hodgson took the published version of the story to the editor of THE LONDON MAGAZINE, Alfred Harmsworth. The magazine was possibly second only to THE STRAND MAGAZINE in standing with middle-class England, and in volume of advertising. They had earlier bought his illustrated article on chair exercises for PENNY PICTORIAL WEEKLY. From their first issue the magazine had included science fiction, fantasy and supernatural tales, and were partial to them. They were wildly enthusiastic over *From the Tideless Sea*, paying him $90 for the British serial rights and making it the lead short story in their May, 1907 issue, decorated with four superlative illustrations by E. F. Skinner. It was blurbed as "A short story that will fascinate every reader by reason of its simple narrative interest and unusual dramatic power. The young author is an Englishman who 'has followed the sea,' and this is his finest effort in fiction." Every other page on top of the story ran headings which read: "A short story of great power," "A tale that grips and holds the reader," "A most original short story," A real masterpiece of the short story." Hodgson rated every claim they made.

With the smashing success of *From the Tideless Sea*, it was a good bet for a sequel. Instead of the sequel appearing in THE LONDON MAGAZINE, it was sent to America where THE MONTHLY STORY MAGAZINE had changed its name to BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE with the May, 1907 issue. It was submitted under the title of *Further News from the Homebird*, and appeared as *More News From the Homebird*, in the August, 1907 number. It would eventually be printed in THE LONDON MAGAZINE for May, 1911 as *The Fifth Message From the Tideless Sea*, with wild editorial raves and a half-dozen superb illustrations.

More News From the Homebird, if anything, surpasses *From the Tideless Sea.* It is the fifth message sent by the unfortunates, but only the second the world has found. Six years have passed: "It has been six years of living in a grave." The baby girl is now 4½ years old. One night, there is a strange tapping intermittent sound along one side of the boat. Then alternately great heavy blows. The next night a large pig kept in an iron cage aboard, weighing hundreds of pounds, is found disemboweled with the bars of its cage snapped. All remove to a little four-bunked iron covered house, with an iron door, with eight iron ports. The tapping begins again and the sound of destruction is heard. Soon tremendous blows are struck at their iron refuge.

The next day "lying on the deck on its back, was a gigantic crab, so vast in size that I had not conceived so huge a monster existed. . .one claw weighed so heavy that I had some to do to lift it from the deck. . ."

It is surmised they have been attacked by a wave of mammoth crabs, somehow attracted to the ship. Perhaps they will return, perhaps they will not. Regardless, "We are beyond all help" the message closes.

The first all-fiction pulp magazine in England was THE STORY TELLER, which began publication with its issue of March, 1907 and, except for its trimmed edges, was indistinguishable from THE ARGOSY, ALL-STORY MAGAZINE, THE MONTHLY STORY MAGAZINE, THE POPULAR MAGAZINE, or similar American publications. *The Mystery of the Derelict*, which Hodgson had published in the July, 1907 issue of this periodical, was the second in his Sargasso mythos, and is one of the most savagely grim horror adventure stories ever told. Becalmed on the fringe of the Sargasso Sea, the four-masted ship *Tarawak's* crew sights a small sailing barque move up to an ancient derelict in the distance. There are the sounds of shots, strange faint noises, and then silence. The next morning, 10 men row over on a small ship to investigate. They find the barque deserted, but on the derelict there are tens of thousands of a gigantic species of rats that attack them. For hundreds of yards rowing back to their ship, the water is black with swimming rats, mounting the oars, climbing up the sides of the boat. When finally they outdistance the rats, there is not a man who is not severely bitten. The sheer terror of events is superlatively handled, in what has become a frequently reprinted masterpiece. Of the nature of the rats, Hodgson gives a clue: "Whether they were true ships' rats, or a species that is to be found in the weed-haunted plains of the Sargasso Sea, I cannot say. . .It may be that they are the descendents of rats that lived in ships long centuries lost in the Weed Sea, and which have learned to live among the weed, forming new characteristics, and developing fresh powers and instincts."

Sherlock Holmes had popularized the detective story by the turn of the century and there were scores of other writers following his lead. The earliest story William Hope Hodgson wrote which could be considered as part of the mystery genre (though there would be many others later) was *The Terror of the Water-Tank*, included in the September, 1907, THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE. Several men, one a police officer, are found strangled outside the town's giant water tank. Fine detective work leads the police to the home of the tank caretaker, where possessions from the bodies of the dead men are found. Convicted and sentenced to be hanged, he is saved when an immense ribbon-shaped water creature is lured from the tank and killed. It obviously has been slipping out and strangling the men. It is suspected that the creature is a mutation and it is discovered that the tank has not been cleaned in many years. Hodgson thrusts home his case for better sanitation, a phobia of his, in his final lines: " 'Yes,' agreed the doctor. 'It certainly ought to provide a lesson in cleanliness.' "

No new fiction by Hodgson appeared between April, 1906 and July, 1907's publication of *The Mystery of the Missing Derelict*. He was hard at work on his first novel, deliberately aimed at book publication. His earnings during that period must have been pitifully meagre, and at 30 years of age, had he not been living at home, he could not have survived. Income from younger brothers working, as well as small rentals from three attached cottages in Cobden View Road, Sheffield, willed to Hodgson's mother by his grandfather William Hodgson in May, 1901, kept the family eating. Hodgson also produced and marketed professional quality black and white picture postcards of Borth, which were offered for sale by souvenir shops to vacationers.

The purpose of getting a hardcover novel published was not immediate money, it was to obtain reviews and reputation that could be converted into money. Even the greatest writers of the day made very little from their books, but banked on sales of fiction and fact to popular magazines to keep them financially solvent. The basic book contract in England during that period provided that the authors of books get *no advance at all*. They were paid *nothing* until the book broke even and then the profits were split 50-50 between publisher and author. Obviously, the author was at the mercy of the publisher in determining at what point the book broke even. Many books, possibly even a *majority* of published books, brought their authors *nothing*. Even the most successful authors, such as H. G. Wells, H. Rider Haggard, Rudyard Kipling, and Arnold Bennett, knew it was imperative to get their novels *serialized* in advance of publication.

Since no novel Hodgson ever wrote was ever serialized, and since at least three of them were suitable for serialization, it was obvious that he wrote them with the maximum literary integrity, so that they could be compromised in no fashion. The major difference between his novels and his magazine works was not in the writing, for some of the short tales that appeared in magazines were unlikely to be surpassed in craftsmanship by any other living author, the major difference rested in the magnitude of imagination. In his novels, the distance of his imaginary probe was exceeded in the entire history of science fiction by only Olaf Stapledon, who could have been inspired by him.

ANOTHER GENEROUS INSTALLMENT IN THE VERY NEXT ISSUE!

One of the most remarkable and successful magazines published in the United States was THE BLACK CAT, a small, 42-paged, saddle-stitched monthly selling for five cents and featuring only short stories. To make it still more unusual it secured most of its short stories from neophytes and amateurs, soliciting their work with an endless series of story contests with handsome payment to the winners.

Launched with the issue of October 1895, the publication was an instantaneous hit and quickly encouraged a string of competitors almost identical in appearance with titles like THE GRAY GOOSE, THE WHITE ELEPHANT, THE PENNY MAGAZINE, THE NICKELL and many others. Because of its title, weird story fans tended to think that THE BLACK CAT was a magazine of supernatural stories, but this was not the case. It did run, almost every issue, at least one and sometimes two or three very clever and frequently light tales of the occult, science fiction or fantasy. Easily one of the most famous of all its stories was *The Woman in Red* by Muriel Campbell Dyar which appeared in the November, 1899 issue. So tantalizing was the ending of this provocatively imaginative story that hundreds of letters poured in asking for a sequel and big red letters across the top of the March, 1900 number presented it reading: "The Woman in Red – Unmasked!" As a special feature of this issue, we are bringing you both the famed original story and its splendid sequel. We have every confidence you will enjoy them.

The Woman In Red

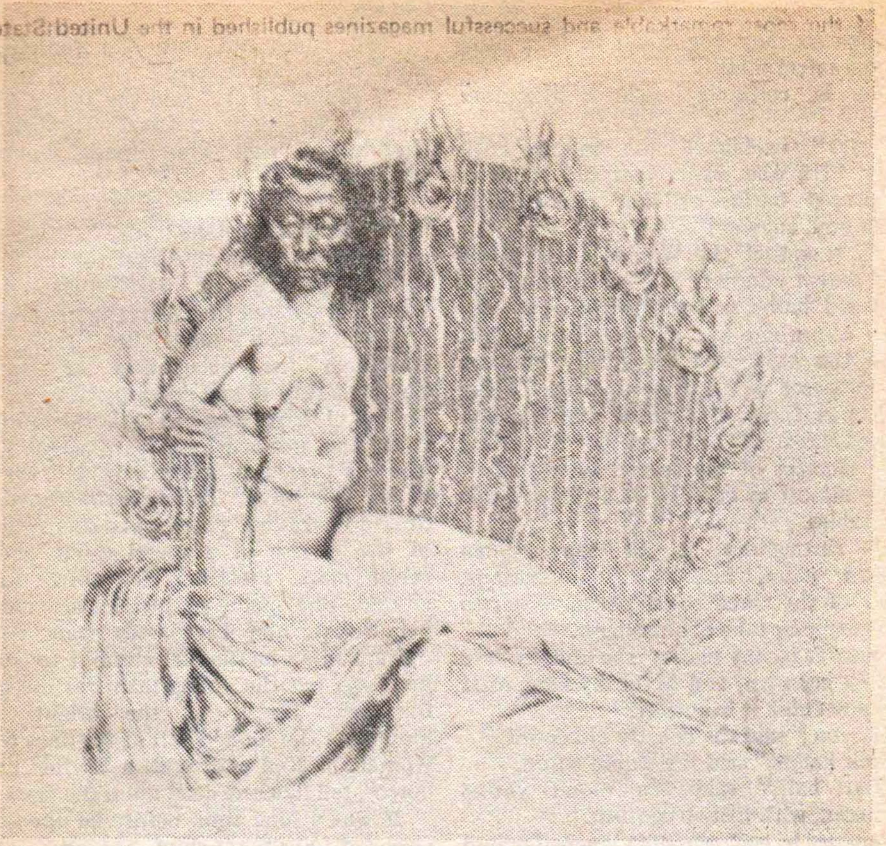
By MURIEL CAMPBELL DYAR

WINTER reigned throughout Europe, but on the Riviera spring and summer bloomed together. Overhead the sky was infinitely blue, below the sea was green and purple and amethyst. Everywhere the sun, everywhere the scent of geranium and mimosa, the fragrance of rose and violet. Always the deep boom, boom of the waves thundering against the tall cliffs of Monaco, always the cry of the sea gull, forever the chimes from the church of Sainte Dévote.

At Monte Carlo, that paradise of the gamester, the season was at its height. The Hôtels de Paris and Beau-Rivage were crowded, those of the quarter La Condamine were full, and well-dressed people, finding shelter in some cheap lodging house over in Monaco, gave the name of some more fashionable resort when applying for a *carte d'admission* to the "Cercle des Etrangeres," the euphemistic title of that institution which draws hither the avid and the inquisitive of all the nations. Day after day, night after night, the Casino overflowed with those who came to tempt Fortune. Every one laughed and sang and was gay. Heavy hearts are hidden at Monte Carlo.

It was at a concert that she first appeared—the Woman in Red. The French tenor was just beginning his number when the doors of the middle box of the right hand tier swung slowly open and closed behind her. She stood for just a moment outlined against the ivory background. Very tall she seemed, dressed from head to foot in red—not cardinal, nor crimson—but the most intense and glowing scarlet. From out this mass of color her bare throat rose vividly white, and down the satin of her skirt her ungloved arms hung, soft and round as those of a child. Her hair, too, fine and fair, gave her head a rather childish look. And then—no wonder fans stopped fluttering and silks began to rustle—her face was entirely concealed by a mask of dark red velvet!

The lady seated herself quickly, with a curious grace in every movement, and the red of her dress spreading out around her, stained as with blood the whiteness of the box. She raised her glass and insolently swept the house, moving her head so that the jewels in her hair blazed and flamed into the faces turned in her direction. A laugh floated from above as a woman in the gallery, with her programme twisted into a little roll, mocked the motion. The Woman in Red turned away her face with a shrug of her white shoulders, and sat through the performance quite still and indifferent. At the beginning of the last number she rose slowly, and gathering together her shimmering scarlet left the box. That was the introduction to the world of Monte Carlo of the Woman in Red.



"The sudden disappearance of her young English lover and the well-authenticated rumor that he had lost his reason over the accidental sight of her face."

After that, interest centered about her, increasing as her peculiarities became known. She never wore a suggestion of any color but red, and that alone was enough to make her conspicuous. Then the mask, thought to have been merely a caprice on the night of the concert, was never removed. That rendered her mysterious. She talked but little, going about silently, with a soft, light step. One might be quite alone, and the next moment suddenly aware of the Red Woman's presence. When the tall young Englishman who lost everything at a turn of the wheel went out into the Casino garden and, cocking his pistol in the shadow of the cacti, muttered, "I'll end the whole cursed business!" the Woman in Red murmured persuasively beside him, "Oh, I wouldn't—" and he didn't, and when a lady knelt one evening before the image of the Virgin in the church of Sainte Dévote, and whispered wildly, "O Blessed Mother, forgive me my sins!" it was the Woman in Red who finished softly for her, "and those who sin against me." This made her something more than conspicuous and mysterious—it made her awesome.

No one every saw her smoke, but her scarlet garments always exhalted a faint odor of cigarettes. Every night she came into the roulette room and sat there in the scarlet dress, with a red flower in her hair, and put down her stakes with as much emotion as though the gold and notes were worthless. Consistent in her color scheme, she invariably placed her money on the red, and nine times out of ten she won.

To make her a trifle more conspicuous, mysterious and eerie, she had for a chaperon a woman so thin and wrinkled and old as to seem hardly capable of life. When some one ventured to ask her a question about the Woman in Red the creature crackled in her high-pitched voice;

"Oh, the devil, the devil, the devil! How should I know?"

"No wonder the men like her," chattered a lively little Frenchwoman. "They'd like us if we muffled our faces and wore clothes like that. I'll wager she has the face of a *blanchisseuse*—any one could be fascinating behind a velvet mask!"

"She is, certainly," said a bystander, drily.

"*Peste!*" exclaimed the sallow critic angrily. "No one wants that old count or that stupid baron or that pink-cheeked English boy, anyway!"

It is true that the Woman in Red had found ardent admirers in the old count and the stupid baron and the English boy—the one to whom she had whispered that night behind the cacti—and the rivalry between them increased as the season passed. To-day one was in favor, to-morrow another, and the frequenters of the Casino got to betting on the chances of the several suitors till it became almost as exciting as a game at one of the tables.

But throughout it all the woman remained calm, inscrutable, mysterious. Neither of the three could persuade her to tell her name or take off her mask.

"I answer to any name," she said. "I have forgotten my own, and as for my face, what makes you think it beautiful?"

"Oh, *you*," said the courtly old count.

"Your hands," said the stupid baron.

"Your hair," said the blond young Englishman, with British egotism.

In answer to each she only laughed a hard little laugh, not altogether pleasant to hear.

To be much talked about and to say little appeared to suit her. A month after her advent no one in Monte Carlo or Monaco knew a whit more about her than at first, and no one would have hesitated to give half his fortune—had he had one—to know everything. The mystery of the masked woman was exasperating—the theories concerning her innumerable. Perhaps the majority of the women believed that, being very ugly, she had adopted this means of attracting the attention rightfully belonging to beauty. She was a problem which might be studied for weeks without arriving at a solution.

The warm southern days crept lazily along, and as sometimes happens even in that sheltered paradise, began to grow oppressively hot. It was on the languid evening of one of these scorching days that the Woman in Red and the young Englishman were gaming side by side at the roulette table. The air of the Casino was heavy and scented, there was a murmur of laughter and talk, and the frequent click-clack of the roulette balls. The woman pushed back her chair impatiently and said to the man:

"Do come out into the garden—it is insufferably hot in here!"

"I should think," said the young man at length, as they strolled through the shrubbery, "that your mask would be unbearable!"

"It is."

"Then why not take it off?"

"I did not come out to talk of that."

"But perhaps I did!" The British shoulders squared themselves aggressively.

The woman made no reply, but continued her occupation of listlessly slipping a ring up and down her finger.

"Oh, I have dropped it!" she suddenly cried, and stooped quickly to search for it. The low branch of a tree caught in the coils of her yellow hair. To free it she impatiently drew up her head. There was a sharp click, as of the release of a metal catch, and the velvet mask, loosened, fell softly to the ground. She made an inarticulate noise in her throat, and her hands were thrown upward in an ineffectual attempt to conceal her face, but the young man was too quick for her. There, in the bright white moonlight, he looked full at the face of the Woman in Red and, with a terrible cry of horror, fell like one dead upon the grass.

It was a long time before he opened his eyes and felt the touch of the woman's hand upon his brow and the cool trickle of water over his face. He lay passive, thinking of nothing. Then suddenly it all came back.

"Oh, don't, don't, *don't* touch me!" he gasped. "Keep away from me!"

He staggered to his feet, and pressed his hands to his eyes to shut out the vision that would return. His knees trembled and his teeth chattered. Something as white as the moonlight gathered at his lips.

The woman made an imploring gesture. "Oh, see I have put it on again," and she turned her head that he might behold the velvet mask.

At the sound of her voice he shivered in terror and, without a word, but making a strange moaning noise, he ran, like one demented, in the direction of the lighted Casino. And in the still, white moonlight the Woman in Red stood like one of the statues of the terraced garden, its marble purity turned to scarlet.

The next night she was at her usual place at the roulette table, but it was the stupid baron who sat beside her.

"Why don't you play?" he asked, as she sat motionless and indifferent, eyed curiously by the spectators of the game. She sat up wearily and pushed a pile of gold and notes upon the red, No. 12. The croupier started the wheel revolving rapidly in one direction and set the ball deftly rolling in the other, and there was a little buzz of conversation. Tongues wagged briskly while eyes were fastened on the whirling wheel.

"What has become of our English friend?" asked one.

"Gone home," was the answer from another across the table. "Perhaps the heat went to his head!" He tapped his forehead significantly.

Gradually the wheel slowed down, and the ball was about to settle with its customary click. Gamblers leaned over the table to see the result of their bets. The slowly rolling sphere was just dropping into No. 12! No, it has settled into the adjoining compartment.

"*Vingt-huit, noir gagne!*" calls out the croupier with shrill monotony, and the shining heaps are distributed to the winners.

"And Madame has lost!" exclaimed the stupid baron, in surprise.

The Woman in Red made no reply, but stood up and, with an imperious motion not to follow, walked steadily from the *salle de jeu*, a vivid bit of color under the glittering lights of the splendid apartment.

Early the next morning she was found lying on the marble steps of the Casino, dead in her scarlet dress. The stain trailing along the snowy marble had been scarlet, too, but was now turning to a reddish brown. In one fine, strong hand was tightly clutched a folded note. The servants and people who gathered in trembling awe sent for the priest of the church of Sainte Dévote to read it. He came quickly, panting a little for breath. Taking the paper from the fingers of the dead woman, he glanced over it nervously, while the people looked on in breathless silence. It was written in French.

"I will read it," the priest said slowly, and he translated the writing in trembling tones:

"I have taken my own life—let that pass. Let no one lift the mask from my face but the priest of the church of Sainte Dévote, and I pray him, when he knows my secret, to say mass for my soul. By all that is holy, respect these words."

As his solemn voice ceased, those crowding about shuddered and fell back in nameless fear. They at once carried the body of the woman to where she had lodged, the early morning sun gleaming strangely on her scarlet garments and yellow hair. The priest entered the house and closed the door upon the crowd.

When he again emerged, he was hardly recognizable. His face, deadly white, twitched and quivered spasmodically, his eyes protruded and rolled wildly from side to side, and his lips were parted in an awful, unholy smile. His trembling hands could scarcely hold the crucifix. To those who spoke to him he made no answer—he did not seem to hear.

They buried the woman that evening at sunset, among the nameless graves on the hill behind Monte Carlo, as speedily as possible. When the grim, grotesque companion of the dead was asked if any one should be sent for, the only answer she would give was:

"Oh, the devil, the devil, the devil. How should I know?"

The priest from the church of Sainte Dévote mumbled the service rapidly and indistinctly over the grave, with one shaking hand raised in a defensive attitude, as though to banish something or still the quaking terror that shook him from head to foot. When the ritual was ended he turned to the dense crowd which no secrecy or word of authority had been able to keep away, and said so sternly and distinctly that his voice echoed in the silence:

"Whosoever as much as dares to touch this grave, upon him I pronounce the everlasting curse of the Holy Church of Rome!"

Down the sloping hillside, back to the town he led the procession, all the way shaking like a leaf. When they came again to the narrow streets he suddenly stopped trembling and began to laugh, and at the sound of such laughter the people stumbled over each other in their anxiety to get away.

The Commissaire Spécial and the Administration acted promptly and with energy. There was an extra concert that very night, a grand ball on that succeeding, followed by a comic opera. At Monte Carlo it will not do to encourage reminiscence. And so, by and by, people stopped thinking, and began to talk of other things. The old count and the stupid baron were among the first to drop the subject. But when to the mad priest in his cell there came continually the deep boom, boom of the sea, the cry of the gull and the chimes of the church where he should never more say mass, he laughed, and laughed, and laughed—though he could not remember why!

Turn the Page to Read the Astonishing Sequel

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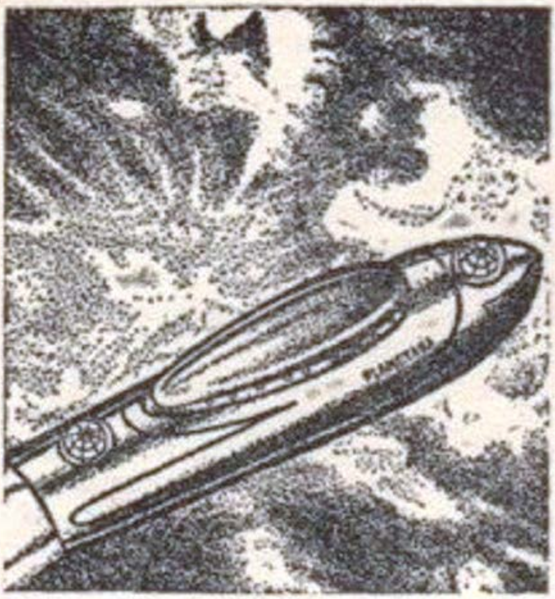

Unmasked

THE ASTONISHING *SEQUEL* TO THE REMARKABLE

The Woman In Red

By MURIEL CAMPBELL DYAR

BY a strange twist of circumstances—call them coincidences if you will, or by another name if you can see relentless Purpose working through all things—I have lately, and almost simultaneously, come into possession of two remarkable revelations concerning the mystery of the Woman in Red—the heroine of that most astounding tragedy of Monte Carto—and they supply the threads to lead a thoughtful mind either to its complete solution or, perhaps, to a still mistier labyrinth within the borderland between flesh and spirit.

My friend Dawson, going up and down the earth in search of health, had been induced to try the healing summer air of southern Arizona and thither we went. The day after our arrival at our destination it rained, with all the discomfort to tourists of wetness in a climate warranted dry. Dawson, in his querulous, invalid's humor, railed at the unpleasant weather as we paced back and forth on the sheltered veranda of the hotel, his fretful eyes on the muddy street and the drift of the fine, white rain.

"Always rain," he grumbled, "rain in London, rain in Paris, rain on the Rhine, rain in Rome, rain here, rain everywhere!"

"You forget," I said, "the Riviera."

"Ye-es," he admitted, "but that was two winters ago."

A girl passed by on the street just then, erect and graceful under her dripping umbrella. A gust of wind, blowing back the cape from her shoulders exposed its scarlet lining, which made a quick flash of color, in the dull, gray morning.

"Monte Carlo!" exclaimed Dawson, with a sudden, backward leap of memory.

"Mystery and masks, and the Scarlet Lady," I said in return.

It had come back to us both, at that flash of scarlet and my careless mention of the Riviera—the awful tragedy of the Woman in Red and the mystery surrounding it and her. We had worn the subject to threads in talking it over the first few months after we had left Monte Carlo, though it was certainly a fruitful subject: The strange appearance of the woman at the gambling resort; her caprice of color and her invariable mask; her success at the gambling table; the sudden disappearance of her young English lover and the well-authenticated rumor that he had lost his reason over the accidental sight of her face one night in the Casino gardens; her suicide immediately after; and, finally, the madness which had come upon the priest of Sainte Dévote, who had lifted the mask from her dead face at her request. But gradually the mystery had been crowded out of our minds by the new scenes and events of our travels and by the ever present anxiety for my friend's health, so that for over a year the subject had not been mentioned.

Now, in an instant, the old horror and fascination of it was upon me once more and I saw by the look in Dawson's eyes that it was so with him. I saw again the tall cliffs of Monaco, with the restless amethyst sea at their feet; the slender, curiously graceful figure in scarlet as it moved before us at Monte Carlo, in the flower-crowded streets and in the brilliant *salle de jeu* of the Casino, and I saw again the ugly stain darkening in the sun on the marble steps.

Without preface, Dawson took up the subject we had dropped so long ago.

"Jack, what in creation was behind that woman's mask?" he began argumentatively and with irritation.

"My dear Dawson," I answered wearily, "how should I know! Perhaps something outside the bounds of creation."

"I am sure she was the Devil," he said, after a pause, but without that emphasis which springs from conviction.

Then we took up the old theories about the matter, over which we had argued so often before. With a sick man's nervous fancy, Dawson insisted that a terrible deformity, or a disfiguring birthmark, or the signs of leprosy, if suddenly and unexpectedly revealed in the face of a human being, might, under certain conditions, cause insanity. But I, arguing the question from the standpoint of vigorous health, was positive that, while such a revelation would undoubtedly be a shock, it could not, under any conditions, have so serious an effect on a sound mind. There were no special reasons for us to doubt the mental strength of the Englishman or of the priest, two men who had drifted together into the tragedy, apparently by the merest chance. Dawson grew cross over the puzzle and puffed his cigar vindictively.

"I wish I could get hold of that infernal old woman," he growled. "I'd get the truth out of her somehow."

A man with whom we had formed a slight acquaintance at the hotel now joined us, and the matter of the Woman in Red was dropped. I could see, however, by the wrathful crease in Dawson's forehead that he was thinking of it still.

His ill-humor over it lasted all day, even until the early dusk, and we went down to dinner. As he was then still taciturn, I amused myself by staring covertly at the people about me. There were the usual semi-invalids at a health resort and the usual curious tourists, eager over everything, from the February almond blossoms on the tables to the Arizona olives on the bill of fare. A little bored by the scene and not over-pleased with my dinner, I was about to rouse Dawson, when I noticed at the farther end of the table opposite us a big, fair, youngish man, half hidden from my view by a huge palm. His face was turned from me and I caught only the ruddy outline of its profile, shaded by abundant, light hair, noticeably gray. Then he turned and I saw his face.

"Dawson," I said, as quietly as I could, "Look!"

He glanced up in the direction I indicated.

"Oh, by jove, by jove!" he said softly under his breath.

It was the young Englishman of Monte Carlo!

I know that my face was flushed with excitement, and I heard the fork in Dawson's hand clatter sharply against his plate. Afterwards, in our room, we talked it over. Upon one thing we were agreed; we would ask the Englishman, point blank if need be, *what* was behind the mask of the Woman in Red. That he was the same boy, grown older more in looks than in years, whom we had seen at Monte Carlo was certain; that he was again in his right mind the circumstances attested, and that we must learn what he saw that night in the gardens was, perhaps, the most absolutely certain thing in the world. We must know, even at the risk of unsettling his reason again by recalling the frightful incident. Dawson remarked grimly that it would be better to unsettle his than to lose ours, and delegated to me the task of bringing about an interview.

I bungled badly, but I managed it. Meeting him in the hotel lobby I claimed a previous acquaintance with him on the Continent, using glibly enough his name, which I had ascertained from the clerk. Being a gentleman and a slow-minded subject of Her Majesty, he did not disclaim me, and a quarter of an hour later he and Dawson and I sat together in our room, talking genially between the puffs of our cigars. We found topics of common interest in plenty and spent a pleasant hour chatting over our travels and the ranching possibilities of Arizona, in which the Englishman was evidently interested. Dawson began to grow uneasy and signalled to me to play trumps. Before I could think how to begin, the Englishman asked suddenly: "By the way, where did you say you ran across me?"

I had not said, but I did now, looking at him squarely:

"At Monte Carlo, two winters ago." The fine color left his face.

"You remember." I continued cruelly, "it was the winter of the Woman in Red sensation."

The Englishman put up his hand to hide his trembling ashen lips.

"For heaven's sake, don't!" he cried. But there was no thought of *finesse* on our part. Dawson leaned forward, his eyes big with eagerness.

"*What*," he fairly shouted, "was behind that woman's mask?"

And this is the story we persuaded the Englishman to tell. He drew farther back into the shadows of the room as he told it, his hand going up now and then to cover his lips, which trembled in spite of him.

"You know the whole wretched affair, of course," he said, "if you were inMonte Carlo at the time. I wish I had not been! You saw how the Count and the Baron and I made fools of ourselves over the woman, I the most blatantly, without doubt. Heaven knows I could not help it, and I doubt if any man of my years and temperament could have done so. Whether it was partly the baffling mystery of her mask I do not know, but there was a fascination about her that was irresistible. I begged her on my knees to let me see her face, begged her a dozen times a day, but she would only turn away with a bitter little laugh. The more she refused my request, the more convinced I became that she was beautiful and that her mask was only a caprice. I formed in my mind a face to fit her hair and her white hands and her charm altogether—a face so clear to me that, had I been an artist, I could have painted it. I was madly jealous of the suave old Count and the witless Baron, and they of me, but gradually I gained favor with her, until it was she and I who, as a rule, walked together and talked together and gamed together, I following her scarlet gown as if bewitched.

On night we left the Casino, where we had been playing, and went out into the gardens, away from the heat of the crowded rooms. Outside the moon made it as light as day. She was restless and nervous and would not sit down, so we walked to and from on the terraces. The air was heavy with the scent of roses, and the moonlight was like wine. Half drunk with it and the gleam of her scarlet, I—oh, well, never mind what. I begged her again to take off her mask, and she answered lightly that she had not come out to talk of that. Angry at her refusal, I sulked like a child. She began listlessly slipping her ring up and down on her finger, and presently it slipped off and dropped to the ground. Before I could prevent her, she stooped to find it. A branch of a shrub caught in her hair and she drew back her head with a quick, nervous start to free it. I heard a little click, and her mask fell upon the gravel walk. Then I saw what I had longed so much to see."

Dawson sat up straight in his chair and my own pulse leaped.

"She was deformed, birth-marked, leprous—or the Devil!" broke in my friend.

The young Englishman drew farther back into the shadows.

"No," he answered nervelessly.

Dawson and I stared at each other, but something in the man's attitude kept us silent.

"There was a girl once at home in England," the shaking voice went on after a pause, "Margaret Allison, the daughter of a glover. I thought I loved her; at any rate, I told her so, for she was pretty, confoundedly so, and I was a young fool. Then I found out my mistake. I remember—I shall never forget—how she looked and smiled at me when I told her I could not marry her. She—she killed herself, and I went to Monte Carlo and lost money to forget about it. Now, you may believe this or not, as you can, but when the woman's mask fell, I saw at first a Thing—not a human face, but a terrible white blur—and out of this came Margaret's face, which looked at me with awful, hurt eyes, and with that smile—O God, that smile! And Margaret lay dead in England. You know the rest. I believed I was crazed for a time, winding up with a fever. Not till long, long after did I learn the final tragedy in the 'Woman in Red' sensation, coming across it one day, while searching for something else in a file of old papers. There! you have my story."

He rose then and leaned against the mantel for a moment.

"Do you wonder," he asked simply, "that my hair is getting gray" Dawson's thin hands were twitching nervously.

"But what do you think—" he began.

The Englishmen stopped him authoritatively and turned to go.

"I do not think," he said, "if I can help it—not of that!"

When we were alone we could only sit and look at each other.

"Dawson," I asked finally, "what do *you* think?"

And Dawson smiled a very ghastly smile.

"I do not think," he answered. "I cannot."

We did not have much time to think after that, for the state of Dawson's health became so alarming that I had to telegraph for his mother and sister. Together we pulled him up again, and I, called home by business, left him convalescing in the sunshine.

I had been home barely a month when I received a letter from an old French physician, a resident of Monte Carlo, who had won a pile of bright twenty-franc pieces from me that eventful winter. This is an English version of his letter:

My Dear K.:—Do you remember the Woman in Red and her career that winter you were here? Do you remember the priest *who went mad? Do you remember our interest in it all? A few days ago I was called to attend that priest, because I have some skill and am very cheap. I found him horribly ill; no hope, but perfectly sane—he had been that way for somedays they told me—only not so ill. You know the mind sometimes comes back to a madman shortly before death. His face was yellow, like parchment, and shrivelled like a shrunk olive, with eyes—ah, Diable, what eyes! He tried all the time to speak, but could not. Finally he signed to me, then fell back, dying miserably. Afterwards, I found this paper beneath his pillow, written by him apparently in his lucid interval. What do you think of it? Mon Dieu, I do not know what to think! Read for yourself.*

The paper enclosed, in a pitifully weak hand, read as follows:

Has it been years, or months, or days that I have been here? They will not tell me. I swear that my mind again is clear as I write this—swear it by thySacred Host and the blessed Mother of Heaven. Yesterday I heard them whisper among themselves that I must die, and I feel that it is so. Before I die I must confess what I saw behind the mask of the Woman in Red, since that was the sight which made me mad, and has kept me here these years, or months or weeks. Perhaps some one coming after me can explain it—some one more versed in the riddles of a weary world.

Before I lifted the mask from the face of this Scarlet Woman that day—whenever it was—I prayed, kneeling on the floor beside her, as one would for the soul of a sinner. I expected to see some disfigurement, hideous enough to be concealed, but nothing more. So it was with comparative calmness that I passed my hand under her bright hair, loosened the metal catch and raised the fatal velvet. Oh, that I could blot out what I saw! That it might not come before my eyes again! At first a white and fearful and shapeless Thing, not human. Then, though the creature was dead before me, there struggled into this a face, so faint I could barely see it, but have mercy upon me, Merciful One! it was the face of my old mother, with livid purple lips, looking at me as she did when I, with my boy's hands, crushed out her life, maddened by her cursed tongue. For long years I had kept my deed a secret, but now it cried up to me from this woman—how I know not. The face stayed only long enough to stare at me and burn itself into my brain forever—then it faded away. All this time, how long it is I do not know, I have had before me that fearful, unheard of Thing, through which something has tried to struggle, but, when I have nearly been able to see it, it has turned to a terrible scarlet, and I have laughed and laughed and laughed, I knew not why. With the scarlet stain on my hands and in my brain I make this statement—

Here the writing became illegible and finally stopped abruptly. Below, the doctor had written: "Sacreé Bleu! it is enough to make lunatics of us all."

Was the Woman in Red a key-board, played upon by the spirits of the dead—helpless clay, moulded by unseen forces? Had each one who had lifted her mask beheld beneath it the most awful vision of which he could conceive? Would the old Count have seen the face of the little vaudeville artist—bah! you know the story. What would the Baron, what would I, what would *you* have seen?

COMING SOON:

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THE MYSTERIOUS CARD

and its astounding sequel

THE MYSTERIOUS CARD REVEALED

by CLEVELAND MOFFATT

Edison Marshall was blessed among authors. He was one of all-too-few who enjoyed success and acknowledgement during his youth and middle-age and achieved his greatest honors and financial rewards in his final years. The man in the street would have been most familiar with the novels from which the moving pictures *Son of Fury* starring Tyrone Power (*Benjamin Blake,* 1941) and *The Viking,* starring Kirk Douglas, were made.

He was widely regarded as the finest writer of historical novels in the field, from 1940 through to 1960, with some of his most famous titles including *Yankee Pasha, Great Smith* and *Castle in the Swamp.* He died October 29, 1967 at the age of 73, and though *The New York Times* obituary published October 31, 1967 stated that "he wrote his first story for a magazine in 1915," they omitted the fact that it was THE ARGOSY that he sold that first story to, and that it was *The Sacred Fire* (May, 1915) and that his second was his oft-reprinted science fiction tale of twin earths, *Who Is Charles Avison?* (April, 1916), published under his full name of Edison Tesla Marshall. He dropped the use of the middle name after several more stories for THE ARGOSY.

He was a Second Lieutenant in the U.S. Armed Services during World War I, but in 1918 resumed writing regularly, predominantly for THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE. He loved the outdoors, and his locales were heavily slanted in that direction but his penchant for the unusual displayed itself in a series as mundane-sounding as "From A Frontiersman's Diary", five of which ran in THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE from August, 1919 to December, 1919. At least three of them can legitimately be classified as stories of fantasy and horror and *The Serpent City,* from the November, 1919 issue not only deserves that designation, but is one of the grimmest and most original tales of retribution to appear in an American magazine. When Marshall's short story *The Heart of Little Shikari* won an O'Henry Prize, as one of the finest of the year in 1921, a volume was collected under that title and *The Serpent City* was among those included upon its issuance by Little, Brown & Company in 1922.

Edison Marshall shared his loyalty to the outdoors and to the fantastic in the early stages of his writing career, a penchant no better typified than in his novel *Og, The Dawn Man,* a four-part serial which ran in THE POPULAR MAGAZINE, March 24 to April 14, 1928 and dealt with a pilot who upon crashing in the Yukon, loses all memory and must rediscover the basic elements that permitted prehistoric man to survive and perpetuate his kind. *Dian of the Lost Land,* similarly deals with a lost race in the antarctic and the qualities it takes to survive under the more primitive conditions of nature.

Knowledge of the environment and the creatures that dwell in it, play an integral part in the triumph of the protagonist in *The Serpent City* which follows.

The Serpent City

By EDISON MARSHALL

There is one mystery in the Southern Oregon mountains that never grows old, and never is understood. Even ancient Abe Carver, who knew the strange ranges as never geologist can hope to know them, who had melted snow in his veins for blood, and strata in his frame for bones, found it a fresh marvel at every fall of darkness. It is the mystery of the mountain night.

It doesn't seem to be the same night that falls over cities and plains. Even the stars look different. There is no smoke to hide or blur them, and they seem to hang just at the top points of the tall, dark pines. Once really to see them, the people say, is to lose at once the worst of a man's fears of that time-honored bogy, death. They give a queer feeling of insignificance, too, that is remarkably good for men. But they are just a small part of the mystery.

There are the smells, never to be forgotten. One of them comes from the balsam, and is more wonderful than any chemical perfume could possibly be, and gives more light, far-flying dreams than is possible with opium. Some of them come from the lakes that make a silver chain from one end of the Back Country to the other,—and smell of wet banks and Heaven alone knows what. Blending in the mixture are such good and healthy smells as sun-baked earth, and fern beds, and tiny, shy mountain daisies that are almost as hard to see as the little rock rabbits close to the snow line. These are the smells that a man can perceive, but of course a man has a ridiculously rudimentary sense of smell. You can tell, by watching the night hunting of a wolf, that he experiences a whole scale of smells on either side of the little octave known to men.

Then there are the sounds that make a mystery just by themselves. Of course, the human sense of hearing has very limited and definite frontiers, but even for human ears the mountains have enough unknown sounds to draw a man's thoughts, as a sponge draws water, far into the strange, little-used spaces of his mind, where he does not like to have them go. Students who have sat in a collegiate class of psychology and have watched the tuningfork experiment are best able to understand these human limits. As the note sounds higher and higher, fewer and fewer students are able to hear it, until only one is left. At the next note the one remaining cannot hear, either. But it is perfectly evident that the forks are still making vibrations, if the human ears were only tuned to hear them. It is the same below the lowest note that a human ear can perceive. And part of the mystery of the mountain night is the ever-present impression that if one's ears were just a little sharper, there would be a thousand sounds that people have never dreamed of. But after all, perhaps these limits are a good thing. As it is, men are having a hard enough time clinging to their long-harbored theories of life and death.

The limbs of the pines scratch and rub together with a very curious sound. It is always right over your head, and it dies away on each side of you. The wind tries to force its way through the brush thicket, and its sound is like a whimper of disappointment. There are a thousand sounds, no two alike, that the wind can make. A few of the million noises of the insect world are pitched in the right key for human beings to hear, and always you are dimly aware that some creature is stalking some other creature in the shadows just beyond. The stalking wolf is one of the most silent creatures in the world, but now and then he cracks a twig, or crushes a leaf. And the darkness itself is a mystery, particularly when the moon is shining through it.

It doesn't seem merely an absence of light. It seems as if it were something in itself that drops down from the mountain tops. It drops with startling speed, and it lifts the same way. And through it, now and then, you can see far-away forests that seem to have silver poured over them, and curiously dark valleys, and strange, deep glens. The whole region is strange beyond words,—with its endless forests and its mysterious lakes and its stone heaps piled without reason or sense, and its creeks that fade away when you need them most,—but particularly it is strange at night. People call it the Back Country because they don't know any other name for it. It is back somewhere behind the hills, and since deer and mines and things can be procured at the very edge of it, there is no sense in entering it very far. As a result, the long-tailed jays still shriek with astonishment and amazement every time one of the curious forked creatures called men comes into their sight.

It isn't good to be lost in the Back Country. There are no landmarks to guide one out. Streams are often very hard to find, and the human body, not very good at best, soon becomes tired of climbing a thousand ridges that look exactly alike. Besides, the long, wild shriek of the mountain lion is apt to frighten a man into that deadly mistake of running in a circle in the dark. Of course, the true-breed mountain lion, weighing one hundred and fifty pounds at the most, is the worst coward in the mountains, but his kill-scream is very disconcerting and terrible.

The night had just dropped down about Abe Carver's cabin; and the wonder that is a remembered echo of the fear that men had in a younger world brought a curious glow into his eyes. He was hardly conscious of it. He had other things to think about to-night, for just that day a very dear and ancient friend had wandered away into the ridges, and the hills are always full of death traps for the unsuspecting. They have always one trick more to play, even when a mountaineer thinks he has learned them all.

People knew at the first glance at Abe Carver that in some one great factor he differed from the common run of mountain men. What the difference was they usually couldn't say. He dressed just like the rest, mostly in buckskin, which wears like iron and does not require constant cleaning.

Then, his hair was strange and gray and long; his arms and legs were hard and knotted; and his face was scarred and deep-lined, like the faces of the mountains themselves. But here all likeness abruptly stopped.

The mountain men never looked squarely into Carver's eyes. They couldn't have told just why. They were not afraid of him,—at least, they did not fear bodily injury at his hands. He was neither particularly fast with a pistol nor particularly strong. His eyes were rather large, and they had a peculiar fixation. They were blue in color, and they were always noticeably bright. The eyelids didn't seem to close down as often as is natural.

Children have bright eyes, but this brightness of his was not the kind that people love to see in the eyes of a child. Strong drink can brighten a man's eyes, and there are certain emotions, like fear and pleasure, that make them sparkle. Carver's eyes had no such warm brightness as is caused by these things. The light to be seen under his brows was just as cold as the glitter that mountaineers behold on the face of the snow banks in the winter sun.

Carver had lived too long in the mountains and had imbued too much of their spirit. He had stepped beyond the pale ordained for human beings, and the mark of a strange, outer world was beneath his lids. The gaunt wolves, howling from the hilltops at night, have something of the same glitter in their eyes. You can catch it sometimes in the eyes of the little cowardly lynx that will mew on your trail all day but never dares attack. And most of all it is the property of the gliding people that live on the lowest of the three planes that make up forest life.

If human beings had that look in a younger world, they have mostly got away from it long since. There is no need for it in farms and cities. It is an inheritance from a wilder, more savage time, and now it remains the mark of a wilder, more savage world that begins where the habitations of men leave off. It is the mark of remorselessness, inexorable as the cold in winter. It is the brand of the kind of mercy one may expect from a wolf pack in the snow, or the rattlesnake on the rock. The other brands Carver had—a peculiar stealthy quality in his walk, and a queer repressed note in his voice—were far too obscure for any except the eyes of a naturalist. And no naturalist would believe them if he saw them.

Abe Carver walked up and down in front of his cabin; and now and then he searched with his eyes the distant hillsides. The dark was over them, but his eyes were trained to see in the darkness. Sometimes he put his fingers to his lips and gave a whistled call that seemed to reecho endlessly among the pines.

"Funny thing," he breathed. "All the time I've had him, he hasn't been gone at feedin' time before."

The old man seemed very haggard and broken as he began to prepare his simple meal. It had been years since he had supped alone. Always the same faithful, loving friend had been crouched at his feet. To-night he was gone; and Abe was very lonely and apprehensive indeed.

There is a kind of fatalism in the creed of the mountains; but it isn't the same kind that is to be found among such old peoples as the Chinese or the Arabs. With the latter, nothing seems to matter much one way or another; and things matter very much indeed in the mountains. The mountaineer is perfectly indifferent to the inevitability of death; but what are half-felt emotions among the plainsmen are passions with him. He cannot forget an injury. He may not know the meaning of pity; but he loves with the devotion of a dog for his master. The farther one goes into the Outer World of the Wild, the more simple and intense emotions become. Abe Carver had only one love, and he gave all the affection of his heart. That love was his shaggy hound, his companion in the hunt, his partner in his explorations, the sharer of his troubles, his defender and slave and friend.

Shag had trotted away on one of his endless hill journeys at noon that day. He had taken the trail that went down toward the Trotter place. Abe would rather have had him go in any other direction. He did not like the Trotters, new from a mountain district in the East. They were grimy and vile-tongued and malignant; and he had once had a dispute in court with them over a trap line. Always before, Shag had returned, bounding like a wolf down the slopes, when the sky first changed to green at sunset. It was nearly nine now; and he had not yet come.

"We'll get you yet," the Trotters had told Carver at the door of the court that day. "We'll bust you open like a ripe papaw!" And then they had whispered oaths down on his head,—such oaths as only men who know the savage mountains can possibly conceive.

"But they wouldn't have shot my Shag," the old man muttered into his coffee cup. "They couldn't have done a thing like that."

But he was lying to himself, and he knew it. There was nothing too low and mean for the Trotters. In this way they differed from most of the mountain men, and even the mountain creatures that range the forest. The latter can be terrible and cruel, but they cannot be low. It is against the laws of the wild.

The night drew on, hour after hour. Supper was done. Carver built his fire high; and like a form in some curious dark-colored stone, he stood waiting at the doorway. He did not seem to move a hand or lift a shoulder. Men who have waited on deer trails know that the most draining conduct in the world is to remain perfectly motionless, yet Abe had stood without motion for two long hours, evidently without fatigue.

It isn't exactly a human quality, and it would have been most disconcerting to watch. A lizard on a stone may have that same impassive immobility; and it is particularly a quality of the serpents. But even the larger forest beasts seem to lack the muscle control to do it easily. Carver stood with his arms loose-hung, his strange, fixed eyes gazing down the trail.

"It couldn't be that them Trotters have got him," he said again. "If they have—"

The words ended in a sort of throaty sob. For there are certain emotions, as all men know, that cannot find expression in words. The words for them have died from the language in these gentler days.

Then his gray head lifted, almost imperceptibly. Far away down the trail he could hear a sound that was not part of the natural noises of the night. Above the sound of the tree limbs, above the stir of the wind in the brush thickets, he heard a faint, low whimper, almost like the noise of the wind itself. And the next instant came an echo of the old, familiar bark of welcome. But it *was* just an echo—the cry of a brave heart that remembers even as it dies.

At once the motionless muscles of the man sprang to life. He leaped down the trail; and a spectator would have been curiously reminded of the lunge of a serpent. The motion was so unbelievably fast, so silent. And in another instant the dying dog was whimpering in his arms.

Its two hind legs were broken; the man could see where the brave animal had dragged them in the dust of the moonlit trail. The hairy coat was matted and wet; and the great, intelligent head was terribly battered and broken.

The dog did not shrink at the sight of the blue pistol pointing squarely in the moonlight. It could see the eyes that aimed along it, full of the same love it had always seen. When the man's eyes had that look, they never were to be feared. The pistol flame leaped in the dark. And then the only sound on the mountain trail was the faint rustle of leaves stirred by the quivering muscles of the dying animal, and the loving, whispered curses of a weeping man.

It was a long time after this that he left the stiffening body and walked on down the trail. He went toward the cabin on the lower level where the Trotters lived. He went very softly, very smoothly, as if with no muscular exertion. A snowshoe rabbit leaped and fled from his trail. The little squeak of terror that it uttered was the same that its breed had learned in long ages, at the sight of a serpent descending from its ledges on its night-hunting.

There are three planes of life in the mountains, and the laws are the same for each. The middle plane consists of all those creatures whose byways are the game trails in the brush and on the hills: the wolves that never are full-fed, the larger bears, deer like streaks of brown light, and the stately elk. The upper plane is the tree people and the winged creatures. Here is the lynx that lies so close to the great branches of the trees that he is all but invisible, the gray squirrels, and such grotesque creatures as the porcupine,—always the last hope of a wanderer lost and starving in the mountains. And finally there is the under plane, knowledge of which is still mostly a mystery except to the greatest naturalists.

In this plane are the rodents, the marmots and rabbits and mice and chipmunk, whose forests are the ferns. And worse than any of these are the poison folk, the gray, speckled rattlesnakes on the rocks. The casual hunter in the hills does not see these poison people. In the first place, most of them are nocturnal in their habits. Besides, they are perfectly camouflaged by nature to match the rocks and dust in which they lie. Hunters very rarely go to the rock ledges that they love, the breeding places where sometimes a hundred of them will sun themselves on the same cliff. And of all the creatures of the wild, theirs is the most remorseless creed.

The wolf turns aside at the sound of their warning rattle. The cattle forsake the slopes where they take their sun baths. They have learned in long years to expect no mercy from the poison folk, for the reptiles have a cold malignancy toward all other living things,—perhaps because far back in their evil minds they can remember when they were the rulers and owners of the whole world, and they are jealous of these intruders. They strike not only in self-defense or in hunting, like most of the forest people. Men who have been struck by a head that leaped like a whip-lash from beneath a rock are well aware of this fact,—if they survive to be aware of anything. The birds hate them because when the glittering eyes meet their own, all power to fly away passes from their wings. The little mice and smaller rodents squeak with terror at just the rustle of the leaves in the shadow. And even men, remembering from a remote time a great breed of serpents that hunted in the darkness just without their caves, hate and fear them too.

They do not understand them. They never quite understood the miracle of their changing skins, their long fasts from food and drink, their motionless slumber on the rocks. Men know that the bite from a full-grown rattler is often a very quick and unhappy death; for the venom itself, a certain complex combination of proteids, is almost as deadly a substance as the wisest chemist can evolve in a laboratory.

The poison folk were Abe Carver's life and study. He had not inherited the usual fear of them. Even in his boyhood he would leave his play to follow the gliding forms through the grass. Their eyes, their habits, their strange, malignant lives, had been a fascination to him in all his long years. And he knew things about them that no living man ever knew before.

His first study was the blue-racers, and the garter and gopher snakes, and such snakes as kill their food by constriction of their coiling bodies. They could exert a most remarkable pressure, as the little Abe learned after many experiments; but compared to the rattlers they were dull and stupid things. He had watched them do their strange dances in the moonlight; he had seen them attack a great toad that had been frozen in its tracks with horror. Later he beheld the same mystery in the rattlers.

Then one day Abe had followed a great rattler from the river bank far up precipitous trails to a wonderful serpent colony on the rocks. A man may live years in the hills and never find one of these places; but once he does, he remembers it to the day he dies. And he will go many paces out of his way to avoid the place again.

The serpent cities are great fragments of broken ledge where the rattlesnakes gather in countless hundreds. No man knows what their business is. No man can imagine what consultations the great gray king rattlers have among themselves, what the females—no less deadly and twice as malignant—say to one another, and why they lie for such endless hours so still upon the rocks.

Sometimes they lie apart, and sometimes a number of them will make a ghastly mass like the twined locks of a Medusa. Sometimes they stretch two and two, and often the great males will battle to the death for a resting place on a rock too small for both. All these things Abe Carver had seen, and if any man in the world knew the why and wherefore of them all, Abe Carver was he.

Abe had been bitten many times, but he had always carried antidotes of the most scientific and effective kind. And long ago he had become immune to rattler's venom. He wore tall, tough boots—for a rattler's bite is painful even when one is immune to its toxin—and he wore long gloves over his wrists and hands. The gloves were just as important as the boots, because in climbing over the snake a man could only make progress by using both hands and feet.

At twenty-one he had a knowledge of rattlesnakes past that of any naturalist of this period in the world. At forty the poison folk that ever coil and glide and strike and dance on the rocks were his cult and his life and his eternal mystery. But at sixty he had passed all this. He had lived too long in the under plane. In a measure they had become his own people. They did not mystify him now. Except for a dog that whined and cowered at the extreme frontier of the snake city, they were the one remaining interest in his life.

At sixty Abe Carver had broken one of the few great underlying laws of the universe. He had probed too deeply into a mystery that had not been meant for human beings to know. It has been the same since the beginning of the world. There have been men who have looked too far into the occult sciences of the East,—and their story is a good one to forget. There is a more recent story of a man who purposely went to prison to study the ways of criminals and came out a criminal himself. Abe Carver had lain for too many long sunlit hours watching the ceaseless coiling of the poison folk. He had gazed too long into their glittering eyes. There had been a time when he wondered at himself, at the strange pleasure he took in the touch of their cold bodies; but that was past. He had once started with amazement at the sight of his own bright eyes in a looking-glass; but long ago he had become accustomed to their glitter. And once another mountaineer had shuddered and sworn that Carver moved through the hills like a snake itself; but Abe had forgotten that his reply had only been a laugh. These were just externals, simply unconscious imitation. But too many times he had watched the night hunting of the snakes, had seen their cold rage in battles; their own remorselessness had grown into his blood and fiber.

They feared him no more. He had learned to imitate a little whispered call—more like a hiss than a word—by which they knew their friends; a sound that long ago he had learned was the snakes' peace greeting. He could whisper it softly at the first stir of a gray ribbon beneath a rock, and it meant that he could pass back and forth unchallenged.

Just once as Carver walked down the moonlit trail to the Trotters' house, he had to utter the call. Just as he had come down into the lower hills, a gray shadow had streaked across his path. And for the first time since he had left his dead companion on the trail, he paused tensely.

His eyes probed into the darkness where the snake had vanished. It had been but a gopher snake, after all; but it had started a queer current of thought in his mind. What had he meant to do by this blind advance? The Trotters were three, all of them dead shots and in the prime of their strength; and he was only one. Does a wolf attack when he had odds of three against him?

He had come up blindly from the trail, his heart full of such cold hatred as most men have long ago lost the power to feel. Hatred must have exercise as well as any other emotion, or it dries up like the poison duct of a snake of fifty winters—and too many years of peace have killed the power of most human beings to feel it. But Carver had had good teachers.

Even at first it had not been the kind of hatred that ignites the brain and heart and makes a man helpless before his foes. Thoughts must be allowed free play; brains must be kept clear; this is one of the first laws of the wilderness. Yet he had not stopped to plan. He was dimly cognizant of some wild and daring impulse to attack all three of the Trotters as they sat in their cottage; of slaying them as a wolf slays sheep. Yet in a single moment of clear thinking he knew that his one hope lay in strategy alone.

He might kill one of them; but surely the deadly aim of one of the other two would end his own life. One was not enough. Besides, the preservation of one's life is the first law of the forest, and no plan must be considered that entailed its loss.

Abe walked softly, stealthily down into the first clearings. Once a horse neighed wildly and fled in unlooked-for-terror, and once a toad, usually so dull and stolid, hopped frantically into the darkness. In a little while he saw the windows of the Trotter cottage.

The men had not yet gone to bed; but the fact did not surprise Carver. Of course they had been looking for Abe to attempt some stroke of vengeance; and they had no intention of being found asleep. Abe felt a little shiver of gladness, something like the first rapture of passion; for the more tired they were in the next day's business, the longer were the odds against them. He stole up to the window.

The three of them were sitting in their filthy room; and drowsiness had begun to dull the savagery of their faces. All evening through they had waited for Abe to come; and now that he was here, they did not know it. They were three great, dark men, foul of tongue and evil of face.

"We might as well go to bed," the oldest Trotter was saying. "The skunk ain't comin'."

The second brother stood up and stretched out his arms. "He ain't got the nerve. Whatever made you think he had? He's crazy, anyway—you can see it in his eyes."

"I don't like them eyes," the youngest of the three objected. And he ought to have known, for they were fast upon him as he spoke.

The others laughed. "He's a bluff—and what could he do against the three of us? We'd shoot him like a rat before he got his guns out. But one of us had better keep watch. We'll take turns at it—two hours each."

"Maybe his dog died on the trail, and he hasn't seen him yet," the youngest of the three went on. "We'd hate to have to carry him up and throw him in old Abe's bed."

The three of them laughed,—a grim, terrible sound that rocked out into the quiet night. The old man's lower teeth gnawed at his lip. He was shaking all over now, yet not enough to stir the dead leaves under his feet. It was not nervousness, except in the sense that all wild creatures are nervous at the beginning of a hunt. It was hatred that seemed to shiver his heart to pieces.

"I tried to leave enough life in him to get home," the older brother answered. And they chortled again. Then they lay down in their clothes to sleep.

They did not dream of the two remorseless eyes that glittered through the windowpane. And then, as a shadow goes, the old man glided away. He went into the deepest brush; and the lessons of silence he had learned on the rock ledges laid his feet like cushions against the dry twigs. Then his lids slowly closed over his fixed eyes, and he went to sleep.

There was work to do on the morrow; and work to be done well needs fresh muscles and clear thought such as only sleep can give. Fifty feet to his right a wolf slept through the early night hours, waiting for the hunting time in the dawn. One hundred to his left a rattlesnake curled about a rock still warm from the previous day's sun; and it was deep in its slumber. And to one that looked down from the clouds, the three would have seemed of the same breed.

The long, silent wait in the brush would have been a physical drain on some men, but Abe knew just how to lie relaxed and conserve his strength. The night drew to morning—a dawn that leaped up over the mountains wherein the trees sprang out of the shadow one by one and grew clear-lined—and the morning drew till noon. The vigilance of the Trotters had grown ever less as the morning hours went by. When they came in to dinner at noon, they had decided that Carver would attempt no vengeance at all.

They did not know that even a toothless wolf will fight to the death, and that a rattlesnake will strike after its poison glands are dried up with age. If they had known these things they might have been more watchful when they went out to their work in the afternoon.

They did not see Abe creep into the house. If he had glided in the dust like his poison people, he could have scarcely been less visible. Even the buzzard that keeps grim watch over all the mountains did not see him.

The house was quite deserted. It was full of the odors of uncleanliness,—a quality very hard to endure by one accustomed to the clean smells of the woods. And there were hardly enough articles of value in the house for his decoy. It didn't much matter, however. The sight of him leaving the cabin with a full sack would be enough to put them on his trail.

He emptied the potatoes from a burlap sack, then filled the bag with such things as he thought the Trotters valued most. Then he put in a light comforter to give the bag an appearance of weight and bulk.

But he was not through yet. The Trotters carried their pistols, but their rifles were hung on the deer horns over the little fireplace. A well-aimed rifle bullet might end the adventure before it had begun; and his next business was to spike the guns beyond repair. It was not hard to do, with a hammer and a brick from the fireplace.

He did not work in silence now. A little noise was better. If the Trotters heard and came, their dog would surely reach him before they did. And he did not wish too long a start on them. He merely wanted to remain just out of pistol range. And now only one gun remained unbroken.

He was still cold as steel; and the only change in him was an added brilliancy in his reptile eyes. But a madness was creeping through his blood like a poison. His face was curiously white; and his motions, ever quickened, became more lithe and sinuous. His age had fallen from his shoulders in a breath. With a clang and clash he struck the fireplace wall with the last of the three rifles and the lock shattered to pieces.

Far away, through the windows, he saw the three Trotters stop in their work. It was just as he had hoped. He shouted at them, a scream of fury, and crouched to wait the onslaught of the dog. It was bounding across the fields toward the cabin; and in a moment more it would spring into the open door.

The two met in the doorway; and a knife flashed down in a white light. Then, laughing his scorn, and in plain sight of the three men that watched from their fields, he kicked the bleeding body from his path.

With his bag over his shoulder, he started running toward the hills. One of the Trotters' herd of long-horned cattle lifted its head from the grass as he passed, and he fired remorselessly at its shoulders. It rocked down with a bellow; and he halted to drive his blade into its neck.

The Trotters were firing now, impotently, with their pistols. And Abe Carver cursed with mad rapture when he saw them spring in pursuit of him. He did not need the sack over his shoulder as a decoy. Once having seen the butchery of the steer and dog, they would follow him till they died.

Just as he had hoped, they soon swung into the long, easy trot that is one of the few accomplishments men have learned from the wild creatures. It is a pace that will run down a horse in time; and they did not question for a moment that overtaking

Carver was but the work of an hour at most. They were young and strong, and he was old.

The youngest of the three had gone to the cabin after the rifles; now he had joined them with the story of a fresh atrocity. And the three of them trotted together up the long slope in pursuit of the gray figure just ahead.

They did not waste their pistol cartridges by firing at Carver. A pistol is not particularly accurate at long distances, and Carver hovered just out of range. They would catch him soon, anyway. Besides, a murder at arm's-length would better satiate their fury.

He led them over hills and down into still glens and around the shoulders of mountains and along narrow trails. He was trotting slowly now, and their pace had decreased too. As danger from pistol fire grew less, he had permitted the distance to narrow between them. Ever he moved toward the great waste of crag and rock heap that men called the Dead Indian Mountains. And ever he drew his three pursuers after him.

Now he was traversing the great range itself. The August sun blasted down in fury, and the rocks swam and shimmered in the heat-waves. It was the most torried hour of the day, just as he had hoped.

The three came hot on the trail, for surely he was amost exhausted now. The great rock heaps, piled as if in the play of a mad god, looked down at this strange chase, and had never seen the like before.

Now Carver was ready to descend. He knew the country well. A thousand times he had crept down this same precipice of shale,—a steep slope that ended on a white rock ledge below. There was no retreat, once one started the descent. Hand and knees and feet were needed to prevent a fatal fall, and only by the most tortuous climbing could one ever dare to leave the white ledge below.

He dipped down and down; uttering a little whispered call that was more nearly like the hiss of a snake than a human cry,—the friendship articulation of the poison people.

Literally hundreds of the lithe, spotted ribbons of gray were sunning themselves on the rocks, as always in the heat of the day. Some of them were in ghastly masses, and some were stretched at full length. It was the great colony of rattlesnakes that Abe Carver had known of old, the great assembly of poison folk whose bite is death.

They could not see him now, but they heard his call. The rattlers shed their skins in dog days; and during the period they become temporarily blind. And that is the time that all creatures most carefully avoid the snake trails in the dust. At such times their malignancy is at its height, and they strike without warning at the slightest movement on the stone.

But they gave no heed to old Abe Carver. They were used to him, and to their own whispered friendship call that marked him as a brother rather than a foe. He climbed slowly down, his face and hands and body almost brushing hundreds of the terrible flat heads. Then he dropped his bag and sped into the brush beneath.

And just as he had known, his three pursuers plunged down after him.

The wild is very old and most imperturbable; and all except its own soft voices are always quickly stilled. A gray old man who had chattered and danced in rapture stretched out in the sun to sleep. And almost as quickly as the ripples die when three stones are cast into the sea, the silence fell again over the serpent city.

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A Tropical Horror

By WILLIAM HOPE HODGSON

WE are a hundred and thirty days out from Melbourne, and for three weeks we have lain in this sweltering calm.

It is midnight, and our watch on deck until four a.m. I go out and sit on the hatch. A minute later, Joky, our youngest 'prentice, joins me for a chatter. Many are the hours we have sat thus and talked in the night watches; though, to be sure, it is Joky who does the talking. I am content to smoke and listen, giving an occasional grunt at seasons to show that I am attentive.

Joky has been silent for some time, his head bent in meditation. Suddenly he looks up, evidently with the intention of making some remark. As he does so, I see his face stiffen with a nameless horror. He crouches back, his eyes staring past me at some unseen fear. Then his mouth opens. *He gives* forth a strangulated cry and topples backward off the hatch, striking his head against the deck. Fearing I know not what, I turn to look.

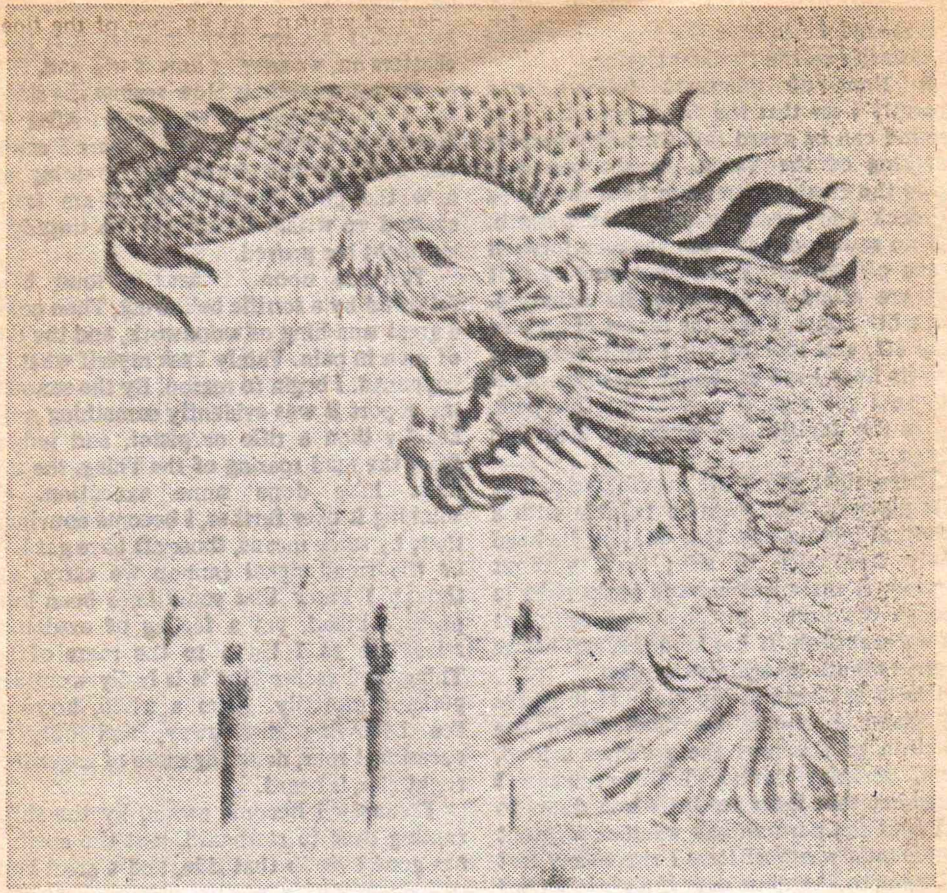
Great Heavens! Rising above the bulwarks, seen plainly in the bright moonlight, is a vast slobbering mouth a fathom across. From the huge dripping lips hang great tentacles. As I look the Thing comes further over the rail. It is rising, rising, higher and higher. There are no eyes visible; *only that fearful* slobbering mouth set on the tremendous trunk-like neck; which, even as I watch, is curling inboard with the stealthy celerity of an enormous eel. Over it comes in vast heaving folds. Will it never end? The ship gives a slow, sullen roll to starboard as she feels the weight. Then the tail, a broad, flat-shaped mass, slips over the teak rail and falls with a loud slump on to the deck.

For a few seconds the hideous creature lies heaped in writhing, slimy coils. Then, with quick, darting movements, the monstrous head travels along the deck. Close by the mainmast stand the harness casks, and alongside of these a freshly opened cask of salt beef with the top loosely replaced. The smell of the meat seems to attract the monster, and I can hear it sniffing with a vast indrawing breath. Then those lips open, displaying four huge fangs; there is a quick forward motion of the head, a sudden crashing, crunching sound, and beef and barrel have disappeared. The noise brings one of the ordinary seamen out of the fo'cas'le. Coming into the night, he can see nothing for a moment. Then, as he gets further aft, he *sees*, and with horrified cries rushes forward. Too late! From the mouth of the Thing there flashes forth a long, broad blade of glistening white, set with fierce *teeth. I avert my eyes, but cannot* shut out the sickening "Glut! Glut!" that follows.

The man on the "look-out," attracted by the disturbance, has witnessed the tragedy, and flies for refuge into the fo'cas'le, flinging to the heavy iron door after him.

The carpenter and sailmaker come running out from the half-deck in their drawers. Seeing the awful Thing, they rush aft to the cabin with shouts of fear. The second mate, after one glance over the break of the poop, runs down the companion-way with the helmsman after him. I can hear them barring the scuttle, and abruptly I *realise that I am on the main deck alone.*

So far I have forgotten my own danger. The past few minutes seem like a portion of an awful dream. Now, however, I comprehend my position and, shaking off the horror that has held me, turn to seek safety. As I do so my eyes fall upon Joky, lying huddled and senseless with fright where he has fallen. I cannot leave him there. Close by stands the empty half-deck—a little steel-built house with iron



"Rising above the bulwarks, seen plainly in the bright moonlight, is a vast slobbering mouth a fathom across."

doors. The lee one is hooked open. Once inside I am safe.

Up to the present the Thing has seemed to be unconscious of my presence. Now, however, the huge barrel-like head sways in my direction; then comes a muffled bellow, and the great tongue flickers in and out as the brute turns and swirls aft to meet me. I know there is not a moment to lose, and, picking up the helpless lad, I make a run for the open door. It is only distant a few yards, but that awful shape is coming down the deck to me in great wreathing coils. I reach the house and tumble in with my burden; then out on deck again to unhook and close the door. Even as I do so something white curls round the end of the house. With a bound I am inside and the door is shut and bolted. Through the thick glass of the ports I see the Thing sweep round the house, in vain search for me.

Joky has not moved yet; so, kneeling down, I loosen his shirt collar and sprinkle some water from the breaker over his face. While I am doing this I hear Morgan shout something; then comes a great shriek of terror, and again that sickening "Glut! Glut!"

Joky stirs uneasily, rubs his eyes, and sits up suddenly.

"Was that Morgan shouting——?" He breaks off with a cry. "Where are we? I have had such awful dreams!"

At this instant there is a sound of running footsteps on the deck and I hear Morgan's voice at the door.

"Tom, open——!"

He stops abruptly and gives an awful cry of despair. Then I hear him rush forward. Through the porthole, I see him spring into the fore rigging and scramble madly aloft. Something steals up after him. It shows white in the moonlight. It wraps itself around his right ankle. Morgan stops dead, plucks out his sheath-knife, and hacks fiercely at the fiendish thing. It lets go, and in a second he is over the top and running for dear life up the t'gallant rigging.

A time of quietness follows, and presently I see that the day is breaking. Not a sound can be heard save the heavy gasping breathing of the Thing. As the sun rises higher the creature stretches itself out along the deck and seems to enjoy the warmth. Still no sound, either from the men forward or the officers aft. I can only suppose that they are afraid of attracting its attention. Yet, a little later, I hear the report of a pistol away aft, and looking out I see the serpent raise its huge head as though listening. As it does so I get a good view of the fore part, and in the daylight see what the night has hidden.

There, right about the mouth, is a pair of little pig-eyes, that seem to twinkle with a diabolical intelligence. It is swaying its head slowly from side to side; then, without warning, it turns quickly and looks right in through the port. I dodge out of sight; but not soon enough. It has seen me, and brings its great mouth up against the glass.

I hold my breath. My God! If it breaks the glass! I cower, horrified. From the direction of the port there comes a loud, harsh, scraping sound. I shiver. Then I remember that there are little iron doors to shut over the ports in bad weather. Without a moment's waste of time I rise to my feet and slam to the door over the port. Then I go round to the others and do the same. We are now in darkness, and I tell Joky in a whisper to light the lamp, which, after some fumbling, he does.

About an hour before midnight I fall asleep. I am awakened suddenly some hours later by a scream of agony and the rattle of a water-dipper. There is a slight scuffling sound; then that soul-revolting "Glut! Glut!"

I guess what has happened. One of the men forrad has slipped out of the fo'cas'le to try and get a little water. Evidently he has trusted to the darkness to hide his movements. Poor beggar! He has paid for his attempt with his life!

After this I cannot sleep, though the rest of the night passes quietly enough. Towards morning I doze a bit, but wake every few minutes with a start. Joky is sleeping peacefully; indeed, he seems worn out with the terrible strain of the past twenty-four hours. About eight a.m. I call him, and we make a light breakfast off the dry ship's biscuit and water. Of the latter happily we have a good supply. Joky seems more himself, and starts to talk a little—possibly somewhat louder than is safe; for, as he chatters on, wondering how it will end, there comes a tremendous blow against the side of the house, making it ring again. After this Joky is very silent. As we sit there I cannot but wonder what all the rest are doing, and how the poor beggars forrard are faring, cooped up without water, as the tragedy of the night has proved.

Towards noon, I hear a loud bang, followed by a terrific bellowing. Then comes a great smashing of woodwork, and the cries of men in pain. Vainly I ask myself what has happened. I begin to reason. By the sound of the report it was evidently something much heavier than a rifle or pistol, and judging from the mad roaring of the Thing, the shot must have done some execution. On thinking it over further, I become convinced that, by some means, those aft have got hold of the small signal cannon we carry, and though I know that some have been hurt, perhaps killed, yet a feeling of exultation seizes me as I listen to the roars of the Thing, and realise that it is badly wounded, perhaps mortally. After a while, however, the bellowing dies away, and only an occasional roar, denoting more of anger than aught else, is heard.

Presently I become aware, by the ship's canting over to starboard, that the creature has gone over to that side, and a great hope springs up within me that possibly it has had enough of us and is going over the rail into the sea. For a time all is silent and my hope grows stronger. I lean across and nudge Joky, who is sleeping with his head on the table. He starts up sharply with a loud cry.

"Hush!" I whisper hoarsely. "I'm not certain, but I do believe it's gone."

Joky's face brightens wonderfully, and he questions me eagerly. We wait another hour or so, with hope ever rising. Our confidence is returning fast. Not a sound can we hear, not even the breathing of the Beast. I get out some biscuits, and Joky, after rummaging in the locker, produces a small piece of pork and a bottle of ship's vinegar. We fall to with a relish. After our long abstinence from food the meal acts on us like wine, and what must Joky do but insist on opening the door, to make sure the Thing has gone. This I will not allow, telling him that at least it will be safer to open the iron port-covers first and have a look out. Joky argues, but I am immovable. He becomes excited. I believe the youngster is light-headed. Then, as I turn to unscrew one of the after-covers, Joky makes a dash at the door. Before he can undo the bolts I have him, and after a short struggle lead him back to the table. Even as I endeavour to quieten him there comes at the starboard door—the door that Joky has tried to open—a sharp, loud sniff, sniff, followed immediately by a thunderous grunting howl and a foul stench of putrid breath sweeps in under the door. A great trembling takes me, and were it not for the carpenter's tool-chest I should fall. Joky turns very white and is violently sick, after which he is seized by a hopeless fit of sobbing.

Hour after hour passes, and, weary to death, I lie down on the chest upon which I have been sitting, and try to rest.

It must be about half-past two in the morning, after a somewhat longer doze, that I am suddenly awakened by a most tremendous uproar away forrad—men's voices shrieking, cursing, praying; but in spite of the terror expressed, so weak and feeble; while in the midst, and at times broken off short with that hellishly suggestive "Glut! Glut!" is the unearthly bellowing of the Thing. Fear incarnate seizes me, and I can only fall on my knees and pray. Too well I know what is happening.

Joky has slept through it all, and I am thankful.

Presently, under the door there steals a narrow riband of light, and I know that the day has broken on the second morning of our imprisonment. I let Joky sleep on. I will let him have peace while he may. Time passes, but I take little notice. The Thing is quiet, probably sleeping. About midday I eat a little biscuit and drink some of the water. Joky still sleeps. It is best so.

A sound breaks the stillness. The ship gives a slight heave, and I know that once more the Thing is awake. Round the deck it moves, causing the ship to roll perceptibly. Once it goes forrard—I fancy to again explore the fo'cas'le. Evidently it finds nothing, for it returns almost immediately. It pauses a moment at the house, then goes on further aft. Up aloft, somewhere in the fore-rigging, there rings out a peal of wild laughter, though sounding very faint and far away. The Horror stops suddenly. I listen intently, but hear nothing save a sharp creaking beyond the after end of the house, as though a strain had come upon the main rigging.

A minute later I hear a cry aloft, followed almost instantly by a loud crash on deck that seems to shake the ship. I wait in anxious fear. What is happening? The minutes pass slowly. Then comes another frightened shout. It ceases suddenly. The suspense has become terrible, and I am no longer able to bear it. Very cautiously I open one of the after port-covers, and peep out to see a fearful sight. There, with its tail upon the deck and its vast body curled round the mainmast, is the monster, its head above the topsail yard, and its great claw-armed tentacle waving in the air. It is the first proper sight that I have had of the Thing. Good Heavens! It must weigh a hundred tons! Knowing that I shall have time, I open the port itself, then crane my head out and look up. There on the extreme end of the lower topsail yard I see one of the able seamen. Even down here I note the staring horror of his face. At this moment he sees me and gives a weak, hoarse cry for help. I can do nothing for him. As I look the great tongue shoots out and licks him off the yard, much as might a dog a fly off the window-pane.

Higher still, but happily out of reach, are two more of the men. As far as I can judge they are lashed to the mast above the royal yard. The Thing attempts to reach them, but after a futile effort it ceases, and starts to slide down, coil on coil, to the deck. While doing this I notice a great gaping wound on its body some twenty feet above the tail.

I drop my gaze from aloft and look aft. The cabin door is torn from its hinges, and the bulkhead—which, unlike the half-deck, is of teak wood—is partly broken down. With a shudder I realise the cause of those cries after the cannon-shot. Turning I screw my head round and try to see the foremast, but cannot. The sun, I notice, is low, and the night is near. Then I draw in my head and fasten up both port and cover.

How will it end? Oh! how will it end?

After a while Joky wakes up. He is very restless, yet though he has eaten nothing during the day I cannot get him to touch anything.

Night draws on. We are too weary—to dispirited to talk. I lie down, but not to sleep. . .Time passes.

* * * * *

A ventilator rattles violently somewhere on the main deck, and there sounds constantly that slurring, gritty noise. Later I hear a cat's agonised howl, and then again all is quiet. Some time after comes a great splash alongside. Then, for some hours all is silent as the grave. Occasionally I sit up on the chest and listen, yet never a whisper of noise comes to me. There is an absolute silence, even the monotonous creak of the gear has died away entirely, and at last a real hope is springing up within me. That splash, this silence—surely I am justified in hoping. I do not wake Joky this time. I will prove first for myself that all is safe. Still I wait. I will run no unnecessary risks. After a time I creep to the after-port and will listen; but there is no sound. I put up my hand and feel at the screw, then again I hesitate, yet not for long. Noiselessly I begin to unscrew the fastening of the heavy shield. It swings loose on its hinge, and I pull it back and peer out. My heart is beating madly. Everything seems strangely dark outside. Perhaps the moon has gone behind a cloud. Suddenly a beam of moonlight enters through the port, and goes as quickly. I stare out. Something moves. Again the light streams in, and now I seem to be looking into a great cavern, at the bottom of which quivers and curls something palely white.

My heart seems to stand still! It is the Horror! I start back and seize the iron port-flap to slam it to. As I do so, something strikes the glass like a steam ran, shatters it to atoms, and flicks past me into the berth. I scream and spring away. The port is quite filled with it. The lamp shows it dimly. It is curling and twisting here and there. It is as thick as a tree, and covered with a smooth slimy skin. At the end is a great claw, like a lobster's, only a thousand times larger. I cower down into the farthest corner. . .It has broken the tool-chest to pieces with one click of those frightful mandibles. Joky has crawled under a bunk. The Thing sweeps round in my direction. I feel a drop of sweat trickle slowly down my face—it tastes salty. Nearer comes that awful death. . .Crash! I roll over backwards. It has crushed the water breaker against which I leant, and I am rolling in the water across the floor. The claw drives up, then down, with a quick uncertain movement, striking the deck a dull, heavy blow, a foot from my head. Joky gives a little gasp of horror. Slowly the Thing rises and starts feeling its way round the berth. It plunges into a bunk and pulls out a bolster, nips it in half and drops it, then moves on. It is feeling along the deck. As it does so it comes across a half of the bolster. It seems to toy with it, then picks it up and takes it out through the port. . .

A wave of putrid air fills the berth. There is a grating sound, and something enters the port again—something white and tapering and set with teeth. Hither and thither it curls, rasping over the bunks, ceiling, and deck, with a noise like that of a great saw at work. Twice it flickers above my head, and I close my eyes. Then off it goes again. It sounds now on the opposite side of the berth and nearer to Joky. Suddenly the harsh, raspy noise becomes muffled, as though the teeth were passing across some soft substance. Joky gives a horrid little scream, that breaks off into a bubbling, whistling sound. I open my eyes. The tip of the vast tongue is curled tightly round something that drips, then is quickly withdrawn, allowing the moonbeams to steal again into the berth. I rise to my feet. Looking round, I note in a mechanical sort of way the wrecked state of the berth—the shattered chests, dismantled bunks, and something else——

"Joky!" I cry, and tingle all over.

There is that awful Thing again at the port. I glance round for a weapon. I will revenge Joky. Ah! there, right under the lamp, where the wreck of the carpenter's chest strews the floor, lies a small hatchet. I spring forward and seize it. It is small, but so keen—so keen! I feel its razor edge lovingly. Then I am back at the port. I stand to one side and raise my weapon. The great tongue is feeling its way to those fearsome remains. It reaches them. As it does so, with a scream of "Joky! Joky!" I strike savagely again and again and again, gasping as I strike; once more, and the monstrous mass falls to the deck, writhing like a hideous eel. A vast, warm flood rushes in through the porthold. There is a sound of breaking steel and an enormous bellowing. A singing comes in my ears and grows louder—louder. Then the berth grows indistinct and suddenly dark.

* * * * *

Extract from the log of the steamship *Hispaniola.*

June 24.—Lat.——N. Long.——W. 11a.m. —Sighted four-masted barque about four points on the port bow, flying signal of distress. Ran down to her and sent a boat aboard. She proved to be the *Glen Doon*, homeward bound from Melbourne to London. Found things in a terrible state. Decks covered with blood and slime. Steel deck-house stove in. Broke open door, and discovered youth of about nineteen in last stage of inanition, also part remains of boy about fourteen years of age. There was a great quantity of blood in the place, and a huge curled-up mass of whitish flesh, weighing about half a ton, one end of which appeared to have been hacked through with a sharp instrument. Found forecastle door open and hanging from one hinge. Doorway bulged, as though something had been forced through. Went inside. Terrible state of affairs, blood everywhere, broken chests, smashed bunks, but no men nor remains. Went aft again and found youth showing signs of recovery. When he came round, gave the name of Thompson. Said they had been attacked by a huge serpent—thought it must have been sea-serpent. He was too weak to say much, but told us there were some men up the mainmast. Sent a hand aloft, who reported them lashed to the royal mast, and quite dead. Went aft to the cabin. Here we found the bulkhead smashed to pieces, and the cabin-door lying on the deck near the after-hatch. Found body of captain down lazarette, but no officers. Noticed amongst the wreckage part of the carriage of a small cannon. Came aboard again.

Have sent the second mate with six men to work her into port. Thompson is with us. He has written out his version of the affair. We certainly consider that the state of the ship, as we found her, bears out in every respect his story. (Signed)

William Norton (Master).
Tom Briggs (1st Mate).

Sylvane--The Silver Birches

By A. MERRITT

Silver maidens of the woods
Whispering 'neath your leafy hoods
Who's your forest lover?

Argosies of crimson berries
At your feet are gleaming;
Spells to guide your dreaming
Cargoes in greenfaery wherries
Launched by woodland rover
O'er the tossing bracken sea—
Lithe white ladies of the lea,
Must we ask the fickle bee,
Ask the gossip plover?
Who's your lover?

Slender sisters, when dusk falls
On your deep cathedraled halls
Which is he who would aspire
To your mystery of green fire—
Who's it comes a-wooing?

Debonair the tasseled larch
With his charmed, misty runes
Shadow wraiths on twilight's arch,
And his troubadourish tunes
Lilting from his wind-swept lyre—
Comes the larch a-suing?

Is't the burgomaster pine?
Or the courtly plumed cedar?
Is the fir your fancy's leader?

Which is he you fain would follow—
Demoiselles of hill and hollow
Who's your forest lover?

If not the single finest science fiction fan magazine ever to appear, FANTASY COMMENTATOR, published by A. Langley Searles, Ph. D., certainly ranks among the top two or three. In bibliographical value it undoubtedly belongs at the very top. Among some of the most extensive bibliographic work done for that publication was William H. Evans' *Fantasy in the Munsey Periodicals,* which began in the Winter, 1946-47 issue of FANTASY COMMENTATOR and concluded in the Spring, 1947 number.

The earliest listing on this bibliography was *The Man With the Brown Beard* by Nathaniel T. Babcock in THE ARGOSY for February, 1896. The reprint of the bibliography, as part of Bradford M. Day's *An Index on the Weird & Fantasy in Magazines* in 1953 in a limited numbered edition of 400 copies (twice the circulation of FANTASY COMMENTATOR), fulfilled the yearnings of some hard-core collectors for this particular item, but very few could find a copy. Since the Munsey magazines, in their long life span (1882 to 1942) printed more science fiction, fantasy and supernatural stories than any other non-specialized source, collectors, for the nearly quarter-of-a-century since the original appearance of Evans' index, have attached a special significance to the earliest listing it contains.

It is unfortunate, though the index is a valuable tool, that Evans overlooked a number of prior works, including, strangely, a 17-part novel with scores of illustrations: *The Conquest of the Moon* by Andre Laurie (serialized weekly, beginning with the November 16, 1889); so *The Man With the Brown Beard* was not, in fact, the first fantasy run by the magazine. Almost as bad an omission was the excellent seven-part novel *River of Darkness* by William Murray Graydon, serialized monthly beginning with the May, 1897 number. There was an abrupt termination at the other end as, in concluding his bibliography with the change of *Argosy* from pulp to slick, under Popular, Evans failed to list *Miracles Made Easy* (April 15, 1942) and *Don't Fool With Phantoms* (December, 1942), both by Nelson S. Bond; *Wizard Beware* by Richard Sale (September, 1942); and a reprint with beautiful Finlay drawings of Irvin S. Cobb's *Fishead* (October, 1942).

Old-time collectors supposed that he had actually begun his listings with the first pulp issue, and that the earlier fantasies missed were explainable on that score, but that did not prove to be the case, either. The first 100% pulp issue was the October, 1896 number, and the April, 1896 issue in which *The Man With the Brown Beard* appeared was an 111-paged slick, not counting advertisments, and was not an all-fiction magazine, since 59 of its pages were taken up with general articles, illustrated with photographs and special drawings. The most interesting of these for the science fiction reader was a short item with two drawings, showing the exterior and interior of a submarine ferry designed by Frenchmen M. Goubet.

Nevertheless, old desires like old beliefs die hard, and many collectors would still like to read that now notorious "first" story. Fortunately, it is both supernatural fantasy and a surprisingly strong story.

The Man With The Brown Beard

By NATHANIEL T. BABCOCK

IF my pen continues to remain a pen and my ink changes not into blood or wine until the purpose is accomplished, I shall, I think, succeed in giving to the public a tale as wondrous strange as any to which the world has, for many years, listened. There is nothing in the appearance of this gracefully pointed bit of steel and its cedar wood handle, as I hold it between my eyes and the lamplight, to suggest a possibility of its suddenly becoming a serpent's tail or a devil's divining rod, nor do I perceive in the contents of my crystal inkstand anything beyond a superior quality of black writing fluid; and yet for caution's sake, and lest I all unexpectedly become again the victim of a supernatural practical joke, I beg the privilege of prefacing my story with the

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There are going to be in the unfolding of this narrative, as everybody will discover, several very embarrassing factors, chief of which is this, that although I suppose I am relating certain extraordinary events which have happend to me, I have no positive means of knowing that such is the case. The two of us, by whom I mean Harry Jessup (who certainly once was and still seems to be) and poor John Sutherland (who clearly now is not), are so closely, so intimately, connected—soulintertwined, if I may use the expression—that I (or is it he?) who speak can be certain of all things more easily than of my (or is it his?) identity.

Clearly, however, we shall not get on at all at this rate. Though honestly endeavoring to enlighten, I perceive I am but mystifying my readers. Let me quiet my nerves with one draught of this wholesome wine (here's to you, poor John Sutherland!) and proceed as calmly as I can with my story.

One year ago tonight I was lying in the Tombs prison, New York City, under sentence of death for murder. I was guiltless. This fact, unfortunately, was known only to myself. In justice to my memory (or should I say in justice to the memory of John Sutherland?) I must briefly relate the circumstances which led to that error of justice which condemned an innocent man to the gallows.

I was born (that is, supposing I am the person who, though contrary to all external appearances, I still believe myself to be) in the city of London, England. If I had parents I never knew them; neither was I acquainted with brothers, sisters, or relatives even of a remote degree. I purloined what little knowledge I had of the world from the lips of gentlemen at the backs of whose chairs I stood during the breakfast and dining hours at some of the most reputable eating houses in London. I got a bit of book learning at an evening school, and other odds and ends of accomplishments I picked up at merry places by gaslight. It was while employed at one of those "Homes of Harmony" that I obtained that knowledge of the pianoforte which, in spite of its superficiality, is today so great a source of wonder to those persons with whom I am now surrounded. I read more than fellows of my sort, and, as a consequence, soon became educated beyond my station and emigrated to America. Upon my arriaval in New York I found work at fair wages in an eating house somewhere east of Broadway. I was put to share the room of an Italian waiter, a surly, ill favored person, who, within two months after I had taken quarters with him, cut his throat while I lay by his side, a circumstance which brought him no greater harm than it brought to me, since on the following morning I was thrown into jail, and six weeks later moved to the Tombs under sentence of death.

A year ago tonight, at just about this hour, to avoid the gaze of the curious newspaper writers who clustered thick about the stove at the end of the narrow corridor upon which my cell opened, and who (the jailer having permitted me the freedom of the passage) pitilessly noted down my every despairing movement, I stepped back behind my grated door and threw myself face downward upon my narrow bed. I remember that the cot was covered with a coarse gray blanket, across which, near either end, was woven a narrow strip of red. The jailer rattled the grating of my door and spoke kindly, advising me to remove my coat and boots and get a bit of sleep. I lifted my head as he spoke. The blood red streak in the blanket was immediately under my chin; I had thrown myself down, throat across it. I sat bolt upright on the bed. My hand went involuntarily to my throat. The jailer's kindly face seemed to my terror stricken vision the face of a devil. I knew that within a few hours I was to be murdered, and he was to be my murderer. I felt that I ought to hate him; that if I were half a man I would seize his beard and batter his head upon the rusty iron of the cage. Yet, when I spoke, my voice was low, courteous, even modestly submissive, as I thanked him for his attention. Great God! think of it—I thanked the man who stood there at my cell door keeping watch over a stalled ox for the coming of the butcher.

He turned to go. The rage which in my soul had found birth and death without power of expression was followed by a frantic grief, an overwhelming self pity. I longed to throw myself upon my knees before the retreating figure and beg for mercy, but again my limbs refused to act, and as the jailer faced the grating for last look at his victim, I think he must have seen a smile—who knows, perhaps a grin?—upon my face, for he brightened, and said, "That's right, Jessup; I'm glad to see you keeping up a good heart."

Tell me the face is the soul's mirror! The soul is as powerless to control the body as the body is powerless to control the soul. Rage, grief, despair, incite to action, and the body mocks them all. True, I am an unlearned and an unlettered man, but of the soul's relation to the body who on earth should know more than I have been taught?

It is possible that the suicide, just prior to the carrying out of his purpose, is made acquainted with that sickening, muscle relaxing, nerve tightening despair which comes to the man who is to be executed tomorrow, but I do not think so. In the case of suicide there must be (and this, before long, I shall fully discover) an absence of that pitiful helplessness which tears the heartstrings of the man who is to be put to death by his fellows. Oh, the grief of it! The haunting horror of any human form! With pistol in hand, even when its cold round muzzle is pressed against his throbbing temple; even to that fractional part of a second in which the cruel deed is done, the suicide is soothed by a consciousness of an optional escape. There is no time fixed. He is the master of his punishment. The inexorable is lacking in the refinement of his torture.

When the jailer had disappeared from view I sank back upon the cot. I turned myself upon my back and looked at the plain white ceiling. I tried to people this vague surface with heaven's lamps—to imagine it was God's firmament. There were the countless stars twinkling as merrily as though no sorrow anywhere existed. Spread out around me was the mighty ocean, foaming and rolling near by, then stretching off like a great, black, quiet plain. I was once more upon the steamer, the accursed steamer that brought me to New York to be killed. The motion, how delightful! swing so, swing so. My hands went to the side of the cot for the protection of my balance. Oh, this motion! now up, now down! The stars, how bright! The waves! see, see how high. Mercy! what pleasure. Great tears flow down my cheeks. Crash! we've struck! We're sinking! My fingers go to my eyes; rub, rub, and there is again the white ceiling. No stars? I spring to my feet. No ocean? A prison cell; death by strangulation in the morning.

I staggered to the cell door; I pressed my cheek against the grating and was able to see a portion of the group of watchers at the end of the corridor. Their heads were together; somebody was relating a story. A fat man had his profile to me. From time to time his hands went down upon his knees with a slap, and his sides shook. He was being amused by reminiscences of the trusty jailer. Amused? These men being amused, and I—

I could no longer endure the sight of my fellow men. Again I threw myself upon the bed. The red stripe on the blanket had lost its terror. I saw nothing, thought of nothing, but men; crowds of men in black; coming after me! Coming with a rope to strangle me. I, a man like themselves, with head and legs and arms like theirs. They would take me by the hands, and we should touch one another; they would look in my face and I should look in theirs, and nowhere, nowhere, would I find anybody to help me, to save me! Shut up in a cage awaiting the approach of my own species, sons of women, like myself; men with toilets carefully made, coming, deliberately, relentlessly coming, to put me to death! Coming perhaps from happy firesides, and waiting only until I should be dead to return to their wives and little ones; not a man among them but would lend an arm to the meanest cripple on the street, yet coming, coming to butcher me. Could the good Lord, who made us all in a world of sin and suffering, approve it? I got down upon my knees, I tried to pray, but just as comfort seemed approaching, a sudden awful sensation, as of the presence of the executioner standing at my back, rope in hand, brought me trembling to my feet. Again I fell exhausted on my bed. And now a mighty terror of my own body seized upon me. My head was raised so that I saw the entire length of my figure. It seemed to me to be the body of a strangled corpse. I moved my foot to dispel the illusion, but with the cessation of its motion the frightful hallucination returned. I madly assisted the delusion. I crossed my hands on my breast; they seemed to become waxen, cold, and bloodless. I closed my eyes and pressed my elbows tightly against my sides to avoid contact with the linen of a coffin. A sickening nausea arose within me; my heart seemed turning over in its place, and then—consciousness ceased; merciful sleep had come to my relief.

* *, *, *

'I awoke with a start. When I make this statement I feel I am doing scant justice to an extraordinary phenomenon. How do I know that I ever awoke? May I not still be lying in a dream upon that prison bed? May not the gallows and rope be yet in store for me? Well, if such is the case, surely my supposing that it is not the case can do no harm. You, my mythical readers, will not worry over it if you are mythical, and if you are real, why, then I, too, must be real, and the phenomenon a reality. I think that I awoke suddenly and with the thought of the dire business of the morning very present in my mind. It was broad daylight—the light of that day I had shivered to think of—the light which was to be a signal for all those men in black with crape on their arms to take their victim to the sacrifice. A film seemed stretched across the balls of my eyes, upon which were mirrored a multitude of colors that now, as my staring pupils dilated, took form in a hundred beautiful things. First of all, I seemed to see just in front of me the face of a pretty child smiling from out a halo of yellow hair; a sideway glance, and heavy curtains of some bright red material parted to permit my dazzled eyes to behold a window flaming with reflections of the morning sunlight. Overhead my sky was a plane of brown and gold. My hand falling at my side rested upon a texture as soft as swansdown; my body undulated upon a bed softer than any it had ever before known.

It is now a year since the day of that awakening. I have been for the last ten minutes endeavoring to recall my first impressions, my earliest thoughts, as this scene, the beauty of which I have but hinted at, dawned upon my sense. I may have supposed myself in heaven, but, if so, the idea could have been no more than momentary, for it was impossible for one lying as I was lying, in a position commanding a view on all sides, not speedily to discover the he was the occupant of a very comfortable bed in a decidedly luxurious bedchamber. My little girl of the golden hair hung in a massive frame on the tinted wall directly opposite the foot of my bed; the window through which came in the early sunlight, was in a bow of the east wall; my brown and gold sky was excellent fresco, equal to anything I had ever seen in those establishments in which my livelihood had been gained on the other side of the water.

How long I had been staring at these marvelous surroundings I cannot say, when suddenly there came a soft rap at the door, which was on the right of the apartment, and a very cheery voice, the voice of a young girl, exclaimed, "Jacko! Jacko, are you going to sleep all day?"

I listened in amazement, and naturally made no reply.

"Jacko, I tell you," continued the pretty voice, "it's after eight o'clock, and we are all waiting for you."

Clearly the child was addressing some person whom she supposed to be in the room, of which I was the only occupant. The rapping on the door of an obviously impatient little fist continued. It was necessary to respond. I said "Helio!"

"All right," replied the little voice. "I'm glad you are awake at last; now do hurry."

Hurry? Hurry where? I had an engagement at seven o'clock. The child assured me, and a French clock on the mantel confirmed her statement, that it was past eight. Where was I? What did it all mean? I softly protruded one foot from the yielding bedclothing and planted it upon the thick carpet on the floor. How warm and grateful was the sense! My other leg followed, and I stood erect. In what was I dressed! White linen, with beautiful scarlet loops in place of common buttonholes—the night robe of a prince! I smoothed the fabric with my hand, and was surprised to discover a roundness and plumpness in my limbs, of which I had never before been conscious. I put my hand to my bewildered head. A beard? A beard upon my face which had ever been beardless!

In the corner was a handsome dresser, surmounted by a high mirror. With wild, uncertain steps I crossed the room. The polished glass of the mirror showed the face of an utter stranger. Forgetful of the fact that, had he stood beside me, my own figure must have obscured his image, I wheeled about and confronted—no one. The room was occupied by myself alone. Again I faced the glass. There stood the corpse, and eyes that seemed starting from his head. I put my hand to my eyes; the specter in the glass imitated the motion. I screamed and fell to the floor, the image in the glass disappearing simultaneously with my fall. I had never fainted in my life, and I did not become unconscious. Lifting myself upon my elbow I looked around me.

The base of a wardrobe immediately opposite my point of vision was set with plate glass. In that mirror I again saw the stranger, lying, as I was lying, with his cheek upon the palm of his hand. I got upon my knees and clasped my hands. The figure in the glass followed each motion. I jumped to my feet. The head and shoulders of the image disappeared, but from the waist downward remained. I then perceived that the mirror in the base of the wardrobe was less than three feet high. It was, then, my own reflection that I saw! No, not my own reflection, for I was a man six feet in height, slimly built, with light hair and blue eyes, and a beardless face. The object in the glass was scarcely five feet nine, inclined to stoutness, with short, curly brown hair, and a heavy dark beard. I turned to the mirror above the dresser, my knees quaking under me from consternation. The ashen face of the brown bearded stranger again confronted me. I lifted my finger to my lips in a dazed, meaningless way, and the man in the glass did the same. Just then there came a loud knock at the door, and a hearty voice said, "Open the door for a moment, Jack; I've something to say to you."

Was the voice addressing me? I stood like a stone, alternately growing hot and cold.

"I say, old man, open the door," continued the voice from without.

Half unconsciously I approached the door and pushed back the bolt that held it. A handsome young fellow, rosy and radiant as from a brisk walk, and bearing a striking resemblance to the image in the glass, rushed in as the bolt was drawn, and clapping his hands upon my shoulders, exclaimed. "Jack, old man, it's all fixed; we're going with you. The governor gave in at the last when mother, Nell, and I all got after him in a bunch. But what's the matter with you, Jack?" (holding me at arm's length and peering anxiously into my face.) "You look as if you'd seen a ghost. Here, Nell! Mother! Jack is fainting."

I have before mentioned that I never faint; neither did I then, though I doubt not Walter had good cause to imagine that I would. I felt the blood leaving my body; I became limp in the strong young fellow's arms as he tenderly assisted me to the sofa. Attracted by his call there entered a moment later a matronly looking woman of fifty or thereabouts, followed by a girl of fifteen, whom I at once recognized as the original of the portrait, grown a few summers older. Both threw themselves on their knees at my feet. Mother (I give the title by which I today address that estimable lady) placed her arm lovingly around my shoulder, and drew my head toward her own, while Nell grasped one of my hands and began to kiss it gently.

"My poor boy," began the lady, "you have overtaxed yourself, just as I feared you would, and the anticipation of this morning's event, in the weakened condition of your nerves, has made you ill. I shall be glad when the ceremony is over and you are comfortably off."

Great heavens! What was the lady speaking of? "The anticipation of this morning's event"? "weakened my nerves"? "comfortably off"? What does it mean? Had I really been executed in the prison yard, and was I in some place of purgatory, waiting to go through the agony under different surroundings? Was this the beginning of a sinner's eternity? Were these people fiends in the guise of angels? Was I to go on forever, being executed in different shapes?

"Come, Jack dear," continued the good lady; "Walter will help you with your clothes, and after a good breakfast and a cup of hot coffee you'll be yourself again."

"And," chimed in the pretty little maiden, "we won't tell Julie what a devoted husband she is to have. A man—oh, Jacko, for shame!—who becomes ill on his wedding day merely at the thought of being married!"

During all this time my lips had refused to utter a sound, and I could now only exclaim, "Heaven have mercy on me!" a remark which caused Walter and his mother to hold a hurried conversation at the back of the sofa, and then to leave the room, saying cheerfully that they would not be gone a moment.

Left alone with me, the young girl clapped her hands over my knees, and looking in my face, said, "Now, Jacko, my darling, tell me what is the matter? You won't keep anything from your own Nell? I admire Julie and I respect her, but if this marriage is going to make you unhappy, I'll break it off if I have to go to the girl myself and tell her that you do not love her. Oh, Jacko, my best, my dearest brother, tell me what is the matter?"

"Please leave me," was all that I could articulate.

"Dear Jacko," cried the affectionate girl, "I cannot leave you. You never spoke to me so before. My brother, my dear, dear brother!"

"Where is your brother?" I cried.

There was probably a look in my eyes that terrified the girl, for she arose to her feet, and with tears streaming from her eyes left the room.

I was alone, and again approached the glass. The brown bearded man looked haggard and unnatural. "For the love of Him who made us," I cried, speaking to the stranger in the mirror, "tell me who you are and who am I?"

"Why, Jack, my boy, what is the matter?"

I felt a strong hand upon my shoulder, and, turning, confronted a pleasant mannered, middle aged gentleman whom I rightly inferred to be a physician. Just behind stood Walter and his mother. I do not know whether it was the strong individuality of the doctor that impressed me with a sense of the reality of my surroundings, which up to this moment had seemed illusory and vague, but I suddenly felt a warmth of blood returning to my limbs and a sense of rest and security in my condition; a determination to drift whithersoever fate might lead me. A smile must have shown itself in my face, for the doctor turned to the anxious lady and said, "It is nothing, my dear madam; mere nervous excitement which will soon pass away." He then prepared a potion, which I cheerfully swallowed. Walter inquired whether he should not assist me to dress, and I assented. The drollery of my existence now began to take precedence of all other emotions. The brown bearded man in the glass was no longer an object of terror in my eyes; he became amusing. I saw, I could not fail to see, that his motions and actions were entirely in my control. Little by little, I came to a graceful acceptance of my new identity. A man who has been hanged, said I to myself, cannot be chooser in any subsequent allotment of events. If this is hell, I must admit it is an unexpectedly agreeable hell, and if it is heaven, I should certainly ask for nothing better.

This mild acceptance of my extraordinary fate, at that time, was probably due in a large measure to the drug which the doctor had administered—a powerful narcotic, no doubt—that quieted my nerves and caused by troubled brain to become languid. Piloted by Walter, who happily insisted upon keeping hold of my arm, I passed through a spacious and handsome hall and down a broad pair of stairs to a very luxurious breakfast room, where, for the first time, I met the head of the family, a mild eyed man past middle age, who, during the strange scenes of the morning, had been absent from the house, and who now greeted me very tenderly. Throughout the breakfast which followed, I remained completely silent. There was a large pier glass opposite me in which, with quiet amusement, I beheld the brown bearded man put morsels of food into his rather handsome mouth, I myself enjoying the sensation of swallowing the same. I did not fail to notice that my silence and evident preoccupation was a source of keen distress to the others at the table, but I was powerless to improve matters.

As the soothing effects of the doctor's potion wore away my thoughts became more troublesome and bewildering, until finally, unable to remain any longer quiet, I arose from the table and fled to an adjoining room. There seemed to have been an intention on the part of some member of the family to follow me, but the head of the house exclaimed, "No, let Jack alone; he'll come out all right presently."

Upon a table in the room in which I had taken refuge lay a newspaper. I picked it up. The date—that dreadful date to which for weeks I had looked forward with sickening consternation—showed me that it was the latest issue. The paper was called the *Denver Tribune*, and was printed in Denver, Colorado. As I scanned the sheet, a faint recollection as of something heard in childhood came upon me. I recalled a conversation caught in a fragmentary way years before, while standing at dinner behind two English noblemen. They were talking of this "Denver, Colorado." What were they saying? Oh, yes, they were speaking of Denver as the chief city of a cattle raising province in the United States.

I was then still in the United States! In Denver! But how in Denver? How anywhere except in a murderer's cell in the Tombs prison, New York?

While pondering with aching head upon these questions, my eyes encountered the following paragraph:

Harry Jessup, the brutal murderer of Eduardo Italiani, is to be hanged in the Tombs prison, New York City, at seven o'clock this morning.

Again and again I read this paragraph. My eyes devoured the three brief lines of print till every word and letter seemed eating its way into my soul. "Harry Jessup, the brutal murderer of Eduardo Italiani, is to be hanged!" Is to be hanged? A clock on the mantel struck nine. "Is to be hanged at the Tombs Prison, New York City, at seven o'clock this morning." Is to be hanged? I, Harry Jessup, am to be—my God! what does it mean? This is the day, this is the morning, and the sun, which rose at five o'clock, is four hours old! My eyes dropped again upon the paper which had fallen on my lap, and I read the following notice:

The marriage of Mr. John Sutherland (better known to his countless friends in Denver as "Jack" Sutherland) to Miss Julie Chamberlain, will take place at the residence of the bride this morning. It is to be a very quiet affair, only the immediate friends of the two families having received cards.

For a moment my brain seemed to be bursting. The sickening nausea which I felt in the prison had returned, and then quietly, like a great awakening of some hitherto dormant intellectual faculties, there stole into my soul the consciousness of a miracle performed. I had not suffered at the hangman's hands. I lived. I had never ceased to live. Every action of my life was accessible to memory. I was still Harry Jessup. Were I dead, had I passed into another world, my store of knowledge would of necessity be increased or diminished; but it remained the same. I mentally ran over my past life, and at every station found proof of a personal and intimate knowledge of but one man, and that man was Harry Jessup. I arose and approached the glass. There stood the brown bearded stranger.

I looked in the face and *knew that he had stolen my soul.* The mirror showed me the body of John Sutherland, with the soul of Harry Jessup. But the soul of the man whose body I wore, what of it?

The sound of voices, subdued but earnest, came to my ears from the adjoining room. The name of "Jack," "dear Jack," was constantly upon the lips of the distressed parents of the loving brother and sister. It needed no marvelous perspicacity for me, stranger as I was to them all, to discover that this "brother Jack," into whose suit of flesh I had unwittingly stepped, was a very dearly beloved member of the household. I learned from such fragments of their talk as reached my ears, that the loved ones were sorely troubled at my (at John Sutherland's) behavior, and were at a loss what to do. The newspaper paragraph, taken in connection with the young lady's remark in the chamber, made it obvious to me that this was to have been the wedding day of the brown bearded man, and I readily understood the dilemma into which his (or rather my) unaccountable conduct had thrown the entire family. Remember, I am now writing of events a year old, and, if I seem singularly composed, it is only because time has graciously permitted me to grow accustomed to the contemplation of these wonders.

As I listened to the tender whisperings of mother and sister, so full of solicitude and anxiety, an overwhelming sense of my own enforced duplicity took possession of me. Who and what was I that I should have entered ghost-like into this happy family circle, bringing sorrow and suffering to all its members and unwarrantedly usurping the place of the eldest son; turning him from his bride, driving him—(the thought flashes like fire upon my brain)—where is John Sutherland? This is his small, fat white hand I hold before me; this is his heart which I feel beating, but his soul—himself—the man—the being who called himself Sutherland? Where is he? Was it an exchange of bodies? Between the hours of twelve o'clock last night and seven o'clock that morning I threw off the flesh and form which was my own, and assumed another mortal dwelling place. The occupant of this body—the body which I see staring at me from yonder mirror—abandoned it for mine. It must have been so. And my body—the external man Jessup—the corporeal shelter which this fond son and loving brother had been forced to enter—what of its fate? Dragged into a prison courtyard and stretched by the neck at the end of a rope, two hours ago.

I do not remember all that occurred in the fever and subsequent delirium which fell upon me. I am told that I lingered between life and death for several months, tenderly watched by the parents and the sister of the unhappy man who died in my place. When I was able to move about, my ignorance of all surroundings, which, as may be imagined, was complete, was attributed by the family physician to a shock of the brain center which, he explained, had destroyed my memory. I must, he said to Mr. and Mrs. Sutherland, be treated as a child and retaught all that I had ever learned. He suggested a trip to Europe, and we are now, after many months, about to sail for England. My failure to recognize the affianced bride of John Sutherland, has, I am told, thrown that young lady into a decline. No member of the Sutherland family has ever crossed the Atlantic, and my intimate knowledge of London will, if I ever reach London, be a new source of wonder to my companions. As for myself, I have passed beyond the reach of wonderment or surprises. I am what I am, while I am, because I am. That is all I know, but I see withal nothing more strange that any two souls should exchange abiding places than that any individual soul should leave its abiding place tenantless and a prey to worms, as is every day the case in all parts of the world. What guarantee, if I may use so trite an expression, have you, or you, my friend, that the soul, which yields itself nightly to dreamless sleep, will find the same environment upon awakening?

We arrived in New York yesterday from Denver, and as soon as I could decently excuse myself from my "relatives," I went straightway to the Tombs prison on Center Street. Having obtained a card of admission, I entered the inner prison, and made my way to the corridor known as "Murderers' Row" Cell No. 5, my cell was empty. The jailer, at sight of whom I came near to faint, informed me that Cell No. 5 had not been occupied since one Jessup, the murderer of an Italian, left it for the gallows a year ago.

"And tell me," I inquired with a calmness which amazed me, "how this—this Jessup met his fate?"

"Terrible, terrible, sir," replied the jailer, evidently having, as he spoke, a vivid picture of the scene in his mind. "I never want to see the like of it again. You see, sir, he was a very nervous customer, most extraordinary so, and I expected we'd have trouble with him. But 'long toward midnight he fell into a sleep just like the sleep of a child, and at half past six he was slumbering as pretty as anything you ever saw. We hated to wake the poor fellow, but it had to be done, so I steps inside the grating and takes hold of his arm. He was awake and bright in a minute. 'All right, Walter,' he says, cheery-like, 'I'm with you.' Then he looks around in a dazed sort of way, and says he, 'Why, hello! What the devil's all this?' and looking at me, he says, 'Who are you?' I told him as kindly as I could, that it was time to be going. He was on his feet then, and staring around. 'Well,' says he, 'this may be a very pretty joke the boys have played on me, old man, but I don't like it. I suppose this is the county jail, and I'm in West Denver, hey? The boys must have got me pretty full at Charpiot's, and yet I could almost swear that I went home straight.'

"I saw at once that he was crazy, and I thought it would be a mercy to get through the business as soon as possible; so I called in the deputies, and we read him the death warrant. It's been a puzzle to me ever since to know what the young chap was thinking about while we were reading the warrant. At times he'd laugh, and then he'd look sort of dazed and wild-like. After the reading, I told him we'd have to be moving, and that I would be obliged to pinion his arms. 'All right, old man,' he said; 'everything goes; but I'll get even with those fellows when their time comes, you mark my words. I suppose now,' he said with a laugh, 'you're going to haul me up?' Tell you, sir," continued the jailer, "it made the cold shivers run down my back to hear him so joking-like, just as if it was all a bit of fun. When we had his arms tied we started for the yard. There was a priest with him, at whom he laughed, saying, 'Well, the boys seem to want to make it as real as possible.' After we got into the court behind the prision, where the gallows stood, and he saw the squad of police and the reporters and deputy sheriffs, he began to tremble, and then suddenly, in a voice that I can hear to this day, he screamed, 'What does it mean? Help! Murder! Murder!' As quick as possible we got him under the drop and pulled the black cap over his face; and then I think he fainted, for he cried, 'Julie! Father!' and fell down in a heap. The work was well done, and he didn't suffer much; but I can tell you, sir, I don't want to have to hang any more crazy men."

Well, as I said before, we are off for Europe in the morning, but I do not think I shall ever reach the other side. I have an idea that somewhere about midway of the Atlantic I shall drown this brown bearded man whom everybody calls "John Sutherland."

In the Next Issue—Another Generous Installment!

WILLIAM HOPE HODGSON—NOVELIST

The facts behind the creation and reception of this great writer's famous novels *WILLIAM HOPE HODGSON—NOVELIST The Boats of the "Glen Carrig", The House on the Borderland* and *The Ghost Pirates* with previously unpublished information.

By SAM MOSKOWITZ

There are many types of horror and there are authors who have made specialties of exploring the possible variations. There is the horror evoked by Frankenstein-type monsters, werewolves, witchcraft and voodoo; there are an endless array of psychological horrors, which have become the specialty of modern writers; there are the horrors of physical torture; the horror of experiencing a disaster overtake one of our loved ones, and literally horrors without end. There are horrors that may occur to those of a certain race or religion when some mystical belief or tradition is violated. Few of them surpass in horror the situation of a white man who awakens one morning to find himself black!

The Black Hands by Albert Bigelow Paine is such a story and had it been written today, it would evoke little more response than a shrug as propaganda for the civil rights movement which is sweeping the nation. The difference is that it was written 70 years ago and first appeared in PEARSON'S MAGAZINE for August, 1903! The author, Albert Bigelow Paine was to score a critical success in 1904 with his biography *Thomas Nast* (the great cartoonist) which caused Mark Twain to ask him to become his official biographer. A later biography *Joan of Arc–Maid of France* (1925) secured him the medal of the Legion of Honor from France.

However, the authorship of a horror science fiction story was no accident. Before he scored his big successes Paine had written at least two other fantastic novels: *Mystery of Evelyn Delorme; A Hypnotic Story* (1894) and *The Great White Way* (1901).

The Black Hands

By ALBERT BIGELOW PAINE

MY first remembrance is of a dim consciousness. I felt no disposition to move, or even to open my eyes. I had the light, helpless feeling that comes after fever.

Somebody by the bed was speaking.

"How will he face it?" The voice seemed to be a woman's—soft, and dropping lower. "Do you think there can be any remedy—any hope that it will go away?"

A negative motion must have been the reply.

"Then it would be better if he—" the voice became a whisper, inaudible.

I assumed that they were speaking of me, and a glimmer of curiosity developed. What had happened? What place was this? Then, in a sudden flash I remembered. A train rushing cityward through winter fields. Passengers chatting or reading under the swaying lamps. A quick cry from the rear—a trainman pushing madly down the aisle—a concussion which had flung me straight into that mysterious land from which I had but just emerged.

Clearly, I had been injured. What was the nature of my hurt? I had lost a limb, perhaps; but this could not be, for the voice had spoken of a remedy—had asked if there was any hope that it would "go away." What injury was there that could go away?

The speculation vaguely interested me. Perhaps it had to do with the spine, and had left me nerveless, inert. Perhaps there was some terrible disfigurement—something that it would be better—if—I— The threads tangled and frayed. I drifted back into mystery and obliteration.

It was at half-past four—of the same day, as I learned afterwards—that I roused again—this time to full consciousness and seeing. A woman sat by my bed—a neat, good-looking girl in a nurse's cap. I recognized the bare walls of a hospital.

The woman seemed startled at my opened eyes, but did not speak. I regarded her steadily. My head was quite clear.

"What place is this?" I asked.

"St. Vincent's Hospital—Eastfield."

"The accident—I remember—it was near here?"

My voice seemed quite full. She nodded.

"My injuries—what are they?"

"Your—head. It struck the seat in front of you."

"And I have been here——"

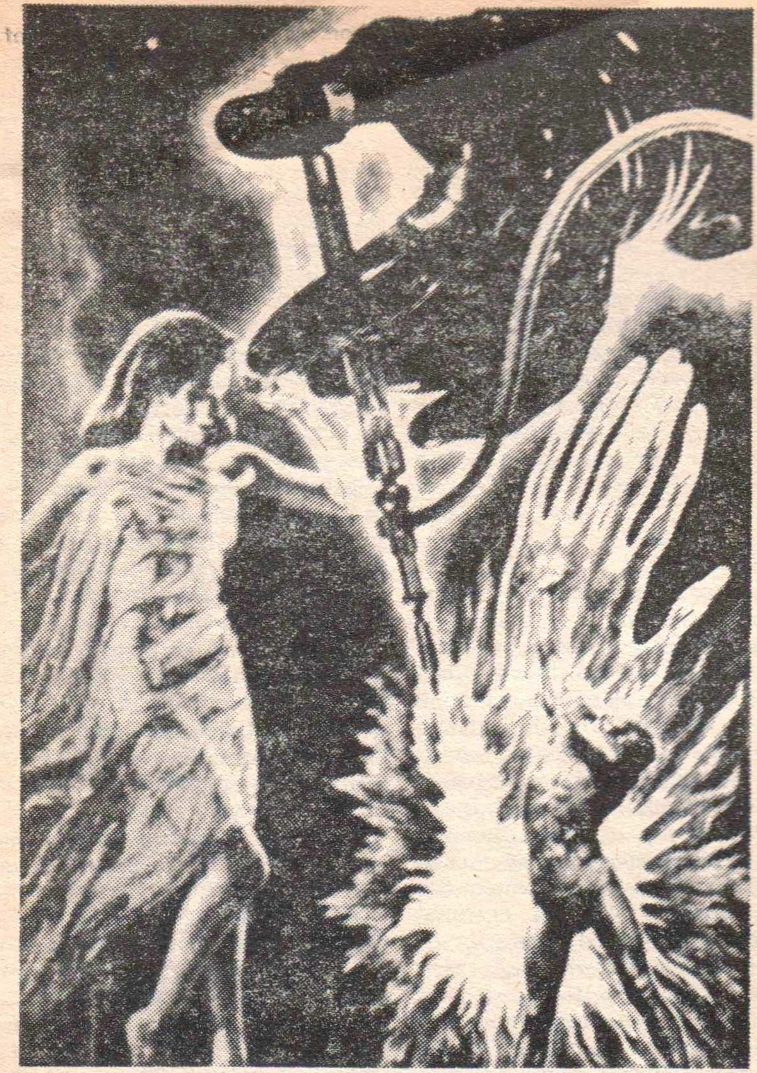
"Three weeks, to-morrow."

"And unconscious all that time?"

"You have suffered a great deal. You were delirious. We had to give you—" she hesitated, and I thought her face whitened—"we injected—opiates."

"But I feel strong—quite well, in fact."

"Yes; your injury was not—like that. It



"The change had occurred before any drug was administered. . .I was a black man!"

was the shock, and then—oh, you must not ask any more! You must rest!"

I closed my eyes to reflect. I wondered if they thought I had been mentally upset. Then I remembered her expression when she had spoken of the opiates. Could I, unconsciously, have become a slave to drugs? All at once I remembered her saying that my head—my face, doubtless—had struck the seat in front of me. I opened my eyes. She had thought me sleeping.

"Give me a hand-glass," I said.

Her face became like death. She began to tremble.

"I—I can't!" she faltered. "We have none. Oh, *please* lie still! You will be so sorry!"

I had half risen on my elbow. I knew now that there was something she could not bear me to see. I attempted a smile.

"Please bring the glass," I insisted.

"If my features are damaged, it does not matter greatly. I was never a beauty, at best."

But she pleaded and trembled.

"No; I can't—I must not! Oh, don't do that!"

I had brought myself up higher on the pillow. I drew one hand from beneath the counterpane, intending to pass it across my face. Then I noticed that for some reason it was covered with a white cotton glove. I was about to ask explanation, when I saw something more—something that made my heart stop and my soul grow sick. Between the glove and my wristband there showed a narrow band of flesh. I stared at it for a moment, stupefied; then with one swift movement I stripped the glove away.

The hand beneath should have been pale from confinement. Instead, it was the deepest brown—the hand of an African!

I looked at it, speechless. Then I turned to the shrinking woman at my bedside.

"Bring the glass," I commanded.

She handed it to me from a little drawer.

"Raise me," I said, "higher! Now!"

I lifted the mirror and looked at myself squarely. My face, my throat, a patch of my breast that showed, were like my hands.

I was as black a negro as walks the earth to-day!

II

MEDICAL experts in the employ of the railroad declared that my change of color had been due to some unaccountable error in the preparation of the opiate which had been given to me hypodermically. I think my nurse must have believed this, and in some measure held herself to blame, though she had only administered, never prepared, the mixture. On the other hand, the hospital board agreed that my condition was the result of a sudden concussion and mental shock, which in some hitherto unknown manner had brought about a chemical change in the color fluid beneath the skin—darkening it, like that of a negro. Hair had whitened after such things. It was conceivable, they declared, that skin might darken. I believe they even claimed that the change had begun before any drug was administered. My face was already discolored, they said, when I had been brought to the hospital; but, as the coach had caught fire, and I had been dragged from amid smoke and cinders, the railroad accounted for this in another manner. It did not matter—I was a black man. So much was clear.

My hair, being naturally very black and curly, my lips those of a full-blooded man, and my nose somewhat broad rather than prominent, all lent themselves to complete my change of race. Nor was this all, for the blow received in my face had resulted in a fracture of the nasal bone, and no surgical skill had been able to prevent a slight depression of the point of the nose and a consequent flattening of the nostrils. I was a negro; in feature, in color—in everything but birth and tradition I belonged to the darkest race of men.

I lingered at St. Vincent's while useless experiments were made for my relief. Then the railroad tendered me a sum of money, which I had the wisdom to accept. Perhaps unconsciously I already realized that my future was likely to be as dark as the hue of my body.

I need not dwell upon the sensational celebrity of my case. The newspapers were filled with it. My picture appeared in every sheet—distorted, wild of mien—"The Man of Changed Race." Even my own paper, where I had filled an important position, could not resist a "Sunday story."

Yet, for all this, I did not realize fully, not yet. There was something unreal and unbelievable about it all. To myself I had not changed. Often I forgot that I was changed to others. Then, suddenly seeing my black hands, I would remember. Even then I could not quite believe. I felt that I must wake up presently to find it all untrue.

At the end of six weeks I returned at last to the city, by night. I could not at once face the streets by day. I might have done so with impunity; for though my name was on every tongue, no one thought of me as the man. I was simply a well-dressed colored man to those who passed me.

I hurried to my apartment. My mother and sister—my only relatives—were abroad for the winter, in Rome. I had written them fully, and, of course, they would have seen the papers. Yet I was glad they were not there to meet me. I needed their love and comfort and support, but they must be accustomed gradually. I must send them photographs.

I was stopped by the colored hall-boy.

"Who do you want to see?" he asked, rather sharply.

"I wish to see no one. I am going to my apartment."

"Whose apartment?" he demanded. "Who do you work for?"

He was not to blame, of course, but I felt my anger rising.

"For nobody!" I said, shortly. "I am Mr. Carter—Mr. George Carter, and I wish to go to my apartment."

The boy's jaw dropped as he stared at me. He recognized me, for he pushed open the elevator door. He uttered no syllable as we ascended, and seemed to shrink into his own corner as if I were something uncanny. I had gone away a superior being—his master. I had returned as one of his own race.

In the silence and seclusion of my apartment, I tried to plan. I must face the world—so much was certain. I had no inclination to live in isolation or without toil, even had my means warranted such a course. I must accept cheerfully such things as had just occurred—the misunderstandings and humiliations that could not be avoided. In time, as people learned all the circumstances, they would become less. I should meet with recognition, sympathy and respect—so I made myself believe. Ah, little indeed did I realize!

I was out early next morning. I wished to get accustomed to facing the daylight. No one on the street paid the least attention to me, and I felt a breath of new courage. I returned to the apartment for breakfast.

It was still early, and the public dining-room was scantily occupied when I entered. Only two or three men were eating. These stared at me without recognition. A waiter came forward, hastily.

"You cannot come in here," he began, rather nervously.

"For what reason?"

"It is against the rules. Colored people are not allowed."

I steadied my voice carefully.

"But I have an apartment here. I am Mr. Carter. I have been ill—you may have heard."

Like the hall-boy, he became speechless—leaving me to seat myself. A little later I saw him go across to the other tables and knew he was whispering the facts to the breakfasters. They looked at me covertly. I dropped my eyes—to my black hands.

Presently a lady came to the door of the dining-room—saw me, gave a slight exclamation, and hesitated. A waiter went forward, and a moment later she entered. I did not look up again, but I knew that her glances were often in my direction. After that a waiter stood at the door, to explain. Michael, for whom I had done more than one good turn, came to serve me. He tried to act and to speak in the old way. It was no use. He could not refer to my absence—he could not mention my affliction. It was not a thing for words.

I hurried away, after a scanty meal. Things would be better at the office. My change of color would not alter my capability, and there it was capability that counted. There, all would understand, and rise to the situation. True, they had not urged my early return, but this I regarded as delicate consideration, rather than any indifference. I now know that it was neither.

But few had arrived when I reached the *Sentinel* rooms. No one opposed my entrance, and I went straight to my desk. I had been seated but a moment when one of the office boys came along. He stopped and stared.

"Leaving a note for Mr. Carter?" he asked. His tone was polite. Potentates of many colors find their way to the great news offices. "Mr. Carter is away," he added. "He has been hurt in a railroad accident. I don't think he will come back."

"I am Mr. Carter," I said.

He knew me then, and fell away from my presence. Presently the news had reached through the office. Groups gathered at the doors, and whisperings came from the corners. A little before noon, Brickley, the managing editor, arrived. Somewhat later a boy summoned me. Brickley extended his hand as I entered.

"Carter, you have my fullest sympathy!" he said, and had he been granting his "fullest permission" his tone would have been the same.

Then he shut the door. It is Brickley's nature to go straight to the heart of things. That is why he is managing editor. He faced me squarely.

"Carter, he said, "do you think this is a good thing?"

"Good! I am accursed!" I said.

"No, no; I mean your coming back here. Do you think it is a good thing to do?"

I looked at him a moment before replying.

"What else can I do?" I said.

"That isn't the point. I'm speaking now for the paper. Don't you see that for you to be here would be *most* conspicuous? The *Sentinel* has never stood for color equality—wait, one moment, Carter, there is nothing personal in this—its policy has been always rather bitterly the other way. You, yourself, have written some of our strongest articles on the subject—showing how the black and the white could never affiliate. Now——"

"But not because of—that is, not altogether—because of color," I broke in, my blood flaming. "There are other things—mentality, racial instincts, features—that is—I mean, not wholly color—I——"

I became incoherent and floundered helplessly. Brickley's eyes were piercing me straight though. Then I saw that they were taking in my curly ebon hair, my full lips, my flattened nose, my black hands.

"Are you sure of that?" he said. "Are you sure that if there were a white race in South Africa, a race with the features and mentality and instincts of the negro, but not black, that you would have written of their descendants in the same strain, holding that mere education and culture could never put them on an equal footing? When has the paper ever condemned the lowest white immigrant because of his political ambition or desire for social progress? Rather, he has been commended, encouraged and helped. On the other hand, have we not repeatedly criticized the public appointment of some man of acknowledged education and attainments—some man—excuse me, Carter, this may sound a bit personal, but it isn't really—of lighter hair, thinner lips, and straighter nose than yours, simply because he was of the black race? You are not really a negro, of course—you've simply met with a great and terrible misfortune. You know that, and I know it, and personally we may or may not believe all the things we write about the color line. But this *isn't* personal, as I say. It's the paper we must consider, and you can see well enough where it would lead us to have you here. The other side would fling it at us, morning, noon, and night. They would quote columns of stuff you have written, and show by it that worthy men of learning and intelligence and straight features had been assailed because of their color, and because of that only. They would print your picture by the side of those articles. They would caricature you. They would ask us to point out the color line in our office. They would drag you into every cartoon."

He picked up a paper on his desk—the first afternoon edition of the *Outcry*, published two doors below.

"Have you seen this?" he asked. "It has just come in."

On an inside page, in one corner, was a small cartoon. It was simply the *Sentinel*, pictured as an armorial shield, across which was a broad black band. Upon the band was scratched the words, "Jet black writing fluid." Below the cut was the legend, "The *Sentinel's* new color line."

It was an unworthy thing, in an obscure corner of the paper. They had shown enough decency, or policy, to begin modestly, but it indicated what they were ready to do. I handed it back in silence.

"You see?" he said. "And they would never stop. They would do it in every conceivable way. They would howl at us until we should have to turn you out. Your life would become unspeakably wretched. You can't afford it, Carter. The *Sentinel* can't afford it. Don't you see how it is? Don't you understand?"

Dazed, overwhelmed, I could not answer, at first. Then, "The *Sentinel* will be condemned for turning me out," I said.

"It may be. But that will blow over in a day. If you let it be understood that you have resigned for reasons of your own—to go abroad—to take treatment, perhaps—there may be little made of it. Of course, the less the better, for you, as well as for the paper."

I nodded, scarcely trusting my voice. Then I rose, rather unsteadily, to go. Brickley extended his hand, and I took it. Extended hands seemed likely to become fewer.

"You may be able to write something for us," he said, "unsigned, of course."

I walked the streets till dusk. At one place a newsboy thrust his wares into my face. A line attracted me, and I bought the paper. It was an afternoon *Sentinel*, announcing my resignation. The condition of my health would not permit me to resume my position. It was thought that I would go abroad for treatment. Brickley had lost no time.

When I reached my apartment, a letter and a telegram awaited me. The letter proved to be a polite note from the manager of the place, asking for my rooms. He was "about to make important alterations." I would be "properly compensated for any inconvenience or expense that might occur." The telegram was from the Sunday editor of the *Outcry*. It requested an article, to be entitled "How it Feels to Become a Negro."

III

I ATE no dinner, and I did not go to bed. I sat staring down on the lighted street, or I walked the floor, trying to think. Certainly the world held some place for me, if only I could find out what it was, and where. Brickley had spoken of my going abroad. Perhaps this was the solution. In certain foreign cities, even those born black are not outcasts. My own people were already in Rome. Without the disgrace, I might, in time, forget.

But there seemed to be fallacy in this. To go abroad, among strangers, would be to identify myself at once with the black race. The thought was repulsive. To make myself known, would be to become a public curiosity—a thing to be followed on the streets, an abnormity, without race and without nation. Furthermore, I had not sufficient means to live abroad in idleness, and it was not likely, with my slight knowledge of foreign tongues, that I could obtain satisfactory employment. I could not be dependent on my mother's modest income, nor could I ask my relatives to dwell with me in seclusion when my sister's life and future might depend on her social privileges. They would be ready to sacrifice, of course, anything. I would accept nothing—nothing but their sympathy, their comfort, and their love. Morning found me at last asleep in my chair from sheer exhaustion. When I awoke, I had forgotten everything. I wondered why I was in the chair—why I was heavy with unhappiness. Then I remembered, for the sun was shining in on my black hands!

I rose, and stripping off my upper garments, stood before the mirror. Black! Black! A negro body—a negro face—what matter then the color of my soul!

I ordered breakfast served in my room. I had scarcely finished, when the hall-boy brought me a bunch of letters. I detained him a moment. I have mentioned that he was colored.

"Joe," I said, "is there any place in the world for a man like me?"

He stared at me, and edged away. Something about his movement gave me again the feeling of unreality—that it was not, could not be true.

"Just a moment, Joe. You are black, too. Are you unhappy?"

He withdrew a little farther. Then he shook his head sagely.

"N—no, sah? I—I isn't unhappy. But den, you see, I's always been dis way."

"But what can I do, Joe? Where can I live, and how is a man like me to earn his bread?"

Joe's head wagged more slowly this time.

"I—I dunno, sah. We cullud folks has to do a heap o'things, an we lives together, mostly."

He backed away. I picked up the first letter on the pile, and opened it. It was from an amusement agency, and offered me a salary to exhibit myself in a dime museum. Here was an answer to the questions I had put to Joe. I could become a part of a museum—a paid freak for the public gaze. It was my advantage over those who had been black from birth. I laughed for the first time. Then I tossed the letter aside. Rather would I perform menial labor. Rather would I dwell with my own color, as one of them.

There were other letters. One, I remember, was from another Sunday paper; one from a traveling side-show. A letter bearing a Western postmark and the business address of a sanitarium had been forwarded from the hospital. It was from a scientific medical expert who wished to experiment with my case. The last letter—it was face down when I came to it, and I did not suspect its import—the last letter was from the woman who had promised to be my wife.

I have not spoken of Miss Carriby before (once I called her Julia, but that was when I was her equal). I have not spoken before, because I wished to do so but once, and then in the proper time. She had been in the South at the time of the accident, and immediately upon my recovery I had written her fully, granting her complete freedom. No answer had come—nothing of any sort, and I had wondered why. She was a woman as clear-headed as she was beautiful, and of strong character. She would realize that I had made my letter brief, plain, and unemotional in order not to harrow her feelings, or to give myself unnecessary pain. That no reply had come, had grieved and surprised me. Now, when I saw the writing, and our city postmark, I fell a-trembling and could scarcely open the envelope. There was only a line.

Dearest: Just reached the city. Come to me soon.

As always,
Julia.

I read and re-read until the words were forever fixed upon the tissue of my brain. I shall never lose sight of those last words from the woman who once gave me her love and promised to share my home. I beat back the billows of hope that surged up within me, and struggled for the firm ground of reason. I must count only on her sympathy and support. But, no—the line meant more than that. She had been silent, fighting out her battle. She had conquered everything but her love. I remembered now that once when I had said, "How can you care for one so unprepossessing as I?" she had answered, "Oh, it does not matter. It is for yourself, your soul, that I care. Nothing could make a difference so long as that remains." Now, she had been put to the proof, and she had not faltered. I gave myself up to the tide that lifted and bore me heavenward. With Julia I would fly to some far island of the South, where the voices and manners of men did not reach. There to another and rarer Desdemona I would consecrate a life of such devotion and loyalty as Othello never dreamed.

I dressed with elaborate care. What matter my dark face and my black hands now. I hurried to the hotel given as her address and presented my card. The clerk took it, stared at me without reading the name, then called a boy and sent up the card, but did not ask me to wait in the parlor, or to be seated in the office. The boy returned soon. I was to go up at once. I followed him, I need hardly say with what conflicting emotions.

The door opened at my knock. A moment later I was facing the woman dearest to me of all the world. She looked at me—the smile faded from her face, and she stepped back with a half-suppressed exclamation.

"Oh, you have mistaken the number," she said. "This is Miss Carriby's apartment."

There was something in the manner of her surprise that made me cold.

"I know, Julia," I said, "and this is George Carter."

I shall never see any eyes such as hers were, then. Fear, recognition, anger, disgust, inquiry—all these were mingled there.

"And what—does it mean?" she managed to say. "Why are you masquerading—here?"

All my new strength passed from me. I sank into a chair.

"My letter—you did not get it?"

"Letter—what letter? No—oh, no! We left Palm Beach. We went on a long cruise. I wrote you. Our vessel just came in last night. I have seen no one; heard nothing; read nothing! What is it? What has happened? Oh, my God!"

She covered her face and rocked back and forth.

"You say that you wrote me?" I asked.

"Yes; oh, yes!"

"The letter never reached me. It may have been on the wrecked train—the mail car was burned."

"Tell me—tell me!" she moaned.

So I told her. I began with the wreck. I told her of my awakening, of my return to the city, of my reception at the office, and at my apartment, of the receipt of her line with all that it had seemed to mean. I broke down then, for the only time during all my days of bitterness, and pleaded and begged that she, too, should not desert me—that we might go away, as I had dreamed, to some remote place where only our love would matter.

I have blamed, denounced, cursed myself since for this. I knew then, as I had always known and written—as I know now, and as I *would write still*— that the *black may not mingle with the white.* But, oh, my Julia!—for once more I must call you by that dear name—I loved you so, and I was weak—weak, and knew not where to turn!

She rocked and wept during my recital, but she did not speak.

"You said once that whatever happened could make no difference," I pleaded—"that it was myself, my soul, that you loved. You said—"

"Oh," she burst out, "but not this! Not this! Don't! Oh, *please don't touch* me!"

I realized then that I had risen—that my arms were extended—that my hands, my black hands, were within a few inches of her face. She covered her eyes that she might not see. I stepped backward softly—so softly that she did not know, perhaps, when I was gone.

I do not remember where I went that day. I suppose I wandered aimlessly about the streets. Toward evening I suddenly found myself in front of my club. I entered as by force of habit. Perhaps for the moment I forgot the nature of my visitation. Perhaps I was too disordered to think, or to care.

An attendant stopped me in the hallway. The electric light fell on my black hands. I turned to go, then I said:

"I am Mr. Carter—surely you remember me. I have had—an accident."

He took my hat, then, staring and gaping, like the others.

"There are no letters?" I asked. I had thought my mother might address me here. She frequently did so.

The boy ran over the package and shook his head. I ascended to the reading-room. Men whom I had known for years were there. They stared at me for a moment, then some came forward and took my hand. Such words as could be said they spoke. They tried not to make me feel. They were gentlemen. One of them—happy-go-lucky Cedarbush—held my hand longest.

"*Don't* you care!" he said. "We don't!"

But they did care, and I knew it. I knew that they must care—that *I* should have cared. One by one they drifted away from me, until presently I was alone. I knew that I should not be asked to resign from the club. I knew—and they knew—that it would not be necessary—that I should never enter that room again. I crept over to a secluded corner—to a writing-table.

"Mother, oh, mother! Come to me—I have no other where to turn!"

As I rose to go, one of the hall-boys handed me a letter. It bore a foreign postmark, and was addressed in my mother's handwriting. It had just arrived.

I stood there under the lamp to read it. It was long, sympathetic and broken-hearted.

She prayed that she might be strengthened to bear this terrible affliction, visited upon her son. What had she done that she should be so punished? Her impulse had been to come to me—to spend her strength, her life, and her means in my behalf. But there was another to be considered. My sister was in her early youth. Her happiness, her future, her life, depended on her surroundings and her associates. It was not God's will that her young life should be darkened by this heavy shadow. There would always be those who would not understand. She would be subject to constant and unbearable humiliations. With the money I had received I must endeavor to procure some relief from my terrible affliction. Meantime, it was better that I should be among old friends in America, and that they should remain abroad, where my sister, who was growing more beautiful daily, was admired and courted, and would, in time make a desirable marriage unless some blight came into her young life. She was sure that I would understand.

I did understand. I felt that my mother was right. I tore in pieces the heart-broken word I had written, and stumbled out into the gloom of evening.

IV

My social decline was as swift as it was complete. Arriving at my apartment I found my furnishings on the pavement, guarded by a policeman. The "alterations" had already begun—it had been found necessary to remove my belongings.

It was growing late, but I secured a van and had my goods taken to storage. Then I wandered into the night, little knowing, or caring, where I went. By and by, I remembered a small hotel, kept by a man for whom I had done many favors. He gave me kind words of greeting and a room for the night, but I knew that I could not remain there. I was a target for the eyes of every lounger. My presence there would mean an eternal series of misunderstandings. It would not be fair to the man I had befriended to disturb his prosperity now.

Next morning the *Outcry* printed a sensational article, relating with vast gusto my dismissal from the *Sentinel*, my expulsion from my apartments, and detailing a wild attempt that it claimed I had made to see my former fiancée. It stated that there had been a disgraceful exhibition, and that I had gone away, vowing vengeance. The whole was enlivened by a new portrait, as devilish as it was unmistakable, a portrait that once seen would identify me for all time. The paper seemed to be in every hand. When I went on the street, people turned to look at me. I bought coffee at a booth on the sidewalk, and some rolls at a baker's. Then I walked down to the river, to plan.

The steadily flowing, silent water fascinated me. Here would be an end to it all. I had the strong man's abhorrence for self-destruction, but the thoroughfares were closing. Eventually my feet would lead me here, and there would be no returning step.

I sat down on the dock and tried to think. Perhaps I could go to Egypt—to South America—to Mexico. Perhaps I could buy a small house in the country, and, living alone, try to support myself with my pen. I thought of many such things, but had no heart for any.

In the end, I wandered back to the city streets, seeking a shelter—a place where I might earn and eat my bread without disgrace—a spot where I might lay my head. That night and the following I slept at a lodging house where the line of exclusion was drawn only at the guest's inability to pay. Food I bought at the grocery stores, and ate it in my room. I could not remain among such surroundings. My soul revolted more at the white men about me than at those of my own color. I realized that I must seek refuge with what had now become my own race.

I sought out a part of the city where a better class of negroes congregate, and secured clean lodgings. The place, the locality, my fellow sojourners, were all repugnant to me, but as a whole it was far better than the accommodations I had left. I resolved to lose myself in this darker corner—to occupy myself with my pen.

Scarcely was I settled, when I was recognized. The press, whose emissaries are to be found in every corner of a great city—whose vigilance no man can long escape—printed the fact of my having found shelter with my own color—with the race I had formerly condemned. The *Outcry* reprinted my picture, and in great double headlines gloated over my downfall. Then, on the same day, it sent one of its Sunday assistants to offer me a thousand dollars for the article previously ordered.

My fellow-lodgers shunned me—the man born of one race with the color of another, and with no claim on either. My landlord, kindly enough, did not turn me out, but it was evident that he wished I might go. Under such conditions, I could not work. I might, indeed, have filled pages for the *Outcry*, but, desperate though I was, and needy as I was likely to be, I was unwilling to court additional notoriety, or to accept what seemed to me that final degradation.

I took up residence, by night, in a still more obscure portion of the city—a lodging among negro tenements, where hallways were heavy with offensive odors, and alive with shouting children of every size and shade. Here I seemed to be unrecognized, but I felt that I could not long endure such environment.

I sought employment as a servant. I could drive, and I knew the city. I secured a position as coachman, but was identified within a week, and again the *Outcry* gave me double headlines and a new portrait, in my new dress. I lost my place, then. I attracted too much attention.

Down and still down. I must have shelter, and I must have occupation. Idleness would drive me mad. I should have left the city, perhaps, but I argued that I could hope to fare no better elsewhere. If I could lose myself at all, it would be in the depths of the great metropolis. I became a truckman, a digger in the streets, a delver in the sewers. I assumed the speech and manner of the negro. It was all of no avail. Wherever I went, whatever I might do, they found me out. My face was familiar to all who had eyes, my case was upon every tongue. Employers did not want a man who attracted a crowd of idlers. Employees refused to work with one thus mysteriously afflicted.

I was ready to surrender at last. The museum that had wanted me for an exhibit seemed to me the one place left to which I could turn—either that, or it was the river.

In my wretched lodgings I looked for the agent's letter. On top of the package was a letter bearing a Western postmark and the card of a sanitarium. Something that was almost like a ray of hope flashed in, as I remembered that it had come from a man who had a theory concerning my case, and believed he could effect a cure. I had given it little thought at the time, for with it, that morning, had come the letter that made me forget all else in the world.

I read and re-read, carefully and with beating heart. His was a desperate remedy, he said, but he believed I might be ready to take desperate chances. It was a procees of exhaustion of the color fluid, requiring long-continued anaesthesia, with more than an equal chance of my not returning to life. It had been successful as a post-mortem experiement, but never had been attempted on a living person. Would I risk the slender chance? I telegraphed, and had a reply within the hour.

That was three days ago. Yesterday I arrived at this spot, this peaceful retreat overlooking blue water that reflects the placid summer sky. Before the open window I am writing these final lines. In a room adjoining there is arranged a table upon which I shall lie, and the doctors have gathered. They have announced that they are ready. But a little more and I shall drift back into a mystery of obliteration, oblivious to all the world, its bitterness and its heart-breaks. As I write these last words I am looking down at my black hands. Will those hands be white if I return to the world of men?

If not, then let me never awaken!

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Pearl Norton Swet had only two stories published in WEIRD TALES and one in its short-lived companion magazine ORIENTAL TALES, all three displaying a good storyteller's competence. Her reputation would be of the most modest kind, were it not for a circumstance beyond her control. In late 1935, Virgil Finlay's marvelous line and stipple drawings had created a literal sensation among the readers of WEIRD TALES, and letters flooded in demanding that he be given a chance at full color cover art. Farnsworth Wright, then editor of WEIRD TALES, commissioned the young Virgil Finlay to do his first cover for the short story *The Medici Boots* by Pearl Norton Swet. He was also to do the interior illustration in black and white.

Finlay turned in both the cover painting and the interior (which were of the identical scene, except for the color). However, due to his inexperience, Finlay had drawn a cover that left the editor no room for the title logo or any place to put the names of featured stories and their authors. The story appeared in the September, 1936 WEIRD TALES, but the Finlay cover was sent back to the artist and Margaret Brundage hastily did a scene for *The Door Into Infinity* by Edmond Hamilton in its place.

When this editor visited Virgil Finlay in 1962, several hundred of his original paintings and drawings, including the unpublished cover, were photographed by my wife Christine E. Haycock, M.D. Eventually, the cover was sold to Gerry de la Ree but in the interim had become scuffed. The cover of this issue is used with the permission of Gerry de la Ree from the original color slide taken by my wife, and appears for the first time anywhere. A special assist was received from Robert A. W. Lowndes in securing a photocopy of the story for the printer.

Pearl Norton Swet, a Chicago resident, died September 15, 1938 and now receives this special posthumous notice because her story was the subject of the first commercial full color cover ever painted by Virgil Finlay. Unfortunately, he died January 18, 1971 at the early age of 56 and never saw that painting professionally reproduced.

The Medici Boots

By PEARL NORTON SWET

FOR fifty years they lay under glass in the Dickerson museum and they were labeled "The Medici Boots." They were fashioned of creamy leather, pliable as a young girl's hands. They were threaded with silver, appliqued with sapphire silks and scarlet, and set on the tip of each was a pale and lovely amethyst. Such were the Medici boots.

Old Silas Dickerson, globe-trotter and collector, had brought the boots from a dusty shop in Florence when he was a young man filled with the lust for travel and adventure. The years passed and Silas Dickerson was an old man, his hair white, his eyes dim, his veined hands trembling with the ague that precedes death.

When he was ninety and the years of his wanderings over, Silas Dickerson died one morning as he sat in a high-backed Venetian chair in his private museum. The Fourteenth Century gold-leaf paintings, the Japanese processional banners, the stolen bones of a Normandy saint—all the beloved trophies of his travels must have watched the dead man impassively for hours before his housekeeper found him.

The old man sat with his head thrown back against the faded tapestry of the Venetian chair, his eyes closed, his bony arms extended along the beautifully carved arms of the chair, and on his lap lay the Medici boots.

It was high noon when they found him, and the sun was streaming through the stained-glass window above the chair and picking at the amethysts, so that the violet stones seemed to eye Marthe, the old housekeeper, with an impudent glitter. Marthe muttered a prayer and crossed herself, before she ran like a scared rabbit to tell the news of the old man's death.

Silas Dickerson's only surviving relatives, the three young Delameters, did not take too seriously the note which was found among the papers in the museum's desk. Old Silas had written the note. It was addressed to John Delameter, for John was his uncle's favorite, but John's pretty wife, Suzanne, and his twin brother, Doctor Eric, read it over his shoulder; and they all smiled tolerantly. Old Dickerson had written of things incomprehensible to the young moderns:

"The contents of my private museum are yours, John, to do with as you see fit. Merely as a suggestion, I would say that the Antiquarian Society would snap up many of the things. A very few are of no particular value, except to me. One thing I want done, however. The Medici boots of ivory leather must either be destroyed or be put for ever under glass in a *public* museum. I prefer that they be destroyed, for they are a dangerous possession. They have gone to the adulterous rendezvous celebrated in the scandalous verses of Lorenzo the Magnificent. They have shod the feet of a murderess. They were cursed by the Church as trappings of the Devil, inciting the wearer to foul deeds and intrigue.

"I shall not disturb you with all their hideous history, but I repeat, they are a dangerous possession. I have taken care to keep them under lock and key, behind plate glass, for more than fifty years. I have never taken them out. Destroy the Medici boots, before they destroy you!"

"But he did take them out!" cried Suzanne. "Uncle was holding the boots when—when Marthe found him there in the museum."

John reread the note, and looked thoughtfully at his young wife. "Yes. Perhaps he was preparing to destroy them right then. Of course, I think the poor old fellow took things a bit too seriously—he was very old, you know, and Marthe says he practically lived in this museum of his."

"And why call a pair of old boots dangerous? Of course, we all know the Medicis were plenty dangerous, but the Medici boots—that's ridiculous, John. Besides——"

Suzanne paused provocatively, her red lips pouting. She looked down at her trimly shod feet. "Besides, I'd like to try on those Medici boots—just once. They're lovely, I think."

John was frowning thoughfully. He scarcely heard her suggestion. He spoke to Eric, instead, and his voice seemed a bit troubled.

"I believe that Uncle *was* getting ready to destroy those boots that very morning he died; else why should he have taken them from their case—after fifty years?"

"Yes, I believe you're right, John, because that note is dated fully a month before Uncle's death. I think he brooded over leaving those boots to one he cared for. Poor old man!"

"I wouldn't call him so, Eric. He had his dreams of adventure realized more fully than most men. I—I think I'll do as he says. I'll destroy the Medici boots."

"If you'd feel better about it" assented his brother. But Suzanne did not speak. She was looking at her shoe, pursing her lips thoughtfully, seeing her feet encased in the gay embroideries of the Medici boots.

John seemed relieved by his decision. "Yes, I'd better do it. We'll be getting back to town in a few days. Old Erskine, you know, Uncle's lawyer, is coming down this afternoon. Then soon we'll be on the wing, Susie and I—Vienna, Paris, the Alps—thanks to Uncle."

"Maybe you think I'm not thankful for my chance at a bit more work at Johns Hopkins," said Eric, and they did not again speak of the Medici boots.

THE deaf old lawyer of the Dickerson estate arrived, and Suzanne, with the easy capability that was part of her charm, saw that he was made comfortable.

At seven there was a perfect dinner served on the awninged terrace outside the softly lit living-room. The stars aided the two little rosy lamps on the table; and swaying willows beside a stone-encircled pool swung the incense of the garden about them.

As dinner ended, John took from the pocket of his coat a small, limp-leather book. He pushed back his dessert plate and laid the book on the table, tapping it with a finger as he spoke.

"This is the history of the Medici boots. It was in the little wall-safe in the museum. After all Uncle said of the Medici boots, shall we read it?" And turning to the old lawyer, he told of Silas Dickerson's letter concerning the boots.

Erskine shook his head, smiling. "Most collectors get an exaggerated sense of the supernatural. Read this, by all means—it should prove interesting."

"Yes, read it, John." Suzanne and Eric spoke almost together.

So, in the circle of rosy light at their little table, John read the story of the Medici boots. It was not a long story and it was told in the language of an anonymous translator, but as John read on, his listeners were drawn together, as by a spell. They scarcely breathed, and the summer night that was so mildly beautiful seemed to take on a sense of hovering danger.

"In the palace of Giuliano de' Medici I have lived long. I am an old woman now, as the years are reckoned in this infamous place, though I am but fifty and three.

"Separated from my betrothed, duped, sold into the marble labyrinth of this hateful palace, it was long before my spirit broke and I went forth, bejeweled and attired in elegance, among the silk-clad Florentines. I was labeled the most beautiful mistress of any of the Medici. I was smirked at, fawned upon for my lord's favors, obscenely jested about in the orgies that took place in the great banquet hall of the palace.

"But in my heart always lay the remembrance of my lost love, and in my soul grew black hatred for the Medici and all their kind. I, who had dreamed only of a modest home, a kind husband, black-haired, trusting little children, was made a tool of the Medici infamy.

"In time, I almost felt myself in league with the Devil. Secretly, and with a growing sense of elation, I made frequent rendezvous with a foul hag whose very name was anathema to the churchly folk of Florence. In her hole of a room in a certain noisome street, she imparted to me those terrible secrets of the Black Arts which were deep in her soul. It was amusing that she was paid in Medici gold.

"The corruption of the Medici bred in them fear; in me a sort of reckless bravery. It was I who poisoned the wine of many a foe of the Medici. It was I who put the point of a dagger in the heart of the old Prince de Vittorio, whose lands and power and palaces were coveted by my lord, Giuliano.

"After a time, bloodshed became an exhilaration to me; the death agonies of those who drank the poisoned cup became more interesting than the flattery of the Medici followers. Even the ladies of the house of the Medici did me the honor of their subtly barbed friendliness.

"Through this very friendliness, I conceived my plan of sweet revenge upon the monsters who had ruined my life. With so great a hatred boiling in my soul that my mind reeled, my sense throbbed, my heart rose in my throat like a spurt of flame, I cursed three things of exquisite beauty with all the fervor of my newly, learned lessons in devilish lore.

"These three beautiful objects I presented to three ladies of the house of Medici—presented them with honeyed words of mock humility. A necklace of jeweled links—I pledged myself to the Devil and willed that the golden necklace would tighten on the soft throat of a lady of the Medici while she slept, and strangle her into black death. A bracelet of filigree and sapphires—to pierce by its hidden silver needle the blue vein in a white Medici wrist, so that her life's blood would spurt and she would know the terror that the house of the Medici gave to others.

"Last, and most ingenious, a pair of creamy boots, pliable, embroidered in silver and silks, encrusted with amethysts—my bethrothal jewels. In my hatred I cursed the boots, willing that the wearer, as long as a shred of boots remained, should kill as I had killed, poison as I had poisoned, leave all thoughts of home and husband and live in wantonness and evil. So I cursed the beautiful boots, forgetting, in my hate, that perhaps another than a Medici might, in the years to come, wear them and become the Devil's pawn, even as I am now.

"In my life, the Medici will have the boots, of that I feel sure; but after that—I can only hope that this bloody history of the boots may be found when I am no more, and may it be a warning.

"I have lived to see my gifts received and worn, and I have laughed in my soul to see any curses bring death and terror and evil to three Medici women. I know not what will become of the golden necklace, the bracelet, or the boots. The boots may be lost or stolen, or they may lie in a Medici palace for age on age, but the curse will cling to them till they are destroyed. So I pray that no woman, save a Medici, will ever wear them.

"As I live and breathe and do the bidding of the lords of Florence, the accursed Medici—I have told the truth. When I am dead, perhaps they will find this book, and, in hell, I shall know and be glad.

"MARIA MODENA DI CAVOURI.

"Florence, 1476."

"WHEW!" said old Erskine.

John laughed. "I don't suppose this charming history would have been any more thrilling if I had read it from the original book, in Italian, of course. Wonder where Uncle got it! There was no mention of it being in the library—but there it was."

"Now, will you destroy those boots?" asked Eric, and he was not entirely in jest.

But Suzanne said, laughingly, "Not before I find out if the Medici lady had a smaller foot than I! Are they still in the museum, John?"

"Never you mind, my dear. They're not for the likes of you."

"Oh, don't be silly, John. This is 1935, not the Fifteenth Century." And they laughed at Suzanne's earnestness.

The book that held the story of the Medici boots lay on the white cloth, looking like a book of lovely verse.

Suzanne, a small white blur against the summer dark, sat quietly while the men talked of Silas Dickerson, his life, his mania for collecting, his death that had so fittingly come to him in his museum. It was nearly twelve when Suzanne left the men on the terrace and with a quiet "good-night" entered the living-room and crossed to the long, shining stairs.

The men went on with their talk. Once, John, looking toward the jutting wing that was the museum, exclaimed, "Look at that, will you? Why—I'd swear I saw a light in the museum."

"You locked it, didn't you?" asked Eric.

"Of course; the key's in my desk upstairs. H-m. I'm probably mistaken, but it did seem as though a light shone there just a moment ago."

"Reflection from the living-room window, I think. Country life is making you jittery, John." And Eric laughed at his brother.

The men sat on, reluctant to leave the beauty of the night, and it was almost two o'clock when they finally went inside.

John said, "I think I'll not disturb Suzanne." And he went to sleep in a wide four-postered bed in a room next to his wife. Eric and the old lawyer were in rooms across the hall.

THE still summer night closed about the house of Silas Dickerson, and when the moon lay dying against the bank of cloud, puffed across a sky by the little wind that came before dawn, young Doctor Eric Delameter awoke, suddenly and completely, to a feeling of clammy apprehension. He had not locked his door, and now, across the grayness of the room, he saw it slowly opening.

A hand was closed around the edge of the door—a woman's hand, small and white and jeweled. Eric sat straight and tense on the edge of his bed, peering across the room. A woman, young and slender, in a long, trailing gown, came toward him smiling. It was Suzanne.

With a gasp, Eric watched her approach till she stood directly before him.

"Suzanne! You are asleep? Suzanne, shall I call John?"

He thought that perhaps he should not waken her; there were things one must remember about sleep-walkers, but physicians scarcely believed them.

Eric was puzzled, too, by her costume. It was not a night-robe she wore, but an elaborate, trailing dress upon which embroideries in silver shone faintly. Her short black curls were bound about three times with strands of pearly beads, her slim white arms were loaded with bracelets. The pointed toes of little shoes peeped beneath her gown, little shoes of creamy leather. An amethyst gleamed on each shoe.

The sight of these amethystine tips affected Eric strangely, much as though he had looked at something hidiously repulsive. He stood up and put out a hand to touch Suzanne's arm.

"Suzanne," he said, gently. "Let me take you to John. Shall I?"

Suzanne looked up at him, and her brown eyes, usually so merry, were deeply slumberous, not with sleep, but with a look of utter abandon. She shook her pearl-bound head slowly, smilingly.

"No, not John. I want you, Eric."

"Mad! Suzanne must be mad!" was Eric's quick thought, but her caress was swifter than his thought. Both jewel-laden arms about his neck, Suzanne kissed him, her red lips pouting warmly upon his.

"Suzanne! You don't know what you're doing." He grasped both her hands in his and with a haste that would have seemed ludicrous to him had he viewed the scene in a picture-play, he hurried her out of his room and across the hall.

Eric opened her door softly and with no gentle hand shoved Suzanne inside her room. She seemed like a little animal in his grasp. She hissed at him; clawed and scratched at his hand. But when he had shut the door, she did not open it again, and after a moment he went back to his own room.

HIS mouth set in a firm line, his heart beating fast, Eric locked his door with a noiseless turn of the key. It was almost dawn, and the garden lay like a rare pastel outside his window; but Eric saw none of it. He scarcely thought, though his lips moved, as if chaotic words were struggling for utterance.

He looked down at his hand, where two long red scratches oozed a trickle of blood.

After he had washed his hand, he lay down on his bed and covered his eyes with his arm, against the picture of Suzanne. Above all else there stood out the gleaming tips of her little shoes, as he had glimpsed them through the dim light of his room when she came toward him.

"She wore the Medici boots! The Medici boots! Suzanne must have taken them from the museum!" Over and over he said softly—"The Medici boots! The Medici boots!"

Eric rather dreaded breakfast, but when he came down at eight, to the terrace where a rustic table was set invitingly, he found John and the lawyer awaiting him. John greeted his brother affectionately.

"'Morning, old boy! Hope you slept well. Why so solemn? Feeling seedy?"

"No, no. I am perfectly all right," Eric replied hastily, relieved that Suzanne was not present. He added with a scarcely noticeable hesitation, "Suzanne not coming down?"

"No," replied John, easily. "She seemed to want to sleep awhile. Sent her regrets. She'll see us at lunch."

John went on. "I certainly had a nightmare last night. Thought a woman in a long, shining dress came into my room and tried to stab me. This morning I found that a glass on my bed-table was overturned and broken, and, by George, I'd cut my wrist on it."

He showed a jagged cut on his wrist. "Take a look, Doctor Eric."

Eric looked at the cut, carefully. "Not bad, but you might have bled to death, had it been a quarter of an inch to the left. If you like, I'll fix it up a bit for you after breakfast."

Eric's voice was calm enough, but his pulse was pounding, his heart sick. All morning he rode through the countryside adjoining the Dickerson estate, but he let the mare go as she liked and where she liked, for his mind was busy with the events of the hour before dawn. He knew that the slash on his brother's wrist was made by steel, not glass. Yet when the ride was over, he could not bring himself to tell John of Suzanne's visit.

"She must have been sleep-walking, though I can't account for the way she was decked out. I've always thought Suzanne extremely modest in her dress, certainly not inclined to load herself with jewelry. And those boots! John must get them today and destroy them, as he said. Silly, perhaps, but——" His thoughts went on and on, always returning to the Medici boots, in spite of himself.

ERIC came back from his ride at eleven o'clock, with as troubled a mind as when he began it. He almost feared to see Suzanne at lunch.

When he did meet her with John and Mr. Erskine on the cool, shaded porch where they lunched, he saw there was nothing to fear. The amorous, clinging woman of the hour before dawn was not there at all. There was only the Suzanne whom Eric knew and loved as a sister.

Here, again, was their merry little Suzanne, somewhat spoiled by her husband, it is true; but a Suzanne sweetly feminine, almost childish in a crisp, white frock and little, low-heeled sandals. Their talk was lazily pleasant—of tennis honors and horses, of the prize delphiniums in the garden, of the tiny maltese kitten which Suzanne had brought up from the stables late that morning and installed in a pink-bowed basket on the porch. She showed the kitten to Eric, handling its tiny paws gently, hushing its plaintive mews with ridiculous pet names.

"Perhaps I'm a bigger fool than I knew. Perhaps it never happened, except in a dream," Eric told himself, unhappily. "And yet——"

He looked at the red marks on his hand, marks made by a furious Suzanne in that hour before the dawn. Too, he remembered the cut on John's wrist, the cut so near the vein.

Eric declined John's invitation to go through the museum with him that afternoon, but he said with a queer sense of diffidence, "While you're there, John, you'd better get rid of the Medici boots. They are terribly creepy things to have around, I think."

"They'll be destroyed, all right. But Suzanne is just bound to try them on. I'll get them, though, and do as Uncle said."

Eric remained on the terrace, speculating somewhat on just what John and Suzanne would do, now that the huge fortune of Silas Dickerson was theirs. Eric was not envious of his brother's good luck, and he was thankful for his share in old Silas' generosity.

At five o'clock he entered the hall, just as Suzanne hurried in from the kitchen. She spread out her hands, laughingly.

"With my own fair hands I've made individual almond tortonis for dessert. Cook thinks I'm a wonder! Each masterpiece in a fluted silver dish, silver candies sprinkled on the pink whipped cream! O-oh!"

She made big eyes in mock gluttony. Eric forgot, for a moment, that there ever had been another Suzanne.

"You're nothing but a little girl, Suzie. You with your rhapsodies over pink whipped cream! But it's sweet of you to go to such trouble on a warm afternoon. See you and the whatever-you-call-'ems at dinner!"

"They're tortonis, Eric, tortonis."

Suzanne ran lightly up the stairs. Eric followed more slowly. He entered his room thinking that there were some things which must be explained in this house with the old museum.

TWENTY minutes before dinner Eric and John were on the terrace waiting for Suzanne. John was talkative, which was just as well, as he might have wondered at his brother's silence. Eric was torn between a desire to tell his brother his reluctant suspicions concerning the Medici boots and Suzanne and his inclination to leave things alone till the boots could be destroyed.

He said, diffidently, "John, has Suzanne those—those boots?"

John chuckled. "Why, yes. I saw them in her room. Do you know she went down to the museum last night and took those boots? It *was* a light I saw in the museum. It was her light. Suzanne has ideas. Wants to wear the boots just once, she says, to lay the ghost of this what's-her-name—Maria Modena. Suzanne says she couldn't sleep much last night. Got up early and tried on those boots. Well, I think I'll destroy 'em tomorrow. Uncle's wish, so I'll do it."

"Tried them on, did she? Well, if you should ask me, I'd say that history of the boots was a bit too exciting for Suzanne. It *was* a haunting story. Uncle must have swallowed it, hook, line, and sinker, eh?"

"Of course. His letter showed that. But Suzanne lives in the present, not the past, as Uncle did. I suppose Suzanne will wear those boots, or she won't feel satisfied. I don't exactly like the idea, I must confess."

Something like an electric shock passed through Eric. He said, somewhat breathlessly, "I don't think Suzanne ought to have the Medici boots."

John looked at him curiously and laughed. "I never knew you were superstitious, Eric. But do you really think——"

"I don't know what I think, John. But if she were my wife, I'd take those boots away from her. Uncle may have known what he was talking about."

"Well, I think she's intending to wear them at dinner, so prepare to be dazzled. Here she is, now. Greetings, sweetheart!"

Suzanne swept across the terrace, her gown goldly shimmering, pearls about her head, as Eric had seen her in the dim hour before dawn. Again the rows of bracelets were weighting her slim arms. And she wore the Medici boots, the amethyst tips peeping beneath her shining dress.

John, ever ready for gay clowning, arose and bowed low. "Hail, Empress! A-ah, the dress you got in Florence on our honeymoon, isn't it? And those darned Medici boots!"

Suzanne unsmilingly extended her hand for him to kiss.

John arched an eyebrow, comically. "What's the matter, honey? Going regal on me?" And retaining her hand, he kissed each of her fingers.

Suzanne snatched away her hand, and the glance she gave her husband was one of venomous hauteur. To Eric she turned a look that was an open caress, leaning toward him, putting a hand on his arm, as he stood beside his chair, stern-lipped, with eyes that would not look at John's hurt bewilderment.

The three sat down then, in the low wicker chairs, and waited for dinner—three people with oddly different emotions. John was hurt, slightly impatient with his bride; Eric was furious with Suzanne, though there was in his heart the almost certain knowledge that the Suzanne beside them on the terrace was not the Suzanne they knew, but a cruelly strange woman, the product of a sinister force, unknown and compelling.

No one, looking on Suzanne's red-lipped and heavy-lidded beauty, could miss the knowledge that here was a woman dangerously subtle, carrying a power more devastating than the darting lightning that now and then showed itself over the tree-tops of the garden. Eric began to feel something of this, and there shaped in his mind a wariness, a defense against this woman who was not Suzanne.

"No *al fresco* dining tonight," said John, as the darkening sky was veined by a sudden spray of blue-green light. "Rain on the way. Pretty good storm, I'd say."

"I like it." replied Suzanne, drawing in a deep breath of the sultry air.

John laughed. "Since when, sweetheart? You usually shake and shiver through a thunderstorm."

Suzanne ignored him. She smiled at Eric

and said in a low tone, "And if I should lose my bravery, you would take care of me, wouldn't you, Eric?"

Before Eric could reply, dinner was announced, and he felt a relief and also a dread. This dinner was going to be difficult.

John offered his arm to his wife, smiling at her, hoping for a smile in return, but Suzanne shrugged and said in a caressing voice, "Eric?"

ERIC could only bow stiffly and offer his arm, while John walked slowly beside them, his face thoughtful, his gay spirits gone. During dinner, however, he tried to revive the lagging conversation. Suzanne spoke in a staccato voice and her choice of words seemed strange to Eric, almost as though she were translating her own thoughts from a foreign tongue.

And finally Suzanne's promised desert came, cool and tempting in its silver dishes. Eric saw a chance to make the talk more natural. He said, gayly, "Johnny, your wife's a chef, a famous pastry chef. Behold the work of her hands! What did you say it was, Suzanne?"

"This? Oh—I do not know what it is called."

"But this afternoon as you were leaving the kitchen—didn't you say it was almond something or other?"

She shook her head, smiling. "Perhaps it is. I wouldn't know."

The maid had placed the tray with the three silver dishes of dessert before Suzanne, that she might put on them the final sprinkling of delicate silver candies. Daintily, Suzanne sifted the shining bubbles over the fluff of cream. Eric, watching her, felt very little surprise when he saw Suzanne, with almost legerdemain deftness, sift upon one dish a film of pinkish powder which could not be detected after it lay on the pink cream.

Waiting, he knew not for what moment, he watched Suzanne pass the silver dishes herself, saw her offer the one with the powdered top to John. And it was then that their attention was attracted by the entrance of the maltese kitten. So tiny it was, so brave in its careening totter across the shiny floor, small tail hoisted like a sail, that John and Eric laughed aloud.

Suzanne merely glanced down at the little creature and turned away. The kitten, however, came to her chair, put up a tiny paw and caught its curved claws in the fragile stuff of Suzanne's gown. Instantly, her face became distorted with rage and she kicked out the kitten, savagely, and with set lips. It seemed to Eric that the amethysts on the Medici boots winked wickedly in the light of the big chandelier.

The kitten was flung some ten feet away, and lay in a small, panting heap.

John sprang up. "Suzanne! How could you?" He took the kitten in his arms and soothed it.

"Why its heart's beating like a triphammer," he said. "I don't understand, Suzanne——"

As the kitten grew quiet, he took a large rose-leaf from the table-flowers and spread it with a heaping spoonful of the pink cream from his dessert. Then he put the kitten on the floor beside it.

"Here, little one. Lick this up. It's fancy eating. Suzanne's sorry. I know she is."

The kitten, with the greed of its kind, devoured the cream, covering its small nose and whiskers with a pinkish film. Suzanne sat back in her chair, fingering her bracelets, her eyes on Eric's face. John watched the kitten, and Eric watched, too—watched tensely, for he sensed what would happen to it.

The kitten finished the cream, licked its paws and whiskers and turned to walk away. Then it spun around in a frantic convulsion, and in a moment lay dead on its back, its tiny red tongue protruding, its paws rigid.

Outside, the storm glowered, and in the chartreuse light of the forked lightning, the great chandelier was turned to a sickly radiance. Thunder rolled like muffled drums.

Suddenly Suzanne began to laugh, peal after peal of terrible laughter, and then, after a glare of lightning, the big chandelier winked out. The room was plunged into stormy darkness, and they could hear the rain lashing through the garden to hurl itself against the windows.

"Don't be frightened, Suzanne." It was John's solicitous voice, and it was followed by a quick movement from Suzanne's side of the table.

A sheet of blue-green light illumined the room for an instant, and Eric saw Suzanne struggling in her husband's arms, one jeweled arm uplifted and in her hand a shining dagger.

WITH a bound that was almost involuntary, Eric reached them and struck at the knife in Suzanne's hand. It clattered to the floor. And as though the fury of the storm and Suzanne's madness both were spent, the slashing rain and the lightning stopped abruptly, and Suzanne ceased to struggle.

"Light the candles, Eric—quickly—on the mantel to your right! Suzanne is hurt!"

In the candle-light, palely golden and swaying, Eric saw Suzanne slumped limply in John's arms. The hem of her golden dress was redly wet and one cream-colored little shoe was fast becoming soaked with blood from a slash across the instep.

"Let's get her over to the window-seat, Eric. Do something for her!—Oh, sweetheart, don't moan like that!" There was no question or reproach in John's voice, only compassion.

Eric took off his coat, rolled up his sleeves. His mouth was grimly set, his hands steady, his voice crisply professional. "Take off those shoes, John. She'll—be herself, then. I mean that she'll be Suzanne—not a murderess of the Medicis. Take them off, John! They're at the bottom of this."

"You mean——" John's voice was breathless, his lips trembling.

"I mean those hellish boots have changed Suzanne from a sweet and lovely girl to—well, do as I tell you. I'll be back with gauze and some things I need."

When Eric hurried back, there were three servants grouped at the dining-room door. He spoke to them bruskly and they left, whispering. Eric closed the door.

While the wet leaves tapped against the windows and stars struggled through the clouds, Eric worked, silently, expertly, grimly, by the light of a flashlight, held in John's unsteady hands and the light of the flickering candles. The house lights were all snuffed out by the storm.

"There," Eric gave a satisfied grunt. The brothers stood looking at Suzanne, who seemed asleep. Her golden dress glimmered in the candle-light and the pearls were slipping from her dark hair. The Medici boots lay in a limp and bloody heap in a corner of the room, where Eric had flung them.

"When she awakes, I shouldn't tell her about any of this, if I were you, John."

"There are things you haven't told me, Eric, aren't there? Things about—the Medici boots?"

Eric looked steadily at his brother. "Yes, old fellow; and after I've told you, those boots must be destroyed. We'll burn them before this night is over. We mustn't move her now. We'll go out on the terrace—it's wet there, but the air is fresh. Did you smell—something peculiar?"

For, as they passed the corner where the Medici boots lay slashed and bloody, Eric could have sworn that there came to him a horrid odor, fetid, hotly offensive—the odor of iniquity and ancient bloody, death.

The Canal

By H. P. LOVECRAFT

Somewhere in dream there is an evil place
Where tall deserted buildings crowd along
A deep, black, narrow channel, reeking strong
Of frightful things, whence oily currents race,
Lanes with old walls half meeting overhead
Wind off to streets one may or may not know,
And feeble moonlight sheds a spectral glow
Over long rows of windows, dark and dead.

There are no footfalls, and the one soft sound
Is of the oily water as it glides
Under stone bridges, and along the sides
Of its deep flume, to some vague ocean bound.
None lives to tell when that stream washed away,
Its dream-lost region from the world of day.

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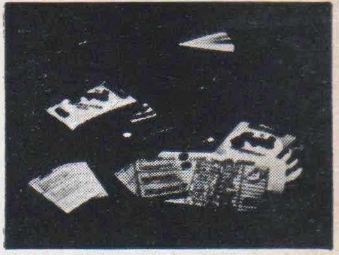

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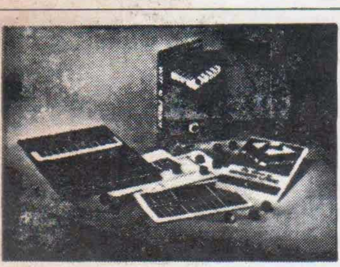

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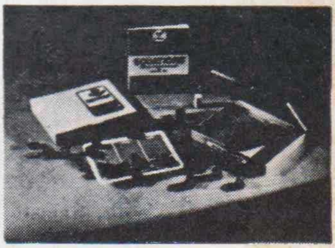

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