

THE **HORROR** **MEGAPACK**



25
**Modern
and
Classic
Horror
Stories**

**H.P. Lovecraft · Robert E. Howard
Darrell Schweitzer · Henry Kuttner
William F. Nolan · Seabury Quinn
John Gregory Betancourt · more!**

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DAGON, by H.P. Lovecraft

I am writing this under an appreciable mental strain, since by tonight I shall be no more. Penniless, and at the end of my supply of the drug which alone makes life endurable, I can bear the torture no longer; and shall cast myself from this garret window into the squalid street below. Do not think from my slavery to morphine that I am a weakling or a degenerate. When you have read these hastily scrawled pages you may guess, though never fully realise, why it is that I must have forgetfulness or death.

It was in one of the most open and least frequented parts of the broad Pacific that the packet of which I was supercargo fell a victim to the German sea-raider. The great war was then at its very beginning, and the ocean forces of the Hun had not completely sunk to their later degradation; so that our vessel was made a legitimate prize, whilst we of her crew were treated with all the fairness and consideration due us as naval prisoners. So liberal, indeed, was the discipline of our captors, that five days after we were taken I managed to escape alone in a small boat with water and provisions for a good length of time.

When I finally found myself adrift and free, I had but little idea of my surroundings. Never a competent navigator, I could only guess vaguely by the sun and stars that I was somewhat south of the equator. Of the longitude I knew nothing, and no island or coast-line was in sight. The weather kept fair, and for uncounted days I drifted aimlessly beneath the scorching sun; waiting either for some passing ship, or to be cast on the shores of some habitable land. But neither ship nor land appeared, and I began to despair in my solitude upon the heaving vastnesses of unbroken blue.

The change happened whilst I slept. Its details I shall never know; for my slumber, though troubled and dream-infested, was continuous. When at last I awakened, it was to discover myself half sucked into a slimy expanse of hellish black mire which extended about me in monotonous undulations as far as I could see, and in which my boat lay grounded some distance away.

Though one might well imagine that my first sensation would be of wonder at so prodigious and unexpected a transformation of scenery, I was in reality more horrified than astonished; for there was in the air and in the rotting soil a sinister quality which chilled me to the very core. The region was putrid with the carcasses of decaying fish, and of other less describable things which I saw protruding from the nasty mud of the unending plain. Perhaps I should not hope to convey in mere words the unutterable hideousness that can dwell in absolute

silence and barren immensity. There was nothing within hearing, and nothing in sight save a vast reach of black slime; yet the very completeness of the stillness and the homogeneity of the landscape oppressed me with a nauseating fear.

The sun was blazing down from a sky which seemed to me almost black in its cloudless cruelty; as though reflecting the inky marsh beneath my feet. As I crawled into the stranded boat I realised that only one theory could explain my position. Through some unprecedented volcanic upheaval, a portion of the ocean floor must have been thrown to the surface, exposing regions which for innumerable millions of years had lain hidden under unfathomable watery depths. So great was the extent of the new land which had risen beneath me, that I could not detect the faintest noise of the surging ocean, strain my ears as I might. Nor were there any sea-fowl to prey upon the dead things.

For several hours I sat thinking or brooding in the boat, which lay upon its side and afforded a slight shade as the sun moved across the heavens. As the day progressed, the ground lost some of its stickiness, and seemed likely to dry sufficiently for travelling purposes in a short time. That night I slept but little, and the next day I made for myself a pack containing food and water, preparatory to an overland journey in search of the vanished sea and possible rescue.

On the third morning I found the soil dry enough to walk upon with ease. The odour of the fish was maddening; but I was too much concerned with graver things to mind so slight an evil, and set out boldly for an unknown goal. All day I forged steadily westward, guided by a far-away hummock which rose higher than any other elevation on the rolling desert. That night I encamped, and on the following day still travelled toward the hummock, though that object seemed scarcely nearer than when I had first espied it. By the fourth evening I attained the base of the mound, which turned out to be much higher than it had appeared from a distance; an intervening valley setting it out in sharper relief from the general surface. Too weary to ascend, I slept in the shadow of the hill.

I know not why my dreams were so wild that night; but ere the waning and fantastically gibbous moon had risen far above the eastern plain, I was awake in a cold perspiration, determined to sleep no more. Such visions as I had experienced were too much for me to endure again. And in the glow of the moon I saw how unwise I had been to travel by day. Without the glare of the parching sun, my journey would have cost me less energy; indeed, I now felt quite able to perform the ascent which had deterred me at sunset. Picking up my pack, I started for the crest of the eminence.

I have said that the unbroken monotony of the rolling plain was a source of vague horror to me; but I think my horror was greater when I gained the summit of the mound and looked down the other side into an immeasurable pit or canyon, whose black recesses the moon had not yet soared high enough to illumine. I felt myself on the edge of the world; peering over the rim into a fathomless chaos of eternal night. Through my terror ran curious reminiscences of *Paradise Lost*, and of Satan's hideous climb through the unfashioned realms of darkness.

As the moon climbed higher in the sky, I began to see that the slopes of the valley were not quite so perpendicular as I had imagined. Ledges and outcroppings of rock afforded fairly easy foot-holds for a descent, whilst after a drop of a few hundred feet, the declivity became very gradual. Urged on by an impulse which I cannot definitely analyse, I scrambled with difficulty down the rocks and stood on the gentler slope beneath, gazing into the Stygian deeps where no light had yet penetrated.

All at once my attention was captured by a vast and singular object on the opposite slope, which rose steeply about an hundred yards ahead of me; an object that gleamed whitely in the newly bestowed rays of the ascending moon. That it was merely a gigantic piece of stone, I soon assured myself; but I was conscious of a distinct impression that its contour and position were not altogether the work of Nature. A closer scrutiny filled me with sensations I cannot express; for despite its enormous magnitude, and its position in an abyss which had yawned at the bottom of the sea since the world was young, I perceived beyond a doubt that the strange object was a well-shaped monolith whose massive bulk had known the workmanship and perhaps the worship of living and thinking creatures.

Dazed and frightened, yet not without a certain thrill of the scientist's or archaeologist's delight, I examined my surroundings more closely. The moon, now near the zenith, shone weirdly and vividly above the towering steeps that hemmed in the chasm, and revealed the fact that a far-flung body of water flowed at the bottom, winding out of sight in both directions, and almost lapping my feet as I stood on the slope. Across the chasm, the wavelets washed the base of the Cyclopean monolith; on whose surface I could now trace both inscriptions and crude sculptures. The writing was in a system of hieroglyphics unknown to me, and unlike anything I had ever seen in books; consisting for the most part of conventionalised aquatic symbols such as fishes, eels, octopi, crustaceans, molluscs, whales, and the like. Several characters obviously represented marine

things which are unknown to the modern world, but whose decomposing forms I had observed on the ocean-risen plain.

It was the pictorial carving, however, that did most to hold me spellbound. Plainly visible across the intervening water on account of their enormous size, were an array of bas-reliefs whose subjects would have excited the envy of a Doré. I think that these things were supposed to depict men—at least, a certain sort of men; though the creatures were shewn disporting like fishes in the waters of some marine grotto, or paying homage at some monolithic shrine which appeared to be under the waves as well. Of their faces and forms I dare not speak in detail; for the mere remembrance makes me grow faint. Grotesque beyond the imagination of a Poe or a Bulwer, they were damnably human in general outline despite webbed hands and feet, shockingly wide and flabby lips, glassy, bulging eyes, and other features less pleasant to recall. Curiously enough, they seemed to have been chiselled badly out of proportion with their scenic background; for one of the creatures was shewn in the act of killing a whale represented as but little larger than himself. I remarked, as I say, their grotesqueness and strange size; but in a moment decided that they were merely the imaginary gods of some primitive fishing or seafaring tribe; some tribe whose last descendant had perished eras before the first ancestor of the Piltdown or Neanderthal Man was born. Awestruck at this unexpected glimpse into a past beyond the conception of the most daring anthropologist, I stood musing whilst the moon cast queer reflections on the silent channel before me.

Then suddenly I saw it. With only a slight churning to mark its rise to the surface, the thing slid into view above the dark waters. Vast, Polyphemus-like, and loathsome, it darted like a stupendous monster of nightmares to the monolith, about which it flung its gigantic scaly arms, the while it bowed its hideous head and gave vent to certain measured sounds. I think I went mad then.

Of my frantic ascent of the slope and cliff, and of my delirious journey back to the stranded boat, I remember little. I believe I sang a great deal, and laughed oddly when I was unable to sing. I have indistinct recollections of a great storm some time after I reached the boat; at any rate, I know that I heard peals of thunder and other tones which Nature utters only in her wildest moods.

When I came out of the shadows I was in a San Francisco hospital; brought thither by the captain of the American ship which had picked up my boat in mid-ocean. In my delirium I had said much, but found that my words had been given scant attention. Of any land upheaval in the Pacific, my rescuers knew nothing; nor did I deem it necessary to insist upon a thing which I knew they could not

believe. Once I sought out a celebrated ethnologist, and amused him with peculiar questions regarding the ancient Philistine legend of Dagon, the Fish-God; but soon perceiving that he was hopelessly conventional, I did not press my inquiries.

It is at night, especially when the moon is gibbous and waning, that I see the thing. I tried morphine; but the drug has given only transient surcease, and has drawn me into its clutches as a hopeless slave. So now I am to end it all, having written a full account for the information or the contemptuous amusement of my fellow-men. Often I ask myself if it could not all have been a pure phantasm—a mere freak of fever as I lay sun-stricken and raving in the open boat after my escape from the German man-of-war. This I ask myself, but ever does there come before me a hideously vivid vision in reply. I cannot think of the deep sea without shuddering at the nameless things that may at this very moment be crawling and floundering on its slimy bed, worshipping their ancient stone idols and carving their own detestable likenesses on submarine obelisks of water-soaked granite. I dream of a day when they may rise above the billows to drag down in their reeking talons the remnants of puny, war-exhausted mankind—of a day when the land shall sink, and the dark ocean floor shall ascend amidst universal pandemonium.

The end is near. I hear a noise at the door, as of some immense slippery body lumbering against it. It shall not find me. God, *that hand!* The window! The window!

THE CHILDREN OF THE NIGHT, by Robert E. Howard

There were, I remember, six of us in Conrad's bizarrely fashioned study, with its queer relics from all over the world and its long rows of books which ranged from the Mandrake Press edition of Boccaccio to a *Missale Romanum*, bound in clasped oak boards and printed in Venice, 1740. Clemants and Professor Kirowan had just engaged in a somewhat testy anthropological argument: Clemants upholding the theory of a separate, distinct Alpine race, while the professor maintained that this so-called race was merely a deviation from an original Aryan stock—possibly the result of an admixture between the southern or Mediterranean races and the Nordic people.

"And how," asked Clemants, "do you account for their brachycephalicism? The Mediterraneans were as long-headed as the Aryans: would admixture between these dolichocephalic peoples produce a broad-headed intermediate type?"

"Special conditions might bring about a change in an originally long-headed race," snapped Kirowan. "Boaz has demonstrated, for instance, that in the case of immigrants to America, skull formations often change in one generation. And Flinders Petrie has shown that the Lombards changed from a long-headed to a round-headed race in a few centuries."

"But what caused these changes?"

"Much is yet unknown to science," answered Kirowan, "and we need not be dogmatic. No one knows, as yet, why people of British and Irish ancestry tend to grow unusually tall in the Darling district of Australia—Cornstalks, as they are called—or why people of such descent generally have thinner jaw-structures after a few generations in New England. The universe is full of the unexplainable."

"And therefore the uninteresting, according to Machen," laughed Taverel.

Conrad shook his head. "I must disagree. To me, the unknowable is most tantalizingly fascinating."

"Which accounts, no doubt, for all the works on witchcraft and demonology I see on your shelves," said Ketrick, with a wave of his hand toward the rows of books.

And let me speak of Ketrick. Each of the six of us was of the same breed—that is to say, a Briton or an American of British descent. By British, I include all natural inhabitants of the British Isles. We represented various strains of English

and Celtic blood, but basically, these strains are the same after all. But Ketrick: to me the man always seemed strangely alien. It was in his eyes that this difference showed externally. They were a sort of amber, almost yellow, and slightly oblique. At times, when one looked at his face from certain angles, they seemed to slant like a Chinaman's.

Others than I had noticed this feature, so unusual in a man of pure Anglo-Saxon descent. The usual myths ascribing his slanted eyes to some pre-natal influence had been mooted about, and I remember Professor Hendrik Brooler once remarked that Ketrick was undoubtedly an atavism, representing a reversion of type to some dim and distant ancestor of Mongolian blood—a sort of freak reversion, since none of his family showed such traces.

But Ketrick comes of the Welsh branch of the Cedrics of Sussex, and his lineage is set down in the Book of Peers. There you may read the line of his ancestry, which extends unbroken to the days of Canute. No slightest trace of Mongoloid intermixture appears in the genealogy, and how could there have been such intermixture in old Saxon England? For Ketrick is the modern form of Cedric, and though that branch fled into Wales before the invasion of the Danes, its male heirs consistently married with English families on the border marches, and it remains a pure line of the powerful Sussex Cedrics—almost pure Saxon. As for the man himself, this defect of his eyes, if it can be called a defect, is his only abnormality, except for a slight and occasional lisp of speech. He is highly intellectual and a good companion except for a slight aloofness and a rather callous indifference which may serve to mask an extremely sensitive nature.

Referring to his remark, I said with a laugh: "Conrad pursues the obscure and mystic as some men pursue romance; his shelves throng with delightful nightmares of every variety."

Our host nodded. "You'll find there a number of delectable dishes—Machen, Poe, Blackwood, Maturin—look, there's a rare feast—Horrid Mysteries, by the Marquis of Grosse—the real Eighteenth Century edition."

Taverel scanned the shelves. "Weird fiction seems to vie with works on witchcraft, voodoo and dark magic."

True; historians and chronicles are often dull; tale-weavers never—the masters, I mean. A voodoo sacrifice can be described in such a dull manner as to take all the real fantasy out of it, and leave it merely a sordid murder. I will admit that few writers of fiction touch the true heights of horror—most of their stuff is too concrete, given too much earthly shape and dimensions. But in such tales as

Poe's Fall of the House of Usher, Machen's Black Seal and Lovecraft's Call of Cthulhu—the three master horror-tales, to my mind—the reader is borne into dark and outer realms of imagination.

“But look there,” he continued, “there, sandwiched between that nightmare of Huysmans', and Walpole's Castle of Otranto—Von Junzt's Nameless Cults. There's a book to keep you awake at night!”

“I've read it,” said Taverel, “and I'm convinced the man is mad. His work is like the conversation of a maniac—it runs with startling clarity for awhile, then suddenly merges into vagueness and disconnected ramblings.”

Conrad shook his head. “Have you ever thought that perhaps it is his very sanity that causes him to write in that fashion? What if he dares not put on paper all he knows? What if his vague suppositions are dark and mysterious hints, keys to the puzzle, to those who know?”

“Bosh!” This from Kirowan. “Are you intimating that any of the nightmare cults referred to by Von Junzt survive to this day—if they ever existed save in the hag-ridden brain of a lunatic poet and philosopher?”

“Not he alone used hidden meanings,” answered Conrad. “If you will scan various works of certain great poets you may find double meanings. Men have stumbled onto cosmic secrets in the past and given a hint of them to the world in cryptic words. Do you remember Von Junzt's hints of ‘a city in the waste’? What do you think of Flecker's line:

“‘Pass not beneath! Men say there blows in stony deserts still a rose
But with no scarlet to her leaf—and from whose heart no perfume flows.’

“Men may stumble upon secret things, but Von Junzt dipped deep into forbidden mysteries. He was one of the few men, for instance, who could read the Necronomicon in the original Greek translation.”

Taverel shrugged his shoulders, and Professor Kirowan, though he snorted and puffed viciously at his pipe, made no direct reply; for he, as well as Conrad, had delved into the Latin version of the book, and had found there things not even a cold-blooded scientist could answer or refute.

“Well,” he said presently, “suppose we admit the former existence of cults revolving about such nameless and ghastly gods and entities as Cthulhu, Yog Sothoth, Tsathoggua, Gol-goroth, and the like, I can not find it in my mind to believe that survivals of such cults lurk in the dark corners of the world today.”

To our surprise Clemants answered. He was a tall, lean man, silent almost to the point of taciturnity, and his fierce struggles with poverty in his youth had lined his face beyond his years. Like many another artist, he lived a distinctly

dual literary life, his swashbuckling novels furnishing him a generous income, and his editorial position on *The Cloven Hoof* affording him full artistic expression. *The Cloven Hoof* was a poetry magazine whose bizarre contents had often aroused the shocked interest of the conservative critics.

"You remember Von Junzt makes mention of a so-called Bran cult," said Clemants, stuffing his pipe-bowl with a peculiarly villainous brand of shag tobacco. "I think I heard you and Taverel discussing it once."

"As I gather from his hints," snapped Kirowan, "Von Junzt includes this particular cult among those still in existence. Absurd."

Again Clemants shook his head. "When I was a boy working my way through a certain university, I had for roommate a lad as poor and ambitious as I. If I told you his name, it would startle you. Though he came of an old Scotch line of Galloway, he was obviously of a non-Aryan type.

"This is in strictest confidence, you understand. But my roommate talked in his sleep. I began to listen and put his disjointed mumbling together. And in his mutterings I first heard of the ancient cult hinted at by Von Junzt; of the king who rules the Dark Empire, which was a revival of an older, darker empire dating back into the Stone Age; and of the great, nameless cavern where stands the Dark Man—the image of Bran Mak Morn, carved in his likeness by a master-hand while the great king yet lived, and to which each worshipper of Bran makes a pilgrimage once in his or her lifetime. Yes, that cult lives today in the descendants of Bran's people—a silent, unknown current it flows on in the great ocean of life, waiting for the stone image of the great Bran to breathe and move with sudden life, and come from the great cavern to rebuild their lost empire."

"And who were the people of that empire?" asked Ketrick.

"Picts," answered Taverel, "doubtless the people known later as the wild Picts of Galloway were predominantly Celtic—a mixture of Gaelic, Cymric, aboriginal and possibly Teutonic elements. Whether they took their name from the older race or lent their own name to that race, is a matter yet to be decided. But when Von Junzt speaks of Picts, he refers specifically to the small, dark, garlic-eating peoples of Mediterranean blood who brought the Neolithic culture into Britain. The first settlers of that country, in fact, who gave rise to the tales of earth spirits and goblins."

"I can not agree to that last statement," said Conrad. "These legends ascribe a deformity and inhumanness of appearances to the characters. There was nothing about the Picts to excite such horror and repulsion in the Aryan peoples. I

believe that the Mediterraneans were preceded by a Mongoloid type, very low in the scale of development, whence these tales—”

“Quite true,” broke in Kirowan, “but I hardly think they preceded the Picts, as you call them, into Britain. We find troll and dwarf legends all over the Continent, and I am inclined to think that both the Mediterranean and Aryan people brought these tales with them from the Continent. They must have been of extremely inhuman aspect, those early Mongoloids.”

“At least,” said Conrad, “here is a flint mallet a miner found in the Welsh hills and gave to me, which has never been fully explained. It is obviously of no ordinary Neolithic make. See how small it is, compared to most implements of that age; almost like a child’s toy; yet it is surprisingly heavy and no doubt a deadly blow could be dealt with it. I fitted the handle to it, myself, and you would be surprized to know how difficult it was to carve it into a shape and balance corresponding with the head.”

We looked at the thing. It was well made, polished somewhat like the other remnants of the Neolithic I had seen, yet as Conrad said, it was strangely different. Its small size was oddly disquieting, for it had no appearance of a toy, otherwise. It was as sinister in suggestion as an Aztec sacrificial dagger. Conrad had fashioned the oaken handle with rare skill, and in carving it to fit the head, had managed to give it the same unnatural appearance as the mallet itself had. He had even copied the workmanship of primal times, fixing the head into the cleft of the haft with rawhide.

“My word!” Taverel made a clumsy pass at an imaginary antagonist and nearly shattered a costly Shang vase. “The balance of the thing is all off-center; I’d have to readjust all my mechanics of poise and equilibrium to handle it.”

“Let me see it,” Ketrick took the thing and fumbled with it, trying to strike the secret of its proper handling. At length, somewhat irritated, he swung it up and struck a heavy blow at a shield which hung on the wall nearby. I was standing near it; I saw the hellish mallet twist in his hand like a live serpent, and his arm wrenched out of line; I heard a shout of alarmed warning—then darkness came with the impact of the mallet against my head.

Slowly I drifted back to consciousness. First there was dull sensation with blindness and total lack of knowledge as to where I was or what I was; then vague realization of life and being, and a hard something pressing into my ribs. Then the mists cleared and I came to myself completely.

I lay on my back half-beneath some underbrush and my head throbbed fiercely. Also my hair was caked and clotted with blood, for the scalp had been laid open.

But my eyes traveled down my body and limbs, naked but for a deerskin loincloth and sandals of the same material, and found no other wound. That which pressed so uncomfortably into my ribs was my ax, on which I had fallen.

Now an abhorrent babble reached my ears and stung me into clear consciousness. The noise was faintly like language, but not such language as men are accustomed to. It sounded much like the repeated hissing of many great snakes.

I stared. I lay in a great, gloomy forest. The glade was overshadowed, so that even in the daytime it was very dark. Aye—that forest was dark, cold, silent, gigantic and utterly grisly. And I looked into the glade.

I saw a shambles. Five men lay there—at least, what had been five men. Now as I marked the abhorrent mutilations my soul sickened. And about clustered the—Things. Humans they were, of a sort, though I did not consider them so. They were short and stocky, with broad heads too large for their scrawny bodies. Their hair was snaky and stringy, their faces broad and square, with flat noses, hideously slanted eyes, a thin gash for a mouth, and pointed ears. They wore the skins of beasts, as did I, but these hides were but crudely dressed. They bore small bows and flint-tipped arrows, flint knives and cudgels. And they conversed in a speech as hideous as themselves, a hissing, reptilian speech that filled me with dread and loathing.

Oh, I hated them as I lay there; my brain flamed with white-hot fury. And now I remembered. We had hunted, we six youths of the Sword People, and wandered far into the grim forest which our people generally shunned. Weary of the chase, we had paused to rest; to me had been given the first watch, for in those days, no sleep was safe without a sentry. Now shame and revulsion shook my whole being. I had slept—I had betrayed my comrades. And now they lay gashed and mangled—butchered while they slept, by vermin who had never dared to stand before them on equal terms. I, Aryara, had betrayed my trust.

Aye—I remembered. I had slept and in the midst of a dream of the hunt, fire and sparks had exploded in my head and I had plunged into a deeper darkness where there were no dreams. And now the penalty. They who had stolen through the dense forest and smitten me senseless, had not paused to mutilate me. Thinking me dead they had hastened swiftly to their grisly work. Now perhaps they had forgotten me for a time. I had sat somewhat apart from the others, and when struck, had fallen half-under some bushes. But soon they would remember me. I would hunt no more, dance no more in the dances of hunt and love and war, see no more the wattle huts of the Sword People.

But I had no wish to escape back to my people. Should I slink back with my tale of infamy and disgrace? Should I hear the words of scorn my tribe would fling at me, see the girls point their contemptuous fingers at the youth who slept and betrayed his comrades to the knives of vermin?

Tears stung my eyes, and slow hate heaved up in my bosom, and my brain. I would never bear the sword that marked the warrior. I would never triumph over worthy foes and die gloriously beneath the arrows of the Picts or the axes of the Wolf People or the River People. I would go down to death beneath a nauseous rabble, whom the Picts had long ago driven into forest dens like rats.

And mad rage gripped me and dried my tears, giving in their stead a berserk blaze of wrath. If such reptiles were to bring about my downfall, I would make it a fall long remembered—if such beasts had memories.

Moving cautiously, I shifted until my hand was on the haft of my ax; then I called on Il-marinen and bounded up as a tiger springs. And as a tiger springs I was among my enemies and mashed a flat skull as a man crushes the head of a snake. A sudden wild clamor of fear broke from my victims and for an instant they closed round me, hacking and stabbing. A knife gashed my chest but I gave no heed. A red mist waved before my eyes, and my body and limbs moved in perfect accord with my fighting brain. Snarling, hacking and smiting, I was a tiger among reptiles. In an instant they gave way and fled, leaving me bestriding half a dozen stunted bodies. But I was not satiated.

I was close on the heels of the tallest one, whose head would perhaps come to my shoulder, and who seemed to be their chief. He fled down a sort of runway, squealing like a monstrous lizard, and when I was close at his shoulder, he dived, snake-like, into the bushes. But I was too swift for him, and I dragged him forth and butchered him in a most gory fashion.

And through the bushes I saw the trail he was striving to reach—a path winding in and out among the trees, almost too narrow to allow the traversing of it by a man of normal size. I hacked off my victim's hideous head, and carrying it in my left hand, went up the serpent-path, with my red ax in my right.

Now as I strode swiftly along the path and blood splashed beside my feet at every step from the severed jugular of my foe, I thought of those I hunted. Aye—we held them in so little esteem, we hunted by day in the forest they haunted. What they called themselves, we never knew; for none of our tribe ever learned the accursed hissing sibilances they used as speech; but we called them Children of the Night. And night-things they were indeed, for they slunk in the depths of the dark forests, and in subterranean dwellings, venturing forth into the hills

only when their conquerors slept. It was at night that they did their foul deeds—the quick flight of a flint-tipped arrow to slay cattle, or perhaps a loitering human, the snatching of a child that had wandered from the village.

But it was for more than this we gave them their name; they were, in truth, people of night and darkness and the ancient horror-ridden shadows of bygone ages. For these creatures were very old, and they represented an outworn age. They had once overrun and possessed this land, and they had been driven into hiding and obscurity by the dark, fierce little Picts with whom we contested now, and who hated and loathed them as savagely as did we.

The Picts were different from us in general appearance, being shorter of stature and dark of hair, eyes and skin, whereas we were tall and powerful, with yellow hair and light eyes. But they were cast in the same mold, for all of that. These Children of the Night seemed not human to us, with their deformed dwarfish bodies, yellow skin and hideous faces. Aye—they were reptiles—vermin.

And my brain was like to burst with fury when I thought that it was these vermin on whom I was to glut my ax and perish. Bah! There is no glory slaying snakes or dying from their bites. All this rage and fierce disappointment turned on the objects of my hatred, and with the old red mist waving in front of me I swore by all the gods I knew, to wreak such red havoc before I died as to leave a dread memory in the minds of the survivors.

My people would not honor me, in such contempt they held the Children. But those Children that I left alive would remember me and shudder. So I swore, gripping savagely my ax, which was of bronze, set in a cleft of the oaken haft and fastened securely with rawhide.

Now I heard ahead a sibilant, abhorrent murmur, and a vile stench filtered to me through the trees, human, yet less than human. A few moments more and I emerged from the deep shadows into a wide open space. I had never before seen a village of the Children. There was a cluster of earthen domes, with low doorways sunk into the ground; squalid dwelling-places, half-above and half-below the earth. And I knew from the talk of the old warriors that these dwelling-places were connected by underground corridors, so the whole village was like an ant-bed, or a system of snake holes. And I wondered if other tunnels did not run off under the ground and emerge long distances from the villages.

Before the domes clustered a vast group of the creatures, hissing and jabbering at a great rate.

I had quickened my pace, and now as I burst from cover, I was running with the fleetness of my race. A wild clamor went up from the rabble as they saw the

avenger, tall, bloodstained and blazing-eyed leap from the forest, and I cried out fiercely, flung the dripping head among them and bounded like a wounded tiger into the thick of them.

Oh, there was no escape for them now! They might have taken to their tunnels but I would have followed, even to the guts of Hell. They knew they must slay me, and they closed around, a hundred strong, to do it.

There was no wild blaze of glory in my brain as there had been against worthy foes. But the old berserk madness of my race was in my blood and the smell of blood and destruction in my nostrils.

I know not how many I slew. I only know that they thronged about me in a writhing, slashing mass, like serpents about a wolf, and I smote until the ax-edge turned and bent and the ax became no more than a bludgeon; and I smashed skulls, split heads, splintered bones, scattered blood and brains in one red sacrifice to Il-marinen, god of the Sword People.

Bleeding from half a hundred wounds, blinded by a slash across the eyes, I felt a flint knife sink deep into my groin and at the same instant a cudgel laid my scalp open. I went to my knees but reeled up again, and saw in a thick red fog a ring of leering, slant-eyed faces. I lashed out as a dying tiger strikes, and the faces broke in red ruin.

And as I sagged, overbalanced by the fury of my stroke, a taloned hand clutched my throat and a flint blade was driven into my ribs and twisted venomously. Beneath a shower of blows I went down again, but the man with the knife was beneath me, and with my left hand I found him and broke his neck before he could writhe away.

Life was waning swiftly; through the hissing and howling of the Children I could hear the voice of Il-marinen. Yet once again I rose stubbornly, through a very whirlwind of cudgels and spears. I could no longer see my foes, even in a red mist. But I could feel their blows and knew they surged about me. I braced my feet, gripped my slippery ax-haft with both hands, and calling once more on Il-marinen I heaved up the ax and struck one last terrific blow. And I must have died on my feet, for there was no sensation of falling; even as I knew, with a last thrill of savagery, that slew, even as I felt the splintering of skulls beneath my ax, darkness came with oblivion.

I came suddenly to myself. I was half-reclining in a big armchair and Conrad was pouring water on me. My head ached and a trickle of blood had half-dried on my face. Kirowan, Taverel and Clemants were hovering about, anxiously, while Ketrick stood just in front of me, still holding the mallet, his face schooled

to a polite perturbation which his eyes did not show. And at the sight of those cursed eyes a red madness surged up in me.

“There,” Conrad was saying, “I told you he’d come out of it in a moment; just a light crack. He’s taken harder than that. All right now, aren’t you, O’Donnel?”

At that I swept them aside, and with a single low snarl of hatred launched myself at Ketrick. Taken utterly by surprise he had no opportunity to defend himself. My hands locked on his throat and we crashed together on the ruins of a divan. The others cried out in amazement and horror and sprang to separate us—or rather, to tear me from my victim, for already Ketrick’s slant eyes were beginning to start from their sockets.

“For God’s sake, O’Donnel,” exclaimed Conrad, seeking to break my grip, “what’s come over you? Ketrick didn’t mean to hit you—let go, you idiot!”

A fierce wrath almost overcame me at these men who were my friends, men of my own tribe, and I swore at them and their blindness, as they finally managed to tear my strangling fingers from Ketrick’s throat. He sat up and choked and explored the blue marks my fingers had left, while I raged and cursed, nearly defeating the combined efforts of the four to hold me.

“You fools!” I screamed. “Let me go! Let me do my duty as a tribesman! You blind fools! I care nothing for the paltry blow he dealt me—he and his dealt stronger blows than that against me, in bygone ages. You fools, he is marked with the brand of the beast—the reptile—the vermin we exterminated centuries ago! I must crush him, stamp him out, rid the clean earth of his accursed pollution!”

So I raved and struggled and Conrad gasped to Ketrick over his shoulder: “Get out, quick! He’s out of his head! His mind is unhinged! Get away from him.”

Now I look out over the ancient dreaming downs and the hills and deep forests beyond and I ponder. Somehow, that blow from that ancient accursed mallet knocked me back into another age and another life. While I was Aryara I had no cognizance of any other life. It was no dream; it was a stray bit of reality wherein I, John O’Donnel, once lived and died, and back into which I was snatched across the voids of time and space by a chance blow. Time and times are but cogwheels, unmatched, grinding on oblivious to one another. Occasionally—oh, very rarely!—the cogs fit; the pieces of the plot snap together momentarily and give men faint glimpses beyond the veil of this everyday blindness we call reality.

I am John O’Donnel and I was Aryara, who dreamed dreams of war-glory and hunt-glory and feast-glory and who died on a red heap of his victims in some

lost age. But in what age and where?

The last I can answer for you. Mountains and rivers change their contours; the landscapes alter; but the downs least of all. I look out upon them now and I remember them, not only with John O'Donnel's eyes, but with the eyes of Aryara. They are but little changed. Only the great forest has shrunk and dwindled and in many, many places vanished utterly. But here on these very downs Aryara lived and fought and loved and in yonder forest he died. Kirowan was wrong. The little, fierce, dark Picts were not the first men in the Isles. There were beings before them—aye, the Children of the Night. Legends—why, the Children were not unknown to us when we came into what is now the isle of Britain. We had encountered them before, ages before. Already we had our myths of them. But we found them in Britain. Nor had the Picts totally exterminated them.

Nor had the Picts, as so many believe, preceded us by many centuries. We drove them before us as we came, in that long drift from the East. I, Aryara, knew old men who had marched on that century-long trek; who had been borne in the arms of yellow-haired women over countless miles of forest and plain, and who as youths had walked in the vanguard of the invaders.

As to the age—that I cannot say. But I, Aryara, was surely an Aryan and my people were Aryans—members of one of the thousand unknown and unrecorded drifts that scattered yellow-haired blue-eyed tribes all over the world. The Celts were not the first to come into western Europe. I, Aryara, was of the same blood and appearance as the men who sacked Rome, but mine was a much older strain. Of the language spoke, no echo remains in the waking mind of John O'Donnel, but I knew that Aryara's tongue was to ancient Celtic what ancient Celtic is to modern Gaelic.

Il-marinen! I remember the god I called upon, the ancient, ancient god who worked in metals—in bronze then. For Il-marinen was one of the base gods of the Aryans from whom many gods grew; and he was Wieland and Vulcan in the ages of iron. But to Aryara he was Il-marinen.

And Aryara—he was one of many tribes and many drifts. Not alone did the Sword People come or dwell in Britain. The River People were before us and the Wolf People came later. But they were Aryans like us, light-eyed and tall and blond. We fought them, for the reason that the various drifts of Aryans have always fought each other, just as the Achaeans fought the Dorians, just as the Celts and Germans cut each other's throats; aye, just as the Hellenes and the Persians, who were once one people and of the same drift, split in two different

ways on the long trek and centuries later met and flooded Greece and Asia Minor with blood.

Now understand, all this I did not know as Aryara. I, Aryara, knew nothing of all these world-wide drifts of my race. I knew only that my people were conquerors, that a century ago my ancestors had dwelt in the great plains far to the east, plains populous with fierce, yellow-haired, light-eyed people like myself; that my ancestors had come westward in a great drift; and that in that drift, when my tribesmen met tribes of other races, they trampled and destroyed them, and when they met other yellow-haired, light-eyed people, of older or newer drifts, they fought savagely and mercilessly, according to the old, illogical custom of the Aryan people. This Aryara knew, and I, John O'Donnel, who know much more and much less than I, Aryara, knew, have combined the knowledge of these separate selves and have come to conclusions that would startle many noted scientists and historians.

Yet this fact is well known: Aryans deteriorate swiftly in sedentary and peaceful lives. Their proper existence is a nomadic one; when they settle down to an agricultural existence, they pave the way for their downfall; and when they pen themselves with city walls, they seal their doom. Why, I, Aryara, remember the tales of the old men—how the Sons of the Sword, on that long drift, found villages of white-skinned yellow-haired people who had drifted into the west centuries before and had quit the wandering life to dwell among the dark, garlic-eating people and gain their sustenance from the soil. And the old men told how soft and weak they were, and how easily they fell before the bronze blades of the Sword People.

Look—is not the whole history of the Sons of Aryan laid on those lines? Look—how swiftly has Persian followed Mede; Greek, Persian; Roman, Greek; and German, Roman. Aye, and the Norseman followed the Germanic tribes when they had grown flabby from a century or so of peace and idleness, and despoiled the spoils they had taken in the southland.

But let me speak of Ketrick. Ha—the short hairs at the back of my neck bristle at the very mention of his name. A reversion to type—but not to the type of some cleanly Chinaman or Mongol of recent times. The Danes drove his ancestors into the hills of Wales; and there, in what medieval century, and in what foul way did that cursed aboriginal taint creep into the clean Saxon blood of the Celtic line, there to lie dormant so long? The Celtic Welsh never mated with the Children any more than the Picts did. But there must have been survivals—vermin lurking in those grim hills, that had outlasted their time and

age. In Aryara's day they were scarcely human. What must a thousand years of retrogression have done to the breed?

What foul shape stole into the Ketrick castle on some forgotten night, or rose out of the dusk to grip some woman of the line, straying in the hills?

The mind shrinks from such an image. But this I know: there must have been survivals of that foul, reptilian epoch when the Ketricks went into Wales. There still may be. But this changeling, this waif of darkness, this horror who bears the noble name of Ketrick, the brand of the serpent is upon him, and until he is destroyed there is no rest for me. Now that I know him for what he is, he pollutes the clean air and leaves the slime of the snake on the green earth. The sound of his lisping, hissing voice fills me with crawling horror and the sight of his slanted eyes inspires me with madness.

For I come of a royal race, and such as he is a continual insult and a threat, like a serpent underfoot. Mine is a regal race, though now it is become degraded and falls into decay by continual admixture with conquered races. The waves of alien blood have washed my hair black and my skin dark, but I still have the lordly stature and the blue eyes of a royal Aryan.

And as my ancestors—as I, Aryara, destroyed the scum that writhed beneath our heels, so shall I, John O'Donnel, exterminate the reptilian thing, the monster bred of the snaky taint that slumbered so long unguessed in clean Saxon veins, the vestigial serpent-things left to taunt the Sons of Aryan. They say the blow I received affected my mind; I know it but opened my eyes. Mine ancient enemy walks often on the moors alone, attracted, though he may not know it, by ancestral urgings. And on one of these lonely walks I shall meet him, and when I meet him, I will break his foul neck with my hands, as I, Aryara, broke the necks of foul night-things in the long, long ago.

Then they may take me and break my neck at the end of a rope if they will. I am not blind, if my friends are. And in the sight of the old Aryan god, if not in the blinded eyes of men, I will have kept faith with my tribe.

MOTHER OF PEARL, by Fitz-James O'Brien

I

I met her in India, when, during an eccentric course of travel, I visited the land of palanquins and hookahs. She was a slender, pale, spiritual-looking girl. Her figure swayed to and fro when she walked, like some delicate plant brushed by a very gentle wind. Her face betokened a rare susceptibility of nervous organization. Large, dark-gray eyes, spanned by slender arches of black eyebrows; irregular and mobile features; a mouth large and singularly expressive, and conveying vague hints of a sensual nature whenever she smiled. The paleness of her skin could hardly be called paleness; it was rather a beautiful transparency of texture, through the whiteness of which one beheld the underglow of life, as one sees the fires of a lamp hazily revealed through the white ground-glass shade that envelops it. Her motions were full of a strange and subtle grace. It positively sent a thrill of an indefinable nature through me to watch her moving across a room. It was perhaps a pleasurable sensation at beholding her perform so ordinary an act in so unusual a manner. Every wanderer in the fields has been struck with delight on beholding a tuft of thistle-down floating calmly through the still atmosphere of a summer day. She possessed in the most perfect degree this aerial serenity of motion. With all the attributes of body, she seemed to move as if disembodied. It was a singular and paradoxical combination of the real and ideal, and therein I think lay the charm.

Then her voice. It was like no voice that I ever heard before. It was low and sweet; but how many hundreds of voices have I heard that were as low and just as sweet! The charm lay in something else. Each word was uttered with a sort of dovelike "coo,"—pray do not laugh at the image, for I am striving to express what after all is perhaps inexpressible. However, I mean to say that the harsh gutturals and hissing dentals of our English tongue were enveloped by her in a species of vocal plumage, so that they flew from her lips, not like pebbles or snakes, as they do from mine and yours, but like humming-birds, soft and round, and imbued with a strange fascination of sound.

We fell in love, married, and Minnie agreed to share my travel for a year, after which we were to repair to my native place in Maine, and settle down into a calm, loving country life.

It was during this year that our little daughter Pearl was born. The way in

which she came to be named Pearl was this.

We were cruising in the Bay of Condatchy, on the west coast of Ceylon, in a small vessel which I had hired for a month's trip, to go where I listed. I had always a singular desire to make myself acquainted with the details of the pearl fishery, and I thought this would be a good opportunity; so with my wife and servants and little nameless child—she was only three months old—on whom, however, we showered daily a thousand unwritable love-titles, I set sail for the grounds of a celebrated pearl fishery.

It was a great although an idle pleasure to sit in one of the small coasting-boats in that cloudless and serene climate, floating on an unruffled sea, and watch the tawny natives, naked, with the exception of a small strip of cotton cloth wound around their loins, plunge into the marvellously clear waters, and after having shot down far beyond sight, as if they had been lead instead of flesh and blood, suddenly break above the surface after what seemed an age of immersion, holding in their hands a basket filled with long, uncouthly shaped bivalves, any of

which might contain a treasure great as that which Cleopatra wasted in her goblet. The oysters being flung into the boat, a brief breathing-spell was taken, and then once more the dark-skinned diver darted down like some agile fish, to recommence his search. For the pearl oyster is by no means to be found in the prodigal profusion in which his less aristocratic brethren, the mill-ponds and blue-points and chinkopins, exist. He is rare and exclusive, and does not bestow himself liberally. He, like all high-born castes, is not prolific.

Sometimes a fearful moment of excitement would overtake us. While two or three of the pearl-divers were under water, the calm, glassy surface of the sea would be cleft by what seemed the thin blade of a sharp knife, cutting through the water with a slow, even, deadly motion. This we knew to be the dorsal fin of the man-eating shark. Nothing can give an idea of the horrible symbolism of that back fin. To a person utterly unacquainted with the habits of the monster, the silent, stealthy, resistless way in which that membranous blade divided the water would inevitably suggest a cruelty swift, unappeasable, relentless. This may seem exaggerated to any one who has not seen the spectacle I speak of. Every seafaring man will admit its truth. When this ominous apparition became visible, all on board the fishing-boats were instantly in a state of excitement. The water was beaten with oars until it foamed. The natives shouted aloud with the most unearthly yells; missiles of all kinds were flung at this Seeva of the ocean, and a relentless attack was kept up on him until the poor fellows groping below

showed their mahogany faces above the surface. We were so fortunate as not to have been the spectators of any tragedy, but we knew from hearsay that it often happened that the shark—a fish, by the way, possessed of a rare intelligence—quietly bided his time until the moment the diver broke water, when there would be a lightning-like rush, a flash of the white belly as the brute turned on his side to snap, a faint cry of agony from the victim, and then the mahogany face would sink convulsed, never to rise again, while a great crimson clot of blood would hang suspended in the calm ocean, the red memorial of a sudden and awful fatality.

One breathless day we were floating in our little boat at the pearl fishery, watching the diving. “We” means my wife, myself, and our little daughter, who was nestled in the arms of her “ayah,” or colored nurse. It was one of those tropical mornings the glory of which is indescribable. The sea was so transparent that the boat in which we lay, shielded from the sun by awnings, seemed to hang suspended in air. The tufts of pink and white coral that studded the bed of the ocean beneath were as distinct as if they were growing at our feet. We seemed to be gazing upon a beautiful parterre of variegated candytuft. The shores, fringed with palms and patches of a gigantic species of cactus, which was then in bloom, were as still and serene as if they had been painted on glass. Indeed, the whole landscape looked like a beautiful scene beheld through a glorified stereoscope;—eminently real as far as detail went, but fixed and motionless as death. Nothing broke the silence save the occasional plunge of the divers into the water, or the noise of the large oysters falling into the bottom of the boats. In the distance, on a small, narrow point of land, a strange crowd of human beings was visible. Oriental pearl merchants, Fakirs selling amulets, Brahmins in their dirty white robes, all attracted to the spot by the prospect of gain (as fish collect round a handful of bait flung into a pond), bargaining, cheating, and strangely mingling religion and lucre. My wife and I lay back on the cushions that lined the after part of our little skiff, languidly gazing on the sea and the sky by turns. Suddenly our attention was aroused by a great shout, which was followed by a volley of shrill cries from the pearl-fishing boats. On turning in that direction, the greatest excitement was visible among the different crews. Hands were pointed, white teeth glittered in the sun, and every dusky form was gesticulating violently. Then two or three blacks seized some long poles and commenced beating the water

violently. Others flung gourds and calabashes and odd pieces of wood and stones in the direction of a particular spot that lay between the nearest fishing-boat and ourselves. The only thing visible in this spot was a black, sharp blade,

thin as the blade of a pen-knife, that appeared, slowly and evenly cutting through the still water. No surgical instrument ever glided through human flesh with a more silent, cruel calm. It needed not the cry of "Shark! shark!" to tell us what it was. In a moment we had a vivid picture of that unseen monster, with his small, watchful eyes, and his huge mouth with its double row of fangs, presented to our mental vision. There were three divers under water at this moment, while directly above them hung suspended this remorseless incarnation of death. My wife clasped my hand convulsively, and became deathly pale. I stretched out the other hand instinctively, and grasped a revolver which lay beside me. I was in the act of cocking it when a shriek of unutterable agony from the ayah burst on our ears. I turned my head quick as a flash of lightning, and beheld her, with empty arms, hanging over the gunwale of the boat, while down in the calm sea I saw a tiny little face, swathed in white, sinking—sinking—sinking!

What are words to paint such a crisis? What pen, however vigorous, could depict the pallid, convulsed face of my wife, my own agonized countenance, the awful despair that settled on the dark face of the ayah, as we three beheld the love of our lives serenely receding from us forever in that impassable, transparent ocean? My pistol fell from my grasp. I, who rejoiced in a vigor of manhood such as few attain, was struck dumb and helpless. My brain whirled in its dome. Every outward object vanished from my sight, and all I saw was a vast, translucent sea and one sweet face, rosy as a sea-shell, shining in its depths—shining with a vague smile that seemed to bid me a mute farewell as it floated away to death! I was roused from a trance of anguish by the flitting of a dark form through the clear water, cleaving its way swiftly toward that darling little shape, that grew dimmer and dimmer every second as it settled in the sea. We all saw it, and the same thought struck us all That terrible, deadly back fin was the key of our sudden terror. The shark! A simultaneous shriek burst from our lips.

I tried to jump overboard, but was withheld by some one. Little use had I done so, for I could not swim a stroke. The dark shape glided on like a flash of light. It reached our treasure. In an instant all we loved on earth was blotted from our sight! My heart stood still. My breath ceased; life trembled on my hips. The next moment a dusky head shot out of the water close to our boat—a dusky head whose parted lips gasped for breath, but whose eyes shone with the brightness of a superhuman joy. The second after, two tawny hands held a dripping white mass above water, and the dark head shouted to the boatmen. Another second, and the brave pearl-diver had clambered in and laid my little daughter at her mother's feet. This was the shark! This the man-eater! This hero in sun-burned

hide, who, with his quick, aquatic sight, had seen our dear one sinking through the sea, and had brought her up to us again, pale and dripping, but still alive!

What tears and what laughter fell on us three by turns as we named our gem rescued from the ocean "Little Pearl".

II

I had been about a year settled at my pleasant homestead in Maine, when the great misfortune of my life fell upon me.

My existence was almost exceptional in its happiness. Independent in circumstances; master of a beautiful place, the natural charms of which were carefully seconded by art; married to a

woman whose refined and cultivated mind seemed to be in perfect accord with my own; and the father of the loveliest little maiden that ever tottered upon tiny feet—what more could I wish for? In the summer-time we varied the pleasant monotony of our rustic life by flying visits to Newport and Nahant. In the winter, a month or six weeks spent in New York, party-going and theatre-going, surfeited us with the rapid life of a metropolis, but gave us food for conversation for months to come. The intervals were well filled up with farming, reading, and the social intercourse into which we naturally fell with the old residents around us.

I said a moment ago that I was perfectly happy at this time. I was wrong. I was happy, but not perfectly happy. A vague grief overshadowed me. My wife's health gave me at times great concern. Charming and spirituelle as she was on most occasions, there were times when she seemed a prey to a brooding melancholy. She would sit for hours in the twilight, in what appeared to be a state of mental apathy, and at such times it was almost impossible to rouse her into even a moderate state of conversational activity. When I addressed her, she would languidly turn her eyes on me, droop the eyelids over the eyeballs, and gaze at me with a strange expression that, I knew not why, sent a shudder through my limbs. It was in vain that I questioned her to ascertain if she suffered. She was perfectly well, she said, but weary. I consulted my old friend and neighbor, Doctor Melony, but, after a careful study of her constitution, he proclaimed her, after his own fashion, to be "Sound as a bell, sir! sound as a bell!"

To me, however, there was a funereal tone in this bell. If it did not toll of death, it at least proclaimed disaster. I cannot say why those dismal forebodings

should have possessed me. Let who will explain the many presentiments of good and bad fortune which waylay men in the road of life, as the witches used to waylay the traveller of old, and rise up in his path prognosticating or cursing.

At times, though, Minnie, as if to cheat speculation, displayed a gayety and cheerfulness beyond all expectation. She would propose little excursions to noted places in our neighborhood, and no eyes in the party would be brighter, no laugh more ringing than hers. Yet these bright spots were but checkers on a life of gloom;—days passed in moodiness and silence; nights of restless tossing on the coach; and ever and anon that strange, furtive look following me as I went to and fro!

As the year slowly sailed through the green banks of summer into the flaming scenery of the fall, I resolved to make some attempt to dissipate this melancholy under which my wife so obviously labored.

“Minnie,” I said to her, one day, “I feel rather dull. Let us go to New York for a few weeks.”

“What for!” she answered, turning her face around slowly until her eyes rested on mine—eyes still filled with that inexplicable expression “What for? To amuse ourselves? My dear Gerald, how can New York amuse you? We live in a hotel, each room of which is a stereotyped copy of the other. We get the same bill of fare—with a fresh date—every day for dinner. We go to parties that are a repetition of the parties we went to last year. The same thin-legged young man leads ‘the German,’ and one could almost imagine that the stewed terrapin which you got for supper had been kept over since the previous winter. There is no novelty—no nothing.”

“There is a novelty, my dear,” I said, although I could not help smiling at her languid dissection of a New York season. “You love the stage, and a new, and, as I am told, a great actress, has appeared there. I, for my part, want to see her.”

“Who is she? But, before you answer, I know perfectly well what a great American dramatic novelty is. She has been gifted by nature with fine eyes, a good figure, and a voice which has a

tolerable scale of notes. Some one, or something, puts it into her head that she was born into this world for the special purpose of interpreting Shakespeare. She begins by reciting to her friends in a little village, and, owing to their encouragement, determines to take lessons from some broken-down actor, who ekes out an insufficient salary by giving lessons in elocution. Under his tuition—as she would under the instruction of any professor of that abominable art known as ‘elocution’—she learns how to display her voice at the expense of the

sense of the author. She thinks of nothing but rising and falling inflections, swimming entrances and graceful exits. Her idea of great emotion is hysterics, and her acme of by-play is to roll her eyes at the audience. You listen in vain for a natural intonation of the voice. You look in vain on the painted—over-painted—face for a single reflex of the emotions depicted by the dramatist;—emotions that, I am sure, when he was registering them on paper, flitted over his countenance, and thrilled his whole being as the auroral lights shimmer over the heavens, and scud a vibration through all nature! My dear husband, I am tired of your great American actress. Please go and buy me half a dozen dolls.”

I laughed. She was in her cynical mood, and none could be more sarcastic than she. But I was determined to gain my point.

“But,” I resumed, “the actress I am anxious to see is the very reverse of the too truthful picture you have painted. I want to see Matilda Heron.”

“And who is Matilda Heron?”

“Well, I can’t very well answer your question definitely, Minnie; but this I know, that she has come from somewhere, and fallen like a bomb-shell in New York. The metaphor is not too pronounced. Her appearance has been an explosion. Now, you blasé critic of actresses, here is a chance for a sensation! Will you go!”

“Of course I will, dear Gerald. But if I am disappointed, call on the gods to help you. I will punish you, if you mislead me, in some awful manner. I’ll—write a play, or—go on the stage myself.”

“Minnie,” said I, kissing her smooth white forehead, “if you go on the stage, you will make a most miserable failure.”

III

We went to New York. Matilda Heron was then playing her first engagement at Wallack’s Theatre. The day after I arrived I secured a couple of orchestra seats, and before the curtain rose Minnie and I were installed in our places—I full of anticipation, she, as all prejudging critics are, determined to be terribly severe if she got a chance.

We were too well bred, too well brought up, too well educated, and too cosmopolitan, to feel any qualms about the morality of the play. We had read it in the French under the title of *La Dame aux Camélias*, and it was now produced in dramatic form under the title of “*Camille*.”

If my wife did not get a chance for criticism, she at least got a sensation. Miss

Heron's first entrance was wonderfully unconventional. The woman dared to come in upon that painted scene as if it really was the home apartment it was represented to be. She did not slide in with her face to the audience, and wait for the mockery that is called "a reception." She walked in easily, naturally, unwitting of any outside eyes. The petulant manner in which she took off her shawl, the commonplace conversational tone in which she spoke to her servant, were revelations to Minnie and myself. Here was a daring reality. Here was a woman who, sacrificing for the moment all conventional prejudices, dared to play the lorette as the lorette herself plays her dramatic life, with all her whims, her passion, her fearlessness of consequences, her occasional vulgarities, her impertinence, her tenderness and self-sacrifice

It was not that we did not see faults. Occasionally Miss Heron's accent was bad, and had a savor of Celtic origin. But what mattered accent, or what mattered elocution, when we felt ourselves in the presence of an inspired woman!

Miss Heron's Camille electrified both Minnie and myself. My wife was particularly bouleversée. The artist we were beholding had not in a very marked manner any of those physical advantages which Minnie had predicated in her onslaught on the dramatic stars. It is true that Miss Heron's figure was commanding, and there was a certain powerful light in her eyes that startled and thrilled; but there was not the beauty of the "favorite actress." The conquest that she achieved was purely intellectual and magnetic.

Of course we were present at the next performance. It was "Medea." We then beheld the great actress under a new phase. In Camille she died for love; in Medea she killed for love. I never saw a human being so rocked by emotion as was my wife during the progress of this tragedy. Her countenance was a mirror of every incident and passion. She swayed to and fro under those gusts of indignant love that the actress sent forth from time to time, and which swept the house like a storm. When the curtain fell she sat trembling—vibrating still with those thunders of passion that the swift lightnings of genius had awakened. She seemed almost in a dream, as I took her to the carriage, and during the drive to our hotel she was moody and silent. It was in vain that I tried to get her to converse about the play. That the actress was great, she acknowledged in the briefest possible sentence. Then she leaned back and seemed to fall into a reverie from which nothing would arouse her.

I ordered supper into our sitting-room, and made Minnie drink a couple of glasses of champagne in the hope that it would rouse her into some state of

mental activity. All my efforts, however, were without avail. She was silent and strange, and occasionally shivered as if penetrated with a sudden chill. Shortly after, she pleaded weariness and retired for the night, leaving me puzzled more than ever by the strangeness of her case.

An hour or two afterward, when I went to bed, I found Minnie apparently asleep. Never had she seemed more beautiful. Her lips were like a bursting rosebud about to blow under the influence of a perfumed wind, just parted as they were by the gentle breath that came and went. The long, dark lashes that swept over her cheek gave a pensive charm to her countenance, which was heightened by a rich stray of nutty hair that swept loosely across her bosom, tossed in the restlessness of slumber. I printed a light kiss upon her forehead, and, with an unuttered prayer for her welfare, lay down to rest.

I know not how long I had been asleep when I was awakened from a profound slumber by one of those indescribable sensations of mortal peril which seem to sweep over the soul, and with as it were the thrill of its passage call louder than a trumpet, Awake ! arouse ! your life hangs by a hair! That this strange physical warning is in all cases the result of a magnetic phenomenon I have not the slightest doubt. To prove it, steal softly, ever so softly, to the bedside of a sleeper, and, although no noise betrays your presence, the slumberer will almost invariably awaken, aroused by a magnetic perception of your proximity. How much more powerfully must the stealthy approach of one who harbors sinister designs affect the slumbering victim! An antagonistic magnetism hovers near; the whole of the subtle currents that course through the electrical machine known as man are shocked with a powerful repulsion, and the sentinel mind whose guard has just been relieved, and which is slumbering in its quarters, suddenly hears the rappel beaten and leaps to arms.

In the midst of my deep sleep I sprang with a sudden bound upright, with every faculty alert. By one of those unaccountable mysteries of our being, I realized, before my eyes could be by any possibility alive to external objects, the presence of a great horror. Simultaneously with this conviction, or following it so quickly as to be almost twin with it, I beheld the vivid flash of a knife, and felt an acute pain in my shoulder. The next instant all was plain, as if the scene, instead of passing in a half-illuminated bedroom, had occurred in the full sunlight of the orient. My wife was standing by my bedside, her hands firmly pinioned in mine, while on the white coverlet lay a sharp table-knife red with the blood which was pouring from a deep wound in my shoulder. I had escaped death by a miracle. Another instant and the long blade would have been driven through my heart.

I never was so perfectly self-possessed as on that terrible occasion. I forced Minnie to sit on the bed, while I looked calmly into her face. She returned my gaze with a sort of serene defiance.

“Minnie,” I said, “I loved you dearly. Why did you do this?”

“I was weary of you,” she answered, in a cold, even voice—a voice so level that it seemed to be spoken on ruled lines—“that is my reason.”

Great heavens! I was not prepared for this sanguinary calm. I had looked for perhaps sonic indication of somnambulism; I had vaguely hoped even for the incoherence or vehemence of speech which would have betokened a sudden insanity—anything, everything but this awful avowal of a deliberate design to murder a man who loved her better than the life she sought! Still I clung to hope. I could not believe that this gentle, refined creature could deliberately quit my side at midnight, possess herself of the very knife which had been used at the table, across which I lavished a thousand fond attentions, and remorselessly endeavor to stab me to the heart. It must be the act of one insane, or laboring under some momentary hallucination. I determined to test her further. I adopted a tone of vehement reproach, hoping, if insanity was smouldering in her brain, to fan the embers to such a flame as would leave no doubt on my mind. I would rather she should be mad than feel that she hated me.

“Woman!” I thundered fiercely, “you must have the mind of a fiend to repay my love in this manner. Beware of my vengeance. Your punishment shall be terrible.”

“Punish me,” she answered; and oh! how serene and distant her voice sounded! —“punish me how and when you will. It will not matter much.” The tones were calm, assured, and fearless. The manner perfectly coherent. A terrible suspicion shot across my mind.

“Have I a rival?” I asked; “is it a guilty love that has prompted you to plan my death? If so, I am sorry you did not kill me.”

“I do not know any other man whom I love. I cannot tell why it is that I do not love you. You are very kind and considerate, but your presence wearies me. I sometimes see vaguely, as in a dream, my ideal of a husband, but he has no existence save in my soul, and I suppose I shall never meet him.”

“Minnie, you are mad!” I cried, despairingly.

“Am I?” she answered, with a faint, sad smile slowly overspreading her pale face, like the dawn breaking imperceptibly over a cold gray lake. “Well, you can think so if you will. It is all one to me.”

I never beheld such apathy—such stoical indifference. Had she exhibited fierce

rage, disappointment at her failure, a mad thirst for my life-blood, I should have preferred it to this awful stagnation of sensibility, this frozen stillness of the heart. I felt all my nature harden suddenly toward her. It seemed to me as if my face became fixed and stern as a bronze head.

“You are an inexplicable monster,” I said, in tones that startled myself, they were so cold and metallic “and I shall not try to decipher you. I will use every endeavor to ascertain, however, whether it is some species of insanity that has afflicted you, or whether you are ruled by the most vicious soul that ever inhabited a human body. You shall return to my house tomorrow, when I will place you under the charge of Doctor Melony. You will live in the strictest seclusion. I need not tell you that, after what has happened, you must henceforth be a stranger to your daughter. Hands crimsoned with her father’s blood are not those that I would see caressing her.”

“Very well. It is all one to me where I am, or how I live.”

“Go to bed.”

She went, calmly as a well-taught child, coolly turning over the pillow on which was sprinkled the blood from the wound in my shoulder, so as to present the under side for her beautiful, guilty head to repose on; gently removed the murderous knife, which was still lying on the coverlet, and placed it on a little table by the side of the bed, and then without a word calmly composed herself to sleep.

It was inexplicable. I stanchd my wound and sat down to think.

What was the meaning of it all? I had visited many lunatic asylums, and had, as one of the various items in my course of study, read much on the phenomena of insanity, which had always been exceedingly interesting to me for this reason: I thought it might be that only through the aberrated intellect can we approach the secrets of the normal mind. The castle, fortified and garrisoned at every angle and loophole, guards its interior mysteries; it is only when the fortress crumbles that we can force our way inside, and detect the secret of its masonry, its form, and the theory of its construction.

But in all my researches I had never met with any symptoms of a diseased mind similar to these my wife exhibited. There was a uniform coherence that completely puzzled me. Her answers to my questions were complete and determinate—that is, they left no room for what is called “cross-examination.” No man ever spent such a night of utter despair as I did, watching in that dimly lit chamber until dawn, while she, my would-be murderess, lay plunged in so profound and calm a slumber that she might have been a wearied angel rather

than a self-possessed demon. The mystery of her guilt was maddening; and I sat hour after hour in my easy-chair, seeking in vain for a clew, until the dawn, spectral and gray, arose over the city. Then I packed up all our luggage, and wandered restlessly over the house until the usual hour for rising had struck.

On returning to my room I found my wife just completing her toilet. To my consternation and horror she flung herself into my arms as I entered.

“O Gerald!” she cried, “I have been so frightened. What has brought all this blood on the pillow and the sheets? Where have you been? When I awoke and missed you and discovered these stains, I knew not what to think. Are you hurt? What is the matter?”

I stared at her. There was not a trace of conscious guilt in her countenance. It was the most consummate acting. Its very perfection made me the more relentless.

“There is no necessity for this hypocrisy,” I said; “it will not alter my resolve. We depart for home to-day. Our luggage is packed, the bills are all paid. Speak to me, I pray you, as little as possible.”

“What is it? Am I dreaming? O Gerald, my darling! what have I done, or what has come over you?” She almost shrieked these queries.

“You know as well as I do, you fair-faced monster. You tried to murder me last night, when I was asleep. There’s your mark on my shoulder. A loving signature, is it not?”

I bared my shoulder as I spoke, and exposed the wound. She gazed wildly in my face for a moment, then tottered and fell. I lifted her up and placed her on the bed. She did not faint, and had strength enough left to ask me to leave her alone for a few moments. I quitted her with a glance of contempt, and went down stairs to make arrangements for our journey. After an absence of about an hour I returned to our apartments. I found her sitting placidly in an easy-chair, looking out of the window. She scarcely noticed my entrance, and the same old, distant look was on her face.

“We start at three o’clock. Are you ready?” I said to her.

“Yes. I need no preparation.” Evenly, calmly uttered, without even turning her head to look at me.

“You have recovered your memory, it seems,” I said. “You wasted your histrionic talents this morning.”

“Did I?” She smiled with the most perfect serenity, arranged herself more easily in her chair, and leaned back as if in a revery. I was enraged beyond endurance, and left the room abruptly.

That evening saw us on our way home. Throughout the journey she maintained the same apathetic air. We scarcely exchanged a word. The instant we reached our house I assigned apartments to her, strictly forbidding her to move from them, and despatched a messenger for Doctor Melony. Minnie, on her part, took possession of her prison without a word. She did not even ask to see our darling little Pearl, who was a thousand times more beautiful and engaging than ever.

Melony arrived, and I laid the awful facts before him. The poor man was terribly shocked.

“Depend on it, it’s opium,” he said. “Let me see her.”

An hour afterward he came to me.

It’s not opium, and it’s not insanity,” he said; “it must be somnambulism. I find symptoms, however, that puzzle me beyond all calculation. That she is not in her normal condition of mind is evident; but I cannot discover the cause of this unnatural excitement. She is coherent, logical, but perfectly apathetic to all outward influences. At first I was certain that she was a victim of opium. Now I feel convinced that I was entirely wrong. It must be somnambulism. I will reside for a time in the house, and trust me to discover this mystery. Meanwhile she must be carefully watched.”

Melony was as good as his word. He watched her incessantly, and reported to me her condition. The poor man was dreadfully puzzled. The strictest surveillance failed to elicit the slightest evidence of her taking any stimulants, although she remained almost all the time in the apathetic state which was so terrible to behold. The Doctor endeavored to arouse her by reproaches for her attempt on my life. She, in return, only smiled, and replied that it was a matter in which she had no further interest. Not a trace of any somnambulistic habit could be discovered. I was thoroughly wretched. I secluded myself from all society but that of Melony; and had it not been for him and my darling little Pearl I am certain that I should have gone mad. The most of my days I spent wandering in the great woods which lay in the neighborhood of my farm, and my evenings I endeavored to divert with reading or a chat with the good Doctor. Yet, talk of what we might, the conversation would always return to the same melancholy topic. It was a maze of sorrow in which we invariably, no matter in what direction we wandered, brought up at the same spot.

IV

The Doctor and myself were sitting one evening, late, in my library, talking

gloomily enough over my domestic tragedy. He was endeavoring to persuade me to look more brightly on the future; to dismiss as far as possible from my mind the accursed horror that dwelt in my home, and to remember that I had still a dear object left on which to centre my affections. This allusion to little Pearl, in such a mood as I was then in, only served to heighten my agony. I began immediately to revolve the chances that, were my wife's disease really insanity, it would be perpetuated in my dear child. Melony, of course, pooh-poohed the idea; but with the obstinacy of grief I clung to it. Suddenly a pause took place in the argument, and the dreary sounds that fill the air in the last nights of autumn swept around the house. The wind soughed through the treetops, which were now almost bare, as if moaning at being deprived of its leafy playmates. Inexplicable noises passed to and fro without the windows. Dead leaves rustled along the piazza, like the rustle of the garments of ghosts. Chilly draughts came from unseen crevices, blowing on back and cheek till one felt as if some invisible lips were close behind, pouring malignant breaths on face and shoulder. Suddenly the pause in our conversation was filled by a noise that we knew came neither from air nor dry leaf. We heard sounding through the night the muffled tread of footsteps. I knew that, except ourselves, the household had long since retired to bed. By a simultaneous action we both sprang to our feet and rushed to a door which opened into a long corridor leading to the nursery, and which communicated, by a series of rambling passages, with the main body of the house. As we flung back the door a light appeared at the further end advancing slowly toward us. It was borne by a tall, white figure. It was my wife! Calm and stately, and with her wonderful serene step, she approached. My heart was frozen when I saw spots of blood on her hands and night-robe. I gave a wild cry, and rushed past her. In another instant I was in baby's room. The night light was burning dimly; the colored nurse was sleeping calmly in her bed; while, in a little cot in another part of the room, I saw—Ah! how tell it?—I cannot! well, little Pearl was murdered—murdered! My darling lay—It was I now who was insane. I rushed back into the corridor to slay the fiend who had done this horrible deed. I had no mercy for her then. I would have killed her a thousand times over. Great Heaven! She was leaning against the wall conversing as calmly with the Doctor as if nothing had happened; smoothing her hair with her reddened fingers, nonchalant as if at an evening party. I ran at her to crush her. Melony leaped between us.

“Stop,” he cried. “The secret is out”;—and as he spoke he held up a little silver box containing what seemed to be a greenish paste. “It is hasheesh, and she is

confessing!”

Her statement was the most awful thing I ever listened to. It was as deliberate as a lawyer’s brief. She had contracted this habit in the East, she said, long before I knew her, and could not break it off. It wound her nature in chains of steel; by degrees it grew upon her, until it became her very life. Her existence lay as it were in a nut-shell, but that shell was to her a universe. One night, she continued, when she was under the influence of the drug, she went with me to see a play in which the wife abhors her husband and murders her children. It was “Medea.” From that instant murder became glorified in her sight, through the medium of the spell-working drug. Her soul became rapt in the contemplation of the spilling of blood. I was to have been her first victim, Pearl her second. She ended by saying, with an ineffable smile, that the delight of the taking away of life was beyond imagination.

I suppose I must have fainted, for when I awoke from what seemed oblivion I found myself in bed, with Dr. Melony by my side. He laid his finger on his lip, and whispered to me that I had been very ill, and must not talk. But I could not restrain myself.

“Where is she?” I muttered.

“Where she ought to be,” he answered; and then I caught faintly the words, “Private madhouse.”

O hasheesh! demon of a new paradise, spiritual whirlwind, I know you now! You blackened my life, you robbed me of all I held dear; but you have since consoled me. You thought, wicked enchanter, that you had destroyed my peace forever. But I have won, through you yourself, the bliss you once blotted out. Vanish past! Hence present! Out upon actuality! Hand in hand, I walk with the conqueror of time, and space, and suffering. Bend, all who hear me, to his worship!

THE WALKING DEAD, by E. Hoffmann Price

When Walt Connell heard the diffident tapping at the back door, he assumed an expression of judicial sternness. Plato Jones, who spaded Connell's garden, must be returning with a fantastic story to account for a week's absence and the six dollars which Connell had given him to buy some orange wine. But it was Plato's wife who tapped at the door, a plump, comely black woman with a small parcel under her arm.

"Evenin', Mr. Walt," she began. "My man Plato ain't come back yet."

Tears were streaming down her face. Connell was saddled with a problem. Taking on a servant entailed responsibilities. He'd have to help her somehow.

"That no-good man of yours probably drank my orange wine and now is afraid to come back," Connell said.

"No sir, no sir!" Amelia protested. "Plato don't drink nuthin'!"

"Well, maybe I can help," Connell temporized.

"Yes, sir, Mr. Walt!" Amelia beamed through her tears. "I knew you'd take care of me."

She thrust into his hands a paper-wrapped parcel.

"I baked y'all a chocolate cake for lunch when you go to get that no-good man! And I fixed up some salted cashew nuts, too."

Her guile had caught him totally off guard. He had accepted the present. Nothing to do but resign himself to a sixty-mile drive down the Mississippi Delta where the *Cajuns* convert undersized oranges into fragrant, blasting wine; a no-man's land, where a century or more ago, Lafitte's pirates found refuge.

The next morning Connell thrust Amelia's gift of chocolate cake and cashew nuts into the parcel compartment and headed down the west bank. He spent the forenoon searching small town jails as he worked his way down the Delta, but no news of Plato. His last chance was Venice, at the end of the highway.

Venice was half a dozen shacks plus a general store not much larger than a piano box. The girl behind the counter was uncommonly attractive. One of those substantial *Cajun* women, with luxurious curves, and plump, firm breasts as inviting as her amiable smile. Connell, however, managed to shift his glance to her dark eyes and began his oft repeated query concerning Plato and his red flivver.

Marie shook her head. Her eyes suddenly became somber as she said, "You're too late."

"What do you mean?" Connell, catching her by the wrist, felt her tremble.

"I didn't have any orange wine," she began, lowering her voice almost to a whisper. "So he went back."

Something was distinctly salty.

"You'd better tell me," he said in a quiet voice that impelled her attention.

Marie was wavering, but she was afraid. Finally she compromised, "We can talk better in back here."

Connell followed her to the rear of the tiny store. The crude, primitive room contained an oil stove, a small wooden table. In the further corner was a bed.

"You won't never see your man again," began Marie, drawing up a chair for Connell. "Not with walking dead men like they got at Ducoin's plantation."

"*Walking dead men!*" he echoed, leaping to his feet. "Who's Ducoin? What ___"

But Connell's query was cut short. The Cajun girl's hand closed about his arm, drawing him to her side.

"I'll tell you later," she whispered. Her dark, smouldering eyes were still haunted, but her lips suggested reasons for delay.

Under other circumstances, Connell would have welcomed the hint, but something about her furtive glance and unnatural eagerness combined with her sinister remarks to repel him. But Connell made little progress. As he drew away, her arm slipped about his neck and her ripe, voluptuous curves pressed him closely as she pleaded, "Don't go...I'm terribly scared..."

She was. But Connell wasn't. And that warm, plump body was as inflaming as orange wine. He drew her to him, stroked her black hair, caressed firm flesh that trembled at his touch, and tried to entice her further remarks about walking dead men.

However, it did not work as he intended. His presence did reassure her, but the contact made his pulse pound like like a rivetting hammer, and the sudden rise and fall of her breasts showed that it was becoming mutual....

Marie's dark eyes were no longer haunted by anything but a desire to get closer. Presently she forgot to brush away an exploring hand, and yielded her eager lips.

And then Connell learned that the Delta offers more than orange wine....

It was close to sunset before he remembered Plato and renewed his inquiries.

"Honest, I couldn't help it," Marie protested. "I didn't have any wine left and just as that man was going to leave, in comes Ducoin with a load. And he tells Plato to come along, he'd fix him up. And I didn't dare warn him."

"Wait till I get at Ducoin!"

“Don’t!” implored Marie. “He’ll know I told you. And you can’t do nothing. Plato’s a walking corpse by now—and I’ll be one, too, if Ducoin finds out—”

She tried to detain Connell, but he broke clear before her full-blown fascinations could conspire with her sinister hints. She had merely delayed the quest; and Connell headed up the river, toward that mysterious plantation.

Ducoin’s house loomed up above the surrounding orange groves, nearly a quarter of a mile from the highway. Its remnants of white paint made it resemble a gaunt, ancient tomb. As Connell pulled up, he saw a Model T parked in a clump of shrubbery. Plato’s decrepit red Lizzie!

And then Connell received a shock. A file of blacks emerged from the orange groves. Their black faces were vacant. They shambled toward the left wing of the house with the grotesque gait of animated dummies.

The sodden, lifeless *clump, clump, clump* of their feet sounded like clods of earth dropping on a coffin. Their arms dangled limp as rags.

Connell shuddered. No wonder that the ignorant *Cajuns* considered them walking dead men.

Clump, clump, clump. The most poverty stricken and oppressed black laborers jest and chatter at the end of a day’s work; but these black men stalked in silence broken only by the shuffling crunch of their flat feet.

Following the file came a white man who wore boots and riding breeches. His heartless, handsome face was tanned and deeply lined. Intelligent but relentless. His dark eyes were as cryptic as his smile as he confronted Connell.

“Looking for someone?”

“Yes. A man named Plato,” said Connell. “Are you Pierre Ducoin?”

“That’s the name,” admitted the taskmaster. “But there are no strangers on this plantation.”

The more Connell saw of Ducoin, the less he liked him. There was something uncanny about the man.

As Connell hesitated, something compelled him to glance towards the veranda that ran the full length of the house, some ten feet above the ground level. Framed by a French window was a girl whose dark eyes and lovely, delicate features for an instant made him forget that she was clad only in a chiffon robe which, half parted, revealed enticing glimpses of silken legs, and a body to which clung the caressing haze of sheer fabric that betrayed slender, olive-tinted curves...the amorous inward sweep of her waist...pert breasts that any hand larger than her own could conceal....

Her lips were silently moving, and she was gesturing for him to leave at once.

But she had overlooked her own loveliness. Connell was staying.

"I'm Walt Connell, and I think you're mistaken," was the retort. "Let me talk to your men. One of them might know about him."

That play was better than making a liar of Ducoin by mentioning Plato's flivver, half concealed in the shadows.

For a moment Ducoin's eyes flared with a light that Connell was certain could not be the reddish sunset glow; his aquiline features tightened, then suddenly he smiled and amiably agreed.

"Do that in the morning. Too late now. This plantation reaches all the way out to the bay, and most of my crew is quartered at the further end. Take us an hour or more to go out, and it's getting dark. Make yourself at home—there is plenty of room here, and you can look in the morning."

A grim-faced black woman served dinner in a vast, high-ceiled room facing the west. Fried chicken, Creole gumbo, rice, and corn bread. All tastily seasoned, except for an utter lack of salt. Connell, reaching for the only shaker on the table, then noticed it contained only pepper.

"Sorry," apologized Ducoin, "but we've run all out of salt. It's rather primitive down here on the Delta. We shop only once a week."

Dinner, despite Ducoin's easy cordiality, was a decided strain. Connell was wondering at the absence of the lovely girl who had warned him.

"Working many men?" he asked.

"A dozen or two," Ducoin carelessly answered. "Haitians, mostly—sullen, stolid brutes, but good workers."

He changed the subject. Connell was relieved when the woman served them night-black, chicory-tintured coffee, and a pony of excellent brandy.

Ducoin remarked, "We turn in early here. Plantation hours begin before sunrise. Aunt Célie will show you your room. In the morning, you can make the rounds with me."

Connell followed the grim-faced woman down the hallway. Her morose, stolid demeanor confirmed Ducoin's comment on the temperament of his workers; yet Connell was distinctly perturbed. And as the door closed behind Aunt Célie, he received a distinct shock.

The moon was rising, casting a shimmering, silvery glow over the black expanse of open fields. Men were at work, digging and hoeing. Utterly unheard of, a night shift on a plantation. Connell heard the thudding blows of their implements, but not a murmur, not a spoken word.

There wasn't an overseer, yet they toiled on, methodically, as though motor

driven, never pausing to lean on their hoes for a breathing spell. They advanced in an unwavering line, grotesquely combining the precision of military drill with the uncouth, ungainly movements of dummies.

Connell shivered and shook his head. Questioning such unnatural creatures would be futile. One glimpse of them and Plato would have taken to his heels. He wondered if his servant might not have abandoned his flivver, frightened out of all reason by the uncanny spectacle of Africans working without song and chatter.

A soft, furtive stirring in the hall just outside of his room made him start violently. Something softly slinking down the hall had paused at his door. By the moon glow that penetrated the shadows, he saw the scarcely perceptible motion of the knob. Something was stealthily seeking him. A silent bound brought Connell to the fireplace, and out of the moonglow. His trembling fingers closed on a pair of massive tongs.

He watched the door soundlessly swing inward. A nebulous spindle of whiteness cleared the edge of the jamb: a spectral, shimmering whiteness that for an instant froze Connell's blood. Then he saw the intruder was the girl who had warned him.

She paused to close the door, and as she turned from the threshold Connell for the first time realized how lovely she was. Her tiny feet were bare, and her shapely legs, gleaming like ivory exclamation marks through the sheer, gauzy fabric of her nightgown, blossomed into seductive curves that fascinated Connell.

The vagrant breeze shifted, drawing the misty fabric closer, revealing her perfections as though she were clad in no more than bare loveliness. The filmy silk clung to the inward curve of her waist, and caressed the firm, delicious roundness of her breast. She was a lovely unreality in the vague light that made her face a sweet, pallid mask, and her black hair a succession of gleaming highlights.

She advanced a pace before she saw Connell.

"Leave at once." As she spoke, she caught his arm. She was trembling violently.

"What's wrong?"

"It's not too late," she whispered as Connell seated himself, and drew her to the arm of his chair. "My uncle is out putting the night shift to work. "I'm Madeline Ducoin."

"I came here to get a man named Plato," insisted Connell.

“He’s one of them now,” said Madeline, shuddering. “A walking corpse.”

“That’s absolute rot! How can a dead man walk?”

“You saw them, didn’t you?” Madeline countered, sighing and shaking her head.

As she leaned toward the window and gestured at the macabre figures that toiled in the moonlight, her dark hair caressed Connell’s cheek, and he felt the supple flex of her slender body. Madeline at least was real in the moon-haunted glamour. His arms closed about her, and drew her to his knee. She was still trembling, but at his touch, she snuggled up like a contented kitten.

Pillowing her head on his shoulder, she looked up and repeated, “Please leave, before it’s too late.”

Connell laughed softly and said, “Never had a better reason for staying.”

For a moment they crossed glances in the moonlight. His arms tightened about her, and she did not draw away. And then as though by common impulse, their lips met, and Connell felt the ecstatic shiver that rippled down her silk clad body. She tried to catch his wrist, brush aside the hand that caressed the gleaming curves of her thigh.

Her inarticulate murmur of protest, breathed in Connell’s ear, further inflamed his blood, and his possessive caresses for the moment brushed aside the hovering presence of mystery and horror. Each seemed to feel that the other was a haven of reality in the devil-haunted plantation.

The lacy hem of her gown was creeping clear of her knees. Connell’s kisses were stifling her murmured protests. Madeline’s breath came in ever quickening gasps. She was clinging to him, the pressure of her firm young breasts telling him that she really did not want him to desist.

If Ducoin was making the rounds of his spectral plantation where black automatons tilled the fields by moonlight, there was no hurry. Connell’s ardent caresses were calling to the surface all the fire and passion of Madeline’s Latin blood. She was lonely and frightened, and his purposeful persistence thrilled and assured her. Her final protest ended in a sigh and a murmur and a silky embrace that became as possessive as Connell’s enfolding arms.

“We’ll soon leave, darling.” As he emerged from his chair, she still clung to him.

“Aunt Célie is asleep.” Her whisper was an invitation. “And Uncle Pierre won’t be back for quite a while....”

She caught his hand.

“You’ll take me with you, won’t you?” Madeline murmured, flinging back her

disarrayed dark hair, and extending alluring arms. "When we leave...."

"I'll take you away from here, forever and always," he promised.

For a long time their murmurings mocked the horrors that marched blindly across the spreading fields of the moon flooded Delta. Finally Madeline slipped from Connell's arms, and gestured toward the moon blot on the floor.

"It's getting late, sweetheart," she whispered. "We'll go to New Orleans as soon as I can pack up."

Connell followed her, and watched her hastily bundle together odds and ends selected from her wardrobe. A strange, mad night. Going in search of a man and finding this incredible armful of loveliness. It was all fantasy, but Connell's lips still tingled from the fire of her kisses. Let Pierre Ducoin keep the secret of the uncanny walking dead men. Plato would eventually appear with some wild story accounting for his absence. It was utterly incredible that he would have lingered long enough to have left any clues. Amelia's African guile had fairly bludgeoned Connell into this mad search.

He watched Madeline dressing in the moon glamour. Once he reached New Orleans with that delicious loveliness, he would pension Plato for life.

They stole through the shadows of the orange grove to Connell's *coupé*. He took Madeline's suitcase and raised the turtle back. Something was stirring in the baggage compartment.

"*Mon Dieu!*" gasped Madeline.

"Is that you, Mr. Walt?" whispered a familiar woman's voice. Amelia Jones emerged. "Did you get Plato?"

Then she saw Madeline, and her voice trailed into reproachful indefiniteness. Connell was betraying his colored folks.

"What the devil are you doing here?" he demanded.

"I just followed," said Amelia. "In case that no good man didn't want to come home."

Her plump, comely face was agleam with perspiration. It was a wonder she had not suffocated in the stuffy baggage compartment during that long search down the Delta. Connell helplessly glanced at Madeline who was nervously fingering his arm. Amelia painfully clambered out of the turtle back.

"Get back in there, Amelia," Connell abruptly ordered. "I'll fix the top."

But the woman shook her head.

"No, sir, Mr. Walt. I'm goin' to find him myself. I knows you're too busy, and I'm much obliged for the ride." Her glance shifted, and she saw the familiar model T. "That's Plato's Ford. I'll get him. Don't you wait here no longer, Mr.

Walt.”

Amelia’s contradictory blend of stubbornness and humility got under Connell’s skin. He couldn’t sell his niggers down the river that way; neither could he leave Madeline another night in that fiend-haunted plantation house. But his indecision was costly.

Dark forms slipping from the shadows closed in on them. Ducoin’s black laborers! Their eyes were not blind, but staring, unfocused and unseeing. Their faces were utterly devoid of expression. Walking dead men, moving with the slow, horrible motion of animated corpses.

“Get back, you devils!” snarled Connell, thrusting aside a clutching hand and driving home with his fist; but it was like hammering the trunk of a tree. Not a gasp, not a grunt, not a change of expression. Madeline screamed as other hands clutched her.

Though Connell’s fists crunched against bony faces, and chunked wrist deep into leathery stomachs, he made no more impression than on tackling dummies. Kicking, slugging, and gouging as the tangle of voiceless black men overwhelmed him, Connell’s brain became a vortex of horror. He knew now why the *Cajuns* called them walking corpses.

They could not be alive. There was no resentment or wrath at his frantic, savage blows. Somewhere he heard a terrified wailing and a scurrying. Amelia was taking cover. The walking corpses seemed unaware of her presence.

Madeline’s outcries were throttled. As Connell vainly battled, he caught glimpses of her silk clad legs flailing in the moonlight, heard the ripping of cloth as her ensemble was torn to ribbons by her captors. Then he was smothered by the irresistible rush. A sickening, musty, charnel stench stifled him. Iron muscles, leathery bodies, exhaling the odor of incipient decay, yet more powerful than any living thing, crushed him to the border of unconsciousness. They seized him and Madeline as though they were logs, and hauled them up the veranda stairs and into Madeline’s room.

Connell heard Pierre Ducoin’s familiar voice.

“Too bad,” he ironically commented as the blacks dropped their burdens, and pinned Connell to the floor with their bony knees. “Aunt Célie told me something was going on.”

Then he turned to the corpse men, and spoke in a purring, primitive language, more rudimentary than any Haitian patois: the old savage dialect of Guinea.

They bound Connell’s hands and feet to a chair, and flung Madeline carelessly across her bed. Though half conscious, she was stirring and moaning, and

instinctively trying to draw her tattered ensemble down about her hips. And then Aunt Célie appeared, black, sombre and malignant. The sinister black woman knelt beside the hearth and struck light. In a moment she had a fire kindled and was heaping it with charcoal.

The walking corpses lined themselves against the wall, awaiting orders. It was only then that Connell fully realized what had mauled and pounded him and Madeline.

They were breathing; but their lack of expression reminded him of a dog he had once seen in a vivisection laboratory. The greater portion of the animal's brain had been removed; it lived, but it was a living log. And those black men had only enough brain left to let their reflexes function.

"How do you like my crew of *zombies*?" murmured Ducoin as the woman set a kettle of water over the glowing coals.

Zombies! That one word rounded out Council's rising horror. They were corpses stolen from unguarded graves and had been reanimated by a primal necromancy to serve as farm cattle! *Zombies*, toiling as no dumb beast could. Rich profits, farming a plantation with hands like those. He wondered why Aunt Célie knelt swaying and muttering before the kettle into which she tossed dried herbs, and bits of bark and roots and pebbles.

"Pretty nice, eh?" was Ducoin's satirical comment. "I learned the trick at Haiti, and I'm going to add you to my string of *zombies*. Once Aunt Célie mixes you a drink you won't be so interested in women."

Wrath blazed in Ducoin's eyes as his glance shifted to his disheveled niece.

"I don't know what you two were doing," he murmured, "but I can fairly well guess. Or else she wouldn't have been so willing to go away with you. Just another no-good wench. She'll be a very good *zombie* herself—"

"You damn' dirty rat!" snarled Connell. "Do you mean—"

"Certainly," answered Ducoin. "After fooling around with you, she's no niece of mine. In this day and age I can't give her what she deserves, but making her a *zombie* is different. Nobody will inquire out here on the Delta. And she'll not be playing around with strangers any more."

Another guttural command. The corpse men marched over to Madeline's bed as returning consciousness stirred her. Connell, struggling against his bonds, saw them stripping her dress to tatters as they throttled her into submission. Shuddering with horror at the grisly contact, Madeline finally surrendered, and the *zombies* methodically lashed her to another chair. Her dress was a pitiful rag. Her clawed breasts were half exposed, and her bruised legs peeped through the

remnants of her hosiery.

Ducoin chuckled at Connell's frenzied struggles.

"That won't do you any good. I'll leave a guard here to watch you while Aunt Célie and I finish the brew that'll make both of you *zombies*."

At Ducoin's command, all but one of the *zombies* filed out of the room. Before he and Aunt Célie followed, the Creole paused to remark. "You were looking for Plato. All right, I'm sending Plato in to help watch you. Now see how you like the white man's burden!"

They left. But presently, as the fumes from the kettle stifled and dizzied Connell, he heard approaching footsteps *clump-clump-clumping* down the hall.

The black apparition which stood framed in the doorway froze his blood. Plato had returned, a loose-jointed, shambling, lifeless hulk that moved in response to the *zombie* master's command.

"Good God in heaven!" he groaned.

"That's why I warned you," whispered Madeline. "I saw Plato before and after."

"If I'd only left—"

"I'm still glad you didn't, Walt. It was such a ghastly, lonely life. Becoming a living corpse is better than never having lived."

A wave of nausea racked Connell. He and Madeline would presently be the companions of that horrible hulk.

"Hitch your chair over, bit by bit," Madeline continued. "Maybe I can get you loose."

Connell's cramped efforts moved the chair a scant fraction of an inch. At the rasp of wood, the heads of the *zombies* shifted. They had their orders. Not a chance.

"Plato," said Connell. "Loosen my hands, Plato, don't you remember me?"

Over and over, he repeated the name. The blank, sightless face seemed to change for an instant.

"Maybe he's not been this way long enough to forget everything," whispered Madeline. "Try again—"

The oft repeated name got unexpected results, but not from the *zombie*. Plato's wife, Amelia, came slinking from the hallway. Her black plump face became slate grey as she stared into the ruddy glow.

"Where's my Plato? Mr. Walt, was you talkin' to him?"

Then she saw the hulk that had been Connell's servant.

"Plato! Don't you hear me talkin' to you?"

Not a sign of life. That blasted brain could not absorb a new impression.

“Plato, honey, can’t you hear me?”

Finally, grey and trembling, the woman turned to Connell.

“Mr. Walt, I can’t do nuthin’. Plato’s dead.”

Connell realized that Amelia’s persuasion had made less impression than his own authoritative voice.

“Untie us, Amelia,” he said.

She had scarcely reached the chair when Plato’s ponderous hand lashed out, flinging her into a corner.

“Mr. Walt,” said the woman, as she struggled to her feet, “I’m goin’ to the village to get help. That devil don’t know I’m here, and I’ll get some friends.”

She stepped into the hall. Connell renewed his struggles. Once or twice Madeline contrived to jerk her chair a fraction of an inch toward him, but a *zombie* leaped forward, bodily picked her up, and set her in a corner. They did nothing to thwart Connell’s struggles against his bonds. The orders had not covered that.

Finally Connell contrived to spread the knotted strands of clothesline.

“Hang on, darling,” he panted. “I’ll be clear in a second.”

“But what good will it do?” moaned Madeline. “They’ll block you before—”

“Maybe I can toss you out the window, chair and all.”

He knew that he had no chance against his grisly captors, but anything was better than waiting for that deadly brew to receive the missing ingredients that would make them living corpses. Connell heard footsteps and relaxed his desperate efforts. His blood froze, and a stifled oath choked him.

It was Amelia. She had a small parcel wrapped in paper. Damn her, why hadn’t she run to the village like she’d said she would?

“Plato, honey,” she pleaded, “I brought you somethin’ good.”

“For God’s sake, go to the village!” shouted Connell.

“That would be wasted effort,” said a sardonic voice.

Ducoin crossed the threshold, accompanied by Aunt Célie and several *zombies*. His sinister presence, and the living dead seemed to freeze Amelia with horror. She had lost her chance to make a break.

“I guess we’ll have a number three *zombie*,” murmured Ducoin.

The living dead now blocked the doorway. Aunt Célie lifted the lid of the kettle, and added a pinch of powder from a small packet. She stirred the villainous potion, and drew off a cupful and held it to Connell’s lips.

“You might as well drink it,” said Ducoin. “If you don’t—” His gaze shifted to

Madeline's trembling bare body and he resumed, "These *zombies* will do anything I tell them. How would you like to see one of them—"

His words trailed to a whisper, but Connell knew what would happen to Madeline, before his eyes.

And then the last remnant of cord that bound his wrist yielded. His freed hand flashed out, striking the steaming beverage from Ducoin's hand. As the Creole recoiled, Connell's other hand jerked loose, gripping him by the throat. The sudden move caught Ducoin off guard. Since the master was present, the *zombies* did not interfere; and Ducoin, throttled by Connell's savage grasp, could not articulate an order.

Sock! Connell's fist hammered home, driving Ducoin crashing into a corner, dazed and numb. Connell struggled with the bonds at his ankles, but only for a moment. Aunt Célie seized his elbows from the rear.

Once Ducoin recovered his voice—!

Amelia was free. But instead of running, she approached Plato.

"Jes' yo' taste one, honey," she crooned, placing a salted cashew nut in the bluish, sagging mouth of her dead husband.

There was a mumbling and a drooling, a sudden flash of perception as the salty tidbit mingled with the saliva; then an inarticulate, bestial howl.

Ducoin and Aunt Célie flung themselves forward.

"Stop her!" yelled Ducoin. "*She's giving them salt!*"

Too late. Burly, powerful Plato had become a raging maniac. Amelia thrust cashew nuts into the mouth of the other *zombie*. Another incredible transformation. Another slaverling, howling brute.

A pistol cracked, but only once. Ducoin's weapon clattered into a corner. Plato and his companion closed in.

The room became a red hell of slaughter. The insensate hulks were pounding and trampling and flinging Ducoin and Aunt Célie about like bean bags.

They hungrily licked splashed blood from their hands, and renewed the assault. Other *zombies* came from the fields, tasted a salted nut, and joined the butchery. And presently there was only a shapeless, gory pulp that they were trampling and beating into the floor....

The *zombies* desisted for lack of fragments left to dismember. Then they clambered to their feet, utterly ignoring Amelia and the two prisoners. They shattered the window, cleared the sill, and dashed across the field. Against the moonglow, Connell saw them burrowing into the ground like dogs.

Amelia, sobbing and laughing, was releasing him and Madeline.

“Mr. Walt,” the woman explained, “when I saw my Plato, I remembered somethin’ my ole grandmammy told me years ago, about them *zombies* cuttin’ up that way when they ate salt. Then I remembered the cashew nuts I gave you. Now, praise de Lord, Plato is plumb dead, and all the other *zombies* are goin’ to their graves like Christians. They always do that, when they get salt. But first they messes up the man what made them *zombies*.”

“But how did he do it?” wondered Connell as he helped Madeline into the car.

“I don’t know anything about it, except that according to the law in Haiti, it’s a capital offense to administer any drug that produces a coma. And I think that’s the real reason Uncle Pierre decided to finish me—he found me reading an old book of Haitian statutes, not long ago, and was afraid of my suspicions.”

“Mr. Walt,” interrupted a voice from the rumble seat, “you’re goin’ to need a maid for the new missus, ain’t you?”

“Absolutely,” assured Connell, “but you’d better take a vacation for a couple of weeks before you come to work....”

SOMETIMES YOU HAVE TO SHOUT ABOUT IT,

by Darrell Schweitzer

When Caroline was born (so she was told later), she came out of the womb screaming, and the doctor allegedly remarked, “Good strong lungs. Maybe she’ll be an opera singer when she grows up.” But by the time she was old enough to run around the neighborhood and blast people’s eardrums to near deafness (or at least to the point of angrily slammed windows and doors) it was clear that she might have the *volume*, but there was no particular beauty in her voice.

“Christ, that kid is *loud*,” people said, and what very few friends she had in the early grades asked her, “Why do you make so much noise?”

That wasn’t to be the last time anyone asked her that, though her mother, by and large, gave up on the point, and when her father took her to the zoo or to the park or celebrated her birthday or otherwise paid attention to her (however infrequently) and managed to keep her quiet, he never ruined the affair by asking such questions.

But most of the time her father was “away” and her mother was preoccupied with something she said Caroline was too young to understand.

Father went away for good when Caroline was nine. One night she got up late because she had a sore throat, or a had had a bad dream, or both (details became confused as she was later forced to tell this story over and over) and for all she knew that it was really unlikely that she would get much comfort from either parent, she came downstairs, and knocked gently on the door to her father’s study (which was always locked, even when he was in it).

But she paused when she heard Father and Mother arguing in there, in tones that sounded as much fearful as angry.

Certainly no one heard her, and she stood alone in the darkened hall as the noise got worse and things crashed and there were awful, burning smells, then the impossible sound of a roaring *wind*, as loud as an express train. The whole house shook with it and something thumped *hard*, once, twice, three times against the door until it seemed about to burst off its hinges.

Then there was silence, and blood flowed like a wave under the door, eclipsing the light from within, splashing over Caroline’s slippers until her feet were soaked and the cuffs of her pajamas were glued to her ankles.

That was when Caroline started screaming. She ran out into the chilly November night, screaming, until windows came up and people shouted, “Shut up you crazy brat!”

She was still screaming when the police found her, hours later, minus her slippers and covered with mud, huddled among some trees in the park, almost hoarse now, so that the noise she made was more of a wheezing moan than a scream, and she tasted blood in her mouth.

After that she was wrapped up in warm blankets and treated kindly by lots of people who made stupid noises at her and talked in near baby-talk in a pathetic attempt to “get down to her level,” as someone (even Caroline, years later) might have put it. She was made to tell her story again and again, but still she screamed a lot, and therapists, in a hospital, gave her drugs to make her sleep, and told her when she woke up that everything had been a bad dream.

But no one believed her story. Her father was gone, yes, but there was no trace of blood, and nothing was broken in the house, and her mother, on visits, refused to explain further. She overheard the doctors and her mom and someone who might have been a lawyer talking about “desertion” once, but when everybody realized Caroline was listening, they shut the door to her room and went down the hall to the lounge.

What *really* must have been a dream, Caroline concluded, was the time her mother slipped into her room after visiting hours and sat down beside her bed in the dark. Mother was crying, which was amazing, and she whispered, “Honey, I want you to know that whatever happens, I still love you.”

Then Caroline turned and buried her face in her pillow and screamed as hard as she could, but no one heard her, and Mother was gone.

That was the greatest discovery in her life so far, that if she screamed into her pillow and no one heard her, she could pretend she was getting better and would be allowed to go home, and she could *keep her secret* from her mother, from the therapists, from everyone.

Her secret, which indeed she had kept, even through the relentless interrogations, was the *real* reason she made so much noise in the first place, why she *screamed*—into her pillow now, unheard by everyone else, which was actually much better.

It was because if she screamed loudly enough, it was like punching through a barrier into another world, and sounds came back to her, not echoes, but *answers*. She was conversing with *something* or someone very far away, and she had to shout to make herself heard. Many nights she would scream into her pillow for a while, then lie awake for hours, listening to the darkness make its reply, comforting her and soothing her, telling strange stories and promising the answers to things she didn’t understand.

If no one else listened to her, if no one else believed her, there was always this other, this answerer, who *did*.

Once she even asked the darkness, “What am I going to be when I grow up?” and a voice like a winter wind rattling dead leaves replied, “Anything you want. Anything at all.”

II

That must have been a dream about her mother saying she loved her, because when Caroline came back home, Mom had a new boyfriend, whose name was Jack. He pretended to be her uncle, but wasn't. He didn't like Caroline at all. Mom would not let “Uncle” Jack hurt her, and once she even grabbed his wrist when he raised a coke bottle to smack her, but otherwise Mom did everything Jack told her to do, as if she were his slave. The two of them were away a lot, or when they were home they were locked in the basement (which had been converted into a laboratory of some sort; Caroline was never allowed down there), and sometimes there were the awful smells and noises.

In summer, Caroline took to sleeping on the porch, or in the hammock in the back yard. This was encouraged. She wasn't wanted in the house.

She always brought a pillow to scream into.

She pretty much raised herself. When she was twelve, she decided she wanted to be a dancer when she grew up, and in the times when Mom and Jack were somewhere else, she would spend long hours curled up in front of the TV watching videotapes of Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers movies, sometimes with the sound off, just watching the two graceful black and white figures whirling across the screen, while the darkness whispered to her in the voice she had known all her life.

Meanwhile, Jack started to bring strangers into the house, a lot of them, late at night. Sometimes they didn't seem to arrive. They were merely *there*. They spoke with foreign accents or even in foreign languages, or chanted, or sang behind closed doors, and the smells were worse then. Caroline could tell that her mother didn't like this. Mom looked hollow-eyed and even afraid, exhausted all the time, but she still wouldn't say anything to Caroline, who knew that when this sort of stuff was happening, it was time to make herself scarce.

She spent hours in the local library, doing her homework, reading books about far places, or drawing leaping, flying, costumed figures in her notebooks. She had given up on the idea of being a dancer by the time she was thirteen, because

she knew she'd never get lessons and it was probably already too late to begin anyway. She'd fallen in love with comic books and sometimes pretended she was a superhero with a secret identity. Not heroine. It never occurred to her that comic-book characters really had gender, or anything under those tights.

More seriously, she thought she'd like to draw *X-Men* when she grew up, even if, right now, her figures tended to be lumpy and misshapen. She knew she'd have to study hard.

But it was hard enough just to get by in school. She was out of the house so much that it was a struggle to keep up appearances. Not that she cared much about appearances the way the popular girls did, not that she bothered with makeup or painting her nails, but she did like to be clean like anybody else, and have fresh underwear. Yet if she spent all night at the library, or at the train station reading under the lights while pretending to be waiting for a late train, and then came home to find the house full of strange people and noises and odd flickering lights and had to sleep out in the yard, it *showed*. She hated going to school with the knees of her pants dirty or leaf bits in her hair. By the time she was in junior high, she figured out how to slip into the girl's locker room at six o'clock in the morning and use the shower—until she got caught at it one day.

"My mom hasn't been paying the water bills," she said, but she didn't think she was believed.

"Caroline," the school counselor said, in a voice so drippingly sympathetic that it was all Caroline could do to not laugh in her face, "is everything all right at home?"

"Yeah," she said. "Everything's fine."

That was the funny part, as she laughed and cried and screamed into her pillow—or sometimes, when she was alone in the park, into the sky and she didn't give a damn who heard her—because things were *not* fine.

It was, again, almost November. She was sleeping out in the yard more often than not because she was afraid to go into the house, and she was likely to get frostbite in that damn hammock, even if she did wear a heavy coat and sleep under the same old, muddy blanket as always.

She lay there in the dark. Her face was cold. Her teeth chattered. She was angry. By now she was fourteen and had torn up her notebooks in a fit of rage, and wasn't going to be an artist anymore when she grew up. No, she was going to become a *scientist* and learn a way to blow up the world and *do it*. No one cared about her. No one believed anything she said, and so, she decided, it didn't matter *what* she said—because she was always a mess, because she was crazy

and everyone knew it and she lived in a house with a yard that was overgrown with weeds and looked condemned or haunted or both. So it didn't matter that time when one of the goth kids at school sidled up to her in the hallway and said, "Caroline, are you a witch? Wanna join our coven?"

"Yes," she said, "I *am* a witch. I've sold my soul to the Devil!"

She said it with such conviction that the goth-kid seemed to just *melt*. He ran away, and Caroline laughed so hard and so long and so loudly that it made a scene, and everybody was staring, and she didn't give a damn if they did.

But most of them didn't call her a witch. Somebody saw her scrounging for pizza out of a dumpster and the next day it was all over school and kids greeted her with, "Eew, gross..." and said among themselves, but making sure she could hear them, "Caroline's going to be a bag-lady when she grows up. Maybe she's one already."

"Yeah, everything's fine," she told the counselor again and again.

So she lay in the hammock in the late October dark, on a night when she was certain that Jack and dear old Mom, who supposedly loved her no matter what, had *murdered* someone. She had seen them dragging a girl not much older than herself, somebody she didn't know, who didn't seem to be wearing much clothing, down into the basement. She had even been able to sneak a glimpse of what was going on down there, just this once. The struggling girl must have made Mom and Uncle Jack careless.

The curtains were open, so Caroline, crouching on the back porch, could peer in through the back door and see down the basement steps. A crowd of people waited at the base of the stairs, their faces horribly pale, all of them dressed in black, their outstretched hands like claws—and then the basement door slammed shut and she *knew*, as she so often did, that it was time to make herself invisible.

That night, after she'd screamed into her crumpled blanket for a long time and finally punched a hole through the darkness into that *other* place where the answers came from, the darkness began to speak to her, its voice more distinct than she had ever heard it before. The darkness *touched* her. Its touch was hard and warm, but somehow comforting, as if strong, invisible hands caressed her. *That night* she looked up from out of her hammock and saw that the whole house was ablaze with light. She watched as *all* of the windows of the house slid open simultaneously, silently. In complete silence her mother and Uncle Jack, now dressed in black robes, leaned out of the upstairs bedroom and floated into the air, ascending like smoke, while from all the other windows, even the barred ones in the basement window-wells, other people rose up, dozens of them, like

an cloud of enormous bats, their black robes fluttering like wings as they spiraled up, up, blotting out the moon.

Meanwhile the darkness whispered in her ear, and something with hard, warm hands touched her and comforted her.

That night was Halloween, not that any trick-or-treaters ever came to Caroline's house, or anyone came at this hour, as it was well past midnight, but she knew that on this night (and also in the spring, at the end of April) Mom and Jack and the rest had their big "do's" and this must have been one of them, for which occasion they had murdered that girl, whoever she was.

The thing in the darkness took her by the hand, and helped her out of the hammock, then led her into a dance as the bat-things scattered from the face of the Moon. Pale light rippled over the back yard and she began to see what she was dancing with, a male figure, naked, utterly black, like a computer graphic, she thought, something that could morph into any shape; but now it was this gleaming, handsome man, and she danced with him as if she were Ginger Rogers and he was Fred Astaire; and they whirled around and around with the music turned off, listening to the darkness, which spoke to her from very far away and told her that she was safe and everything would be fine and she could be anything, anything at all that she wanted to be when she grew up.

"Yeah, I'm a witch all right, just like my mom," she said aloud, as if concluding that conversation with the goth-boy at school. "I'm pretty sure."

But all that might have been a dream. She knew she would have to wait until dawn, when Mom and Jack and the rest would return from their distant sabbat. Then the friend she had called out of the darkness would confront them, and command them, and begin to feed.

Then she would be sure.

She shouted. She didn't care who heard.

THE STORY OF MING-Y, by Lafcadio Hearn

Sang the Poet Tching-Kou: "*Surely the Peach-Flowers blossom over the tomb of Sië-Thao.*"

Do you ask me who she was—the beautiful Sië-Thao? For a thousand years and more the trees have been whispering above her bed of stone. And the syllables of her name come to the listener with the lisp of the leaves; with the quivering of many-fingered boughs; with the fluttering of lights and shadows; with the breath, sweet as a woman's presence, of numberless savage flowers—*Sië-Thao*. But, saving the whispering of her name, what the trees say cannot be understood; and they alone remember the years of Sië-Thao. Something about her you might, nevertheless, learn from any of those Kiang-kou-jin—those famous Chinese story-tellers, who nightly narrate to listening crowds, in consideration of a few tsien, the legends of the past. Something concerning her you may also find in the book entitled "*Kin-Kou-Ki-Koan*," which signifies in our tongue: "*The Marvellous Happenings of Ancient and of Recent Times.*" And perhaps of all things therein written, the most marvellous is this memory of Sië-Thao:—

Five hundred years ago, in the reign of the Emperor Houngh-Wou, whose dynasty was *Ming*, there lived in the City of Genii, the city of Kwang-tchau-fu, a man celebrated for his learning and for his piety, named Tien-Pelou. This Tien-Pelou had one son, a beautiful boy, who for scholarship and for bodily grace and for polite accomplishments had no superior among the youths of his age. And his name was Ming-Y.

Now when the lad was in his eighteenth summer, it came to pass that Pelou, his father, was appointed Inspector of Public Instruction at the city of Tching-tou; and Ming-Y accompanied his parents thither. Near the city of Tching-tou lived a rich man of rank, a high commissioner of the government, whose name was Tchang, and who wanted to find a worthy teacher for his children. On hearing of the arrival of the new Inspector of Public Instruction, the noble Tchang visited him to obtain advice in this matter; and happening to meet and converse with Pelou's accomplished son, immediately engaged Ming-Y as a private tutor for his family.

Now as the house of this Lord Tchang was situated several miles from town, it was deemed best that Ming-Y should abide in the house of his employer. Accordingly the youth made ready all things necessary for his new sojourn; and his parents, bidding him farewell, counselled him wisely, and cited to him the

words of Lao-tseu and of the ancient sages:

“By a beautiful face the world is filled with love; but Heaven may never be deceived thereby. Shouldst thou behold a woman coming from the East, look thou to the West; shouldst thou perceive a maiden approaching from the West, turn thine eyes to the East.”

If Ming-Y did not heed this counsel in after days, it was only because of his youth and the thoughtlessness of a naturally joyous heart.

And he departed to abide in the house of Lord Tchang, while the autumn passed, and the winter also.

When the time of the second moon of spring was drawing near, and that happy day which the Chinese call Hoa-tchao, or, “The Birthday of a Hundred Flowers,” a longing came upon Ming-Y to see his parents; and he opened his heart to the good Tchang, who not only gave him the permission he desired, but also pressed into his hand a silver gift of two ounces, thinking that the lad might wish to bring some little memento to his father and mother. For it is the Chinese custom, on the feast of Hoa-tchao, to make presents to friends and relations.

That day all the air was drowsy with blossom perfume, and vibrant with the droning of bees. It seemed to Ming-Y that the path he followed had not been trodden by any other for many long years; the grass was tall upon it; vast trees on either side interlocked their mighty and moss-grown arms above him, beshadowing the way; but the leafy obscurities quivered with bird-song, and the deep vistas of the wood were glorified by vapors of gold, and odorous with flower-breathings as a temple with incense. The dreamy joy of the day entered into the heart of Ming-Y; and he sat him down among the young blossoms, under the branches swaying against the violet sky, to drink in the perfume and the light, and to enjoy the great sweet silence. Even while thus reposing, a sound caused him to turn his eyes toward a shady place where wild peach-trees were in bloom; and he beheld a young woman, beautiful as the pinkening blossoms themselves, trying to hide among them. Though he looked for a moment only, Ming-Y could not avoid discerning the loveliness of her face, the golden purity of her complexion, and the brightness of her long eyes, that sparkled under a pair of brows as daintily curved as the wings of the silkworm butterfly outspread. Ming-Y at once turned his gaze away, and, rising quickly, proceeded on his journey. But so much embarrassed did he feel at the idea of those charming eyes peeping at him through the leaves, that he suffered the money he had been carrying in his sleeve to fall, without being aware of it. A few moments later he heard the patter of light feet running behind him, and a woman’s voice calling

him by name. Turning his face in great surprise, he saw a comely servant-maid, who said to him, "Sir, my mistress bade me pick up and return you this silver which you dropped upon the road." Ming-Y thanked the girl gracefully, and requested her to convey his compliments to her mistress. Then he proceeded on his way through the perfumed silence, athwart the shadows that dreamed along the forgotten path, dreaming himself also, and feeling his heart beating with strange quickness at the thought of the beautiful being that he had seen.

It was just such another day when Ming-Y, returning by the same path, paused once more at the spot where the gracious figure had momentarily appeared before him. But this time he was surprised to perceive, through a long vista of immense trees, a dwelling that had previously escaped his notice—a country residence, not large, yet elegant to an unusual degree. The bright blue tiles of its curved and serrated double roof, rising above the foliage, seemed to blend their color with the luminous azure of the day; the green-and-gold designs of its carven porticos were exquisite artistic mockeries of leaves and flowers bathed in sunshine. And at the summit of terrace-steps before it, guarded by great porcelain tortoises, Ming-Y saw standing the mistress of the mansion—the idol of his passionate fancy—accompanied by the same waiting-maid who had borne to her his message of gratitude. While Ming-Y looked, he perceived that their eyes were upon him; they smiled and conversed together as if speaking about him; and, shy though he was, the youth found courage to salute the fair one from a distance. To his astonishment, the young servant beckoned him to approach; and opening a rustic gate half veiled by trailing plants bearing crimson flowers, Ming-Y advanced along the verdant alley leading to the terrace, with mingled feelings of surprise and timid joy. As he drew near, the beautiful lady withdrew from sight; but the maid waited at the broad steps to receive him, and said as he ascended:

"Sir, my mistress understands you wish to thank her for the trifling service she recently bade me do you, and requests that you will enter the house, as she knows you already by repute, and desires to have the pleasure of bidding you good-day."

Ming-Y entered bashfully, his feet making no sound upon a matting elastically soft as forest moss, and found himself in a reception-chamber vast, cool, and fragrant with scent of blossoms freshly gathered. A delicious quiet pervaded the mansion; shadows of flying birds passed over the bands of light that fell through the half-blinds of bamboo; great butterflies, with pinions of fiery color, found their way in, to hover a moment about the painted vases, and pass out again into

the mysterious woods. And noiselessly as they, the young mistress of the mansion entered by another door, and kindly greeted the boy, who lifted his hands to his breast and bowed low in salutation. She was taller than he had deemed her, and supplely-slender as a beauteous lily; her black hair was interwoven with the creamy blossoms of the *chu-sha-kih*; her robes of pale silk took shifting tints when she moved, as vapors change hue with the changing of the light.

"If I be not mistaken," she said, when both had seated themselves after having exchanged the customary formalities of politeness, "my honored visitor is none other than Tien-chou, surnamed Ming-Y, educator of the children of my respected relative, the High Commissioner Tchang. As the family of Lord Tchang is my family also, I cannot but consider the teacher of his children as one of my own kin."

"Lady," replied Ming-Y, not a little astonished, "may I dare to inquire the name of your honored family, and to ask the relation which you hold to my noble patron?"

"The name of my poor family," responded the comely lady, "is *Ping*—an ancient family of the city of Tching-tou. I am the daughter of a certain Sië of Moun-hao; Sië is my name, likewise; and I was married to a young man of the Ping family, whose name was Khang. By this marriage I became related to your excellent patron; but my husband died soon after our wedding, and I have chosen this solitary place to reside in during the period of my widowhood."

There was a drowsy music in her voice, as of the melody of brooks, the murmurings of spring; and such a strange grace in the manner of her speech as Ming-Y had never heard before. Yet, on learning that she was a widow, the youth would not have presumed to remain long in her presence without a formal invitation; and after having sipped the cup of rich tea presented to him, he arose to depart. Sië would not suffer him to go so quickly.

"Nay, friend," she said; "stay yet a little while in my house, I pray you; for, should your honored patron ever learn that you had been here, and that I had not treated you as a respected guest, and regaled you even as I would him, I know that he would be greatly angered. Remain at least to supper."

So Ming-Y remained, rejoicing secretly in his heart, for Sië seemed to him the fairest and sweetest being he had ever known, and he felt that he loved her even more than his father and his mother. And while they talked the long shadows of the evening slowly blended into one violet darkness; the great citron-light of the sunset faded out; and those starry beings that are called the Three Councillors,

who preside over life and death and the destinies of men, opened their cold bright eyes in the northern sky. Within the mansion of Sië the painted lanterns were lighted; the table was laid for the evening repast; and Ming-Y took his place at it, feeling little inclination to eat, and thinking only of the charming face before him. Observing that he scarcely tasted the dainties laid upon his plate, Sië pressed her young guest to partake of wine; and they drank several cups together. It was a purple wine, so cool that the cup into which it was poured became covered with vapory dew; yet it seemed to warm the veins with strange fire. To Ming-Y, as he drank, all things became more luminous as by enchantment; the walls of the chamber appeared to recede, and the roof to heighten; the lamps glowed like stars in their chains, and the voice of Sië floated to the boy's ears like some far melody heard through the spaces of a drowsy night. His heart swelled; his tongue loosened; and words flitted from his lips that he had fancied he could never dare to utter. Yet Sië sought not to restrain him; her lips gave no smile; but her long bright eyes seemed to laugh with pleasure at his words of praise, and to return his gaze of passionate admiration with affectionate interest.

"I have heard," she said, "of your rare talent, and of your many elegant accomplishments. I know how to sing a little, although I cannot claim to possess any musical learning; and now that I have the honor of finding myself in the society of a musical professor, I will venture to lay modesty aside, and beg you to sing a few songs with me. I should deem it no small gratification if you would condescend to examine my musical compositions."

"The honor and the gratification, dear lady," replied Ming-Y, "will be mine; and I feel helpless to express the gratitude which the offer of so rare a favor deserves."

The serving-maid, obedient to the summons of a little silver gong, brought in the music and retired. Ming-Y took the manuscripts, and began to examine them with eager delight. The paper upon which they were written had a pale yellow tint, and was light as a fabric of gossamer; but the characters were antiquesque beautiful, as though they had been traced by the brush of Heï-song Ché-Tchoo himself—that divine Genius of Ink, who is no bigger than a fly; and the signatures attached to the compositions were the signatures of Youen-tchin, Kao-pien, and Thou-mou—mighty poets and musicians of the dynasty of Thang! Ming-Y could not repress a scream of delight at the sight of treasures so inestimable and so unique; scarcely could he summon resolution enough to permit them to leave his hands even for a moment. "O Lady!" he cried, "these

are veritably priceless things, surpassing in worth the treasures of all kings. This indeed is the handwriting of those great masters who sang five hundred years before our birth. How marvellously it has been preserved! Is not this the wondrous ink of which it was written: Po-nien-jou-chi, i-tien-jou-ki—‘After centuries I remain firm as stone, and the letters that I make like lacquer’? And how divine the charm of this composition!—the song of Kao-pien, prince of poets, and Governor of Sze-tchouen five hundred years ago!”

“Kao-pien! darling Kao-pien!” murmured Sië, with a singular light in her eyes. “Kao-pien is also my favorite. Dear Ming-Y, let us chant his verses together, to the melody of old—the music of those grand years when men were nobler and wiser than to-day.”

And their voices rose through the perfumed night like the voices of the wonder-birds—of the Fung-hoang—blending together in liquid sweetness. Yet a moment, and Ming-Y, overcome by the witchery of his companion’s voice, could only listen in speechless ecstasy, while the lights of the chamber swam dim before his sight, and tears of pleasure trickled down his cheeks.

So the ninth hour passed; and they continued to converse, and to drink the cool purple wine, and to sing the songs of the years of Thang, until far into the night. More than once Ming-Y thought of departing; but each time Sië would begin, in that silver-sweet voice of hers, so wondrous a story of the great poets of the past, and of the women whom they loved, that he became as one entranced; or she would sing for him a song so strange that all his senses seemed to die except that of hearing. And at last, as she paused to pledge him in a cup of wine, Ming-Y could not restrain himself from putting his arm about her round neck and drawing her dainty head closer to him, and kissing the lips that were so much ruddier and sweeter than the wine. Then their lips separated no more;—the night grew old, and they knew it not.

The birds awakened, the flowers opened their eyes to the rising sun, and Ming-Y found himself at last compelled to bid his lovely enchantress farewell. Sië, accompanying him to the terrace, kissed him fondly and said, “Dear boy, come hither as often as you are able—as often as your heart whispers you to come. I know that you are not of those without faith and truth, who betray secrets; yet, being so young, you might also be sometimes thoughtless; and I pray you never to forget that only the stars have been the witnesses of our love. Speak of it to no living person, dearest; and take with you this little souvenir of our happy night.”

And she presented him with an exquisite and curious little thing—a paper-weight in likeness of a couchant lion, wrought from a jade-stone yellow as that

created by a rainbow in honor of Kong-fu-tze. Tenderly the boy kissed the gift and the beautiful hand that gave it. "May the Spirits punish me," he vowed, "if ever I knowingly give you cause to reproach me, sweetheart!" And they separated with mutual vows.

That morning, on returning to the house of Lord Tchang, Ming-Y told the first falsehood which had ever passed his lips. He averred that his mother had requested him thenceforward to pass his nights at home, now that the weather had become so pleasant; for, though the way was somewhat long, he was strong and active, and needed both air and healthy exercise. Tchang believed all Ming-Y said, and offered no objection. Accordingly the lad found himself enabled to pass all his evenings at the house of the beautiful Sië. Each night they devoted to the same pleasures which had made their first acquaintance so charming: they sang and conversed by turns; they played at chess—the learned game invented by Wu-Wang, which is an imitation of war; they composed pieces of eighty rhymes upon the flowers, the trees, the clouds, the streams, the birds, the bees. But in all accomplishments Sië far excelled her young sweetheart. Whenever they played at chess, it was always Ming-Y's general, Ming-Y's tsiang, who was surrounded and vanquished; when they composed verses, Sië's poems were ever superior to his in harmony of word-coloring, in elegance of form, in classic loftiness of thought. And the themes they selected were always the most difficult—those of the poets of the Thang dynasty; the songs they sang were also the songs of five hundred years before—the songs of Youen-tchin, of Thou-mou, of Kao-pien above all, high poet and ruler of the province of Sze-tchouen.

So the summer waxed and waned upon their love, and the luminous autumn came, with its vapors of phantom gold, its shadows of magical purple.

Then it unexpectedly happened that the father of Ming-Y, meeting his son's employer at Tching-tou, was asked by him: "Why must your boy continue to travel every evening to the city, now that the winter is approaching? The way is long, and when he returns in the morning he looks fordone with weariness. Why not permit him to slumber in my house during the season of snow?" And the father of Ming-Y, greatly astonished, responded: "Sir, my son has not visited the city, nor has he been to our house all this summer. I fear that he must have acquired wicked habits, and that he passes his nights in evil company—perhaps in gaming, or in drinking with the women of the flower-boats." But the High Commissioner returned: "Nay! that is not to be thought of. I have never found any evil in the boy, and there are no taverns nor flower-boats nor any places of dissipation in our neighborhood. No doubt Ming-Y has found some amiable

youth of his own age with whom to spend his evenings, and only told me an untruth for fear that I would not otherwise permit him to leave my residence. I beg that you will say nothing to him until I shall have sought to discover this mystery; and this very evening I shall send my servant to follow after him, and to watch whither he goes.”

Pelou readily assented to this proposal, and promising to visit Tchang the following morning, returned to his home. In the evening, when Ming-Y left the house of Tchang, a servant followed him unobserved at a distance. But on reaching the most obscure portion of the road, the boy disappeared from sight as suddenly as though the earth had swallowed him. After having long sought after him in vain, the domestic returned in great bewilderment to the house, and related what had taken place. Tchang immediately sent a messenger to Pelou.

In the mean time Ming-Y, entering the chamber of his beloved, was surprised and deeply pained to find her in tears. “Sweetheart,” she sobbed, wreathing her arms around his neck, “we are about to be separated forever, because of reasons which I cannot tell you. From the very first I knew this must come to pass; and nevertheless it seemed to me for the moment so cruelly sudden a loss, so unexpected a misfortune, that I could not prevent myself from weeping! After this night we shall never see each other again, beloved, and I know that you will not be able to forget me while you live; but I know also that you will become a great scholar, and that honors and riches will be showered upon you, and that some beautiful and loving woman will console you for my loss. And now let us speak no more of grief; but let us pass this last evening joyously, so that your recollection of me may not be a painful one, and that you may remember my laughter rather than my tears.”

She brushed the bright drops away, and brought wine and music and the melodious kin of seven silken strings, and would not suffer Ming-Y to speak for one moment of the coming separation. And she sang him an ancient song about the calmness of summer lakes reflecting the blue of heaven only, and the calmness of the heart also, before the clouds of care and of grief and of weariness darken its little world. Soon they forgot their sorrow in the joy of song and wine; and those last hours seemed to Ming-Y more celestial than even the hours of their first bliss.

But when the yellow beauty of morning came their sadness returned, and they wept. Once more Sië accompanied her lover to the terrace-steps; and as she kissed him farewell, she pressed into his hand a parting gift—a little brush-case of agate, wonderfully chiselled, and worthy the table of a great poet. And they

separated forever, shedding many tears.

Still Ming-Y could not believe it was an eternal parting. "No!" he thought, "I shall visit her tomorrow; for I cannot now live without her, and I feel assured that she cannot refuse to receive me." Such were the thoughts that filled his mind as he reached the house of Tchang, to find his father and his patron standing on the porch awaiting him. Ere he could speak a word, Pelou demanded: "Son, in what place have you been passing your nights?"

Seeing that his falsehood had been discovered, Ming-Y dared not make any reply, and remained abashed and silent, with bowed head, in the presence of his father. Then Pelou, striking the boy violently with his staff, commanded him to divulge the secret; and at last, partly through fear of his parent, and partly through fear of the law which ordains that "*the son refusing to obey his father shall be punished with one hundred blows of the bamboo*," Ming-Y faltered out the history of his love.

Tchang changed color at the boy's tale. "Child," exclaimed the High Commissioner, "I have no relative of the name of Ping; I have never heard of the woman you describe; I have never heard even of the house which you speak of. But I know also that you cannot dare to lie to Pelou, your honored father; there is some strange delusion in all this affair."

Then Ming-Y produced the gifts that Sië had given him—the lion of yellow jade, the brush-case of carven agate, also some original compositions made by the beautiful lady herself. The astonishment of Tchang was now shared by Pelou. Both observed that the brush-case of agate and the lion of jade bore the appearance of objects that had lain buried in the earth for centuries, and were of a workmanship beyond the power of living man to imitate; while the compositions proved to be veritable master-pieces of poetry, written in the style of the poets of the dynasty of Thang.

"Friend Pelou," cried the High Commissioner, "let us immediately accompany the boy to the place where he obtained these miraculous things, and apply the testimony of our senses to this mystery. The boy is no doubt telling the truth; yet his story passes my understanding." And all three proceeded toward the place of the habitation of Sië.

But when they had arrived at the shadiest part of the road, where the perfumes were most sweet and the mosses were greenest, and the fruits of the wild peach flushed most pinkly, Ming-Y, gazing through the groves, uttered a cry of dismay. Where the azure-tiled roof had risen against the sky, there was now only

the blue emptiness of air; where the green-and-gold facade had been, there was visible only the flickering of leaves under the aureate autumn light; and where the broad terrace had extended, could be discerned only a ruin—a tomb so ancient, so deeply gnawed by moss, that the name graven upon it was no longer decipherable. The home of Sië had disappeared!

All suddenly the High Commissioner smote his forehead with his hand, and turning to Pelou, recited the well-known verse of the ancient poet Tching-Kou:

*“Surely the peach-flowers blossom
over the tomb of SIË-THAO.”*

“Friend Pelou,” continued Tchang, “the beauty who bewitched your son was no other than she whose tomb stands there in ruin before us! Did she not say she was wedded to Ping-Khang? There is no family of that name, but Ping-Khang is indeed the name of a broad alley in the city near. There was a dark riddle in all that she said. She called herself Sië of Moun-Hiao: there is no person of that name; there is no street of that name; but the Chinese characters *Moun* and *hiao*, placed together, form the character ‘Kiao.’ Listen! The alley Ping-Khang, situated in the street Kiao, was the place where dwelt the great courtesans of the dynasty of Thang! Did she not sing the songs of Kao-pien? And upon the brush-case and the paper-weight she gave your son, are there not characters which read, ‘*Pure object of art belonging to Kao, of the city of Pho-hai*’? That city no longer exists; but the memory of Kao-pien remains, for he was governor of the province of Sze-tchouen, and a mighty poet. And when he dwelt in the land of Chou, was not his favorite the beautiful wanton Sië—Sië-Thao, unmatched for grace among all the women of her day? It was he who made her a gift of those manuscripts of song; it was he who gave her those objects of rare art. Sië-Thao died not as other women die. Her limbs may have crumbled to dust; yet something of her still lives in this deep wood—her Shadow still haunts this shadowy place.”

Tchang ceased to speak. A vague fear fell upon the three. The thin mists of the morning made dim the distances of green, and deepened the ghostly beauty of the woods. A faint breeze passed by, leaving a trail of blossom-scent—a last odor of dying flowers—thin as that which clings to the silk of a forgotten robe; and, as it passed, the trees seemed to whisper across the silence, “*Sië-Thao*.”

Fearing greatly for his son, Pelou sent the lad away at once to the city of Kwang-tchau-fu. And there, in after years, Ming-Y obtained high dignities and honors by reason of his talents and his learning; and he married the daughter of

an illustrious house, by whom he became the father of sons and daughters famous for their virtues and their accomplishments. Never could he forget Sië-Thao; and yet it is said that he never spoke of her—not even when his children begged him to tell them the story of two beautiful objects that always lay upon his writing-table: a lion of yellow jade, and a brush-case of carven agate.

BY MOONLIGHT, by John Gregory Betancourt

Even by moonlight, the farm looked like a disaster area. The barn had started to lean, so much paint had peeled off the main building that its walls looked like sun-bleached driftwood, and at least half of the outbuildings had collapsed. I drove forward slowly, my rental car nosing among the scattered clumps of rusted-out machinery like a reluctant explorer, until I reached the house's front steps.

They say you always come full circle, but it was hard to believe I'd spent the first eighteen years of my life here. How long ago had it been now? I thought hard and couldn't remember today's date, not the year anyway. Nineteen ninety something. August 14, I thought. Time didn't mean much anymore.

It had been at least fifty years since I'd seen this place.

Returning for my father's funeral had been hard enough; I'd hoped driving out to the farm one last time would be easier. *I could have prevented it. I could have made him one like me. He didn't need to die.*

But he would have wanted it this way, him with his unsmiling Christian ways.

I had an uneasy feeling, like I'd returned to the scene of some crime I'd committed, but of course that couldn't be true. I'd always been careful to cover my tracks; nobody could ever follow me here. Was it guilt? I could have laughed. My kind didn't feel guilt. Nevertheless I had the vague feeling I'd betrayed someone, left some promise unfulfilled.

Shutting off the car's engine, I climbed out and paused, turning slowly, listening to the wind in the fields and the hum of insects. My darker senses took in the whole of the land around me, cataloging the living and the dead. *A few gophers, a stray dog prowling the gully behind the house, birds drowsing safely in their nests, a snake languorously swallowing a mouse...* And, farther away, at the next farm over—Old Man Jessup's place, but he'd be long gone by now—young lovers sat on the front porch, holding hands, kissing. I could feel the rising intensity of their passion.

Abruptly I called in my vision. Business first, I thought. I walked up the creaking old steps to the front door and pulled out the key. The lock clicked, the door opened easily, and a musty, stale smell hit me in the face. I wrinkled my nose and stepped in.

The carpets were dirty and worn through in places, the wallpaper was peeling, and the furniture looked broken and tattered. Even so, a lump rose in my throat. Less than I'd thought had changed in the years since I'd left.

“Home,” I whispered.

I’d been born in this house, lived my first eighteen years here, and only escaped when I’d been drafted into the war...

The night in 1944 when the German artillery shot my bomber down, we’d already dumped our cargo over Dresden. I had watched the city burning below and felt a vindictive sort of pride: *take that, you bastards*, I thought. *For all the suffering, for all the innocents you’ve killed or enslaved, for all the terror and fear and death you caused, take that!*

Suddenly the plane lurched, but it wasn’t like hitting an air pocket. We fell to the side—my buddy Lou on top of me, both of us all knees and elbows as we tried to right ourselves—and when we couldn’t, I realized it was because the plane had tilted. We lurched again, and suddenly wind screamed in, along with an oily black smoke that made me gasp for breath.

“Come on!” Lou shouted in my ear, and somehow we made it to the hatch. He blew it open and pushed me out.

I don’t remember much after that. I think I must’ve hit my head. Somehow, though, my parachute opened and I made it to the ground safely, instinctively tucking and rolling like I’d drilled to do so many times.

When I came up to my feet, several bright lights suddenly shone in my eyes. I raised a hand to shield my face, blinded, afraid. Squinting, I made out half a dozen men in German uniforms with rifles leveled at my chest. I raised my hands. Their captain drew a large knife and stepped forward. I tensed, but he only cut the parachute away. They he searched me and confiscated my pistol, knife, and survival kit. He tucked my cigarettes into his pocket and handed my wallet back after flipping through it once. I don’t think the pictures of my mother and father interested him.

“*Namen?*” he asked, pulling out a little black book.

“Private Anderson, Tucker,” I said, and recited my serial number. He jotted it down, then put his book away.

“You are prisoner,” he said in heavily accented English. “Come now.”

Turning, he led the way to a dirt road, where a dusty old truck waited. At his gesture, two of his men lowered the clapboard. I climbed in past two alert looking guards.

“No talk,” said the captain who’d found me. Then his boots crunched on the ground and he was gone.

I leaned forward, straining to see my fellow prisoners. Had the Germans caught Lou? As best I could tell in the darkness, about half a dozen sullen men

sat there with me. One of them moaned a little. I could smell blood and urine.

“Hello?” I whispered. “Lou?”

“Shh,” the man next to me said softly in my ear. “The guards will give you a thrashing if they hear.” He had a British accent. “We’re all R.A.F.,” he added. “No other yanks here, old boy.”

“Thanks,” I whispered.

“Smithers,” he said softly, and we shook hands.

“Tuck,” I told him.

He nodded and that was the end of it. I sank back a little.

Lou wasn’t here. He might have gotten away.

It was a small comfort.

It was dawn when the truck started. By the thin gray morning light, I could see my five fellow prisoners clearly for the first time. They looked as bleary-eyed and miserable as I felt. Smithers was a corporal, I saw. Nobody said anything; we just rode in a sullen, helpless silence under the watchful eyes of our two guards.

After an hour or so, we came to a stop. Through the back of the truck I could see what looked like a small rail yard. Dense forest came down near the tracks about a hundred yards away. The guards lowered the clapboard and motioned us out. Stretching stiff muscles, we complied.

Several boxcars were parked on the tracks waiting for an engine, I saw. The guards lined us up while they opened one, then loaded us into it like cattle. Dirty straw lined the floor, I saw when I stepped in. It smelled faintly of mold.

“What about a doctor?” Smithers called to the captain outside. “Can you get us a doctor? One of our chaps has a broken arm! You there—”

The guards rolled the boxcar’s door shut with a firm thump and I heard a bar being lowered into place. Luckily it wasn’t dark inside. Blades of light slanted between the thick wooden slats of the walls.

“Hey!” Smithers yelled.

I heard boots walking away. We were alone.

“Bastards,” Smithers swore. He kicked the door for a little while, but it did no good.

Everyone else was settling down on the straw. I hadn’t realized how drained I was; when I lay down, I fell asleep almost at once, but not easily and not deeply.

Twice that day the guards opened the door, once to serve a kind of lunch—a thin greasy stew and stale bread—and once to replace the latrine bucket in the

corner. Each time Smithers tried to talk to the Germans about Carter, the man with the broken arm, but they either didn't understand or weren't interested in anything but their immediate task.

There didn't seem to be much else we could do but make the poor devil comfortable. Carter seemed in a kind of fever dream, talking or moaning every now and again, sometimes thrashing about, and I thought that sleep was probably the best thing for him. He wouldn't be aware of his pain. We took turns sitting beside him, talking soothingly if he moaned, trying to make him as comfortable as we could. He seemed to be growing steadily worse despite everything we did.

"He'll be dead by morning," I heard one of the men mutter.

Smithers shot him an angry look. "None of that," he said. "He's a strong lad, our Carter. He'll pull through."

That evening the Germans served the same sort of greasy stew again, and after we finished, they brought in another three British prisoners. I wondered if that was a good or a bad sign for my friend Lou.

Darkness fell, and I began to feel sleepy even though I'd spent most of the day half drowsing out on the straw. I stretched out and began to drift off.

Suddenly Carter thrashed like a crazed mule. His boot struck me in the arm, and cursing, I sat up and pinned his legs to protect myself.

"Easy there," I murmured. "Easy." At last he lay still, panting. I arranged the straw under his head, then looked at the others.

None of them had moved a muscle to help. I shook my head. Carter was one of theirs. They should be the ones looking after him, I thought, not me. A few seconds later Carter lay quietly again. Everyone else was snoring softly. Rising, I moved to the other end of the boxcar. He wouldn't wake me up again tonight, I thought. If he cried out, one of his mates could see to him.

Then I heard the bar on the door lift, and rollers squealed as the door moved aside. A dark shape stood silhouetted in the opening. It moved forward, snuffling the air like a pig. At once it drifted to the injured man, hunched over him, and a soft lapping sound began.

I had to be dreaming, I thought. I rubbed my eyes, but the door still gaped and the creature still crouched over Carter. Everyone else still seemed to be asleep. I touched my sore arm. I would have been asleep, too, I thought, if Carter hadn't kicked me.

Moving as softly as I could, taking great care not to rustle the straw, I crept up on the stranger. At the time I thought he must have heard me, but now I know he

sensed my aliveness behind him. As I was about to jump forward, he suddenly rose and whirled, and I gazed into a face from a madman's nightmare.

He had eyes that glowed like a cat's, only red, and fangs like a snake's. Blood covered his face and hands. As I watched, a long thin white tongue licked it from his lips and chin.

Slowly he smiled. It was the most terrifying expression I had ever seen, and it sent a cold jolt through me, worse than anything I could ever have imagined. I felt my bladder let go. An icy sweat began to pour from my skin. I trembled. I shook all over. No matter how I tried, I could not look away from those horrible red eyes.

"Zo," it whispered, for I realized that it was not a man. "*Was makst du hier, Mann?*" It drifted forward like a cloud of smoke, enveloping me, and I blinked and found myself on my back. A numbness came over me. I heard the lapping sound again, but closer, at my throat. My mind drifted like a leaf in a stream.

Air raid sirens suddenly blew outside. I blinked and sat up, suddenly alone. My neck ached. My hands felt icy. My legs shook like gelatin.

With effort, I turned to look for the creature, but it seemed to have vanished. The boxcar's door still stood open. I crawled to it, then half fell out onto the train tracks. I huddled there for a moment, afraid I'd been seen or heard. Across from the boxcar I saw running men, and one by one windows in the station went dark. The air raid siren blared. Far overhead, I heard the throaty rumble of bombers.

Somehow, I climbed to my feet and stumbled off toward the forest. My only thought was of escape from the creature. If a German guard had found me, I think I would have embraced him with joy.

I must have been dazed by the attack, driven half crazy from fear and pain and bloodloss. As I think back over the months that followed, only fractured images come to mind: stalking small animals in the dark, ripping open their throats, drinking their blood to warm my cold insides. Hiding in a fox burrow against the painful brightness of day. Sobbing uncontrollably at the sight of towns, of distant men and women, of the kind of warm happy life I felt I had lost forever.

Whatever that creature was, whatever it had done to me, I realized that I, too, was no longer a man. I hunted and lived as an animal. And, like an animal, I began to rely on my senses—senses which now seemed inexplicably altered. As I moved silently through the forest, I could somehow feel every warm living body around me...could paralyze small animals with the force of my gaze...could hunt as the fiercest predators must have done in the dawn of history.

The first true memory I have is of taking a human life: a boy who wandered

too far into the woods one night fell prey to my fangs. After I drank his life away, I recoiled in horror at what I had done, and it was as though I awakened for the first time since the Germans had captured me. *I had murdered a boy.* It was truly the worst moment of my life.

I buried him deep in my fox burrow and fled deep into the woods. That afternoon I sensed hundreds of men searching for they boy, felt their pain of loss, their hurt and despair. I longed to go to them, to tell them what I had done, to take my punishment like a man, but I could not summon the strength. They never found either of us.

After that I vowed not to give in to my base instincts. I would not be a wild creature unfit for human company. And so, very slowly, very painfully, with the death of that boy, I did gain a measure of control over myself.

It was as though I had emerged from a dream, or perhaps from an infancy of sorts. I came aware of myself and saw what I had become: a dirty, naked, monstrous beast sucking the life from the living. I could not continue this way.

Over the next few months I took greater care. After satisfying my hungers with the blood of beasts, I crept out of the forest and moved among the dwellings of men. Now that I tried, I discovered I could render whole households unconscious with the sheer force of my will. As they slept, I crept among them and took whatever I needed: soap, a razor, clean clothes, and their brightly colored paper money. The war must be over, I realized as I studied them in their beds. They had the soft, well-fed look of peace all about them.

When I caught sight of my reflection in a mirror, I knew the truth. I had not wanted to admit it, but inside I had already guessed what I had become: a vampire. Not one like Bela Lugosi's Dracula in the movies, cringing at crosses and holy water, but a man transformed into a blood-driven animal, with all of a man's weaknesses and an animal's strengths. I could not turn myself into an animal; I *was* an animal—a nocturnal, blood-drinking animal with powers over the minds and bodies of others—so much for legends, I thought. Crosses, garlic, and running water wouldn't stop me. I suspected bullets might.

Of course there were moments of self-pity, times when I wondered why I had been spared death to continue this monstrous half life. Why me? I silently cried. Why couldn't I have died in that boxcar so long ago? I had no answer.

I had avoided the sun, but the next day I went out in it. As I suspected, I found it uncomfortable and far too bright, but my flesh did not burn. With dark glasses and a hat, I could move in the daytime if I chose.

I stole glasses and a hat that evening.

Cleaned up, shaved, with hair combed and cut as best I could manage, I followed the road to the Dresden. I ate frequently, trying to curb my instincts to hunt and kill, and found raw or very rare meat could sustain me, though it never truly satisfied my vast appetite. I had by this time learned some German, and posing as an American tourist, I managed to make my way to West Berlin.

My journey back to America was long and convoluted. By the time I reached New York City by steamship, nearly five years had passed.

I still hungered, but now I chose my victims carefully. They were criminals and cutthroats, murderers and racketeers, the scum of society. I stole everything I wanted from them. When the thirst became too great, I drank their blood—always careful to make it seem as though they had been murdered by rivals gangsters. Once, staging the scene of a grisly murder, I paused to wonder how many other such notorious crimes had actually been arranged by my kind. The St. Valentine's Day Massacre? The blood was a giveaway. The Donner Party? Possibly. The Mary Celeste? Rather likely. Any of a hundred more could have been—and probably were—the result of vampire attacks.

And vampire I proclaimed myself. There could be no other answer for my condition. Much as legend, books, and films portrayed us as cold, unfeeling creatures of the grave, the reverse was true. I felt; I needed and yearned and dreamed and hoped and prayed. And I craved companionship. The followers and acolytes I occasionally gathered to myself never proved satisfying. They wanted to *be* like me, to become vampires themselves, but I had no idea how I had become one myself. Biting them didn't seem to do the trick; they remained the same frail, weak creatures they'd always been, and eventually I tired of them and abandoned their kind forever.

In 1960, when I called my parents for the first time since my return from the war, my mother answered the telephone. I was so nervous my hands shook.

"Hello?" she said when nobody answered. "Hello?"

"Mother," I said, "this is Tuck."

There was silence. Then, "If this is your idea of a joke, you're sick." And she hung up.

I called back. The telephone rang, but nobody picked up.

I sat up alone all that night. And the following night I fed on anyone and anything that moved for the first time since Germany. The police blamed a satanic cult. I could have laughed.

I never tried to contact my parents again while they were alive, though I dutifully took out a subscription to the weekly *Plainfield Gazette* and began

scanning the obituary page. My mother died in 1979, and I came out to see her funeral, standing at the back of her casket lowered into the ground. Mother had always been active in the church. Nearly a hundred people turned out to pay their last respects. It rained; nobody paid any attention to a lone stranger in black who didn't speak and didn't attend the reception afterwards.

And now my father...

I had no claim on the family house and lands. Officially I was "lost and presumed dead." I looked perhaps thirty or thirty-five today; nobody would believe me if I came forward and claimed to be sixty-year-old Tucker Anderson, heir to the estate. The farm would probably go to one of our Oakhill relatives.

As I wandered through the house, I realized I wouldn't miss it. Earlier that night, I'd put the executor of my parents' estate to sleep and taken his keys. Alone, I'd driven out, looking for something—though what, I couldn't quite say.

Dishes were stacked two feet high in the kitchen sink, and the cheap formica table had disappeared beneath yellowing newspapers, a scattering of old tools, and the dried-out remains of a dozen TV dinners. I could see where rats or mice had been gnawing at the food and papers.

My parents' bedroom was dirty and unkempt; the bedclothes hadn't been washed in months, probably. There was a sickly sweet smell like infection in the air, so I opened the windows to try and get rid of it.

Then I climbed up the narrow stairs to what had once been the attic, to where my room had been. It felt like I was approaching a gallows.

When I pushed the door open, though, I found my room hadn't changed since I'd left. Clearly nobody had been up here since my mother died, and dust lay like a blanket over everything.

I stood before my bureau, studying the blocky wooden figures I'd carved as a boy. They were crude, not good at all, but they'd occupied my evening hours while listening to The Shadow and Jack Benny on the radio. An old Cardinals baseball card was stuck to the mirror. Gary Lewitt, the name said, but I didn't remember him. Perhaps he was some forgotten hero.

I poked through the bureau drawers, wincing a bit at how worn all my clothes had been. I'd been a ragged kid, pure hick trash. I moved to the closet. The clothes there weren't much better. Most should have been thrown out long before I stopped wearing them.

As I was just about to leave, my gaze fell on a small shoebox peeking out from under a towel on the closet floor. I'd kept my childhood treasures there, I recalled with a sad little smile. How pathetic they must seem now.

Nevertheless, I picked up the box, crossed to the bed, and spilled out the contents. Half remembering, I pawed through Indian arrowheads, bits of string, colored stones, a few Mercury dimes and buffalo nickels, chipped marbles, and half a dozen clippings from old magazines. One article from *Farmer's World* caught my eye, and when I unfolded it, I discovered an ad for a Regulator 155 tractor. The paper's edges felt feathery from being handled too much, and the crease where I'd folded and refolded it had almost cut it in half. I'd loved that tractor as a kid. I'd dreamed of buying Father one for his birthday.

Finally I sighed, scooped my treasures back into their box, added the carvings from my bureau, and only paused to look one last time out the single small, high window. As a kid, I'd always had to stand on a chair to see out. Now it was eye level.

You can come full circle, but you can't go home, I thought sadly. My mother had made that clear the one time I'd called. It was best to let the old ghosts go, to move on and make the best of your life. That was what I'd come here to do, after all, wasn't it?

I ended up staying the night. There were clean sheets in the closet, and I changed my old bed and slept in my old room. Everything and nothing had changed.

If there are such a thing as ghosts, perhaps they touched me then. When I awakened, the sun streaming in that small window and touching my face, for a second it was 1944 again and I was a kid. I could almost smell bacon frying downstairs, almost hear Father's old tractor pattering away in the yard, almost hear the soft lowing of our cows in the south pasture.

I rose, dressed slowly, and went downstairs to shave and freshen up. In the bathroom, in a little cup on a shelf, sat my father's false teeth. I smiled. He should have seen my teeth, I thought.

As I stared at his, though, it came to me that there was something odd about them, about the way they were cut. The eye teeth seemed too long...longer certainly than I remembered, but Father had never been one to smile.

I picked up his teeth and, smiling to show off my fangs, compared both of ours in the mirror. They were identical.

But that's not possible, I thought. How—how could he—

And then the full horror of it hit me, and I realized what he had been all along. *Vampire*. Like me. Only he'd never known it.

It wasn't the bite of that German vampire so long ago, I thought, that had infected me with the vampire disease. With a growing sense of horror, I realized

I had always been one, only my feeding frenzy—my bloodlust—had never been awakened. If I'd stayed comfortably home on the family farm, I never would have known. I could have lived out my life drowsing away the days like my parents. I might have married and had children of my own, and they too would never have awakened to their true heritage.

I returned to the kitchen table and sank down in one of the faded old chairs. Opening my shoebox of treasures, I stared down at them. For the first time since Germany, I wept.

I had come home at last. I, vampire, son of a vampire, had come full circle.

THE GATEWAY OF THE MONSTER, by William Hope Hodgson

In response to Carnacki's usual card of invitation to have dinner and listen to a story, I arrived promptly at 427, Cheyne Walk, to find the three others who were always invited to these happy little times, there before me. Five minutes later, Carnacki, Arkright, Jessop, Taylor, and I were all engaged in the "pleasant occupation" of dining.

"You've not been long away, this time," I remarked, as I finished my soup; forgetting momentarily Carnacki's dislike of being asked even to skirt the borders of his story until such time as he was ready. Then he would not stint words.

"That's all," he replied, with brevity; and I changed the subject, remarking that I had been buying a new gun, to which piece of news he gave an intelligent nod, and a smile which I think showed a genuinely good-humored appreciation of my intentional changing of the conversation.

Later, when dinner was finished, Carnacki snuggled himself comfortably down in his big chair, along with his pipe, and began his story, with very little circumlocution:—

"As Dodgson was remarking just now, I've only been away a short time, and for a very good reason too—I've only been away a short distance. The exact locality I am afraid I must not tell you; but it is less than twenty miles from here; though, except for changing a name, that won't spoil the story. And it is a story too! One of the most extraordinary things ever I have run against.

"I received a letter a fortnight ago from a man I must call Anderson, asking for an appointment. I arranged a time, and when he came, I found that he wished me to investigate and see whether I could not clear up a long-standing and well—too well—authenticated case of what he termed 'haunting.' He gave me very full particulars, and, finally, as the case seemed to present something unique, I decided to take it up.

"Two days later, I drove to the house late in the afternoon. I found it a very old place, standing quite alone in its own grounds. Anderson had left a letter with the butler, I found, pleading excuses for his absence, and leaving the whole house at my disposal for my investigations. The butler evidently knew the object of my visit, and I questioned him pretty thoroughly during dinner, which I had in rather lonely state. He is an old and privileged servant, and had the history of the Grey Room exact in detail. From him I learned more particulars regarding two things

that Anderson had mentioned in but a casual manner. The first was that the door of the Grey Room would be heard in the dead of night to open, and slam heavily, and this even though the butler knew it was locked, and the key on the bunch in his pantry. The second was that the bedclothes would always be found torn off the bed, and hurled in a heap into a corner.

“But it was the door slamming that chiefly bothered the old butler. Many and many a time, he told me, had he lain awake and just got shivering with fright, listening; for sometimes the door would be slammed time after time—thud! thud! thud!—so that sleep was impossible.

“From Anderson, I knew already that the room had a history extending back over a hundred and fifty years. Three people had been strangled in it—an ancestor of his and his wife and child. This is authentic, as I had taken very great pains to discover; so that you can imagine it was with a feeling I had a striking case to investigate that I went upstairs after dinner to have a look at the Grey Room.

“Peter, the old butler, was in rather a state about my going, and assured me with much solemnity that in all the twenty years of his service, no one had ever entered that room after nightfall. He begged me, in quite a fatherly way, to wait till the morning, when there would be no danger, and then he could accompany me himself.

“Of course, I smiled a little at him, and told him not to bother. I explained that I should do no more than look ’round a bit, and, perhaps, affix a few seals. He need not fear; I was used to that sort of thing. But he shook his head when I said that.

“‘There isn’t many ghosts like ours, sir,’ he assured me, with mournful pride. And, by Jove! he was right, as you will see.

“I took a couple of candles, and Peter followed with his bunch of keys. He unlocked the door; but would not come inside with me. He was evidently in a fright, and he renewed his request that I would put off my examination until daylight. Of course, I laughed at him again, and told him he could stand sentry at the door, and catch anything that came out.

“‘It never comes outside, sir,’ he said, in his funny, old, solemn manner. Somehow, he managed to make me feel as if I were going to have the ‘creeps’ right away. Anyway, it was one to him, you know.

“I left him there, and examined the room. It is a big apartment, and well furnished in the grand style, with a huge four-poster, which stands with its head to the end wall. There were two candles on the mantelpiece, and two on each of

the three tables that were in the room. I lit the lot, and after that, the room felt a little less inhumanly dreary; though, mind you, it was quite fresh, and well kept in every way.

“After I had taken a good look ’round, I sealed lengths of baby ribbon across the windows, along the walls, over the pictures, and over the fireplace and the wall closets. All the time, as I worked, the butler stood just without the door, and I could not persuade him to enter; though I jested him a little, as I stretched the ribbons, and went here and there about my work. Every now and again, he would say:—‘You’ll excuse me, I’m sure, sir; but I do wish you would come out, sir. I’m fair in a quake for you.’

“I told him he need not wait; but he was loyal enough in his way to what he considered his duty. He said he could not go away and leave me all alone there. He apologized; but made it very clear that I did not realize the danger of the room; and I could see, generally, that he was in a pretty frightened state. All the same, I had to make the room so that I should know if anything material entered it; so I asked him not to bother me, unless he really heard or saw something. He was beginning to get on my nerves, and the ‘feel’ of the room was bad enough, without making it any nastier.

“For a time further, I worked, stretching ribbons across the floor, and sealing them, so that the merest touch would have broken them, were anyone to venture into the room in the dark with the intention of playing the fool. All this had taken me far longer than I had anticipated; and, suddenly, I heard a clock strike eleven. I had taken off my coat soon after commencing work; now, however, as I had practically made an end of all that I intended to do, I walked across to the settee, and picked it up. I was in the act of getting into it, when the old butler’s voice (he had not said a word for the last hour) came sharp and frightened:—‘Come out, sir, quick! There’s something going to happen!’ Jove! but I jumped, and then, in the same moment, one of the candles on the table to the left went out. Now whether it was the wind, or what, I do not know; but, just for a moment, I was enough startled to make a run for the door; though I am glad to say that I pulled up, before I reached it. I simply could not bunk out, with the butler standing there, after having, as it were, read him a sort of lesson on ‘bein’ brave, y’know.’ So I just turned right ’round, picked up the two candles off the mantelpiece, and walked across to the table near the bed. Well, I saw nothing. I blew out the candle that was still alight; then I went to those on the two tables, and blew them out. Then, outside of the door, the old man called again:—‘Oh! sir, do be told! Do be told!’

“‘All right, Peter,’ I said, and by Jove, my voice was not as steady as I should have liked! I made for the door, and had a bit of work not to start running. I took some thundering long strides, as you can imagine. Near the door, I had a sudden feeling that there was a cold wind in the room. It was almost as if the window had been suddenly opened a little. I got to the door, and the old butler gave back a step, in a sort of instinctive way. ‘Collar the candles, Peter!’ I said, pretty sharply, and shoved them into his hands. I turned, and caught the handle, and slammed the door shut, with a crash. Somehow, do you know, as I did so, I thought I felt something pull back on it; but it must have been only fancy. I turned the key in the lock, and then again, double-locking the door. I felt easier then, and set-to and sealed the door. In addition, I put my card over the keyhole, and sealed it there; after which I pocketed the key, and went downstairs—with Peter; who was nervous and silent, leading the way. Poor old beggar! It had not struck me until that moment that he had been enduring a considerable strain during the last two or three hours.

“About midnight, I went to bed. My room lay at the end of the corridor upon which opens the door of the Grey Room. I counted the doors between it and mine, and found that five rooms lay between. And I am sure you can understand that I was not sorry. Then, just as I was beginning to undress, an idea came to me, and I took my candle and sealing wax, and sealed the doors of all five rooms. If any door slammed in the night, I should know just which one.

“I returned to my room, locked the door, and went to bed. I was waked suddenly from a deep sleep by a loud crash somewhere out in the passage. I sat up in bed, and listened, but heard nothing. Then I lit my candle. I was in the very act of lighting it when there came the bang of a door being violently slammed, along the corridor. I jumped out of bed, and got my revolver. I unlocked the door, and went out into the passage, holding my candle high, and keeping the pistol ready. Then a queer thing happened. I could not go a step toward the Grey Room. You all know I am not really a cowardly chap. I’ve gone into too many cases connected with ghostly things, to be accused of that; but I tell you I funk’d it; simply funk’d it, just like any blessed kid. There was something precious unholy in the air that night. I ran back into my bedroom, and shut and locked the door. Then I sat on the bed all night, and listened to the dismal thudding of a door up the corridor. The sound seemed to echo through all the house.

“Daylight came at last, and I washed and dressed. The door had not slammed for about an hour, and I was getting back my nerve again. I felt ashamed of myself; though, in some ways it was silly; for when you’re meddling with that

sort of thing, your nerve is bound to go, sometimes. And you just have to sit quiet and call yourself a coward until daylight. Sometimes it is more than just cowardice, I fancy. I believe at times it is something warning you, and fighting *for* you. But, all the same, I always feel mean and miserable, after a time like that.

“When the day came properly, I opened my door, and, keeping my revolver handy, went quietly along the passage. I had to pass the head of the stairs, along the way, and who should I see coming up, but the old butler, carrying a cup of coffee. He had merely tucked his nightshirt into his trousers, and he had an old pair of carpet slippers on.

“‘Hullo, Peter!’ I said, feeling suddenly cheerful; for I was as glad as any lost child to have a live human being close to me. ‘Where are you off to with the refreshments?’

“The old man gave a start, and slopped some of the coffee. He stared up at me, and I could see that he looked white and done-up. He came on up the stairs, and held out the little tray to me. ‘I’m very thankful indeed, sir, to see you safe and well,’ he said. ‘I feared, one time, you might risk going into the Grey Room, sir. I’ve lain awake all night, with the sound of the Door. And when it came light, I thought I’d make you a cup of coffee. I knew you would want to look at the seals, and somehow it seems safer if there’s two, sir.’

“‘Peter,’ I said, ‘you’re a brick. This is very thoughtful of you.’ And I drank the coffee. ‘Come along,’ I told him, and handed him back the tray. ‘I’m going to have a look at what the Brutes have been up to. I simply hadn’t the pluck to in the night.’

“‘I’m very thankful, sir,’ he replied. ‘Flesh and blood can do nothing, sir, against devils; and that’s what’s in the Grey Room after dark.’

“I examined the seals on all the doors, as I went along, and found them right; but when I got to the Grey Room, the seal was broken; though the card, over the keyhole, was untouched. I ripped it off, and unlocked the door, and went in, rather cautiously, as you can imagine; but the whole room was empty of anything to frighten one, and there was heaps of light. I examined all my seals, and not a single one was disturbed. The old butler had followed me in, and, suddenly, he called out:—‘The bedclothes, sir!’

“I ran up to the bed, and looked over; and, surely, they were lying in the corner to the left of the bed. Jove! you can imagine how queer I felt. Something *had* been in the room. I stared for a while, from the bed, to the clothes on the floor. I had a feeling that I did not want to touch either. Old Peter, though, did not seem

to be affected that way. He went over to the bed coverings, and was going to pick them up, as, doubtless, he had done every day these twenty years back; but I stopped him. I wanted nothing touched, until I had finished my examination. This, I must have spent a full hour over, and then I let Peter straighten up the bed; after which we went out, and I locked the door; for the room was getting on my nerves.

“I had a short walk, and then breakfast; after which I felt more my own man, and so returned to the Grey Room, and, with Peter’s help, and one of the maids, I had everything taken out of the room, except the bed—even the very pictures. I examined the walls, floor and ceiling then, with probe, hammer and magnifying glass; but found nothing suspicious. And I can assure you, I began to realize, in very truth, that some incredible thing had been loose in the room during the past night. I sealed up everything again, and went out, locking and sealing the door, as before.

“After dinner, Peter and I unpacked some of my stuff, and I fixed up my camera and flashlight opposite to the door of the Grey Room, with a string from the trigger of the flashlight to the door. Then, you see, if the door were really opened, the flashlight would blare out, and there would be, possibly, a very queer picture to examine in the morning. The last thing I did, before leaving, was to uncap the lens; and after that I went off to my bedroom, and to bed; for I intended to be up at midnight; and to ensure this, I set my little alarm to call me; also I left my candle burning.

“The clock woke me at twelve, and I got up and into my dressing gown and slippers. I shoved my revolver into my right side-pocket, and opened my door. Then, I lit my darkroom lamp, and withdrew the slide, so that it would give a clear light. I carried it up the corridor, about thirty feet, and put it down on the floor, with the open side away from me, so that it would show me anything that might approach along the dark passage. Then I went back, and sat in the doorway of my room, with my revolver handy, staring up the passage toward the place where I knew my camera stood outside the door of the Grey Room.

“I should think I had watched for about an hour and a half, when, suddenly, I heard a faint noise, away up the corridor. I was immediately conscious of a queer prickling sensation about the back of my head, and my hands began to sweat a little. The following instant, the whole end of the passage flicked into sight in the abrupt glare of the flashlight. There came the succeeding darkness, and I peered nervously up the corridor, listening tensely, and trying to find what lay beyond the faint glow of my dark-lamp, which now seemed ridiculously dim by contrast

with the tremendous blaze of the flash-power.... And then, as I stooped forward, staring and listening, there came the crashing thud of the door of the Grey Room. The sound seemed to fill the whole of the large corridor, and go echoing hollowly through the house. I tell you, I felt horrible—as if my bones were water. Simply beastly. Jove! how I did stare, and how I listened. And then it came again—thud, thud, thud, and then a silence that was almost worse than the noise of the door; for I kept fancying that some awful thing was stealing upon me along the corridor. And then, suddenly, my lamp was put out, and I could not see a yard before me. I realized all at once that I was doing a very silly thing, sitting there, and I jumped up. Even as I did so, I *thought* I heard a sound in the passage, and quite *near* me. I made one backward spring into my room, and slammed and locked the door. I sat on my bed, and stared at the door. I had my revolver in my hand; but it seemed an abominably useless thing. I felt that there was something the other side of that door. For some unknown reason I *knew* it was pressed up against the door, and it was soft. That was just what I thought. Most extraordinary thing to think.

“Presently I got hold of myself a bit, and marked out a pentacle hurriedly with chalk on the polished floor; and there I sat in it almost until dawn. And all the time, away up the corridor, the door of the Grey Room thudded at solemn and horrid intervals. It was a miserable, brutal night.

“When the day began to break, the thudding of the door came gradually to an end, and, at last, I got hold of my courage, and went along the corridor in the half light to cap the lens of my camera. I can tell you, it took some doing; but if I had not done so my photograph would have been spoilt, and I was tremendously keen to save it. I got back to my room, and then set-to and rubbed out the five-pointed star in which I had been sitting.

“Half an hour later there was a tap at my door. It was Peter with my coffee. When I had drunk it, we both went along to the Grey Room. As we went, I had a look at the seals on the other doors; but they were untouched. The seal on the door of the Grey Room was broken, as also was the string from the trigger of the flashlight; but the card over the keyhole was still there. I ripped it off, and opened the door. Nothing unusual was to be seen until we came to the bed; then I saw that, as on the previous day, the bedclothes had been torn off, and hurled into the left-hand corner, exactly where I had seen them before. I felt very queer; but I did not forget to look at all the seals, only to find that not one had been broken.

“Then I turned and looked at old Peter, and he looked at me, nodding his head.

“‘Let’s get out of here!’ I said. ‘It’s no place for any living human to enter, without proper protection.’

“We went out then, and I locked and sealed the door, again.

“After breakfast, I developed the negative; but it showed only the door of the Grey Room, half opened. Then I left the house, as I wanted to get certain matters and implements that might be necessary to life; perhaps to the spirit; for I intended to spend the coming night in the Grey Room.

“I go back in a cab, about half-past five, with my apparatus, and this, Peter and I carried up to the Grey Room, where I piled it carefully in the center of the floor. When everything was in the room, including a cat which I had brought, I locked and sealed the door, and went toward the bedroom, telling Peter I should not be down for dinner. He said, ‘Yes, sir,’ and went downstairs, thinking that I was going to turn in, which was what I wanted him to believe, as I knew he would have worried both me and himself, if he had known what I intended.

“But I merely got my camera and flashlight from my bedroom, and hurried back to the Grey Room. I locked and sealed myself in, and set to work, for I had a lot to do before it got dark.

“First, I cleared away all the ribbons across the floor; then I carried the cat—still fastened in its basket—over toward the far wall, and left it. I returned then to the center of the room, and measured out a space twenty-one feet in diameter, which I swept with a ‘broom of hyssop.’ About this, I drew a circle of chalk, taking care never to step over the circle. Beyond this I smudged, with a bunch of garlic, a broad belt right around the chalked circle, and when this was complete, I took from among my stores in the center a small jar of a certain water. I broke away the parchment, and withdrew the stopper. Then, dipping my left forefinger in the little jar, I went ’round the circle again, making upon the floor, just within the line of chalk, the Second Sign of the Saaamaaa Ritual, and joining each Sign most carefully with the left-handed crescent. I can tell you, I felt easier when this was done, and the ‘water circle’ complete. Then, I unpacked some more of the stuff that I had brought, and placed a lighted candle in the ‘valley’ of each Crescent. After that, I drew a Pentacle, so that each of the five points of the defensive star touched the chalk circle. In the five points of the star I placed five portions of the bread, each wrapped in linen, and in the five ‘vales,’ five opened jars of the water I had used to make the ‘water circle.’ And now I had my first protective barrier complete.

“Now, anyone, except you who know something of my methods of investigation, might consider all this a piece of useless and foolish superstition;

but you all remember the Black Veil case, in which I believe my life was saved by a very similar form of protection, whilst Aster, who sneered at it, and would not come inside, died. I got the idea from the Sigsand MS., written, so far as I can make out, in the 14th century. At first, naturally, I imagined it was just an expression of the superstition of his time; and it was not until a year later that it occurred to me to test his 'Defense,' which I did, as I've just said, in that horrible Black Veil business. You know how *that* turned out. Later, I used it several times, and always I came through safe, until that Moving Fur case. It was only a partial 'defense' therefore, and I nearly died in the pentacle. After that I came across Professor Garder's 'Experiments with a Medium.' When they surrounded the Medium with a current, in vacuum, he lost his power—almost as if it cut him off from the Immaterial. That made me think a lot; and that is how I came to make the Electric Pentacle, which is a most marvelous 'Defense' against certain manifestations. I used the shape of the defensive star for this protection, because I have, personally, no doubt at all but that there is some extraordinary virtue in the old magic figure. Curious thing for a Twentieth Century man to admit, is it not? But, then, as you all know, I never did, and never will, allow myself to be blinded by the little cheap laughter. I ask questions, and keep my eyes open.

"In this last case I had little doubt that I had run up against a supernatural monster, and I meant to take every possible care; for the danger is abominable.

"I turned-to now to fit the Electric Pentacle, setting it so that each of its 'points' and 'vales' coincided exactly with the 'points' and 'vales' of the drawn pentagram upon the floor. Then I connected up the battery, and the next instant the pale blue glare from the intertwining vacuum tubes shone out.

"I glanced about me then, with something of a sigh of relief, and realized suddenly that the dusk was upon me, for the window was grey and unfriendly. Then 'round at the big, empty room, over the double barrier of electric and candle light. I had an abrupt, extraordinary sense of weirdness thrust upon me—in the air, you know; as it were, a sense of something inhuman impending. The room was full of the stench of bruised garlic, a smell I hate.

"I turned now to the camera, and saw that it and the flashlight were in order. Then I tested my revolver, carefully, though I had little thought that it would be needed. Yet, to what extent materialization of an ab-natural creature is possible, given favorable conditions, no one can say; and I had no idea what horrible thing I was going to see, or feel the presence of. I might, in the end, have to fight with a materialized monster. I did not know, and could only be prepared. You see, I

never forgot that three other people had been strangled in the bed close to me, and the fierce slamming of the door I had heard myself. I had no doubt that I was investigating a dangerous and ugly case.

“By this time, the night had come; though the room was very light with the burning candles; and I found myself glancing behind me, constantly, and then all ’round the room. It was nervy work waiting for that thing to come. Then, suddenly, I was aware of a little, cold wind sweeping over me, coming from behind. I gave one great nerve-thrill, and a prickly feeling went all over the back of my head. Then I hove myself ’round with a sort of stiff jerk, and stared straight against that queer wind. It seemed to come from the corner of the room to the left of the bed—the place where both times I had found the heap of tossed bedclothes. Yet, I could see nothing unusual; no opening—nothing!...

“Abruptly, I was aware that the candles were all a-flicker in that unnatural wind.... I believe I just squatted there and stared in a horribly frightened, wooden way for some minutes. I shall never be able to let you know how disgustingly horrible it was sitting in that vile, cold wind! And then, flick! flick! flick! all the candles ’round the outer barrier went out; and there was I, locked and sealed in that room, and with no light beyond the weakish blue glare of the Electric Pentacle.

“A time of abominable tenseness passed, and still that wind blew upon me; and then, suddenly, I knew that something stirred in the corner to the left of the bed. I was made conscious of it, rather by some inward, unused sense than by either sight or sound; for the pale, short-radius glare of the Pentacle gave but a very poor light for seeing by. Yet, as I stared, something began slowly to grow upon my sight—a moving shadow, a little darker than the surrounding shadows. I lost the thing amid the vagueness, and for a moment or two I glanced swiftly from side to side, with a fresh, new sense of impending danger. Then my attention was directed to the bed. All the covering’s were being drawn steadily off, with a hateful, stealthy sort of motion. I heard the slow, dragging slither of the clothes; but I could see nothing of the thing that pulled. I was aware in a funny, subconscious, introspective fashion that the ‘creep’ had come upon me; yet that I was cooler mentally than I had been for some minutes; sufficiently so to feel that my hands were sweating coldly, and to shift my revolver, half-consciously, whilst I rubbed my right hand dry upon my knee; though never, for an instant, taking my gaze or my attention from those moving clothes.

“The faint noises from the bed ceased once, and there was a most intense silence, with only the sound of the blood beating in my head. Yet, immediately

afterward, I heard again the slurring of the bedclothes being dragged off the bed. In the midst of my nervous tension I remembered the camera, and reached 'round for it; but without looking away from the bed. And then, you know, all in a moment, the whole of the bed coverings were torn off with extraordinary violence, and I heard the flump they made as they were hurled into the corner.

“There was a time of absolute quietness then for perhaps a couple of minutes; and you can imagine how horrible I felt. The bedclothes had been thrown with such savageness! And, then again, the brutal unnaturalness of the thing that had just been done before me!

“Abruptly, over by the door, I heard a faint noise—a sort of crickling sound, and then a pitter or two upon the floor. A great nervous thrill swept over me, seeming to run up my spine and over the back of my head; for the seal that secured the door had just been broken. Something was there. I could not see the door; at least, I mean to say that it was impossible to say how much I actually saw, and how much my imagination supplied. I made it out, only as a continuation of the grey walls.... And then it seemed to me that something dark and indistinct moved and wavered there among the shadows.

“Abruptly, I was aware that the door was opening, and with an effort I reached again for my camera; but before I could aim it the door was slammed with a terrific crash that filled the whole room with a sort of hollow thunder. I jumped, like a frightened child. There seemed such a power behind the noise; as though a vast, wanton Force were ‘out.’ Can you understand?

“The door was not touched again; but, directly afterward, I heard the basket, in which the cat lay, creak. I tell you, I fairly pringled all along my back. I knew that I was going to learn definitely whether whatever was abroad was dangerous to Life. From the cat there rose suddenly a hideous caterwaul, that ceased abruptly; and then—too late—I snapped off the flashlight. In the great glare, I saw that the basket had been overturned, and the lid was wrenched open, with the cat lying half in, and half out upon the floor. I saw nothing else, but I was full of the knowledge that I was in the presence of some Being or Thing that had power to destroy.

“During the next two or three minutes, there was an odd, noticeable quietness in the room, and you much remember I was half-blinded, for the time, because of the flashlight; so that the whole place seemed to be pitchy dark just beyond the shine of the Pentacle. I tell you it was most horrible. I just knelt there in the star, and whirled 'round, trying to see whether anything was coming at me.

“My power of sight came gradually, and I got a little hold of myself; and

abruptly I saw the thing I was looking for, close to the 'water circle.' It was big and indistinct, and wavered curiously, as though the shadow of a vast spider hung suspended in the air, just beyond the barrier. It passed swiftly 'round the circle, and seemed to probe ever toward me; but only to draw back with extraordinary jerky movements, as might a living person if they touched the hot bar of a grate.

"'Round and 'round it moved, and 'round and 'round I turned. Then, just opposite to one of the Vales' in the pentacles, it seemed to pause, as though preliminary to a tremendous effort. It retired almost beyond the glow of the vacuum light, and then came straight toward me, appearing to gather form and solidity as it came. There seemed a vast, malign determination behind the movement, that must succeed. I was on my knees, and I jerked back, falling on to my left hand, and hip, in a wild endeavor to get back from the advancing thing. With my right hand I was grabbing madly for my revolver, which I had let slip. The brutal thing came with one great sweep straight over the garlic and the 'water circle,' almost to the vale of the pentacle. I believe I yelled. Then, just as suddenly as it had swept over, it seemed to be hurled back by some mighty, invisible force.

"It must have been some moments before I realized that I was safe; and then I got myself together in the middle of the pentacles, feeling horribly gone and shaken, and glancing 'round and 'round the barrier; but the thing had vanished. Yet, I had learnt something, for I knew now that the Grey Room was haunted by a monstrous hand.

"Suddenly, as I crouched there, I saw what had so nearly given the monster an opening through the barrier. In my movements within the pentacle I must have touched one of the jars of water; for just where the thing had made its attack the jar that guarded the 'deep' of the 'vale' had been moved to one side, and this had left one of the 'five doorways' unguarded. I put it back, quickly, and felt almost safe again, for I had found the cause, and the 'defense' was still good. And I began to hope again that I should see the morning come in. When I saw that thing so nearly succeed, I had an awful, weak, overwhelming feeling that the 'barriers' could never bring me safe through the night against such a Force. You can understand?

"For a long time I could not see the hand; but, presently, I thought I saw, once or twice, an odd wavering, over among the shadows near the door. A little later, as though in a sudden fit of malignant rage, the dead body of the cat was picked up, and beaten with dull, sickening blows against the solid floor. That made me

feel rather queer.

“A minute afterward, the door was opened and slammed twice with tremendous force. The next instant the thing made one swift, vicious dart at me, from out of the shadows. Instinctively, I started sideways from it, and so plucked my hand from upon the Electric Pentacle, where—for a wickedly careless moment—I had placed it. The monster was hurled off from the neighborhood of the pentacles; though—owing to my inconceivable foolishness—it had been enabled for a second time to pass the outer barriers. I can tell you, I shook for a time, with sheer funk. I moved right to the center of the pentacles again, and knelt there, making myself as small and compact as possible.

“As I knelt, there came to me presently, a vague wonder at the two ‘accidents’ which had so nearly allowed the brute to get at me. Was I being *influenced* to unconscious voluntary actions that endangered me? The thought took hold of me, and I watched my every movement. Abruptly, I stretched a tired leg, and knocked over one of the jars of water. Some was spilled; but, because of my suspicious watchfulness, I had it upright and back within the vale while yet some of the water remained. Even as I did so, the vast, black, half-materialized hand beat up at me out of the shadows, and seemed to leap almost into my face; so nearly did it approach; but for the third time it was thrown back by some altogether enormous, overmastering force. Yet, apart from the dazed fright in which it left me, I had for a moment that feeling of spiritual sickness, as if some delicate, beautiful, inward grace had suffered, which is felt only upon the too near approach of the ab-human, and is more dreadful, in a strange way, than any physical pain that can be suffered. I knew by this more of the extent and closeness of the danger; and for a long time I was simply cowed by the butt-headed brutality of that Force upon my spirit. I can put it no other way.

“I knelt again in the center of the pentacles, watching myself with more fear, almost, than the monster; for I knew now that, unless I guarded myself from every sudden impulse that came to me, I might simply work my own destruction. Do you see how horrible it all was?

“I spent the rest of the night in a haze of sick fright, and so tense that I could not make a single movement naturally. I was in such fear that any desire for action that came to me might be prompted by the Influence that I knew was at work on me. And outside of the barrier that ghastly thing went ’round and ’round, grabbing and grabbing in the air at me. Twice more was the body of the dead cat molested. The second time, I heard every bone in its body scrunch and crack. And all the time the horrible wind was blowing upon me from the corner

of the room to the left of the bed.

“Then, just as the first touch of dawn came into the sky, that unnatural wind ceased, in a single moment; and I could see no sign of the hand. The dawn came slowly, and presently the wan light filled all the room, and made the pale glare of the Electric Pentacle look more unearthly. Yet, it was not until the day had fully come, that I made any attempt to leave the barrier, for I did not know but that there was some method abroad, in the sudden stopping of that wind, to entice me from the pentacles.

“At last, when the dawn was strong and bright, I took one last look ’round, and ran for the door. I got it unlocked, in a nervous and clumsy fashion, then locked it hurriedly, and went to my bedroom, where I lay on the bed, and tried to steady my nerves. Peter came, presently, with the coffee, and when I had drunk it, I told him I meant to have a sleep, as I had been up all night. He took the tray, and went out quietly, and after I had locked my door I turned in properly, and at last got to sleep.

“I woke about midday, and after some lunch, went up to the Grey Room. I switched off the current from the Pentacle, which I had left on in my hurry; also, I removed the body of the cat. You can understand I did not want anyone to see the poor brute. After that, I made a very careful search of the corner where the bedclothes had been thrown. I made several holes, and probed, and found nothing. Then it occurred to me to try with my instrument under the skirting. I did so, and heard my wire ring on metal. I turned the hook end that way, and fished for the thing. At the second go, I got it. It was a small object, and I took it to the window. I found it to be a curious ring, made of some greying material. The curious thing about it was that it was made in the form of a pentagon; that is, the same shape as the inside of the magic pentacle, but without the ‘mounts,’ which form the points of the defensive star. It was free from all chasing or engraving.

“You will understand that I was excited, when I tell you that I felt sure I held in my hand the famous Luck Ring of the Anderson family; which, indeed, was of all things the one most intimately connected with the history of the haunting. This ring was handed on from father to son through generations, and always—in obedience to some ancient family tradition—each son had to promise never to wear the ring. The ring, I may say, was brought home by one of the Crusaders, under very peculiar circumstances; but the story is too long to go into here.

“It appears that young Sir Hulbert, an ancestor of Anderson’s, made a bet, in drink, you know, that he would wear the ring that night. He did so, and in the

morning his wife and child were found strangled in the bed, in the very room in which I stood. Many people, it would seem, thought young Sir Hulbert was guilty of having done the thing in drunken anger; and he, in an attempt to prove his innocence, slept a second night in the room. He also was strangled. Since then, as you may imagine, no one has ever spent a night in the Grey Room, until I did so. The ring had been lost so long, that it had become almost a myth; and it was most extraordinary to stand there, with the actual thing in my hand, as you can understand.

“It was whilst I stood there, looking at the ring, that I got an idea. Supposing that it were, in a way, a doorway—You see what I mean? A sort of gap in the world-hedge. It was a queer idea, I know, and probably was not my own, but came to me from the Outside. You see, the wind had come from that part of the room where the ring lay. I thought a lot about it. Then the shape—the inside of a pentacle. It had no ‘mounts,’ and without mounts, as the Sigsand MS. has it: —‘Thee mownts wych are thee Five Hills of safetie. To lack is to gyve pow’r to thee daemon; and surelie to fayvor the Evill Thyng.’ You see, the very shape of the ring was significant; and I determined to test it.

“I unmade the pentacle, for it must be made afresh *and around* the one to be protected. Then I went out and locked the door; after which I left the house, to get certain matters, for neither ‘yarbs nor fyre nor waier’ must be used a second time. I returned about seven thirty, and as soon as the things I had brought had been carried up to the Grey Room, I dismissed Peter for the night, just as I had done the evening before. When he had gone downstairs, I let myself into the room, and locked and sealed the door. I went to the place in the center of the room where all the stuff had been packed, and set to work with all my speed to construct a barrier about me and the ring.

“I do not remember whether I explained it to you. But I had reasoned that, if the ring were in any way a ‘medium of admission,’ and it were enclosed with me in the Electric Pentacle, it would be, to express it loosely, insulated. Do you see? The Force, which had visible expression as a Hand, would have to stay beyond the Barrier which separates the Ab from the Normal; for the ‘gateway’ would be removed from accessibility.

“As I was saying, I worked with all my speed to get the barrier completed about me and the ring, for it was already later than I cared to be in that room ‘unprotected.’ Also, I had a feeling that there would be a vast effort made that night to regain the use of the ring. For I had the strongest conviction that the ring was a necessity to materialization. You will see whether I was right.

“I completed the barriers in about an hour, and you can imagine something of the relief I felt when I felt the pale glare of the Electric Pentacle once more all about me. From then, onward, for about two hours, I sat quietly, facing the corner from which the wind came. About eleven o’clock a queer knowledge came that something was near to me; yet nothing happened for a whole hour after that. Then, suddenly, I felt the cold, queer wind begin to blow upon me. To my astonishment, it seemed now to come from behind me, and I whipped ’round, with a hideous quake of fear. The wind met me in the face. It was blowing up from the floor close to me. I stared down, in a sickening maze of new frights. What on earth had I done now! The ring was there, close beside me, where I had put it. Suddenly, as I stared, bewildered, I was aware that there was something queer about the ring—funny shadowy movements and convolutions. I looked at them, stupidly. And then, abruptly, I knew that the wind was blowing up at me from the ring. A queer indistinct smoke became visible to me, seeming to pour upward through the ring, and mix with the moving shadows. Suddenly, I realized that I was in more than any mortal danger; for the convoluting shadows about the ring were taking shape, and the death-hand was forming *within* the Pentacle. My Goodness! do you realize it! I had brought the ‘gateway’ into the pentacles, and the brute was coming through—pouring into the material world, as gas might pour out from the mouth of a pipe.

“I should think that I knelt for a moment in a sort of stunned fright. Then, with a mad, awkward movement, I snatched at the ring, intending to hurl it out of the Pentacle. Yet it eluded me, as though some invisible, living thing jerked it hither and thither. At last, I gripped it; yet, in the same instant, it was torn from my grasp with incredible and brutal force. A great, black shadow covered it, and rose into the air, and came at me. I saw that it was the Hand, vast and nearly perfect in form. I gave one crazy yell, and jumped over the Pentacle and the ring of burning candles, and ran despairingly for the door. I fumbled idiotically and ineffectually with the key, and all the time I stared, with a fear that was like insanity, toward the Barriers. The hand was plunging toward me; yet, even as it had been unable to pass into the Pentacle when the ring was without, so, now that the ring was within, it had no power to pass out. The monster was chained, as surely as any beast would be, were chains riveted upon it.

“Even then, I got a flash of this knowledge; but I was too utterly shaken with fright, to reason; and the instant I managed to get the key turned, I sprang into the passage, and slammed the door with a crash. I locked it, and got to my room somehow; for I was trembling so that I could hardly stand, as you can imagine. I

locked myself in, and managed to get the candle lit; then I lay down on my bed, and kept quiet for an hour or two, and so I got steadied.

“I got a little sleep, later; but woke when Peter brought my coffee. When I had drunk it I felt altogether better, and took the old man along with me whilst I had a look into the Grey Room. I opened the door, and peeped in. The candles were still burning, wan against the daylight; and behind them was the pale, glowing star of the Electric Pentacle. And there, in the middle, was the ring...the gateway of the monster, lying demure and ordinary.

“Nothing in the room was touched, and I knew that the brute had never managed to cross the Pentacles. Then I went out, and locked the door.

“After a sleep of some hours, I left the house. I returned in the afternoon in a cab. I had with me an oxy-hydrogen jet, and two cylinders, containing the gases. I carried the things into the Grey Room, and there, in the center of the Electric Pentacle, I erected the little furnace. Five minutes later the Luck Ring, once the ‘luck,’ but now the ‘bane,’ of the Anderson family, was no more than a little solid splash of hot metal.”

Carnacki felt in his pocket, and pulled out something wrapped in tissue paper. He passed it to me. I opened it, and found a small circle of greyish metal, something like lead, only harder and rather brighter.

“Well?” I asked, at length, after examining it and handing it ‘round to the others. “Did that stop the haunting?”

Carnacki nodded. “Yes,” he said. “I slept three nights in the Grey Room, before I left. Old Peter nearly fainted when he knew that I meant to; but by the third night he seemed to realize that the house was just safe and ordinary. And, you know, I believe, in his heart, he hardly approved.”

Carnacki stood up and began to shake hands. “Out you go!” he said, genially. And presently we went, pondering, to our various homes.

CANON ALBERIC'S SCRAP-BOOK, by M.R. James

St Bertrand de Comminges is a decayed town on the spurs of the Pyrenees, not very far from Toulouse, and still nearer to Bagnères-de-Luchon. It was the site of a bishopric until the Revolution, and has a cathedral which is visited by a certain number of tourists. In the spring of 1883 an Englishman arrived at this old-world place—I can hardly dignify it with the name of city, for there are not a thousand inhabitants. He was a Cambridge man, who had come specially from Toulouse to see St Bertrand's Church, and had left two friends, who were less keen archaeologists than himself, in their hotel at Toulouse, under promise to join him on the following morning. Half an hour at the church would satisfy *them*, and all three could then pursue their journey in the direction of Auch. But our Englishman had come early on the day in question, and proposed to himself to fill a note-book and to use several dozens of plates in the process of describing and photographing every corner of the wonderful church that dominates the little hill of Comminges. In order to carry out this design satisfactorily, it was necessary to monopolize the verger of the church for the day. The verger or sacristan (I prefer the latter appellation, inaccurate as it may be) was accordingly sent for by the somewhat brusque lady who keeps the inn of the Chapeau Rouge; and when he came, the Englishman found him an unexpectedly interesting object of study. It was not in the personal appearance of the little, dry, wizened old man that the interest lay, for he was precisely like dozens of other church-guardians in France, but in a curious furtive or rather hunted and oppressed air which he had. He was perpetually half glancing behind him; the muscles of his back and shoulders seemed to be hunched in a continual nervous contraction, as if he were expecting every moment to find himself in the clutch of an enemy. The Englishman hardly knew whether to put him down as a man haunted by a fixed delusion, or as one oppressed by a guilty conscience, or as an unbearably henpecked husband. The probabilities, when reckoned up, certainly pointed to the last idea; but, still, the impression conveyed was that of a more formidable persecutor even than a termagant wife.

However, the Englishman (let us call him Dennistoun) was soon too deep in his note-book and too busy with his camera to give more than an occasional glance to the sacristan. Whenever he did look at him, he found him at no great distance, either huddling himself back against the wall or crouching in one of the gorgeous stalls. Dennistoun became rather fidgety after a time. Mingled suspicions that he was keeping the old man from his *déjeuner*, that he was

regarded as likely to make away with St Bertrand's ivory crozier, or with the dusty stuffed crocodile that hangs over the font, began to torment him.

"Won't you go home?" he said at last; "I'm quite well able to finish my notes alone; you can lock me in if you like. I shall want at least two hours more here, and it must be cold for you, isn't it?"

"Good heavens!" said the little man, whom the suggestion seemed to throw into a state of unaccountable terror, "such a thing cannot be thought of for a moment. Leave monsieur alone in the church? No, no; two hours, three hours, all will be the same to me. I have breakfasted, I am not at all cold, with many thanks to monsieur."

"Very well, my little man," quoth Dennistoun to himself: "you have been warned, and you must take the consequences."

Before the expiration of the two hours, the stalls, the enormous dilapidated organ, the choir-screen of Bishop John de Mauléon, the remnants of glass and tapestry, and the objects in the treasure-chamber had been well and truly examined; the sacristan still keeping at Dennistoun's heels, and every now and then whipping round as if he had been stung, when one or other of the strange noises that trouble a large empty building fell on his ear. Curious noises they were, sometimes.

"Once," Dennistoun said to me, "I could have sworn I heard a thin metallic voice laughing high up in the tower. I darted an inquiring glance at my sacristan. He was white to the lips. "It is he—that is—it is no one; the door is locked," was all he said, and we looked at each other for a full minute."

Another little incident puzzled Dennistoun a good deal. He was examining a large dark picture that hangs behind the altar, one of a series illustrating the miracles of St Bertrand. The composition of the picture is well-nigh indecipherable, but there is a Latin legend below, which runs thus:

Qualiter S. Bertrandus liberavit hominem quem diabolus diu volebat strangulare. (How St Bertrand delivered a man whom the Devil long sought to strangle.)

Dennistoun was turning to the sacristan with a smile and a jocular remark of some sort on his lips, but he was confounded to see the old man on his knees, gazing at the picture with the eye of a suppliant in agony, his hands tightly clasped, and a rain of tears on his cheeks. Dennistoun naturally pretended to have noticed nothing, but the question would not go away from him, "Why should a daub of this kind affect anyone so strongly?" He seemed to himself to be getting some sort of clue to the reason of the strange look that had been

puzzling him all the day: the man must be a monomaniac; but what was his monomania?

It was nearly five o'clock; the short day was drawing in, and the church began to fill with shadows, while the curious noises—the muffled footfalls and distant talking voices that had been perceptible all day—seemed, no doubt because of the fading light and the consequently quickened sense of hearing, to become more frequent and insistent.

The sacristan began for the first time to show signs of hurry and impatience. He heaved a sigh of relief when camera and note-book were finally packed up and stowed away, and hurriedly beckoned Dennistoun to the western door of the church, under the tower. It was time to ring the Angelus. A few pulls at the reluctant rope, and the great bell Bertrande, high in the tower, began to speak, and swung her voice up among the pines and down to the valleys, loud with mountain-streams, calling the dwellers on those lonely hills to remember and repeat the salutation of the angel to her whom he called Blessed among women. With that a profound quiet seemed to fall for the first time that day upon the little town, and Dennistoun and the sacristan went out of the church.

On the doorstep they fell into conversation.

“Monsieur seemed to interest himself in the old choir-books in the sacristy.”

“Undoubtedly. I was going to ask you if there were a library in the town.”

“No, monsieur; perhaps there used to be one belonging to the Chapter, but it is now such a small place—” Here came a strange pause of irresolution, as it seemed; then, with a sort of plunge, he went on: “But if monsieur is *amateur des vieux livres*, I have at home something that might interest him. It is not a hundred yards.”

At once all Dennistoun's cherished dreams of finding priceless manuscripts in untrodden corners of France flashed up, to die down again the next moment. It was probably a stupid missal of Plantin's printing, about 1580. Where was the likelihood that a place so near Toulouse would not have been ransacked long ago by collectors? However, it would be foolish not to go; he would reproach himself for ever after if he refused. So they set off. On the way the curious irresolution and sudden determination of the sacristan recurred to Dennistoun, and he wondered in a shamefaced way whether he was being decoyed into some purlieu to be made away with as a supposed rich Englishman. He contrived, therefore, to begin talking with his guide, and to drag in, in a rather clumsy fashion, the fact that he expected two friends to join him early the next morning. To his surprise, the announcement seemed to relieve the sacristan at once of

some of the anxiety that oppressed him.

“That is well,” he said quite brightly—“that is very well. Monsieur will travel in company with his friends: they will be always near him. It is a good thing to travel thus in company—sometimes.”

The last word appeared to be added as an afterthought and to bring with it a relapse into gloom for the poor little man.

They were soon at the house, which was one rather larger than its neighbours, stone-built, with a shield carved over the door, the shield of Alberic de Mauléon, a collateral descendant, Dennistoun tells me, of Bishop John de Mauléon. This Alberic was a Canon of Comminges from 1680 to 1701. The upper windows of the mansion were boarded up, and the whole place bore, as does the rest of Comminges, the aspect of decaying age.

Arrived on his doorstep, the sacristan paused a moment.

“Perhaps,” he said, “perhaps, after all, monsieur has not the time?”

“Not at all—lots of time—nothing to do till tomorrow. Let us see what it is you have got.”

The door was opened at this point, and a face looked out, a face far younger than the sacristan’s, but bearing something of the same distressing look: only here it seemed to be the mark, not so much of fear for personal safety as of acute anxiety on behalf of another. Plainly the owner of the face was the sacristan’s daughter; and, but for the expression I have described, she was a handsome girl enough. She brightened up considerably on seeing her father accompanied by an able-bodied stranger. A few remarks passed between father and daughter of which Dennistoun only caught these words, said by the sacristan: “He was laughing in the church,” words which were answered only by a look of terror from the girl.

But in another minute they were in the sitting-room of the house, a small, high chamber with a stone floor, full of moving shadows cast by a wood-fire that flickered on a great hearth. Something of the character of an oratory was imparted to it by a tall crucifix, which reached almost to the ceiling on one side; the figure was painted of the natural colours, the cross was black. Under this stood a chest of some age and solidity, and when a lamp had been brought, and chairs set, the sacristan went to this chest, and produced therefrom, with growing excitement and nervousness, as Dennistoun thought, a large book, wrapped in a white cloth, on which cloth a cross was rudely embroidered in red thread. Even before the wrapping had been removed, Dennistoun began to be interested by the size and shape of the volume. “Too large for a missal,” he thought, “and not the

shape of an antiphoner; perhaps it may be something good, after all.” The next moment the book was open, and Dennistoun felt that he had at last lit upon something better than good. Before him lay a large folio, bound, perhaps, late in the seventeenth century, with the arms of Canon Alberic de Mauléon stamped in gold on the sides. There may have been a hundred and fifty leaves of paper in the book, and on almost every one of them was fastened a leaf from an illuminated manuscript. Such a collection Dennistoun had hardly dreamed of in his wildest moments. Here were ten leaves from a copy of Genesis, illustrated with pictures, which could not be later than A.D. 700. Further on was a complete set of pictures from a Psalter, of English execution, of the very finest kind that the thirteenth century could produce; and, perhaps best of all, there were twenty leaves of uncial writing in Latin, which, as a few words seen here and there told him at once, must belong to some very early unknown patristic treatise. Could it possibly be a fragment of the copy of Papias “On the Words of Our Lord,” which was known to have existed as late as the twelfth century at Nîmes?¹ In any case, his mind was made up; that book must return to Cambridge with him, even if he had to draw the whole of his balance from the bank and stay at St. Bertrand till the money came. He glanced up at the sacristan to see if his face yielded any hint that the book was for sale. The sacristan was pale, and his lips were working.

“If monsieur will turn on to the end,” he said.

So monsieur turned on, meeting new treasures at every rise of a leaf; and at the end of the book he came upon two sheets of paper, of much more recent date than anything he had seen yet, which puzzled him considerably. They must be contemporary, he decided, with the unprincipled Canon Alberic, who had doubtless plundered the Chapter library of St Bertrand to form this priceless scrap-book. On the first of the paper sheets was a plan, carefully drawn and instantly recognizable by a person who knew the ground, of the south aisle and cloisters of St Bertrand’s. There were curious signs looking like planetary symbols, and a few Hebrew words in the corners; and in the north-west angle of the cloister was a cross drawn in gold paint. Below the plan were some lines of writing in Latin, which ran thus:

Responsa 12(mi) Dec. 1694. Interrogatum est: Inveniamne? Responsum est: Invenies. Fiamne dives? Fies. Vivamne invidendus? Vives. Moriarne in lecto meo? Ita. (Answers of the 12th of December, 1694. It was asked: Shall I find it? Answer: Thou shalt. Shall I become rich? Thou wilt. Shall I live an

object of envy? Thou wilt. Shall I die in my bed? Thou wilt.)

“A good specimen of the treasure-hunter’s record—quite reminds one of Mr Minor-Canon Quatremain in *Old St Paul’s*,” was Dennistoun’s comment, and he turned the leaf.

What he then saw impressed him, as he has often told me, more than he could have conceived any drawing or picture capable of impressing him. And, though the drawing he saw is no longer in existence, there is a photograph of it (which I possess) which fully bears out that statement. The picture in question was a sepia drawing at the end of the seventeenth century, representing, one would say at first sight, a Biblical scene; for the architecture (the picture represented an interior) and the figures had that semi-classical flavour about them which the artists of two hundred years ago thought appropriate to illustrations of the Bible. On the right was a king on his throne, the throne elevated on twelve steps, a canopy overhead, soldiers on either side—evidently King Solomon. He was bending forward with outstretched sceptre, in attitude of command; his face expressed horror and disgust, yet there was in it also the mark of imperious command and confident power. The left half of the picture was the strangest, however. The interest plainly centred there.

On the pavement before the throne were grouped four soldiers, surrounding a crouching figure which must be described in a moment. A fifth soldier lay dead on the pavement, his neck distorted, and his eye-balls starting from his head. The four surrounding guards were looking at the King. In their faces, the sentiment of horror was intensified; they seemed, in fact, only restrained from flight by their implicit trust in their master. All this terror was plainly excited by the being that crouched in their midst.

I entirely despair of conveying by any words the impression which this figure makes upon anyone who looks at it. I recollect once showing the photograph of the drawing to a lecturer on morphology—a person of, I was going to say, abnormally sane and unimaginative habits of mind. He absolutely refused to be alone for the rest of that evening, and he told me afterwards that for many nights he had not dared to put out his light before going to sleep. However, the main traits of the figure I can at least indicate.

At first you saw only a mass of coarse, matted black hair; presently it was seen that this covered a body of fearful thinness, almost a skeleton, but with the muscles standing out like wires. The hands were of a dusky pallor, covered, like the body, with long, coarse hairs, and hideously taloned. The eyes, touched in with a burning yellow, had intensely black pupils, and were fixed upon the

throned King with a look of beast-like hate. Imagine one of the awful bird-catching spiders of South America translated into human form, and endowed with intelligence just less than human, and you will have some faint conception of the terror inspired by the appalling effigy. One remark is universally made by those to whom I have shown the picture: "It was drawn from the life."

As soon as the first shock of his irresistible fright had subsided, Dennistoun stole a look at his hosts. The sacristan's hands were pressed upon his eyes; his daughter, looking up at the cross on the wall, was telling her beads feverishly.

At last the question was asked: "Is this book for sale?"

There was the same hesitation, the same plunge of determination that he had noticed before, and then came the welcome answer: "If monsieur pleases."

"How much do you ask for it?"

"I will take two hundred and fifty francs."

This was confounding. Even a collector's conscience is sometimes stirred, and Dennistoun's conscience was tenderer than a collector's.

"My good man!" he said again and again, "your book is worth far more than two hundred and fifty francs. I assure you—far more."

But the answer did not vary: "I will take two hundred and fifty francs—not more."

There was really no possibility of refusing such a chance. The money was paid, the receipt signed, a glass of wine drunk over the transaction, and then the sacristan seemed to become a new man. He stood upright, he ceased to throw those suspicious glances behind him, he actually laughed or tried to laugh. Dennistoun rose to go.

"I shall have the honour of accompanying monsieur to his hotel?" said the sacristan.

"Oh, no, thanks! it isn't a hundred yards. I know the way perfectly, and there is a moon."

The offer was pressed three or four times and refused as often.

"Then, monsieur will summon me if—if he finds occasion; he will keep the middle of the road, the sides are so rough."

"Certainly, certainly," said Dennistoun, who was impatient to examine his prize by himself; and he stepped out into the passage with his book under his arm.

Here he was met by the daughter; she, it appeared, was anxious to do a little business on her own account; perhaps, like Gehazi, to "take somewhat" from the foreigner whom her father had spared.

“A silver crucifix and chain for the neck; monsieur would perhaps be good enough to accept it?”

Well, really, Dennistoun hadn't much use for these things. What did mademoiselle want for it?

“Nothing—nothing in the world. Monsieur is more than welcome to it.”

The tone in which this and much more was said was unmistakably genuine, so that Dennistoun was reduced to profuse thanks, and submitted to have the chain put round his neck. It really seemed as if he had rendered the father and daughter some service which they hardly knew how to repay. As he set off with his book they stood at the door looking after him, and they were still looking when he waved them a last good night from the steps of the Chapeau Rouge.

Dinner was over, and Dennistoun was in his bedroom, shut up alone with his acquisition. The landlady had manifested a particular interest in him since he had told her that he had paid a visit to the sacristan and bought an old book from him. He thought, too, that he had heard a hurried dialogue between her and the said sacristan in the passage outside the *salle à manger*; some words to the effect that “Pierre and Bertrand would be sleeping in the house” had closed the conversation.

All this time a growing feeling of discomfort had been creeping over him—nervous reaction, perhaps, after the delight of his discovery. Whatever it was, it resulted in a conviction that there was someone behind him, and that he was far more comfortable with his back to the wall. All this, of course, weighed light in the balance as against the obvious value of the collection he had acquired. And now, as I said, he was alone in his bedroom, taking stock of Canon Alberic's treasures, in which every moment revealed something more charming.

“Bless Canon Alberic!” said Dennistoun, who had an inveterate habit of talking to himself. “I wonder where he is now? Dear me! I wish that landlady would learn to laugh in a more cheering manner; it makes one feel as if there was someone dead in the house. Half a pipe more, did you say? I think perhaps you are right. I wonder what that crucifix is that the young woman insisted on giving me? Last century, I suppose. Yes, probably. It is rather a nuisance of a thing to have round one's neck—just too heavy. Most likely her father has been wearing it for years. I think I might give it a clean up before I put it away.”

He had taken the crucifix off, and laid it on the table, when his attention was caught by an object lying on the red cloth just by his left elbow. Two or three ideas of what it might be flitted through his brain with their own incalculable quickness.

A penwiper? No, no such thing in the house. A rat? No, too black. A large spider? I trust to goodness not—no. Good God! a hand like the hand in that picture!

In another infinitesimal flash he had taken it in. Pale, dusky skin, covering nothing but bones and tendons of appalling strength; coarse black hairs, longer than ever grew on a human hand; nails rising from the ends of the fingers and curving sharply down and forward, grey, horny, and wrinkled.

He flew out of his chair with deadly, inconceivable terror clutching at his heart. The shape, whose left hand rested on the table, was rising to a standing posture behind his seat, its right hand crooked above his scalp. There was black and tattered drapery about it; the coarse hair covered it as in the drawing. The lower jaw was thin—what can I call it?—shallow, like a beast's; teeth showed behind the black lips; there was no nose; the eyes, of a fiery yellow, against which the pupils showed black and intense, and the exulting hate and thirst to destroy life which shone there, were the most horrifying features in the whole vision. There was intelligence of a kind in them—intelligence beyond that of a beast, below that of a man.

The feelings which this horror stirred in Dennistoun were the intensest physical fear and the most profound mental loathing. What did he do? What could he do? He has never been quite certain what words he said, but he knows that he spoke, that he grasped blindly at the silver crucifix, that he was conscious of a movement towards him on the part of the demon, and that he screamed with the voice of an animal in hideous pain.

Pierre and Bertrand, the two sturdy little serving-men, who rushed in, saw nothing, but felt themselves thrust aside by something that passed out between them, and found Dennistoun in a swoon. They sat up with him that night, and his two friends were at St Bertrand by nine o'clock next morning. He himself, though still shaken and nervous, was almost himself by that time, and his story found credence with them, though not until they had seen the drawing and talked with the sacristan.

Almost at dawn the little man had come to the inn on some pretence, and had listened with the deepest interest to the story retailed by the landlady. He showed no surprise.

"It is he—it is he! I have seen him myself," was his only comment; and to all questionings but one reply was vouchsafed: "*Deux fois je l'ai vu: mille fois je l'ai senti.*" He would tell them nothing of the provenance of the book, nor any details of his experiences. "I shall soon sleep, and my rest will be sweet. Why

should you trouble me?" he said.²

We shall never know what he or Canon Alberic de Mauléon suffered. At the back of that fateful drawing were some lines of writing which may be supposed to throw light on the situation:

*Contradictio Salomonis cum demonio nocturno. Albericus de Mauléone delineavit. V. Deus in adiutorium. Ps. Qui habitat. Sancte Bertrande, demoniorum effugator, intercede pro me miserrimo. Primum uidi nocte 12(mi) Dec. 1694: uidebo mox ultimum. Peccaui et passus sum, plura adhuc passurus. Dec. 29, 1701.*³

I have never quite understood what was Dennistoun's view of the events I have narrated. He quoted to me once a text from Ecclesiasticus: "Some spirits there be that are created for vengeance, and in their fury lay on sore strokes." On another occasion he said: "Isaiah was a very sensible man; doesn't he say something about night monsters living in the ruins of Babylon? These things are rather beyond us at present."

Another confidence of his impressed me rather, and I sympathized with it. We had been, last year, to Comminges, to see Canon Alberic's tomb. It is a great marble erection with an effigy of the Canon in a large wig and soutane, and an elaborate eulogy of his learning below. I saw Dennistoun talking for some time with the Vicar of St Bertrand's, and as we drove away he said to me: "I hope it isn't wrong: you know I am a Presbyterian—but I—I believe there will be "saying of Mass and singing of dirges" for Alberic de Mauléon's rest." Then he added, with a touch of the Northern British in his tone, "I had no notion they came so dear."

The book is in the Wentworth Collection at Cambridge. The drawing was photographed and then burnt by Dennistoun on the day when he left Comminges on the occasion of his first visit.

¹ We now know that these leaves did contain a considerable fragment of that work, if not of that actual copy of it.

² He died that summer; his daughter married, and settled at St Papoul. She never understood the circumstances of her father's "obsession."

³ i.e., The Dispute of Solomon with a demon of the night. Drawn by Alberic de Mauléon. *Versicle*. O Lord, make haste to help me. *Psalm*. Whoso dwelleth xci.

Saint Bertrand, who putteth devils to flight, pray for me most unhappy. I saw it first on the night of Dec. 12, 1694: soon I shall see it for the last time. I have

sinned and suffered, and have more to suffer yet. Dec. 29, 1701.

The “Gallia Christiana” gives the date of the Canon’s death as December 31, 1701, “in bed, of a sudden seizure.” Details of this kind are not common in the great work of the Sammarthani.

DRACULA'S GUEST, by Bram Stoker

When we started for our drive the sun was shining brightly on Munich, and the air was full of the joyousness of early summer. Just as we were about to depart, Herr Delbrück (the maître d'hôtel of the Quatre Saisons, where I was staying) came down, bareheaded, to the carriage and, after wishing me a pleasant drive, said to the coachman, still holding his hand on the handle of the carriage door:

“Remember you are back by nightfall. The sky looks bright but there is a shiver in the north wind that says there may be a sudden storm. But I am sure you will not be late.” Here he smiled, and added, “for you know what night it is.”

Johann answered with an emphatic, “Ja, mein Herr,” and, touching his hat, drove off quickly. When we had cleared the town, I said, after signalling to him to stop:

“Tell me, Johann, what is tonight?”

He crossed himself, as he answered laconically: “Walpurgis nacht.” Then he took out his watch, a great, old-fashioned German silver thing as big as a turnip, and looked at it, with his eyebrows gathered together and a little impatient shrug of his shoulders. I realised that this was his way of respectfully protesting against the unnecessary delay, and sank back in the carriage, merely motioning him to proceed. He started off rapidly, as if to make up for lost time. Every now and then the horses seemed to throw up their heads and sniffed the air suspiciously. On such occasions I often looked round in alarm. The road was pretty bleak, for we were traversing a sort of high, wind-swept plateau. As we drove, I saw a road that looked but little used, and which seemed to dip through a little, winding valley. It looked so inviting that, even at the risk of offending him, I called Johann to stop—and when he had pulled up, I told him I would like to drive down that road. He made all sorts of excuses, and frequently crossed himself as he spoke. This somewhat piqued my curiosity, so I asked him various questions. He answered fencingly, and repeatedly looked at his watch in protest. Finally I said:

“Well, Johann, I want to go down this road. I shall not ask you to come unless you like; but tell me why you do not like to go, that is all I ask.” For answer he seemed to throw himself off the box, so quickly did he reach the ground. Then he stretched out his hands appealingly to me, and implored me not to go. There was just enough of English mixed with the German for me to understand the drift of his talk. He seemed always just about to tell me something—the very

idea of which evidently frightened him; but each time he pulled himself up, saying, as he crossed himself: “Walpurgis-Nacht!”

I tried to argue with him, but it was difficult to argue with a man when I did not know his language. The advantage certainly rested with him, for although he began to speak in English, of a very crude and broken kind, he always got excited and broke into his native tongue—and every time he did so, he looked at his watch. Then the horses became restless and sniffed the air. At this he grew very pale, and, looking around in a frightened way, he suddenly jumped forward, took them by the bridles and led them on some twenty feet. I followed, and asked why he had done this. For answer he crossed himself, pointed to the spot we had left and drew his carriage in the direction of the other road, indicating a cross, and said, first in German, then in English: “Buried him—him what killed themselves.”

I remembered the old custom of burying suicides at cross-roads: “Ah! I see, a suicide. How interesting!” But for the life of me I could not make out why the horses were frightened.

Whilst we were talking, we heard a sort of sound between a yelp and a bark. It was far away; but the horses got very restless, and it took Johann all his time to quiet them. He was pale, and said, “It sounds like a wolf—but yet there are no wolves here now.”

“No?” I said, questioning him; “isn’t it long since the wolves were so near the city?”

“Long, long,” he answered, “in the spring and summer; but with the snow the wolves have been here not so long.”

Whilst he was petting the horses and trying to quiet them, dark clouds drifted rapidly across the sky. The sunshine passed away, and a breath of cold wind seemed to drift past us. It was only a breath, however, and more in the nature of a warning than a fact, for the sun came out brightly again. Johann looked under his lifted hand at the horizon and said:

“The storm of snow, he comes before long time.” Then he looked at his watch again, and, straightway holding his reins firmly—for the horses were still pawing the ground restlessly and shaking their heads—he climbed to his box as though the time had come for proceeding on our journey.

I felt a little obstinate and did not at once get into the carriage.

“Tell me,” I said, “about this place where the road leads,” and I pointed down.

Again he crossed himself and mumbled a prayer, before he answered, “It is unholy.”

“What is unholy?” I enquired.

“The village.”

“Then there is a village?”

“No, no. No one lives there hundreds of years.”

My curiosity was piqued, “But you said there was a village.”

“There was.”

“Where is it now?”

Whereupon he burst out into a long story in German and English, so mixed up that I could not quite understand exactly what he said, but roughly I gathered that long ago, hundreds of years, men had died there and been buried in their graves; and sounds were heard under the clay, and when the graves were opened, men and women were found rosy with life, and their mouths red with blood. And so, in haste to save their lives (aye, and their souls!—and here he crossed himself) those who were left fled away to other places, where the living lived, and the dead were dead and not—not something. He was evidently afraid to speak the last words. As he proceeded with his narration, he grew more and more excited. It seemed as if his imagination had got hold of him, and he ended in a perfect paroxysm of fear—white-faced, perspiring, trembling and looking round him, as if expecting that some dreadful presence would manifest itself there in the bright sunshine on the open plain. Finally, in an agony of desperation, he cried:

“Walpurgis nacht!” and pointed to the carriage for me to get in. All my English blood rose at this, and, standing back, I said:

“You are afraid, Johann—you are afraid. Go home; I shall return alone; the walk will do me good.” The carriage door was open. I took from the seat my oak walking-stick—which I always carry on my holiday excursions—and closed the door, pointing back to Munich, and said, “Go home, Johann—Walpurgis-nacht doesn’t concern Englishmen.”

The horses were now more restive than ever, and Johann was trying to hold them in, while excitedly imploring me not to do anything so foolish. I pitied the poor fellow, he was deeply in earnest; but all the same I could not help laughing. His English was quite gone now. In his anxiety he had forgotten that his only means of making me understand was to talk my language, so he jabbered away in his native German. It began to be a little tedious. After giving the direction, “Home!” I turned to go down the cross-road into the valley.

With a despairing gesture, Johann turned his horses towards Munich. I leaned on my stick and looked after him. He went slowly along the road for a while:

then there came over the crest of the hill a man tall and thin. I could see so much in the distance. When he drew near the horses, they began to jump and kick about, then to scream with terror. Johann could not hold them in; they bolted down the road, running away madly. I watched them out of sight, then looked for the stranger, but I found that he, too, was gone.

With a light heart I turned down the side road through the deepening valley to which Johann had objected. There was not the slightest reason, that I could see, for his objection; and I daresay I tramped for a couple of hours without thinking of time or distance, and certainly without seeing a person or a house. So far as the place was concerned, it was desolation, itself. But I did not notice this particularly till, on turning a bend in the road, I came upon a scattered fringe of wood; then I recognised that I had been impressed unconsciously by the desolation of the region through which I had passed.

I sat down to rest myself, and began to look around. It struck me that it was considerably colder than it had been at the commencement of my walk—a sort of sighing sound seemed to be around me, with, now and then, high overhead, a sort of muffled roar. Looking upwards I noticed that great thick clouds were drifting rapidly across the sky from North to South at a great height. There were signs of coming storm in some lofty stratum of the air. I was a little chilly, and, thinking that it was the sitting still after the exercise of walking, I resumed my journey.

The ground I passed over was now much more picturesque. There were no striking objects that the eye might single out; but in all there was a charm of beauty. I took little heed of time and it was only when the deepening twilight forced itself upon me that I began to think of how I should find my way home. The brightness of the day had gone. The air was cold, and the drifting of clouds high overhead was more marked. They were accompanied by a sort of far-away rushing sound, through which seemed to come at intervals that mysterious cry which the driver had said came from a wolf. For a while I hesitated. I had said I would see the deserted village, so on I went, and presently came on a wide stretch of open country, shut in by hills all around. Their sides were covered with trees which spread down to the plain, dotting, in clumps, the gentler slopes and hollows which showed here and there. I followed with my eye the winding of the road, and saw that it curved close to one of the densest of these clumps and was lost behind it.

As I looked there came a cold shiver in the air, and the snow began to fall. I thought of the miles and miles of bleak country I had passed, and then hurried on

to seek the shelter of the wood in front. Darker and darker grew the sky, and faster and heavier fell the snow, till the earth before and around me was a glistening white carpet the further edge of which was lost in misty vagueness. The road was here but crude, and when on the level its boundaries were not so marked, as when it passed through the cuttings; and in a little while I found that I must have strayed from it, for I missed underfoot the hard surface, and my feet sank deeper in the grass and moss. Then the wind grew stronger and blew with ever increasing force, till I was fain to run before it. The air became icy-cold, and in spite of my exercise I began to suffer. The snow was now falling so thickly and whirling around me in such rapid eddies that I could hardly keep my eyes open. Every now and then the heavens were torn asunder by vivid lightning, and in the flashes I could see ahead of me a great mass of trees, chiefly yew and cypress all heavily coated with snow.

I was soon amongst the shelter of the trees, and there, in comparative silence, I could hear the rush of the wind high overhead. Presently the blackness of the storm had become merged in the darkness of the night. By-and-by the storm seemed to be passing away: it now only came in fierce puffs or blasts. At such moments the weird sound of the wolf appeared to be echoed by many similar sounds around me.

Now and again, through the black mass of drifting cloud, came a straggling ray of moonlight, which lit up the expanse, and showed me that I was at the edge of a dense mass of cypress and yew trees. As the snow had ceased to fall, I walked out from the shelter and began to investigate more closely. It appeared to me that, amongst so many old foundations as I had passed, there might be still standing a house in which, though in ruins, I could find some sort of shelter for a while. As I skirted the edge of the copse, I found that a low wall encircled it, and following this I presently found an opening. Here the cypresses formed an alley leading up to a square mass of some kind of building. Just as I caught sight of this, however, the drifting clouds obscured the moon, and I passed up the path in darkness. The wind must have grown colder, for I felt myself shiver as I walked; but there was hope of shelter, and I groped my way blindly on.

I stopped, for there was a sudden stillness. The storm had passed; and, perhaps in sympathy with nature's silence, my heart seemed to cease to beat. But this was only momentarily; for suddenly the moonlight broke through the clouds, showing me that I was in a graveyard, and that the square object before me was a great massive tomb of marble, as white as the snow that lay on and all around it. With the moonlight there came a fierce sigh of the storm, which appeared to

resume its course with a long, low howl, as of many dogs or wolves. I was awed and shocked, and felt the cold perceptibly grow upon me till it seemed to grip me by the heart. Then while the flood of moonlight still fell on the marble tomb, the storm gave further evidence of renewing, as though it was returning on its track. Impelled by some sort of fascination, I approached the sepulchre to see what it was, and why such a thing stood alone in such a place. I walked around it, and read, over the Doric door, in German:

COUNTESS DOLINGEN OF GRATZ

IN STYRIA

SOUGHT AND FOUND DEATH

1801

On the top of the tomb, seemingly driven through the solid marble—for the structure was composed of a few vast blocks of stone—was a great iron spike or stake. On going to the back I saw, graven in great Russian letters:

“The dead travel fast.”

There was something so weird and uncanny about the whole thing that it gave me a turn and made me feel quite faint. I began to wish, for the first time, that I had taken Johann’s advice. Here a thought struck me, which came under almost mysterious circumstances and with a terrible shock. This was Walpurgis Night!

Walpurgis Night, when, according to the belief of millions of people, the devil was abroad—when the graves were opened and the dead came forth and walked. When all evil things of earth and air and water held revel. This very place the driver had specially shunned. This was the depopulated village of centuries ago. This was where the suicide lay; and this was the place where I was alone—unmanned, shivering with cold in a shroud of snow with a wild storm gathering again upon me! It took all my philosophy, all the religion I had been taught, all my courage, not to collapse in a paroxysm of fright.

And now a perfect tornado burst upon me. The ground shook as though thousands of horses thundered across it; and this time the storm bore on its icy wings, not snow, but great hailstones which drove with such violence that they might have come from the thongs of Balearic slingers—hailstones that beat down leaf and branch and made the shelter of the cypresses of no more avail than though their stems were standing-corn. At the first I had rushed to the nearest tree; but I was soon fain to leave it and seek the only spot that seemed to

afford refuge, the deep Doric doorway of the marble tomb. There, crouching against the massive bronze door, I gained a certain amount of protection from the beating of the hailstones, for now they only drove against me as they ricocheted from the ground and the side of the marble.

As I leaned against the door, it moved slightly and opened inwards. The shelter of even a tomb was welcome in that pitiless tempest, and I was about to enter it when there came a flash of forked-lightning that lit up the whole expanse of the heavens. In the instant, as I am a living man, I saw, as my eyes were turned into the darkness of the tomb, a beautiful woman, with rounded cheeks and red lips, seemingly sleeping on a bier. As the thunder broke overhead, I was grasped as by the hand of a giant and hurled out into the storm. The whole thing was so sudden that, before I could realise the shock, moral as well as physical, I found the hailstones beating me down. At the same time I had a strange, dominating feeling that I was not alone. I looked towards the tomb. Just then there came another blinding flash, which seemed to strike the iron stake that surmounted the tomb and to pour through to the earth, blasting and crumbling the marble, as in a burst of flame. The dead woman rose for a moment of agony, while she was lapped in the flame, and her bitter scream of pain was drowned in the thundercrash. The last thing I heard was this mingling of dreadful sound, as again I was seized in the giant-grasp and dragged away, while the hailstones beat on me, and the air around seemed reverberant with the howling of wolves. The last sight that I remembered was a vague, white, moving mass, as if all the graves around me had sent out the phantoms of their sheeted-dead, and that they were closing in on me through the white cloudiness of the driving hail.

Gradually there came a sort of vague beginning of consciousness; then a sense of weariness that was dreadful. For a time I remembered nothing; but slowly my senses returned. My feet seemed positively racked with pain, yet I could not move them. They seemed to be numbed. There was an icy feeling at the back of my neck and all down my spine, and my ears, like my feet, were dead, yet in torment; but there was in my breast a sense of warmth which was, by comparison, delicious. It was as a nightmare—a physical nightmare, if one may use such an expression; for some heavy weight on my chest made it difficult for me to breathe.

This period of semi-lethargy seemed to remain a long time, and as it faded away I must have slept or swooned. Then came a sort of loathing, like the first stage of sea-sickness, and a wild desire to be free from something—I knew not what. A vast stillness enveloped me, as though all the world were asleep or dead

—only broken by the low panting as of some animal close to me. I felt a warm rasping at my throat, then came a consciousness of the awful truth, which chilled me to the heart and sent the blood surging up through my brain. Some great animal was lying on me and now licking my throat. I feared to stir, for some instinct of prudence bade me lie still; but the brute seemed to realise that there was now some change in me, for it raised its head. Through my eyelashes I saw above me the two great flaming eyes of a gigantic wolf. Its sharp white teeth gleamed in the gaping red mouth, and I could feel its hot breath fierce and acrid upon me.

For another spell of time I remembered no more. Then I became conscious of a low growl, followed by a yelp, renewed again and again. Then, seemingly very far away, I heard a “Holloa! holloa!” as of many voices calling in unison. Cautiously I raised my head and looked in the direction whence the sound came; but the cemetery blocked my view. The wolf still continued to yelp in a strange way, and a red glare began to move round the grove of cypresses, as though following the sound. As the voices drew closer, the wolf yelped faster and louder. I feared to make either sound or motion. Nearer came the red glow, over the white pall which stretched into the darkness around me. Then all at once from beyond the trees there came at a trot a troop of horsemen bearing torches. The wolf rose from my breast and made for the cemetery. I saw one of the horsemen (soldiers by their caps and their long military cloaks) raise his carbine and take aim. A companion knocked up his arm, and I heard the ball whizz over my head. He had evidently taken my body for that of the wolf. Another sighted the animal as it slunk away, and a shot followed. Then, at a gallop, the troop rode forward—some towards me, others following the wolf as it disappeared amongst the snow-clad cypresses.

As they drew nearer I tried to move, but was powerless, although I could see and hear all that went on around me. Two or three of the soldiers jumped from their horses and knelt beside me. One of them raised my head, and placed his hand over my heart.

“Good news, comrades!” he cried. “His heart still beats!”

Then some brandy was poured down my throat; it put vigour into me, and I was able to open my eyes fully and look around. Lights and shadows were moving among the trees, and I heard men call to one another. They drew together, uttering frightened exclamations; and the lights flashed as the others came pouring out of the cemetery pell-mell, like men possessed. When the further ones came close to us, those who were around me asked them eagerly:

“Well, have you found him?”

The reply rang out hurriedly:

“No! no! Come away quick—quick! This is no place to stay, and on this of all nights!”

“What was it?” was the question, asked in all manner of keys. The answer came variously and all indefinitely as though the men were moved by some common impulse to speak, yet were restrained by some common fear from giving their thoughts.

“It—it—indeed!” gibbered one, whose wits had plainly given out for the moment.

“A wolf—and yet not a wolf!” another put in shudderingly.

“No use trying for him without the sacred bullet,” a third remarked in a more ordinary manner.

“Serve us right for coming out on this night! Truly we have earned our thousand marks!” were the ejaculations of a fourth.

“There was blood on the broken marble,” another said after a pause—“the lightning never brought that there. And for him—is he safe? Look at his throat! See, comrades, the wolf has been lying on him and keeping his blood warm.”

The officer looked at my throat and replied:

“He is all right; the skin is not pierced. What does it all mean? We should never have found him but for the yelping of the wolf.”

“What became of it?” asked the man who was holding up my head, and who seemed the least panic-stricken of the party, for his hands were steady and without tremor. On his sleeve was the chevron of a petty officer.

“It went to its home,” answered the man, whose long face was pallid, and who actually shook with terror as he glanced around him fearfully. “There are graves enough there in which it may lie. Come, comrades—come quickly! Let us leave this cursed spot.”

The officer raised me to a sitting posture, as he uttered a word of command; then several men placed me upon a horse. He sprang to the saddle behind me, took me in his arms, gave the word to advance; and, turning our faces away from the cypresses, we rode away in swift, military order.

As yet my tongue refused its office, and I was perforce silent. I must have fallen asleep; for the next thing I remembered was finding myself standing up, supported by a soldier on each side of me. It was almost broad daylight, and to the north a red streak of sunlight was reflected, like a path of blood, over the waste of snow. The officer was telling the men to say nothing of what they had

seen, except that they found an English stranger, guarded by a large dog.

“Dog! that was no dog,” cut in the man who had exhibited such fear. “I think I know a wolf when I see one.”

The young officer answered calmly: “I said a dog.”

“Dog!” reiterated the other ironically. It was evident that his courage was rising with the sun; and, pointing to me, he said, “Look at his throat. Is that the work of a dog, master?”

Instinctively I raised my hand to my throat, and as I touched it I cried out in pain. The men crowded round to look, some stooping down from their saddles; and again there came the calm voice of the young officer:

“A dog, as I said. If aught else were said we should only be laughed at.”

I was then mounted behind a trooper, and we rode on into the suburbs of Munich. Here we came across a stray carriage, into which I was lifted, and it was driven off to the Quatre Saisons—the young officer accompanying me, whilst a trooper followed with his horse, and the others rode off to their barracks.

When we arrived, Herr Delbrück rushed so quickly down the steps to meet me, that it was apparent he had been watching within. Taking me by both hands he solicitously led me in. The officer saluted me and was turning to withdraw, when I recognised his purpose, and insisted that he should come to my rooms. Over a glass of wine I warmly thanked him and his brave comrades for saving me. He replied simply that he was more than glad, and that Herr Delbrück had at the first taken steps to make all the searching party pleased; at which ambiguous utterance the maître d’hôtel smiled, while the officer pleaded duty and withdrew.

“But Herr Delbrück,” I enquired, “how and why was it that the soldiers searched for me?”

He shrugged his shoulders, as if in depreciation of his own deed, as he replied:

“I was so fortunate as to obtain leave from the commander of the regiment in which I served, to ask for volunteers.”

“But how did you know I was lost?” I asked.

“The driver came hither with the remains of his carriage, which had been upset when the horses ran away.”

“But surely you would not send a search-party of soldiers merely on this account?”

“Oh, no!” he answered; “but even before the coachman arrived, I had this telegram from the Boyar whose guest you are,” and he took from his pocket a telegram which he handed to me, and I read:

Bistritz.

Be careful of my guest—his safety is most precious to me. Should aught happen to him, or if he be missed, spare nothing to find him and ensure his safety. He is English and therefore adventurous. There are often dangers from snow and wolves and night. Lose not a moment if you suspect harm to him. I answer your zeal with my fortune.—*Dracula*.

As I held the telegram in my hand, the room seemed to whirl around me; and, if the attentive maître d'hôtel had not caught me, I think I should have fallen. There was something so strange in all this, something so weird and impossible to imagine, that there grew on me a sense of my being in some way the sport of opposite forces—the mere vague idea of which seemed in a way to paralyse me. I was certainly under some form of mysterious protection. From a distant country had come, in the very nick of time, a message that took me out of the danger of the snow-sleep and the jaws of the wolf.

THE MAN WHO FOUND OUT, by Algernon Blackwood

(A Nightmare)

1

Professor Mark Ebor, the scientist, led a double life, and the only persons who knew it were his assistant, Dr. Laidlaw, and his publishers. But a double life need not always be a bad one, and, as Dr. Laidlaw and the gratified publishers well knew, the parallel lives of this particular man were equally good, and indefinitely produced would certainly have ended in a heaven somewhere that can suitably contain such strangely opposite characteristics as his remarkable personality combined.

For Mark Ebor, F.R.S., etc., etc., was that unique combination hardly ever met with in actual life, a man of science and a mystic.

As the first, his name stood in the gallery of the great, and as the second—but there came the mystery! For under the pseudonym of “Pilgrim” (the author of that brilliant series of books that appealed to so many), his identity was as well concealed as that of the anonymous writer of the weather reports in a daily newspaper. Thousands read the sanguine, optimistic, stimulating little books that issued annually from the pen of “Pilgrim,” and thousands bore their daily burdens better for having read; while the Press generally agreed that the author, besides being an incorrigible enthusiast and optimist, was also—a woman; but no one ever succeeded in penetrating the veil of anonymity and discovering that “Pilgrim” and the biologist were one and the same person.

Mark Ebor, as Dr. Laidlaw knew him in his laboratory, was one man; but Mark Ebor, as he sometimes saw him after work was over, with rapt eyes and ecstatic face, discussing the possibilities of “union with God” and the future of the human race, was quite another.

“I have always held, as you know,” he was saying one evening as he sat in the little study beyond the laboratory with his assistant and intimate, “that Vision should play a large part in the life of the awakened man—not to be regarded as infallible, of course, but to be observed and made use of as a guide-post to possibilities—”

“I am aware of your peculiar views, sir,” the young doctor put in deferentially, yet with a certain impatience.

“For Visions come from a region of the consciousness where observation and experiment are out of the question,” pursued the other with enthusiasm, not noticing the interruption, “and, while they should be checked by reason afterwards, they should not be laughed at or ignored. All inspiration, I hold, is of the nature of interior Vision, and all our best knowledge has come—such is my confirmed belief—as a sudden revelation to the brain prepared to receive it—”

“Prepared by hard work first, by concentration, by the closest possible study of ordinary phenomena,” Dr. Laidlaw allowed himself to observe.

“Perhaps,” sighed the other; “but by a process, none the less, of spiritual illumination. The best match in the world will not light a candle unless the wick be first suitably prepared.”

It was Laidlaw’s turn to sigh. He knew so well the impossibility of arguing with his chief when he was in the regions of the mystic, but at the same time the respect he felt for his tremendous attainments was so sincere that he always listened with attention and deference, wondering how far the great man would go and to what end this curious combination of logic and “illumination” would eventually lead him.

“Only last night,” continued the elder man, a sort of light coming into his rugged features, “the vision came to me again—the one that has haunted me at intervals ever since my youth, and that will not be denied.”

Dr. Laidlaw fidgeted in his chair.

“About the Tablets of the Gods, you mean—and that they lie somewhere hidden in the sands,” he said patiently. A sudden gleam of interest came into his face as he turned to catch the professor’s reply.

“And that I am to be the one to find them, to decipher them, and to give the great knowledge to the world—”

“Who will not believe,” laughed Laidlaw shortly, yet interested in spite of his thinly-veiled contempt.

“Because even the keenest minds, in the right sense of the word, are hopelessly—unscientific,” replied the other gently, his face positively aglow with the memory of his vision. “Yet what is more likely,” he continued after a moment’s pause, peering into space with rapt eyes that saw things too wonderful for exact language to describe, “than that there should have been given to man in the first ages of the world some record of the purpose and problem that had been set him to solve? In a word,” he cried, fixing his shining eyes upon the face of his perplexed assistant, “that God’s messengers in the far-off ages should have given to His creatures some full statement of the secret of the world, of the secret of

the soul, of the meaning of life and death—the explanation of our being here, and to what great end we are destined in the ultimate fullness of things?”

Dr. Laidlaw sat speechless. These outbursts of mystical enthusiasm he had witnessed before. With any other man he would not have listened to a single sentence, but to Professor Ebor, man of knowledge and profound investigator, he listened with respect, because he regarded this condition as temporary and pathological, and in some sense a reaction from the intense strain of the prolonged mental concentration of many days.

He smiled, with something between sympathy and resignation as he met the other's rapt gaze.

“But you have said, sir, at other times, that you consider the ultimate secrets to be screened from all possible—”

“The *ultimate* secrets, yes,” came the unperturbed reply; “but that there lies buried somewhere an indestructible record of the secret meaning of life, originally known to men in the days of their pristine innocence, I am convinced. And, by this strange vision so often vouchsafed to me, I am equally sure that one day it shall be given to me to announce to a weary world this glorious and terrific message.”

And he continued at great length and in glowing language to describe the species of vivid dream that had come to him at intervals since earliest childhood, showing in detail how he discovered these very Tablets of the Gods, and proclaimed their splendid contents—whose precise nature was always, however, withheld from him in the vision—to a patient and suffering humanity.

“The *Scrutator*, sir, well described ‘Pilgrim’ as the Apostle of Hope,” said the young doctor gently, when he had finished; “and now, if that reviewer could hear you speak and realize from what strange depths comes your simple faith—”

The professor held up his hand, and the smile of a little child broke over his face like sunshine in the morning.

“Half the good my books do would be instantly destroyed,” he said sadly; “they would say that I wrote with my tongue in my cheek. But wait,” he added significantly; “wait till I find these Tablets of the Gods! Wait till I hold the solutions of the old world-problems in my hands! Wait till the light of this new revelation breaks upon confused humanity, and it wakes to find its bravest hopes justified! Ah, then, my dear Laidlaw—”

He broke off suddenly; but the doctor, cleverly guessing the thought in his mind, caught him up immediately.

“Perhaps this very summer,” he said, trying hard to make the suggestion keep

pace with honesty; “in your explorations in Assyria—your digging in the remote civilization of what was once Chaldea, you may find—what you dream of—”

The professor held up his hand, and the smile of a fine old face.

“Perhaps,” he murmured softly, “perhaps!”

And the young doctor, thanking the gods of science that his leader’s aberrations were of so harmless a character, went home strong in the certitude of his knowledge of externals, proud that he was able to refer his visions to self-suggestion, and wondering complaisantly whether in his old age he might not after all suffer himself from visitations of the very kind that afflicted his respected chief.

And as he got into bed and thought again of his master’s rugged face, and finely shaped head, and the deep lines traced by years of work and self-discipline, he turned over on his pillow and fell asleep with a sigh that was half of wonder, half of regret.

2

It was in February, nine months later, when Dr. Laidlaw made his way to Charing Cross to meet his chief after his long absence of travel and exploration. The vision about the so-called Tablets of the Gods had meanwhile passed almost entirely from his memory.

There were few people in the train, for the stream of traffic was now running the other way, and he had no difficulty in finding the man he had come to meet. The shock of white hair beneath the low-crowned felt hat was alone enough to distinguish him by easily.

“Here I am at last!” exclaimed the professor, somewhat wearily, clasping his friend’s hand as he listened to the young doctor’s warm greetings and questions. “Here I am—a little older, and *much* dirtier than when you last saw me!” He glanced down laughingly at his travel-stained garments.

“And *much* wiser,” said Laidlaw, with a smile, as he bustled about the platform for porters and gave his chief the latest scientific news.

At last they came down to practical considerations.

“And your luggage—where is that? You must have tons of it, I suppose?” said Laidlaw.

“Hardly anything,” Professor Ebor answered. “Nothing, in fact, but what you see.”

“Nothing but this hand-bag?” laughed the other, thinking he was joking.

“And a small portmanteau in the van,” was the quiet reply. “I have no other luggage.”

“You have no other luggage?” repeated Laidlaw, turning sharply to see if he were in earnest.

“Why should I need more?” the professor added simply.

Something in the man’s face, or voice, or manner—the doctor hardly knew which—suddenly struck him as strange. There was a change in him, a change so profound—so little on the surface, that is—that at first he had not become aware of it. For a moment it was as though an utterly alien personality stood before him in that noisy, bustling throng. Here, in all the homely, friendly turmoil of a Charing Cross crowd, a curious feeling of cold passed over his heart, touching his life with icy finger, so that he actually trembled and felt afraid.

He looked up quickly at his friend, his mind working with startled and unwelcome thoughts.

“Only this?” he repeated, indicating the bag. “But where’s all the stuff you went away with? And—have you brought nothing home—no treasures?”

“This is all I have,” the other said briefly. The pale smile that went with the words caused the doctor a second indescribable sensation of uneasiness. Something was very wrong, something was very queer; he wondered now that he had not noticed it sooner.

“The rest follows, of course, by slow freight,” he added tactfully, and as naturally as possible. “But come, sir, you must be tired and in want of food after your long journey. I’ll get a taxi at once, and we can see about the other luggage afterwards.”

It seemed to him he hardly knew quite what he was saying; the change in his friend had come upon him so suddenly and now grew upon him more and more distressingly. Yet he could not make out exactly in what it consisted. A terrible suspicion began to take shape in his mind, troubling him dreadfully.

“I am neither very tired, nor in need of food, thank you,” the professor said quietly. “And this is all I have. There is no luggage to follow. I have brought home nothing—nothing but what you see.”

His words conveyed finality. They got into a taxi, tipped the porter, who had been staring in amazement at the venerable figure of the scientist, and were conveyed slowly and noisily to the house in the north of London where the laboratory was, the scene of their labours of years.

And the whole way Professor Ebor uttered no word, nor did Dr. Laidlaw find the courage to ask a single question.

It was only late that night, before he took his departure, as the two men were standing before the fire in the study—that study where they had discussed so many problems of vital and absorbing interest—that Dr. Laidlaw at last found strength to come to the point with direct questions. The professor had been giving him a superficial and desultory account of his travels, of his journeys by camel, of his encampments among the mountains and in the desert, and of his explorations among the buried temples, and, deeper, into the waste of the prehistoric sands, when suddenly the doctor came to the desired point with a kind of nervous rush, almost like a frightened boy.

“And you found—” he began stammering, looking hard at the other’s dreadfully altered face, from which every line of hope and cheerfulness seemed to have been obliterated as a sponge wipes markings from a slate—“you found —”

“I found,” replied the other, in a solemn voice, and it was the voice of the mystic rather than the man of science—“I found what I went to seek. The vision never once failed me. It led me straight to the place like a star in the heavens. I found—the Tablets of the Gods.”

Dr. Laidlaw caught his breath, and steadied himself on the back of a chair. The words fell like particles of ice upon his heart. For the first time the professor had uttered the well-known phrase without the glow of light and wonder in his face that always accompanied it.

“You have—brought them?” he faltered.

“I have brought them home,” said the other, in a voice with a ring like iron; “and I have—deciphered them.”

Profound despair, the bloom of outer darkness, the dead sound of a hopeless soul freezing in the utter cold of space seemed to fill in the pauses between the brief sentences. A silence followed, during which Dr. Laidlaw saw nothing but the white face before him alternately fade and return. And it was like the face of a dead man.

“They are, alas, indestructible,” he heard the voice continue, with its even, metallic ring.

“Indestructible,” Laidlaw repeated mechanically, hardly knowing what he was saying.

Again a silence of several minutes passed, during which, with a creeping cold about his heart, he stood and stared into the eyes of the man he had known and loved so long—aye, and worshipped, too; the man who had first opened his own eyes when they were blind, and had led him to the gates of knowledge, and no

little distance along the difficult path beyond; the man who, in another direction, had passed on the strength of his faith into the hearts of thousands by his books.

“I may see them?” he asked at last, in a low voice he hardly recognized as his own. “You will let me know—their message?”

Professor Ebor kept his eyes fixedly upon his assistant’s face as he answered, with a smile that was more like the grin of death than a living human smile.

“When I am gone,” he whispered; “when I have passed away. Then you shall find them and read the translation I have made. And then, too, in your turn, you must try, with the latest resources of science at your disposal to aid you, to compass their utter destruction.” He paused a moment, and his face grew pale as the face of a corpse. “Until that time,” he added presently, without looking up, “I must ask you not to refer to the subject again—and to keep my confidence meanwhile—*ab—so—lute—ly.*”

3

A year passed slowly by, and at the end of it Dr. Laidlaw had found it necessary to sever his working connexion with his friend and one-time leader. Professor Ebor was no longer the same man. The light had gone out of his life; the laboratory was closed; he no longer put pen to paper or applied his mind to a single problem. In the short space of a few months he had passed from a hale and hearty man of late middle life to the condition of old age—a man collapsed and on the edge of dissolution. Death, it was plain, lay waiting for him in the shadows of any day—and he knew it.

To describe faithfully the nature of this profound alteration in his character and temperament is not easy, but Dr. Laidlaw summed it up to himself in three words: *Loss of Hope*. The splendid mental powers remained indeed undimmed, but the incentive to use them—to use them for the help of others—had gone. The character still held to its fine and unselfish habits of years, but the far goal to which they had been the leading strings had faded away. The desire for knowledge—knowledge for its own sake—had died, and the passionate hope which hitherto had animated with tireless energy the heart and brain of this splendidly equipped intellect had suffered total eclipse. The central fires had gone out. Nothing was worth doing, thinking, working for. There *was* nothing to work for any longer!

The professor’s first step was to recall as many of his books as possible; his second to close his laboratory and stop all research. He gave no explanation, he

invited no questions. His whole personality crumbled away, so to speak, till his daily life became a mere mechanical process of clothing the body, feeding the body, keeping it in good health so as to avoid physical discomfort, and, above all, doing nothing that could interfere with sleep. The professor did everything he could to lengthen the hours of sleep, and therefore of forgetfulness.

It was all clear enough to Dr. Laidlaw. A weaker man, he knew, would have sought to lose himself in one form or another of sensual indulgence—sleeping-draughts, drink, the first pleasures that came to hand. Self-destruction would have been the method of a little bolder type; and deliberate evil-doing, poisoning with his awful knowledge all he could, the means of still another kind of man. Mark Ebor was none of these. He held himself under fine control, facing silently and without complaint the terrible facts he honestly believed himself to have been unfortunate enough to discover. Even to his intimate friend and assistant, Dr. Laidlaw, he vouchsafed no word of true explanation or lament. He went straight forward to the end, knowing well that the end was not very far away.

And death came very quietly one day to him, as he was sitting in the arm-chair of the study, directly facing the doors of the laboratory—the doors that no longer opened. Dr. Laidlaw, by happy chance, was with him at the time, and just able to reach his side in response to the sudden painful efforts for breath; just in time, too, to catch the murmured words that fell from the pallid lips like a message from the other side of the grave.

“Read them, if you must; and, if you can—destroy. But”—his voice sank so low that Dr. Laidlaw only just caught the dying syllables—“but—never, never—give them to the world.”

And like a grey bundle of dust loosely gathered up in an old garment the professor sank back into his chair and expired.

But this was only the death of the body. His spirit had died two years before.

4

The estate of the dead man was small and uncomplicated, and Dr. Laidlaw, as sole executor and residuary legatee, had no difficulty in settling it up. A month after the funeral he was sitting alone in his upstairs library, the last sad duties completed, and his mind full of poignant memories and regrets for the loss of a friend he had revered and loved, and to whom his debt was so incalculably great. The last two years, indeed, had been for him terrible. To watch the swift decay of the greatest combination of heart and brain he had ever known, and to realize

he was powerless to help, was a source of profound grief to him that would remain to the end of his days.

At the same time an insatiable curiosity possessed him. The study of dementia was, of course, outside his special province as a specialist, but he knew enough of it to understand how small a matter might be the actual cause of how great an illusion, and he had been devoured from the very beginning by a ceaseless and increasing anxiety to know what the professor had found in the sands of "Chaldea," what these precious Tablets of the Gods might be, and particularly—for this was the real cause that had sapped the man's sanity and hope—what the inscription was that he had believed to have deciphered thereon.

The curious feature of it all to his own mind was, that whereas his friend had dreamed of finding a message of glorious hope and comfort, he had apparently found (so far as he had found anything intelligible at all, and not invented the whole thing in his dementia) that the secret of the world, and the meaning of life and death, was of so terrible a nature that it robbed the heart of courage and the soul of hope. What, then, could be the contents of the little brown parcel the professor had bequeathed to him with his pregnant dying sentences?

Actually his hand was trembling as he turned to the writing-table and began slowly to unfasten a small old-fashioned desk on which the small gilt initials "M.E." stood forth as a melancholy memento. He put the key into the lock and half turned it. Then, suddenly, he stopped and looked about him. Was that a sound at the back of the room? It was just as though someone had laughed and then tried to smother the laugh with a cough. A slight shiver ran over him as he stood listening.

"This is absurd," he said aloud; "too absurd for belief—that I should be so nervous! It's the effect of curiosity unduly prolonged." He smiled a little sadly and his eyes wandered to the blue summer sky and the plane trees swaying in the wind below his window. "It's the reaction," he continued. "The curiosity of two years to be quenched in a single moment! The nervous tension, of course, must be considerable."

He turned back to the brown desk and opened it without further delay. His hand was firm now, and he took out the paper parcel that lay inside without a tremor. It was heavy. A moment later there lay on the table before him a couple of weather-worn plaques of grey stone—they looked like stone, although they felt like metal—on which he saw markings of a curious character that might have been the mere tracings of natural forces through the ages, or, equally well, the half-obliterated hieroglyphics cut upon their surface in past centuries by the

more or less untutored hand of a common scribe.

He lifted each stone in turn and examined it carefully. It seemed to him that a faint glow of heat passed from the substance into his skin, and he put them down again suddenly, as with a gesture of uneasiness.

“A very clever, or a very imaginative man,” he said to himself, “who could squeeze the secrets of life and death from such broken lines as those!”

Then he turned to a yellow envelope lying beside them in the desk, with the single word on the outside in the writing of the professor—the word *Translation*.

“Now,” he thought, taking it up with a sudden violence to conceal his nervousness, “now for the great solution. Now to learn the meaning of the worlds, and why mankind was made, and why discipline is worth while, and sacrifice and pain the true law of advancement.”

There was the shadow of a sneer in his voice, and yet something in him shivered at the same time. He held the envelope as though weighing it in his hand, his mind pondering many things. Then curiosity won the day, and he suddenly tore it open with the gesture of an actor who tears open a letter on the stage, knowing there is no real writing inside at all.

A page of finely written script in the late scientist’s handwriting lay before him. He read it through from beginning to end, missing no word, uttering each syllable distinctly under his breath as he read.

The pallor of his face grew ghastly as he neared the end. He began to shake all over as with ague. His breath came heavily in gasps. He still gripped the sheet of paper, however, and deliberately, as by an intense effort of will, read it through a second time from beginning to end. And this time, as the last syllable dropped from his lips, the whole face of the man flamed with a sudden and terrible anger. His skin became deep, deep red, and he clenched his teeth. With all the strength of his vigorous soul he was struggling to keep control of himself.

For perhaps five minutes he stood there beside the table without stirring a muscle. He might have been carved out of stone. His eyes were shut, and only the heaving of the chest betrayed the fact that he was a living being. Then, with a strange quietness, he lit a match and applied it to the sheet of paper he held in his hand. The ashes fell slowly about him, piece by piece, and he blew them from the window-sill into the air, his eyes following them as they floated away on the summer wind that breathed so warmly over the world.

He turned back slowly into the room. Although his actions and movements were absolutely steady and controlled, it was clear that he was on the edge of violent action. A hurricane might burst upon the still room any moment. His

muscles were tense and rigid. Then, suddenly, he whitened, collapsed, and sank backwards into a chair, like a tumbled bundle of inert matter. He had fainted.

In less than half an hour he recovered consciousness and sat up. As before, he made no sound. Not a syllable passed his lips. He rose quietly and looked about the room.

Then he did a curious thing.

Taking a heavy stick from the rack in the corner he approached the mantelpiece, and with a heavy shattering blow he smashed the clock to pieces. The glass fell in shivering atoms.

“Cease your lying voice for ever,” he said, in a curiously still, even tone. “There is no such thing as *time*!”

He took the watch from his pocket, swung it round several times by the long gold chain, smashed it into smithereens against the wall with a single blow, and then walked into his laboratory next door, and hung its broken body on the bones of the skeleton in the corner of the room.

“Let one damned mockery hang upon another,” he said smiling oddly. “Delusions, both of you, and cruel as false!”

He slowly moved back to the front room. He stopped opposite the bookcase where stood in a row the “Scriptures of the World,” choicely bound and exquisitely printed, the late professor’s most treasured possession, and next to them several books signed “Pilgrim.”

One by one he took them from the shelf and hurled them through the open window.

“A devil’s dreams! A devil’s foolish dreams!” he cried, with a vicious laugh.

Presently he stopped from sheer exhaustion. He turned his eyes slowly to the wall opposite, where hung a weird array of Eastern swords and daggers, scimitars and spears, the collections of many journeys. He crossed the room and ran his finger along the edge. His mind seemed to waver.

“No,” he muttered presently; “not that way. There are easier and better ways than that.”

He took his hat and passed downstairs into the street.

5

It was five o’clock, and the June sun lay hot upon the pavement. He felt the metal door-knob burn the palm of his hand.

“Ah, Laidlaw, this is well met,” cried a voice at his elbow; “I was in the act of

coming to see you. I've a case that will interest you, and besides, I remembered that you flavoured your tea with orange leaves!—and I admit—”

It was Alexis Stephen, the great hypnotic doctor.

“I've had no tea today,” Laidlaw said, in a dazed manner, after staring for a moment as though the other had struck him in the face. A new idea had entered his mind.

“What's the matter?” asked Dr. Stephen quickly. “Something's wrong with you. It's this sudden heat, or overwork. Come, man, let's go inside.”

A sudden light broke upon the face of the younger man, the light of a heavensent inspiration. He looked into his friend's face, and told a direct lie.

“Odd,” he said, “I myself was just coming to see you. I have something of great importance to test your confidence with. But in *your* house, please,” as Stephen urged him towards his own door—“in your house. It's only round the corner, and I—I cannot go back there—to my rooms—till I have told you.

“I'm your patient—for the moment,” he added stammeringly as soon as they were seated in the privacy of the hypnotist's sanctum, “and I want—er—”

“My dear Laidlaw,” interrupted the other, in that soothing voice of command which had suggested to many a suffering soul that the cure for its pain lay in the powers of its own reawakened will, “I am always at your service, as you know. You have only to tell me what I can do for you, and I will do it.” He showed every desire to help him out. His manner was indescribably tactful and direct.

Dr. Laidlaw looked up into his face.

“I surrender my will to you,” he said, already calmed by the other's healing presence, “and I want you to treat me hypnotically—and at once. I want you to suggest to me”—his voice became very tense—“that I shall forget—forget till I die—everything that has occurred to me during the last two hours; till I die, mind,” he added, with solemn emphasis, “till I die.”

He floundered and stammered like a frightened boy. Alexis Stephen looked at him fixedly without speaking.

“And further,” Laidlaw continued, “I want you to ask me no questions. I wish to forget for ever something I have recently discovered—something so terrible and yet so obvious that I can hardly understand why it is not patent to every mind in the world—for I have had a moment of absolute *clear vision*—of merciless clairvoyance. But I want no one else in the whole world to know what it is—least of all, old friend, yourself.”

He talked in utter confusion, and hardly knew what he was saying. But the pain on his face and the anguish in his voice were an instant passport to the other's

heart.

"Nothing is easier," replied Dr. Stephen, after a hesitation so slight that the other probably did not even notice it. "Come into my other room where we shall not be disturbed. I can heal you. Your memory of the last two hours shall be wiped out as though it had never been. You can trust me absolutely."

"I know I can," Laidlaw said simply, as he followed him in.

6

An hour later they passed back into the front room again. The sun was already behind the houses opposite, and the shadows began to gather.

"I went off easily?" Laidlaw asked.

"You were a little obstinate at first. But though you came in like a lion, you went out like a lamb. I let you sleep a bit afterwards."

Dr. Stephen kept his eyes rather steadily upon his friend's face.

"What were you doing by the fire before you came here?" he asked, pausing, in a casual tone, as he lit a cigarette and handed the case to his patient.

"I? Let me see. Oh, I know; I was worrying my way through poor old Ebor's papers and things. I'm his executor, you know. Then I got weary and came out for a whiff of air." He spoke lightly and with perfect naturalness. Obviously he was telling the truth. "I prefer specimens to papers," he laughed cheerily.

"I know, I know," said Dr. Stephen, holding a lighted match for the cigarette. His face wore an expression of content. The experiment had been a complete success. The memory of the last two hours was wiped out utterly. Laidlaw was already chatting gaily and easily about a dozen other things that interested him. Together they went out into the street, and at his door Dr. Stephen left him with a joke and a wry face that made his friend laugh heartily.

"Don't dine on the professor's old papers by mistake," he cried, as he vanished down the street.

Dr. Laidlaw went up to his study at the top of the house. Half way down he met his housekeeper, Mrs. Fewings. She was flustered and excited, and her face was very red and perspiring.

"There've been burglars here," she cried excitedly, "or something funny! All your things is just any'ow, sir. I found everything all about everywhere!" She was very confused. In this orderly and very precise establishment it was unusual to find a thing out of place.

"Oh, my specimens!" cried the doctor, dashing up the rest of the stairs at top

speed. "Have they been touched or—"

He flew to the door of the laboratory. Mrs. Fewings panted up heavily behind him.

"The labatry ain't been touched," she explained, breathlessly, "but they smashed the libry clock and they've 'ung your gold watch, sir, on the skelinton's hands. And the books that weren't no value they flung out er the window just like so much rubbish. They must have been wild drunk, Dr. Laidlaw, sir!"

The young scientist made a hurried examination of the rooms. Nothing of value was missing. He began to wonder what kind of burglars they were. He looked up sharply at Mrs. Fewings standing in the doorway. For a moment he seemed to cast about in his mind for something.

"Odd," he said at length. "I only left here an hour ago and everything was all right then."

"Was it, sir? Yes, sir." She glanced sharply at him. Her room looked out upon the courtyard, and she must have seen the books come crashing down, and also have heard her master leave the house a few minutes later.

"And what's this rubbish the brutes have left?" he cried, taking up two slabs of worn gray stone, on the writing-table. "Bath brick, or something, I do declare."

He looked very sharply again at the confused and troubled housekeeper.

"Throw them on the dust heap, Mrs. Fewings, and—and let me know if anything is missing in the house, and I will notify the police this evening."

When she left the room he went into the laboratory and took his watch off the skeleton's fingers. His face wore a troubled expression, but after a moment's thought it cleared again. His memory was a complete blank.

"I suppose I left it on the writing-table when I went out to take the air," he said. And there was no one present to contradict him.

He crossed to the window and blew carelessly some ashes of burned paper from the sill, and stood watching them as they floated away lazily over the tops of the trees.

PHANTAS, by Oliver Onions

*“For, barring all pother,
With this, or the other,
Still Britons are Lords of the Main.”*

THE CHAPTER OF ADMIRALS

I

As Abel Keeling lay on the galleon's deck, held from rolling down it only by his own weight and the sun-blackened hand that lay outstretched upon the planks, his gaze wandered, but ever returned to the bell that hung, jammed with the dangerous heel-over of the vessel, in the small ornamental belfry immediately abaft the mainmast. The bell was of cast bronze, with half-obliterated bosses upon it that had been the heads of cherubs; but wind and salt spray had given it a thick incrustation of bright, beautiful, lichenous green. It was this colour that Abel Keeling's eyes liked.

For wherever else on the galleon his eyes rested they found only whiteness—the whiteness of extreme eld. There were slightly varying degrees in her whiteness; here she was of a white that glistened like salt-granules, there of a greyish chalky white, and again her whiteness had the yellowish cast of decay; but everywhere it was the mild, disquieting whiteness of materials out of which the life had departed. Her cordage was bleached as old straw is bleached, and half her ropes kept their shape little more firmly than the ash of a string keeps its shape after the fire has passed; her pallid timbers were white and clean as bones found in sand; and even the wild frankincense with which (for lack of tar, at her last touching of land) she had been pitched, had dried to a pale hard gum that sparkled like quartz in her open seams. The sun was yet so pale a buckler of silver through the still white mists that not a cord or timber cast a shadow; and only Abel Keeling's face and hands were black, carked and cinder-black from exposure to his pitiless rays.

The galleon was the *Mary of the Tower*, and she had a frightful list to starboard. So canted was she that her mainyard dipped one of its steel sickles into the glassy water, and, had her foremast remained, or more than the broken stump of her bonaventure mizzen, she must have turned over completely. Many days ago they had stripped the mainyard of its course, and had passed the sail under the Mary's bottom, in the hope that it would stop the leak. This it had partly done as long as the galleon had continued to glide one way; then, without coming about, she had begun to glide the other, the ropes had parted, and she had dragged the sail after her, leaving a broad tarnish on the silver sea.

For it was broadside that the galleon glided, almost imperceptibly, ever

sucking down. She glided as if a loadstone drew her, and, at first, Abel Keeling had thought it was a loadstone, pulling at her iron, drawing her through the pearly mists that lay like face-cloths to the water and hid at a short distance the tarnish left by the sail. But later he had known that it was no loadstone drawing at her iron. The motion was due—must be due—to the absolute deadness of the calm in that silent, sinister, three-miles-broad waterway. With the eye of his mind he saw that loadstone now as he lay against a gun-truck, all but toppling down the deck. Soon that would happen again which had happened for five days past. He would hear again the chattering of monkeys and the screaming of parrots, the mat of green and yellow weeds would creep in towards the Mary over the quicksilver sea, once more the sheer wall of rock would rise, and the men would run....

But no; the men would not run this time to drop the fenders. There were no men left to do so, unless Bligh was still alive. Perhaps Bligh was still alive. He had walked half-way down the quarterdeck steps a little before the sudden nightfall of the day before, had then fallen and lain for a minute (dead, Abel Keeling had supposed, watching him from his place by the gun-truck), and had then got up again and tottered forward to the forecastle, his tall figure swaying and his long arms waving. Abel Keeling had not seen him since. Most likely, he had died in the forecastle during the night. If he had not been dead he would have come aft again for water....

At the remembrance of the water Abel Keeling lifted his head. The strands of lean muscle about his emaciated mouth worked, and he made a little pressure of his sun-blackened hand on the deck, as if to verify its steepness and his own balance. The mainmast was some seven or eight yards away.... He put one stiff leg under him and began, seated as he was, to make shuffling movements down the slope.

To the mainmast, near the belfry, was affixed his contrivance for catching water. It consisted of a collar of rope set lower at one side than at the other (but that had been before the mast had steeved so many degrees away from the zenith), and tallowed beneath. The mists lingered later in that gully of a strait than they did on the open ocean, and the collar of rope served as a collector for the dews that condensed on the mast. The drops fell into a small earthen pipkin placed on the deck beneath it.

Abel Keeling reached the pipkin and looked into it. It was nearly a third full of fresh water. Good. If Bligh, the mate, was dead, so much the more water for Abel Keeling, master of the *Mary of the Tower*. He dipped two fingers into the

pipkin and put them into his mouth. This he did several times. He did not dare to raise the pipkin to his black and broken lips for dread of a remembered agony, he could not have told how many days ago, when a devil had whispered to him, and he had gulped down the contents of the pipkin in the morning, and for the rest of the day had gone waterless.... Again he moistened his fingers and sucked them; then he lay sprawling against the mast, idly watching the drops of water as they fell.

It was odd how the drops formed. Slowly they collected at the edge of the tallowed collar, trembled in their fullness for an instant, and fell, another beginning the process instantly. It amused Abel Keeling to watch them. Why (he wondered) were all the drops the same size? What cause and compulsion did they obey that they never varied, and what frail tenuity held the little globules intact? It must be due to some Cause.... He remembered that the aromatic gum of the wild frankincense with which they had parcelled the seams had hung on the buckets in great sluggish gouts, obedient to a different compulsion; oil was different again, and so were juices and balsams. Only quicksilver (perhaps the heavy and motionless sea put him in mind of quicksilver) seemed obedient to no law.... Why was it so?

Bligh, of course, would have had his explanation: it was the Hand of God. That sufficed for Bligh, who had gone forward the evening before, and whom Abel Keeling now seemed vaguely and as at a distance to remember as the deep-voiced fanatic who had sung his hymns as, man by man, he had committed the bodies of the ship's company to the deep. Bligh was that sort of man; accepted things without question; was content to take things as they were and be ready with the fenders when the wall of rock rose out of the opalescent mists. Bligh, too, like the waterdrops, had his Law, that was his and nobody else's....

There floated down from some rotten rope up aloft a flake of scurf, that settled in the pipkin. Abel Keeling watched it dully as it settled towards the pipkin's rim. When presently he again dipped his fingers into the vessel the water ran into a little vortex, drawing the flake with it. The water settled again; and again the minute flake determined towards the rim and adhered there, as if the rim had power to draw it....

It was exactly so that the galleon was gliding towards the wall of rock, the yellow and green weeds, and the monkeys and parrots. Put out into mid-water again (while there had been men to put her out) she had glided to the other wall. One force drew the chip in the pipkin and the ship over the tranced sea. It was the Hand of God, said Bligh....

Abel Keeling, his mind now noting minute things and now clouded with torpor, did not at first hear a voice that was quakingly lifted up over by the forecastle—a voice that drew nearer, to an accompaniment of swirling water.

*“O Thou, that Jonas in the fish
Three days didst keep from pain,
Which was a figure of Thy death
And rising up again—”*

It was Bligh, singing one of his hymns:

*“O Thou, that Noah keptst from flood
And Abram, day by day,
As he along through Egypt passed
Didst guide him in the way—”*

The voice ceased, leaving the pious period uncompleted. Bligh was alive, at any rate.... Abel Keeling resumed his fitful musing.

Yes, that was the Law of Bligh's life, to call things the Hand of God; but Abel Keeling's Law was different; no better, no worse, only different. The Hand of God, that drew chips and galleons, must work by some method; and Abel Keeling's eyes were dully on the pipkin again as if he sought the method there.

...

Then conscious thought left him for a space, and when he resumed it was without obvious connection.

Oars, of course, were the thing. With oars, men could laugh at calms. Oars, that only pinnaces and galliasses now used, had had their advantages. But oars (which was to say a method, for you could say if you liked that the Hand of God grasped the oar-loom, as the Breath of God filled the sail)—oars were antiquated, belonged to the past, and meant a throwing-over of all that was good and new and a return to fine lines, a battle-formation abreast to give effect to the shock of the ram, and a day or two at sea and then to port again for provisions. Oars...no. Abel Keeling was one of the new men, the men who swore by the line-ahead, the broadside fire of sakers and demi-cannon, and weeks and months without a landfall. Perhaps one day the wits of such men as he would devise a craft, not oar-driven (because oars could not penetrate into the remote seas of the world)—not sail-driven (because men who trusted to sails found themselves in an airless, three-mile strait, suspended motionless between cloud and water, ever gliding to a wall of rock)—but a ship...a ship...

*“To Noah and his sons with him
God spake, and thus said He:
A covenant set I up with you
And your posterity—”*

It was Bligh again, wandering somewhere in the waist. Abel Keeling’s mind was once more a blank. Then slowly, slowly, as the water drops collected on the collar of rope, his thought took shape again.

A galliasse? No, not a galliasse. The galliasse made shift to be two things, and was neither. This ship, that the hand of man should one day make for the Hand of God to manage, should be a ship that should take and conserve the force of the wind, take it and store it as she stored her victuals; at rest when she wished, going ahead when she wished; turning the forces both of calm and storm against themselves. For, of course, her force must be wind—stored wind—a bag of the winds, as the children’s tale had it—wind probably directed upon the water astern, driving it away and urging forward the ship, acting by reaction. She would have a wind-chamber, into which wind would be pumped with pumps.... Bligh would call that equally the Hand of God, this driving-force of the ship of the future that Abel Keeling dimly foreshadowed as he lay between the mainmast and the belfry, turning his eyes now and then from ashy white timbers to the vivid green bronze-rust of the bell above him....

Bligh’s face, liver-coloured with the sun and ravaged from inwards by the faith that consumed him, appeared at the head of the quarterdeck steps. His voice beat uncontrolledly out.

*“And in the earth here is no place
Of refuge to be found,
Nor in the deep and water-course
That passeth under ground—”*

II

Bligh’s eyes were lidded, as if in contemplation of his inner ecstasy. His head was thrown back, and his brows worked up and down tormentedly. His wide mouth remained open as his hymn was suddenly interrupted on the long-drawn note. From somewhere in the shimmering mists the note was taken up, and there drummed and rang and reverberated through the strait a windy, hoarse, and dismal bellow, alarming and sustained. A tremor rang through Bligh. Moving

like a sightless man, he stumbled forward from the head of the quarterdeck steps, and Abel Keeling was aware of his gaunt figure behind him, taller for the steepness of the deck. As that vast empty sound died away, Bligh laughed in his mania.

“Lord, hath the grave’s wide mouth a tongue to praise Thee? Lo, again—”

Again the cavernous sound possessed the air, louder and nearer. Through it came another sound, a slow throb, throb—throb, throb—Again the sounds ceased.

“Even Leviathan lifteth up his voice in praise!” Bligh sobbed.

Abel Keeling did not raise his head. There had returned to him the memory of that day when, before the morning mists had lifted from the strait, he had emptied the pipkin of the water that was the allowance until night should fall again. During that agony of thirst he had seen shapes and heard sounds with other than his mortal eyes and ears, and even in the moments that had alternated with his lightness, when he had known these to be hallucinations, they had come again. He had heard the bells on a Sunday in his own Kentish home, the calling of children at play, the unconcerned singing of men at their daily labour, and the laughter and gossip of the women as they had spread the linen on the hedge or distributed bread upon the platters. These voices had rung in his brain, interrupted now and then by the groans of Bligh and of two other men who had been alive then. Some of the voices he had heard had been silent on earth this many a long year, but Abel Keeling, thirst-tortured, had heard them, even as he was now hearing that vacant moaning with the intermittent throbbing that filled the strait with alarm....

“Praise Him, praise Him, praise Him!” Bligh was calling deliriously.

Then a bell seemed to sound in Abel Keeling’s ears, and, as if something in the mechanism of his brain had slipped, another picture rose in his fancy—the scene when the *Mary of the Tower* had put out, to a bravery of swinging bells and shrill fifes and valiant trumpets. She had not been a leper-white galleon then. The scroll-work on her prow had twinkled with gilding; her belfry and stern-galleries and elaborate lanterns had flashed in the sun with gold; and her fighting-tops and the war-pavesse about her waist had been gay with painted coats and scutcheons. To her sails had been stitched gaudy ramping lions of scarlet saye, and from her mainyard, now dipping in the water, had hung the broad two-tailed pennant with the Virgin and Child embroidered upon it....

Then suddenly a voice about him seemed to be saying, “*And a half-seven—and a half-seven—*” and in a twink the picture in Abel Keeling’s brain changed

again. He was at home again, instructing his son, young Abel, in the casting of the lead from the skiff they had pulled out of the harbour.

“*And a half-seven!*” the boy seemed to be calling.

Abel Keeling’s blackened lips muttered: “Excellently well cast, Abel, excellently well cast!”

“*And a half-seven—and a half-seven—seven—seven—*”

“Ah,” Abel Keeling murmured, “that last was not a clear cast—give me the line—thus it should go...ay, so.... Soon you shall sail the seas with me in the *Mary of the Tower*. You are already perfect in the stars and the motions of the planets; tomorrow I will instruct you in the use of the backstaff....”

For a minute or two he continued to mutter; then he dozed. When again he came to semi-consciousness it was once more to the sound of bells, at first faint, then louder, and finally becoming a noisy clamour immediately above his head. It was Bligh. Bligh, in a fresh attack of delirium, had seized the bell-lanyard and was ringing the bell insanely. The cord broke in his fingers, but he thrust at the bell with his hand, and again called aloud.

“Upon an harp and an instrument of ten strings...let Heaven and Earth praise Thy Name!...”

He continued to call aloud, and to beat on the bronze-rusted bell.

“*Ship ahoy! What ship’s that?*”

One would have said that a veritable hail had come out of the mists; but Abel Keeling knew those hails that came out of the mists. They came from ships which were not there. “Ay, ay, keep a good look-out, and have a care to your lodemanage,” he muttered again to his son....

But, as sometimes a sleeper sits up in his dream, or rises from his couch and walks, so all of a sudden Abel Keeling found himself on his hands and knees on the deck, looking back over his shoulder. In some deep-seated region of his consciousness he was dimly aware that the cant of the deck had become more perilous, but his brain received the intelligence and forgot it again. He was looking out into the bright and baffling mists. The buckler of the sun was of a more ardent silver; the sea below it was lost in brilliant evaporation; and between them, suspended in the haze, no more substantial than the vague darkneses that float before dazzled eyes, a pyramidal phantom-shape hung. Abel Keeling passed his hand over his eyes, but when he removed it the shape was still there, gliding slowly towards the *Mary’s* quarter. Its form changed as he watched it. The spirit-grey shape that had been a pyramid seemed to dissolve into four upright members, slightly graduated in tallness, that nearest the *Mary’s*

stern the tallest and that to the left the lowest. It might have been the shadow of the gigantic set of reed-pipes on which that vacant mournful note had been sounded.

And as he looked, with fooled eyes, again his ears became fooled:

“Ahoy there! What ship’s that? Are you a ship?... Here, give me that trumpet —” Then a metallic barking. *“Ahoy there! What the devil are you? Didn’t you ring a bell? Ring it again, or blow a blast or something, and go dead slow!”*

All this came, as it were, indistinctly, and through a sort of high singing in Abel Keeling’s own ears. Then he fancied a short bewildered laugh, followed by a colloquy from somewhere between sea and sky.

“Here, Ward, just pinch me, will you? Tell me what you see there. I want to know if I’m awake.”

“See where?”

“There, on the starboard bow. (Stop that ventilating fan; I can’t hear myself think.) See anything? Don’t tell me it’s that damned Dutchman—don’t pitch me that old Vanderdecken tale—give me an easy one first, something about a sea-serpent.... You did hear that bell, didn’t you?”

“Shut up a minute—listen—”

Again Bligh’s voice was lifted up.

“This is the cov’nant that I make:

From henceforth nevermore

Will I again the world destroy

With water, as before.”

Bligh’s voice died away again in Abel Keeling’s ears.

“Oh—my—fat—Aunt—Julia!” the voice that seemed to come from between sea and sky sounded again. Then it spoke more loudly. *“I say,”* it began with careful politeness, *“if you are a ship, do you mind telling us where the masquerade is to be? Our wireless is out of order, and we hadn’t heard of it.... Oh, you do see it, Ward, don’t you?... Please, please tell us what the hell you are!”*

Again Abel Keeling had moved as a sleepwalker moves. He had raised himself up by the belfry timbers, and Bligh had sunk in a heap on the deck. Abel Keeling’s movement overturned the pipkin, which raced the little trickle of its contents down the deck and lodged where the still and brimming sea made, as it were, a chain with the carved balustrade of the quarterdeck—one link a still gleaming edge, then a dark baluster, and then another gleaming link. For one moment only Abel Keeling found himself noticing that that which had driven Bligh aft had been the rising of the water in the waist as the galleon settled by

the head—the waist was now entirely submerged; then once more he was absorbed in his dream, its voices, and its shape in the mist, which had again taken the form of a pyramid before his eyeballs.

“*Of course,*” a voice seemed to be complaining anew, and still through that confused dinning in Abel Keeling’s ears, “*we can’t turn a four-inch on it.... And, of course, Ward, I don’t believe in ’em. D’you hear, Ward? I don’t believe in ’em, I say.... Shall we call down to old A. B.? This might interest His Scientific Skippership....*”

“Oh, lower a boat and pull out to it—into it—over it—through it—”

“Look at our chaps crowded on the barbette yonder. They’ve seen it. Better not give an order you know won’t be obeyed....”

Abel Keeling, cramped against the antique belfry, had begun to find his dream interesting. For, though he did not know her build, that mirage was the shape of a ship. No doubt it was projected from his brooding on ships of half an hour before; and that was odd.... But perhaps, after all, it was not very odd. He knew that she did not really exist; only the appearance of her existed; but things had to exist like that before they really existed. Before the *Mary of the Tower* had existed she had been a shape in some man’s imagination; before that, some dreamer had dreamed the form of a ship with oars; and before that, far away in the dawn and infancy of the world, some seer had seen in a vision the raft before man had ventured to push out over the water on his two planks. And since this shape that rode before Abel Keeling’s eyes was a shape in his, Abel Keeling’s dream, he, Abel Keeling, was the master of it. His own brooding brain had contrived her, and she was launched upon the illimitable ocean of his own mind.

...

*“And I will not unmindful be
Of this, My covenant, passed
Twixt Me and you and every flesh
Whiles that the world should last,”*

sang Bligh, rapt....

But as a dreamer, even in his dream, will scratch upon the wall by his couch some key or word to put him in mind of his vision on the morrow when it has left him, so Abel Keeling found himself seeking some sign to be a proof to those to whom no vision is vouchsafed. Even Bligh sought that—could not be silent in his bliss, but lay on the deck there, uttering great passionate Amens and praising his Maker, as he said, upon an harp and an instrument of ten strings. So with

Abel Keeling. It would be the Amen of his life to have praised God, not upon a harp, but upon a ship that should carry her own power, that should store wind or its equivalent as she stored her victuals, that should be something wrested from the chaos of uninvention and ordered and disciplined and subordinated to Abel Keeling's will.... And there she was, that ship-shaped thing of spirit-grey, with the four pipes that resembled a phantom organ now broadside and of equal length. And the ghost-crew of that ship were speaking again....

The interrupted silver chain by the quarterdeck balustrade had now become continuous, and the balusters made a herring-bone over their own motionless reflections. The spilt water from the pipkin had dried, and the pipkin was not to be seen. Abel Keeling stood beside the mast, erect as God made man to go. With his leathery hand he smote upon the bell. He waited for the space of a minute, and then cried:

"Ahoy!... Ship ahoy!... What ship's that?"

III

We are not conscious in a dream that we are playing a game the beginning and end of which are in ourselves. In this dream of Abel Keeling's a voice replied:

"Hallo, it's found its tongue.... Ahoy there! What are you?"

Loudly and in a clear voice Abel Keeling called: "Are you a ship?"

With a nervous giggle the answer came:

"We are a ship, aren't we, Ward? I hardly feel sure.... Yes, of course, we're a ship. No question about us. The question is what the dickens you are."

Not all the words these voices used were intelligible to Abel Keeling, and he knew not what it was in the tone of these last words that reminded him of the honour due to the *Mary of the Tower*. Blister-white and at the end of her life as she was, Abel Keeling was still jealous of her dignity; the voice had a youngish ring; and it was not fitting that young chins should be wagged about his galleon. He spoke curtly.

"You that spoke—are you the master of that ship?"

"Officer of the watch," the words floated back; *"the captain's below."*

"Then send for him. It is with masters that masters hold speech," Abel Keeling replied.

He could see the two shapes, flat and without relief, standing on a high narrow structure with rails. One of them gave a low whistle, and seemed to be fanning his face; but the other rumbled something into a sort of funnel. Presently the two

shapes became three. There was a murmuring, as of a consultation, and then suddenly a new voice spoke. At its thrill and tone a sudden tremor ran through Abel Keeling's frame. He wondered what response it was that that voice found in the forgotten recesses of his memory....

"Ahoy!" seemed to call this new yet faintly remembered voice. "*What's all this about? Listen. We're His Majesty's destroyer Seapink, out of Devonport last October, and nothing particular the matter with us. Now who are you?*"

"The *Mary of the Tower*, out of the Port of Rye on the day of Saint Anne, and only two men—"

A gasp interrupted him.

"Out of WHERE?" that voice that so strangely moved Abel Keeling said unsteadily, while Bligh broke into groans of renewed rapture.

"Out of the Port of Rye, in the County of Sussex...nay, give ear, else I cannot make you hear me while this man's spirit and flesh wrestle so together!... Ahoy! Are you gone?" For the voices had become a low murmur, and the ship-shape had faded before Abel Keeling's eyes. Again and again he called. He wished to be informed of the disposition and economy of the wind-chamber....

"The wind-chamber!" he called, in an agony lest the knowledge almost within his grasp should be lost. "I would know about the wind-chamber...."

Like an echo, there came back the words, uncomprehendingly uttered, "*The wind-chamber?...*"

"...that driveth the vessel—perchance 'tis not wind—a steel bow that is bent also conserveth force—the force you store, to move at will through calm and storm...."

"Can you make out what it's driving at?"

"Oh, we shall all wake up in a minute...."

"Quiet, I have it; the engines; it wants to know about our engines. It'll be wanting to see our papers presently. Rye Port!... Well, no harm in humouring it; let's see what it can make of this. Ahoy there!" came the voice to Abel Keeling, a little more strongly, as if a shifting wind carried it, and speaking faster and faster as it went on. "Not wind, but steam; d'you hear? Steam, steam. Steam, in eight Yarrow water-tube boilers. S-t-e-a-m, steam. Got it? And we've twin-screw triple expansion engines, indicated horse-power four thousand, and we can do 430 revolutions per minute; savvy? Is there anything your phantomhood would like to know about our armament?..."

Abel Keeling was muttering fretfully to himself. It annoyed him that words in his own vision should have no meaning for him. How did words come to him in

a dream that he had no knowledge of when wide awake? The *Seapink*—that was the name of this ship; but a pink was long and narrow, low-carged and square-built aft....

“And as for our armament,” the voice with the tones that so profoundly troubled Abel Keeling’s memory continued, *“we’ve two revolving Whitehead torpedo-tubes, three six-pounders on the upper deck, and that’s a twelve-pounder forward there by the conning-tower. I forgot to mention that we’re nickel steel, with a coal capacity of sixty tons in most damnably placed bunkers, and that thirty and a quarter knots is about our top. Care to come aboard?”*

But the voice was speaking still more rapidly and feverishly, as if to fill a silence with no matter what, and the shape that was uttering it was straining forward anxiously over the rail.

“Ugh! But I’m glad this happened in the daylight,” another voice was muttering.

“I wish I was sure it was happening at all.... Poor old spook!”

“I suppose it would keep its feet if her deck was quite vertical. Think she’ll go down, or just melt?”

“Kind of go down...without wash....”

“Listen—here’s the other one now—”

For Bligh was singing again:

*“For, Lord, Thou know’st our nature such
If we great things obtain,
And in the getting of the same
Do feel no grief or pain,
“We little do esteem thereof;
But, hardly brought to pass,
A thousand times we do esteem
More than the other was.”*

“But oh, look—look—look at the other!... Oh, I say, wasn’t he a grand old boy! Look!”

For, transfiguring Abel Keeling’s form as a prophet’s form is transfigured in the instant of his rapture, flooding his brain with the white eureka-light of perfect knowledge, that for which he and his dream had been at a standstill had come. He knew her, this ship of the future, as if God’s Finger had bitten her lines into his brain. He knew her as those already sinking into the grave know things, miraculously, completely, accepting Life’s impossibilities with a nodded “Of

course.” From the ardent mouths of her eight furnaces to the last drip from her lubricators, from her bed-plates to the breeches of her quick-firers, he knew her—read her gauges, thumbed her bearings, gave the ranges from her range-finders, and lived the life he lived who was in command of her. And he would not forget on the morrow, as he had forgotten on many morrows, for at last he had seen the water about his feet, and knew that there would be no morrow for him in this world....

And even in that moment, with but a sand or two to run in his glass, indomitable, insatiable, dreaming dream on dream, he could not die until he knew more. He had two questions to ask, and a master-question; and but a moment remained. Sharply his voice rang out.

“Ho, there!... This ancient ship, the *Mary of the Tower*, cannot steam thirty and a quarter knots, but yet she can sail the waters. What more does your ship? Can she soar above them, as the fowls of the air soar?”

“Lord, he thinks we’re an aeroplane!... No, she can’t...”

“And can you dive, even as the fishes of the deep?”

“No.... Those are submarines...we aren’t a submarine...”

But Abel Keeling waited for no more. He gave an exulting chuckle.

“Oho, oho—thirty knots, and but on the face of the waters—no more than that? Oho!... Now *my* ship, the ship I see as a mother sees full-grown the child she has but conceived—*my* ship, I say—oho!—*my* ship shall.... Below there—trip that gun!”

The cry came suddenly and alertly, as a muffled sound came from below and an ominous tremor shook the galleon.

“By Jove, her guns are breaking loose below—that’s her finish—”

“Trip that gun, and double-breech the others!” Abel Keeling’s voice rang out, as if there had been any to obey him. He had braced himself within the belfry frame; and then in the middle of the next order his voice suddenly failed him. His ship-shape, that for the moment he had forgotten, rode once more before his eyes. This was the end, and his master-question, apprehension for the answer to which was now torturing his face and well-nigh bursting his heart, was still unasked.

“Ho—he that spoke with me—the master,” he cried in a voice that ran high, “is he there?”

“Yes, yes!” came the other voice across the water, sick with suspense. “Oh, be quick!”

There was a moment in which hoarse cries from many voices, a heavy thud

and rumble on wood, and a crash of timbers and a gurgle and a splash were indescribably mingled; the gun under which Abel Keeling had lain had snapped her rotten breechings and plunged down the deck, carrying Bligh's unconscious form with it. The deck came up vertical, and for one instant longer Abel Keeling clung to the belfry.

"I cannot see your face," he screamed, "but meseems your voice is a voice I know. *What is your name?*"

In a torn sob the answer came across the water:

"Keeling—Abel Keeling.... Oh, my God!"

And Abel Keeling's cry of triumph, that mounted to a victorious "Huzza!" was lost in the downward plunge of the *Mary of the Tower*, that left the strait empty save for the sun's fiery blaze and the last smoke-like evaporation of the mists.

FEAR, by Achmed Abdullah

The fact that the man whom he feared had died ten years earlier did not in the least lessen Stuart McGregor's obsession of horror, of a certain grim expectancy, every time he recalled that final scene, just before Farragut Hutchison disappeared in the African jungle that stood, spectrally motionless as if forged out of some blackish-green metal, in the haggard moonlight.

As he reconstructed it, the whole scene seemed unreal, almost oppressively, ludicrously theatrical. The pall of sodden, stygian darkness all around; the night sounds of soft-winged, obscene things flapping lazily overhead or brushing against the furry trees that held the woolly heat of the tropical day like boiler pipes in a factory; the slimy, swishy things that glided and crawled and wiggled underfoot; the vibrant growl of a hunting lioness that began in a deep basso and peaked to a shrill, high-pitched, ridiculously inadequate treble; a spotted hyena's vicious, bluffing bark; the chirp and whistle of innumerable monkeys; a warthog breaking through the undergrowth with a clumsy, clownish crash—and somewhere, very far away, the staccato thumping of a signal drum, and more faintly yet the answer from the next in line.

He had seen many such drums, made from fire-hollowed palm trees and covered with tightly stretched skin—often the skin of a human enemy.

Yes. He remembered it all. He remembered the night jungle creeping in on their camp like a sentient, malign being—and then that ghastly, ironic moon squinting down, just as Farragut Hutchison walked away between the six giant, plumed, ochre-smeared Bakoto warriors, and bringing into crass relief the tattoo mark on the man's back where the shirt had been torn to tatters by camel thorns and wait-a-bit spikes and saber-shaped palm leaves.

He recalled the occasion when Farragut Hutchison had had himself tattooed; after a crimson, drunken spree at Madam Celeste's place in Port Said, the other side of the Red Sea traders' bazaar, to please a half-caste Swahili dancing girl who looked like a golden Madonna of evil, familiar with all the seven sins. Doubtless the girl had gone shares with the Levantine craftsman who had done the work—an eagle, in bold red and blue, surmounted by a lopsided crown, and surrounded by a wavy design. The eagle was in profile, and its single eye had a disconcerting trick of winking sardonically whenever Farragut Hutchison moved his back muscles or twitched his shoulder blades.

Always, in his memory, Stuart McGregor saw that tattoo mark.

Always did he see the wicked, leering squint in the eagle's eye—and then he

would scream, wherever he happened to be, in a theatre, a Broadway restaurant, or across some good friend's mahogany and beef.

Thinking back, he remembered that, for all their bravado, for all their showing off to each other, both he and Farragut Hutchinson had been afraid since that day, up the hinterland, when, drunk with fermented palm wine, they had insulted the fetish of the Bakotos, while the men were away hunting and none left to guard the village except the women and children and a few feeble old men whose curses and high-pitched maledictions were picturesque, but hardly effectual enough to stop him and his partner from doing a vulgar, intoxicated dance in front of the idol, from grinding burning cigar ends into its squat, repulsive features, and from generally polluting the *juju* hut—not to mention the thorough and profitable looting of the place.

They had got away with the plunder, gold dust and a handful of splendid canary diamonds, before the Bakoto warriors had returned. But fear had followed them, stalked them, trailed them; a fear different from any they had ever experienced before. And be it mentioned that their path of life had been crimson and twisted and fantastic, that they had followed the little squinting swarth-headed, hunchbacked djinni of adventure wherever man's primitive lawlessness rules above the law, from Nome to Timbuktu, from Peru to the black felt tents of Outer Mongolia, from the Australian bush to the absinth-sodden apache haunts of Paris. Be it mentioned, furthermore, that thus, often, they had stared death in the face and, not being fools, had found the staring distasteful and shivery.

But what they had felt on that journey, back to the security of the coast and the ragged Union Jack flapping disconsolately above the British governor's official corrugated iron mansion, had been something worse than mere physical fear; it had been a nameless, brooding, sinister apprehension which had crept through their souls, a harshly discordant note that had pealed through the hidden recesses of their beings.

Everything had seemed to mock them—the crawling, sour-miasmic jungle; the slippery roots and timber falls; the sun of the tropics, brown, decayed, like the sun on the Day of Judgment; the very flowers, spiky, odorous, waxen, unhealthy, lascivious.

At night, when they had rested in some clearing, they had even feared their own campfire—flaring up, twinkling, flickering, then coiling into a ruby ball. It had seemed completely isolated in the purple night.

Isolated!

And they had longed for human companionship—white companionship.

White faces. *White* slang. *White* curses. *White* odors. *White* obscenities.

Why—they would have welcomed a decent, square, honest white murder; a knife flashing in some yellow-haired Norse sailor's brawny fist; a belaying pin in the hand of some bullying Liverpool tramp-ship skipper; some Nome gambler's six-gun splattering leaden death; some apache of the Rue de Venise garroting a passerby.

But here, in the African jungle—and how Stuart McGregor remembered it—the fear of death had seemed pregnant with unmentionable horror. There had been no sounds except the buzzing of the tsetse flies and a faint rubbing of drums, whispering through the desert and jungle like the voices of disembodied souls, astray on the outer rim of creation.

And, overhead, the stars. Always, at night, three stars, glittering, leering; and Stuart McGregor, who had gone through college and had once written his college measure of limping, anemic verse, had pointed at them.

“The three stars of Africa!” he had said. “The star of violence! The star of lust! And the little stinking star of greed!”

And he had broken into staccato laughter which had struck Farragut Hutchinson as singularly out of place and had caused him to blurt forth with a wicked curse:

“Shut your trap, you—”

For already they had begun to quarrel, those two pals of a dozen tight, riotous adventures. Already, imperceptibly, gradually, like the shadow of a leaf through summer dusk, a mutual hatred had grown up between them.

But they had controlled themselves. The diamonds were good, could be sold at a big figure; and, even split in two, would mean a comfortable stake.

Then, quite suddenly, had come the end—the end for them.

And the twisting, gliding skill of Stuart McGregor's fingers had made sure that Farragut Hutchison should be that one.

Years after, when Africa as a whole had faded to a memory of coiling, unclean shadows, Stuart McGregor used to say, with that rather plaintive, monotonous drawl of his, that the end of this phantasmal African adventure had been different from what he had expected it to be.

In a way, he had found it disappointing.

Not that it had lacked in purely dramatic thrills and blood-curdling trimmings. That wasn't it. On the contrary, it had had a plethora of thrills.

But, rather, he must have been keyed up to too high a pitch; must have

expected too much, feared too much during that journey from the Bakoto village back through the hinterland.

Thus when, one night, the Bakoto warriors had come from nowhere, out of the jungle, hundreds of them, silent, as if the wilderness had spewed them forth, it had seemed quite prosy.

Prosy, too, had been the expectation of death. It had even seemed a welcome relief from the straining fatigues of the jungle pull, the recurrent fits of fever, the flying and crawling pests, the gnawing moroseness which is so typically African.

"An explosion of life and hatred," Stuart McGregor used to say, "that's what I had expected, don't you see? Quick and merciless. And it wasn't. For the end came—slow and inevitable. Solid. Greek in a way. And so courtly! So polite! That was the worst of it!"

For the leader of the Bakotos, a tall, broad, frizzy, odorous warrior, with a face like a black Nero with a dash of Manchu emperor, had bowed before them with a great clanking of barbarous ornaments. There had been no marring taint of hatred in his voice as he told them that they must pay for their insults to the fetish. He had not even mentioned the theft of the gold dust and diamonds.

"My heart is heavy at the thought, white chiefs," he said. "But—you must pay!"

Stuart McGregor had stammered ineffectual, foolish apologies:

"We—we were drunk. We didn't know what—oh—what we—"

"What you were doing!" the Bakoto had finished the sentence for him, with a little melancholy sigh. "And there is forgiveness in my heart—"

"You—you mean to say—" Farragut Hutchison had jumped up, with extended hand, blurting out hectic thanks.

"Forgiveness in my heart, not the *juju*'s," gently continued the black man. "For the *juju* never forgives. On the other hand, the *juju* is fair. He wants his just measure of blood. Not an ounce more. Therefore," the Bakoto had gone on, and his face had been as stony and as passionless as that of the Buddha who meditates in the shade of the cobra's hood, "the choice will be yours."

"Choice?" Farragut Hutchison had looked up, a gleam of hope in his eyes.

"Yes. Choice which one of you will die." The Bakoto had smiled, with the same suave courtliness which had, somehow, increased the utter horror of the scene. "Die—oh—a slow death, befitting the insult to the *juju*, befitting the *juju*'s great holiness!"

Suddenly, Stuart McGregor had understood that there would be no arguing, no bargaining whatsoever; and, quickly, had come his hysterical question:

“Who? I—or—”

He had slurred and stopped, somehow ashamed, and the Bakoto had finished the interrupted question with gentle, gliding, inhuman laughter: “Your friend? White chief, that is for you two to decide. I only know that the *juju* has spoken to the priest, and that he is satisfied with the life of one of you two; the life—and the death. A slow death.”

He had paused; then had continued gently, so very, very gently: “Yes. A slow death, depending entirely upon the vitality of the one of you two who will be sacrificed to the *juju*. There will be little knives. There will be the flying insects which follow the smell of blood and festering flesh. Too, there will be many crimson-headed ants, many ants—and a thin river of honey to show them the trail.”

He had yawned. Then he had gone on: “Consider. The *juju* is just. He only wants the sacrifice of one of you, and you yourselves must decide which one shall go, and which one shall stay. And—remember the little, little knives. Be pleased to remember the many ants which follow the honey trail. I shall return shortly and hear your choice.”

He had bowed and, with his silent warriors, had stepped back into the jungle that had closed behind them like a curtain.

Even in that moment of stark, enormous horror, horror too great to be grasped, horror that swept over and beyond the barriers of fear—even in that moment Stuart McGregor had realized that, by leaving the choice to them, the Bakoto had committed a refined cruelty worthy of a more civilized race, and had added a psychic torture fully as dreadful as the physical torture of the little knives.

Too, in that moment of ghastly, lecherous expectancy, he had known that it was Farragut Hutchison who would be sacrificed to the *juju*—Farragut Hutchison who sat there, staring into the camp fire, making queer little, funny noises in his throat.

Suddenly, Stuart McGregor had laughed—he remembered that laugh to his dying day—and had thrown a greasy pack of playing cards into the circle of meager, indifferent light.

“Let the cards decide, old boy,” he had shouted. “One hand of poker—and no drawing to your hand. Showdown! That’s square, isn’t it?”

“Sure!” the other had replied, still staring straight ahead of him. “Go ahead and deal—”

His voice had drifted into a mumble while Stuart McGregor had picked up the deck, had shuffled, slowly, mechanically.

As he shuffled, it had seemed to him as if his brain was frantically telegraphing to his fingers, as if all those delicate little nerves that ran from the back of his skull down to his finger tips were throbbing a clicking little chorus:

“Do—it—Mac! Do—it—Mac! Do—it—Mac!” with a maddening, syncopated rhythm.

And he had kept on shuffling, had kept on watching the motions of his fingers—and had seen that his thumb and second finger had shuffled the ace of hearts to the bottom of the deck.

Had he done it on purpose? He did not know then. He never found out—though, in his memory, he lived through the scene a thousand times.

But there were the little knives. There were the ants. There was the honey trail. There was his own, hard decision to live. And, years earlier, he had been a professional faro dealer at Silver City.

Another ace had joined the first at the bottom of the deck. The third. The fourth.

And then Farragut Hutchison’s violent: “Deal, man, deal! You’re driving me crazy. Get it over with.”

The sweat had been pouring from Stuart McGregor’s face. His blood had throbbed in his veins. Something like a sledgehammer had drummed at the base of his skull.

“Cut, won’t you?” he had said, his voice coming as if from very far away.

The other had waved a trembling hand, “No, no! Deal ’em as they lie. You won’t cheat me.”

Stuart McGregor had cleared a little space on the ground with the point of his shoe.

He remembered the motion. He remembered how the dead leaves had stirred with a dry, rasping, tragic sound, how something slimy and phosphorous-green had squirmed through the tufted jungle grass, how a little furry scorpion had scurried away with a clicking *tchk-tchk-tchk*.

He had dealt.

Mechanically, even as he was watching them, his fingers had given himself five cards from the bottom of the deck. Four aces—and the queen of diamonds. And, the next second, in answer to Farragut Hutchison’s choked: “Showdown! I have two pair—kings—and jacks!” his own well simulated shriek of joy and triumph:

“I win! I’ve four aces! Every ace in the pack!”

And then Farragut Hutchison’s weak, ridiculous exclamation—ridiculous

considering the dreadful fate that awaited him:

“Geewhittaker! You’re some lucky guy, aren’t you, Mac?”

At the same moment, the Bakoto chief had stepped out of the jungle, followed by half a dozen warriors.

Then the final scene—that ghastly, ironic moon squinting down, just as Farragut Hutchison had walked away between the giant, plumed, ochre-smeared Bakoto warriors, and bringing into stark relief the tattoo mark on his back where the shirt had been torn to tatters—and the leering, evil wink in the eagle’s eye as Farragut Hutchison twitched his shoulder blades with absurd, nervous resignation.

Stuart McGregor remembered it every day of his life.

He spoke of it to many. But only to Father Aloysius O’Donnell, the priest who officiated in the little Gothic church around the corner, on Ninth Avenue, did he tell the whole truth—did he confess that he had cheated.

“Of course I cheated!” he said. “Of course!” And, with a sort of mocking bravado: “What would you have done, padre?”

The priest, who was old and wise and gentle, thus not at all sure of himself, shook his head.

“I don’t know,” he replied. “I don’t know.”

“Well—I do know. You would have done what I did. You wouldn’t have been able to help yourself.” Then, in a low voice: “And you would have paid! As I pay—every day, every minute, every second of my life.”

“Regret, repentance,” murmured the priest, but the other cut him short.

“Repentance—nothing. I regret nothing! I repent nothing! I’d do the same tomorrow. It isn’t that—oh—that—what d’ye call it—sting of conscience, that’s driving me crazy. It’s fear!”

“Fear of what?” asked Father O’Donnell.

“Fear of Farragut Hutchison—who is dead!”

Ten years ago!

And he knew that Farragut Hutchison had died. For not long afterward a British trader had come upon certain gruesome but unmistakable remains and had brought the tale to the coast. Yet was there fear in Stuart McGregor’s soul, fear worse than the fear of the little knives. Fear of Farragut Hutchison who was dead?

No. He did not believe that the man was dead. He did not believe it, could not believe it.

“And even suppose he’s dead,” he used to say to the priest, “he’ll get me. He’ll

get me as sure as you're born. I saw it in the eye of that eagle—the squinting eye of that infernal, tattooed eagle!”

Then he would turn a grayish yellow, his whole body would tremble with a terrible palsy and, in a sort of whine, which was both ridiculous and pathetic, given his size and bulk, given the crimson, twisted adventures through which he had passed, he would exclaim:

“He'll get me. He'll get me. He'll get me even from beyond the grave.”

And then Father O'Donnell would cross himself rapidly, just a little guiltily.

It is said that there is a morbid curiosity which forces the murderer to view the place of his crime.

Some psychic reason of the same kind may have caused Stuart McGregor to decorate the walls and corners of his sitting room with the memories of that Africa which he feared and hated, and which, daily, he was trying to forget—with a shimmering, cruel mass of jungle curios, sjamboks and assegais, signal drums and daggers, knobkerries and rhino shields and what not.

Steadily, he added to his collection, buying in auction rooms, in little shops on the waterfront, from sailors and ship pursers and collectors who had duplicates for sale.

He became a well-known figure in the row of antique stores in back of Madison Square Garden, and was so liberal when it came to payment that Morris Newman, who specialized in African curios, would send the pick of all the new stuff he bought to his house.

It was on a day in August—one of those tropical New York days when the very birds gasp for air, when orange-flaming sun rays drop from the brazen sky like crackling spears and the melting asphalt picks them up again and tosses them high—that Stuart McGregor, returning from a short walk, found a large, round package in his sitting room.

“Mr. Newman sent it,” his servant explained. “He said it's a rare curio, and he's sure you'll like it.”

“All right.”

The servant bowed, left, and closed the door, while Stuart McGregor cut the twine, unwrapped the paper, looked.

And then, suddenly, he screamed with fear; and, just as suddenly, the scream of fear turned into a scream of maniacal joy.

For the thing which Newman had sent him was an African signal drum, covered with tightly stretched skin—human skin—white skin! And square in the center there was a tattoo mark—an eagle in red and blue, surmounted by a

lopsided crown, and surrounded by a wavy design.

Here was the final proof that Farragut Hutchison was dead, that, forever, he was rid of his fear. In a paroxysm of joy, he picked up the drum and clutched it to his heart.

And then he gave a cry of pain. His lips quivered, frothed. His hands dropped the drum and fanned the air, and he looked at the thing that had fastened itself to his right wrist.

It seemed like a short length of rope, grayish in color, spotted with dull red. Even as Stuart McGregor dropped to the floor, dying, he knew what had happened.

A little venomous snake, an African fer-de-lance, that had been curled up in the inside of the drum, been numbed by the cold, and had been revived by the splintering heat of New York.

Yes—even as he died he knew what had happened. Even as he died, he saw that malign, obscene squint in the eagle's eye. Even as he died, he knew that Farragut Hutchison had killed him—from beyond the grave!

LUCIFER, by John D. Swain

The notorious Remsen Case was table-talk a year or so ago, although a few today could quote the details offhand. Because of it, half a dozen men were discussing psychic trivialities, in a more or less desultory way. Bliven, the psychoanalyst, was speaking.

"It all hinges on a tendency which is perhaps best expressed in such old saws as: 'Drowning men clutch at straws,' 'Any port in a storm,' or, 'A gambling chance.'

"When men have exhausted science and religion, they turn to mediums, and crystal-gazers, and clairvoyants, and patent medicines. I knew an intelligent pharmacist who was dying of a malignant disease. Operated on three times. Specialists had given him up. Then he began to take the nostrums and cure-alls on his own shelves, although he knew perfectly well what they contained—or could easily enough have found out. Consulted a lot of herb doctors, and long-haired Indian healers, and advertising specialists."

"And, of course, without result," commented the little English doctor.

"I wouldn't say that," said Bliven. "It kept alive the forlorn spark of hope in his soul. Better than merely folding his hands and waiting for the inevitable! He was just starting in with a miraculous Brazilian root, when he snuffed out. On the whole, he lived happier, and quite possibly longer, because of all the fake remedies and doctors he spent so much money on. It's all in your own mind, you know. Nothing else counts much."

"All fakes, including the records of the P.S.R.," nodded Holmes, who lectured on experimental psychology.

The little doctor shook his head depreciatingly.

"I shouldn't go as far as that, really," he objected, "because, every now and then, in the midst of their conscious faking, as you call it, with the marked cards and prepared slates, the hidden magnets and invisible wires and all, these mediums and pseudo-magicians come up against something that utterly baffles them. I have talked with a well-known prestidigitator who has a standing bet of a hundred guineas that he can duplicate the manifestations of any medium; and yet he states that every now and then he finds himself utterly baffled. He can fake the thing cleverly, you understand; but he cannot fathom the unknown forces back of it all. It is dangerous ground. It is sometimes blasphemy! It is blundering in where angels fear to tread."

"Piffle!" snorted Bliven. "The subconscious mind explains it all; and we have

only skirted the edge of our subject. When we have mastered it, we shall do thing right in the laboratory that will put every astrologer and palmist and tea-ground prophet out of business.”

Nobody seemed to have anything to answer, and the psychoanalyst turned to the little doctor.

“You know this, Royce,” he asserted, a bit defiantly.

“I don’t pretend to follow you new-era chaps as closely as I ought; but I recall an incident in my early practice that is not explicable in the present-day stage of your science, as I understand it.”

Bliven grunted.

“Well—shoot!” he said, “Of course, we can’t check up your facts, but if you were an accurate observer, we may be able to offer a plausible theory, at least.”

Royce flushed at his brusque way of putting it, but took no offence. Everyone makes allowances for Bliven, who is a good fellow, but crudely sure of himself, and a slave to his hobby.

“It happened a long, long time ago,” began Royce, “when I was an intern in a London hospital. If you know anything about our hospitals, you will understand that they are about the last places on earth for anything bizarre to occur in. Everything is frightfully ethical, and prosy, and red-tapey—far more so than in institutions over here, better as these are in many ways.

“But almost anything can happen in London, and does. You love to point to New York as the typical Cosmopolis—because it has a larger Italian population than has Rome, a larger German than Berlin, a Jewish than Jerusalem, and so forth. Well, London has all this, and more. It has nuclei of Afghans, and Turkomans, and Arabs; it has neighborhoods where conversation is carried on in no known tongue. It even has a Synagogue of Black Jews—dating certainly from the Plantagenet dynasty, and probably earlier.

“Myriads spend all their lives in London, and die knowing nothing about it. Sir Walter Besant devoted twenty years to the collecting of data for his history of the city, and confessed that he had only a smattering of his subject. Men learn some one of its hundred phases passing well; Scotland Yard agents, buyers of old pewter or black-letter books, tea importers, hotel keepers, solicitors, clubmen; but outside of their own little broods the eternal fog, hiding the real London in its sticky, yellow embrace. I was born there, attended its University, practiced for a couple of years in Whitechapel, and migrated to the fashionable Westminster district; but I visit the city as a stranger.

“So, if anything mysterious were to happen anywhere, it might well be in

London; although as I have said, one would hardly look for it in one of our solid, dull, intensely prosaic hospitals.

“Watts-Bedloe was the big man in my day. You will find his works in your medical libraries, Bliven; though I dare say he has been thrust aside by the onmarch of science. Osteopathy owes a deal to him, I think; and I know that Doctor Lorenz, the great orthopedist of today, freely acknowledges his own debt.

“There was brought to us one day a peculiarly distressing case; the only child of Sir William Hutchinson, a widower, whose hopes had almost idolatrously centered in this boy, who was a cripple. You would have to be British to understand just how Sir William felt. He was a keen sportsman; played all outdoor games superlatively well, rode to hounds over his own fields, shot tigers from an elephant’s back in India, and on foot in Africa, rented a salmon stream in Norway, captained the All-English polo team for years, sailed his own yacht, bred his own hunters, had climbed all the more difficult Swiss peaks, and was the first amateur to operate a biplane.

“So that to natural parental grief was added the bitter downfall of all the plans he had for this boy; instructing him in the fine art of fly-casting, straight shooting, hard riding, and all that sort of thing. Instead of a companion who could take up the life of his advancing years were forcing him to relinquish, in a measure, he had a hopeless cripple to carry on, and end his line.

“He was a dear, patient little lad, with the most beautiful head, and great, intelligent eyes; but his wretched little body was enough to wring your heart. Twisted, warped, shriveled—and far beyond the skill of Watts-Bedloe himself, who had been Sir William’s last resort. When he sadly confessed that there was nothing he could do, that science and skillful nursing might add a few years to the mere existence of the little martyr, you will understand that his father came to that pass which you, Bliven, have illustrated in citing the case of the pharmacist. He was, in short, ready to try anything: to turn to quacks, necromancers, to Satan himself, if his son might be made whole!

“Oh, naturally he had sought the aid of religion. Noted clergy of his own faith had anointed the brave eyes, the patient lips, the crooked limbs, and prayed that God might work a miracle. But none was vouchsafed. I haven’t the least idea who it was that suggested the to Luciferians to Sir William.”

“Luciferians? Devil worshipers?” interrupted Holmes. “Were there any of them in your time?”

“There are plenty of them today; but it is the most secret sect in the world. Huysmand in La-Bas has told us as much as has anyone; and you know perfectly

well, or should, that all priests who believe in the Real Presence, take the utmost care that the sacred wafer does not pass into irresponsible hands. Many will not even place it on the communicant's palm; but only in his mouth. For the stolen Host is essential to the celebration of the infamous Black Mass which forms the chief ceremony of the Luciferian ritual. And every year a number of thefts, or attempted thefts, from the tabernaculum, are reported in the press.

"Now the theory of this strange sect is not without a certain distorted rationality. They argue that Lucifer's Star of the Morning was cast out of Heaven after a great battle, in which he was defected to be sure, but not destroyed, nor even crippled. Today, after centuries of missionary zeal, Christianity has gathered only a tithe of the people into its fold; the great majority is, and always has been, outside. The wicked flourish, often the righteous stumble; and at the last great battle of Armageddon, the Luciferians believe that their champion will finally triumph.

"Meanwhile, and in almost impenetrable secrecy, they practice their infamous rites and serve the devil, foregathering preferably in some abandoned church, which has an altar, and above it a crucifix, which they reverse. It is believed that they number hundreds of thousands, and flourish in every quarter of the world; and it is presumed that they employ grips and passwords. But amid so much that is conjecture, this fact stands clear: the cult of Lucifer does exist, and has from time immemorial.

"I never had the least idea who suggested them to Sir William. May have been some friend who was a secret devotee, and wished to make a proselyte. May have been an idle word overheard in a club—or penny bus. The point is, he did hear, discovered that an occult power was claimed by their unholy priests, was ready to mortgage his estate or sell his soul for this little chap, and somehow got in touch with them.

"The fact that he managed it, that he browbeat Watts-Bedloe into permitting one of the fraternity to enter the hospital at all, is the best example I can give of his despairing persistence. At that, the physician agreed only upon certain seemingly prohibitive conditions. The fellow was not to touch the little patient, nor even to draw near his bed. He was not to speak to him, or seek to hold his gaze. No phony hypnotism, or anything like that.

"Watts-Bedloe, I think, framed the conditions in the confident hope that they would end negotiations; and he was profoundly disgusted when he learned that the Luciferian, though apathetic, was not in the least deterred by the hardness of the terms. It appeared that he had not been at all willing to come under any

circumstances; that he tried persistently to learn how Sir William had heard of him, and his address, and that he had refused remuneration of any sort. Altogether, a new breed of fakir, you see!

“There were five of us in the room at the time appointed, besides the little patient, who was sleeping peacefully. Fact is, Watts-Bedloe had taken the precaution of administering a sleeping draught, in order that the quack might not in any possible way work upon his nervous system. Watts-Bedloe was standing by the cot, his sandy hair rumpled, his stiff moustache bristling, for all the world like an Airdale terrier on guard. The father was there, of course; and the head nurse, and a powerful and taciturn orderly. You can see that there wasn’t much chance of the devil-man pulling off anything untoward!

“When, precisely on the moment, the door opened and he stood before us, I suffered as great a shock of surprise as ever in my life; and a rapid glance at my companions’ faces showed me that their amazement equaled mine. I don’t know just what type we had visualized—whether a white-bearded mystic clad in a long cloak with a peaked hat bearing cabalistic symbols, or a pale, sinister and debonair man of the world, such as George Arliss has given us, or what not; but certainly not the utterly insignificant creature who bowed awkwardly, and stood twirling a bowler hat in his hands as the door closed behind him.

“He was a little, plump, bald man of middle age, looking for all the world like an unsuccessful greengrocer, or a dealer in butter and cheese in a small way. Although the day was cool, with a damp yellow fog swirling over the city, he perspired freely, and continually wiped his brow with a cheap bandana. He seemed at once ill at ease, yet perfectly confident, if you know what I mean. I realize that it sounds like silly rot; but that is the only way I can describe him. Utterly certain that he could do that for which he had come, but very much wishing that he were anywhere else. I heard Watts-Bedloe mutter ‘my word!’ And I believe he would have spat disgustedly—were such an act thinkable of a physician in a London hospital!

“The Luciferian priest turned to Sir William. When he spoke, it seemed entirely in keeping with his appearance that he should take liberties with his aspirates. ‘I’m ’ere, m’lord. And h’at your service.’

“Watts-Bedloe spoke sharply, ‘Look here, my man!’ he said. ‘Do you pretend to say that you can make this crippled child whole?’

“The strange man turned his moist, pasty face, livid in the fog murk, toward the specialist. ‘E that I serves can, and will. I’m a middleman, in a manner of speaking. A transmitter. H’its easy enough for ’im, but I don’t advise it, and I

warns you I'm not to be 'eld responsible for 'ow 'E does it.'

"Watts-Bedloe turned to Sir William. 'Let's have an end to the sickening farce,' he said curtly. 'I need fresh air!'

"Sir William nodded to the little man, who mopped his brow with his bandana, and pointed to the cot. 'Draw back the coverlet!' he commanded.

"The nurse obeyed, after a questioning glance at Watts-Bedloe. 'Tyke off 'is night gown,' continued the visitor.

"Watts-Bedloe's lips parted in a snarl at this, but Sir William arrested him with a gesture, stepped to his son's side, and with infinite gentleness took off the tiny gown, leaving the sleeping child naked in his bed.

"Again, as always, I felt a surge of pity sweep through me. The noble head, the pigeon breast, rising and falling softly now, the crooked spine, the little gnarled, twisted limbs! But my attention was quickly drawn back to the strange man.

"Barely glancing at the child, he fumbled at his greasy waistcoat, Watts-Bedloe watching him meanwhile like a lynx, as he took out a crumb of chalk and, squatting down, drew a rude circle on the floor about him; a circle of possibly four feet in diameter. And within this circle he began laboriously to write certain works and figures."

"Hold on there!" spoke Bliven. "Certain words and figures? Just what symbols, please?"

"There was a swastika emblem," Royce promptly replied, "and others familiar to some of the older secret orders, and sometimes found on Aztec ruins and Babylonian brick tablets; the open eye, for instance, and a rude fist with thumb extended. Also he scrawled the sequence 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-9, the '8' omitted, you notice, which he multiplied by 18, and again by 27, and by 36; you can amuse yourselves working it out. The result is curious. Lastly, he wrote the sentence, 'Sigma te, sigma, temere me tangis et angis.' A palindrome, you observe; that is, it reads equally well—or ill, backward or forward."

"Hocus pocus! Old stuff!" snorted Bliven.

Royce gazed mildly at him.

"Old stuff, as you say, professor. Older than recorded history. Having done this, a matter of five minutes, perhaps, with Watts-Bedloe becoming more and more restless, and evidently holding himself in with difficulty, the fellow rose stiffly from his squatting position, carefully replaced the fragment of chalk in his pocket, mopped his brow for the twentieth time, and gestured toward the cot with a moist palm. 'Now, cover 'im h'up!' he ordered. 'All h'up; 'ead and all.'

"The nurse gently drew the sheet over the little form. We could see it rise and

fall with the regular respiration of slumber. Suddenly, eyes wide open and staring at the floor, the fellow began to pray, in Latin. And whatever his English, his Latin was beautiful to listen to, and virgin pure! It was too voluble for me to follow verbatim—I made as good a transcript as I could a bit later, and will be glad to show it to you, Bliven—but, anyhow, it was a prayer to Lucifer, at once an adoration and a petition, that he would vouchsafe before these Christian unbelievers a proof of his dominion over fire, earth, air and water. He ceased abruptly as he had begun, and nodded toward the cot. ‘H’it is done!’ he sighed, and once again mopped his forehead.

“‘You infernal charlatan!’ snarled Watts-Bedloe, unable longer to contain himself. ‘You’ve got the effrontery to stand there and tell us anything has been wrought upon that child by your slobbering drivel?’

“The man looked at him with lusterless eyes. ‘Look for yerself, guv’ner.’ he answered.

“It was Sir William who snatched back the sheet from his son; and till my dying day I shall remember the unearthly beauty of what our astounded eyes beheld. Lying there, smile upon his lips, like a perfect form fresh from the hand of his Creator, his little limbs straight and delicately rounded, a picture of almost awesome loveliness, lay the child we had but five minutes before seen as a wrecked and broken travesty of humanity.”

Again Bliven interrupted explosively:

“Oh, I say now, Royce! I’ll admit you tell a ripping story, as such; you had even me hanging breathless on your climax. But this is too much! As man to man, you can’t sit there and tell us this child was cured!”

“I didn’t say that; for he was dead.”

Bliven was speechless, for once; but Holmes spoke up in remonstrance:

“It seems strange to me that such a queer story should not have been repeated, and discussed!”

“It isn’t strange, if you happen to know anything about London hospitals,” Royce explained patiently. “Who would repeat it? Would Watts-Bedloe permit it to be known that by his permission some charlatan was admitted, and that during his devilish incantations his patient died? Would the stricken father mention the subject, even to us? Or the head nurse and orderly, cogs in an inexorable machine?”

“All this took place nearly forty years ago; and it is the first time I have spoken of it. Watts-Bedloe died years back; and Sir William’s line is extinct. I can’t verify a detail; but it all happened exactly as I have stated. As for the

Luciferians, none of us, I think, saw him depart. He simply stole out in to the slimy yellow fog, back to whatever private hell it was he came from, somewhere in London, the city nobody knows, and where anything may happen!”

PENNIES FROM HELL, by Darrell Schweitzer

I met Jim Bowen for the first time in over ten years in a Fifties Revival bar in Philadelphia. It was the sort of place with posters of James Dean, Marilyn Monroe, and Elvis on the walls, the waiters in regulation Duck's Ass hairdos, an interior decorating style which can only be described as Art Tacko, and of course, inevitably, a dance-floor. The sign over the entrance said: **BOP TILL YOU DROP.**

It wasn't Jimbo's style, but there he was. I called him over to my table. He looked up, didn't seem to recognize me at first, and then slid off his bar stool, glass in hand, not stumble-down drunk, but walking, ah, *carefully*. That, too, wasn't his style.

"You've changed," I said.

"Well, I'm *forty-three*, Chuckie-boy. I can still call you that, I hope, for all you're a big-time Novelist now. For me the downhill slide into senility has already begun. Not much longer and I'll be decrepit enough to get a job as an extra in *Night of the Return of the Revenge of the Living Dead, Part II.*"

I could tell that he was, as we literary types phrase it, in his cups.

"This isn't like you."

"At least it's a grown-up obsession." He nodded toward his glass.

I glanced at the picture of Roy Rogers and Trigger on the wall behind him.

"So why are you worried about being grown-up all of a sudden?"

"You remember what I used to say, Chuckie-boy? In American society we remain adolescents until they issue us bifocals. Well, I wear contacts, but the time has come, as inevitably it must. I think that's why I come here." He lifted his glass and pointed one finger at Jimmy Dean, then at Elvis. "This place is a mausoleum of lost youth. It reminds us that time is passing."

"Awfully morbid of you, Jimbo, old buddy."

"Well, Goddamit, I have every *right* to be morbid. Sometimes I get to thinking about Joe Eisenberg—"

"The cartoonist...who died?"

"Yeah. He was after your time. You'd gone off to commit literature by then."

"I met him in your office once," I said. "Besides, after I stopped writing for underground comics, I still read them, at least the ones you published. I loved Eisenberg's stuff. As far out as S. Clay Wilson, only he could draw. I particularly remember the upside-down face series, this guy with his nose pointing up, and corks with little crucifixes stuck in his nostrils, and the caption:

Damned uncomfortable, but it sure keeps the snot vampires away. Great stuff, elegant, tasteful—

“But he never grew up, and it was a childish obsession that killed him.”

“I never knew exactly how he died.”

Jim went back to the bar for another drink. I had a hunch I was going to need an excuse to linger for some time yet, so I called a waitress over and ordered a Brown Cow and a Wangadamburger.

My friend came back, sat down again, and drank in silence for several minutes, then finally said, “I suppose I’ve set myself up for this. I might as well tell you the whole story. You don’t have to believe a word of it, but you can listen. Maybe you can use some of it in a book.”

“Jimbo, I may have called you a lot of things, but never a liar.”

“Just listen.”

“Okay,” I said.

“Well the first thing you have to remember,” Jim began, “is that Joe Eisenberg was like one of the characters in his own cartoons. *Mock-pedantry* was definitely his shtick. You couldn’t tell when he was serious and when he wasn’t. He’d explain something like the Spooch Theory in the driest professorial tone, like an arcane point of real linguistics.”

“The *what* theory?”

“The idea was that spooch is an inherently funny word on the phonetic level. The double-o sound is inherently funny. The **sp** sort of slides you in there, and the hard **ch** traps you inside the word, so the **oo** can resonate until it reaches the humor threshold. A soft sound at the end, and you’d escape. That’s why ‘spoon’ isn’t funny; but spooch is.”

I snickered. Jim took another sip of his drink and said, “You see? That proves it. Or that’s what Joe used to say. And he had lots more where that came from.”

“Weird.”

“Yeah, but creative people are allowed to be weird. The same secret committee that issues the bifocals assigns weirdness quotas, and underground comic book artists get more than most people. And Joe was fun that way. We used to call him. Spoocho Marx. The other Marx Brothers had locked him in the refrigerator and forgotten about him, sometime back in the ’30s, so here he was. He looked the part too, like a dark-haired version of Harpo.

“But somewhere he went too far, and the silliness turned into craziness of a less pleasant sort. I think it began about a year after he’d started working for me, one evening in December. I was still prosperous then, and lived in the suburbs,

and Joe and I used to go home on the same train.

“We had been working late over some story boards. It was the beginning of Joe’s *Miracles of Saint Toad* series that later got such a tremendous response in *Zipperhead Funnies*. He had the art wrapped in a plastic trash can liner under one arm, and we ran for the train, the wind and rain blasting in our faces. I reached the entrance first, and I could hear the train rumbling in downstairs. We would have made it, but Joe suddenly called out, ‘Jim! Help!’

“He’d spilled the artwork, all of it, half inside the doorway; half out. Rain splattered over the floor. Late commuters rushed in, not too careful where they stepped.

“I ran back and helped him recover it, but by then several panels had been ruined. They’d have to be redone. We missed the train, and had to wait another hour inside the station. Much of that time was spent drying the story boards with paper towels from the men’s room.

“‘How the Hell did you drop them?’ I asked.

“‘Oh,’ he said, digging into his coat pocket. ‘Here’s why.’ He held up a penny. ‘You know what they say, *See a penny; pick it up; all the day you’ll have good luck—*’

“‘That was real dumb,’ I said. ‘Grade-A Idiota Maximus. You’re running to catch a train, in the rain, and you’re carrying art that took you days or even weeks to produce, and you risk it all for *one crummy cent*. Not what I would call sound financial planning, my dear fellow. Not at all.’

“He went on for a minute drying a spot where the ink, had run badly, then he gave me his best Harpo smile and said, ‘It isn’t the money, Jimbo. It’s more *luck*. If I don’t have luck, I might lapse into superstition, which is really bad luck. It’s where I get my inspiration from. I’ve found that out. It works like this: I have to find at least one penny every day. That’s basic recognition from the gods.’

“‘The gods?’

“‘Yeah, Zeus and all that crowd. Nobody sacrifices oxen or goes to oracles anymore, so this is how they stay in touch With the few remaining faithful.’

“‘Uh-huh...’

“‘Like I said, you find one penny a day and that’s a sign that at least nothing disastrous will happen. Find more, or dimes or quarters, and you’re ten times blessed, or twenty-five times, and things will turn out real nice. Find a bright, shiny penny, and something new will come into your life, while an old, tarnished thing means that you’ll find something or do something which is old and

familiar, but still good. It's a form of divination, I suppose. There are lots of ramifications. I could go on for hours.'

"He proceeded to do so. He explained away the accident with the art by the fact that he hadn't yet picked up a penny that day, and so was sailing under a curse, so to speak. But the evening would be better. He would probably get a lot of work done, or inherit money from a long-lost uncle, or hear from his old girlfriend, or something. The penny foretold it. He had a whole system worked out, as elaborate as anything in an astrology manual, and he was absolutely serious as he explained it all, in the station while waited, then on the train all the way to his stop.

"Any other time it might have been hilarious, but I was thinking about deadlines and distributors, and the sort of scene my then-wife Carol was going to cause when I got home late and her special Organic dinner was cold.

"'Christ, Joe,' I said at last. 'I don't have time for this bullshit.'

"He turned to me, a hurt look on his face. 'It isn't bullshit,' he said quietly.

"Before I could say anything, the train arrived at his stop, and he got up and left.

"Things got rapidly weirder after that, but I didn't care, because Joe was hot. He was turning in great stuff. Before long I gave him his own book, *Saint Toad's Cracked Chimes*, and by the time the third issue was out and the returns were in on the first, I knew we had a hit. If he had discovered the secret of success by picking up pennies on the street, well, all I could say was more power to him.

"It's hard for me to think of any scene in what was left of his life that didn't have a penny in it. I mean, he found them *everywhere*. In a dark alley, during a *blackout*, for God's sake, he stopped, bent over, and said, 'Ah, here we go!'

"That summer we went to a comic art convention in Boston. The two of us shared the taxi from the train station to the hotel, and, sure enough, there was a penny on the floor in front of him. He held it up to the window, doing his best Harpo act, and, true to character, whipped out an oversized magnifying glass and began to scrutinize the coin minutely.

"'What do you expect to find on it, the secret of the ages?' I asked.

"'Something like that, Jimbo.'

"Joe was a big success with the fans. He could be a real charmer when he wanted to be. But he got a lot of odd looks, always bending over to pick up pennies. There were a lot of jokes about how badly I paid my artists, that they had to scrounge change to stay alive. And once, in the middle of a panel discussion, all the microphones went dead. Joe calmly unscrewed the top of his,

shook it, and a penny dropped onto the table top. He gave the audience his trademarked grin, and there was nervous laughter, as if most people didn't get the joke.

“‘There's a fortune written on it,’ he told them. ‘It says: *You will find true love and get laid.*’

“That got a laugh, and, you know, the prediction came true, at least in part. There was a groupie in the audience, who used Joe's shtick to bait him... literally. She laid out a trail of pennies, up a flight of stairs, along a corridor, and under the door of her room. The door was unlocked. And that, to make a steamy story short, is how Joe Eisenberg lost his virginity, at the age of twenty-seven. Because the gods had revealed that he would, he told me afterward.

“‘I'm sure glad I picked up *that* penny,’ he said.

“I think he used his silliness to hide social awkwardness. And somewhere along the line, all this very much ceased to be amusing.

“He found I don't know *how* many pennies during the remainder of the convention, and on the train ride back. The way he pounced on them told me that the totally overdone gag was turning into a mania. It was a wonder he didn't walk right into people. He was always scanning the floor, looking for pennies.

“‘Awwright! Enough of this!’ I told him in my best Graham Chapman-as-a-British-Army-officer voice. This has got to stop. It's getting silly.’

“‘I only wish it were, Jimbo,’ he said softly, then turned to stare out the train window.

“It was early November when he came into my office one evening late with a stack of new artwork. Things were going badly for me by then, for all Joe's stuff sold better than anything else I had. The mid-'70s were bad times for undergrounds. Sex and obscenity had lost a good deal of their novelty, and the Moron Majority was after us. Head shops were closing, and with them went much of the distribution. Books that had sold 75,000 copies five years previously were now lucky to do 20,000. And so I was *living* in that dingy office above the record store on South Street. My suburban apartment, and my wife-Carol, had gone in the course of belt-tightening.

“I was working late with some bills, and Joe knew I'd be there. He had a key and he just came in. I hardly glanced up. Just as he stepped through the door my Selectric jammed and began making a hideous rattle.

“Somehow he was expecting it. Joe dropped his artwork on a chair and ran to my desk, leaning over my shoulder, reaching into my typewriter with the longest pair of tweezers I have ever laid eyes on, and extracted—you don't have to guess

—a shiny, new, Goddamn *penny* from the innards of my typewriter. As soon as he did, the machine reverted to a contented hum.

“Out came the magnifying glass again. I knew better than to expect an explanation.

“‘This is great!’ he said in something that was almost a tone of reverential awe. ‘The pattern is complete. I have all the answers now.’

“Without another word, he left, not bothering to even discuss the artwork. But, as I said, I was pretty used to his, ah, eccentricities by now. So I just got up and looked at the art myself.

“And in a minute, I’d forgotten my troubles, how weird Joe was getting, and everything. The stuff was brilliant. It was the first of that final sequence of the *Saint Toad* strips, in which the warty sage sets out on his pilgrimage to find the Meaning of Life in the Land of Reversible Cups. I was laughing aloud. It was a breakthrough, which put Joe on a level with the immortal R. Crumb, or even a notch above.

“‘Wow,’ I said to myself. ‘Mister Natural, move over.’

“It was part of a sustained burst of creativity on Joe’s part. I didn’t see him much after that. He sent his stuff in by Federal Express. There was enough there to keep *Saint Toad* going for several years, weird, metaphysical stuff, all full of dooms and prophecies—and some of his predictions were just uncanny, as things turned out. You know, about the World Series and Comet Kohoutek and the president’s brain.

“There were pennies in every panel. It became a trademark, a game; to see where he had hidden them. Even in the *Fantastic Voyage* parody sequence, where the hero sails a tiny submarine up his own asshole, if you look very closely, there’s an Indian-head cent lodged in the pancreas.

“It was completely impossible for me to think of Joe Eisenberg Without thinking of pennies, and vice-versa. ‘*My God,*’ I told myself, ‘*he must have buckets of them by now.*’

“By the time the following January came around, the sales of Joe’s work were all that was keeping my operation afloat. So you can understand my alarm when I tried to call him one day and got a recorded message saying his phone had been disconnected.

“It was a mistake, I told myself. Or maybe he had just forgotten to pay the bill. I sent him a letter, certified, so he’d have to come to the door and sign for it.

“The letter was returned, undeliverable.

“There was another Joe Eisenberg shtick that came to mind: mock-childish

eagerness over the question, *Can we panic now? Huh? Huh? Can we?*

“Yes, I thought, *we can panic now.*”

“I decided to pay him a visit. It was raining that evening as I walked to the train station. I couldn’t help but think of the night when the penny-mania had all begun. Joe no doubt would have called it a sign from the gods, a meaningful symmetry or something.

“There was a discarded newspaper on the seat beside me as the train pulled out of 30th Street and headed for the suburbs. I glanced at the familiar scenes for a while, then picked up the paper. It was a back section, and there, under a snide headline, was a piece about a ‘local character,’ the Penny Man, who spent whole days wandering the streets after loose change, the bulging pockets of his old overcoat jangling. For all there was no photo and no names were mentioned, I knew it was Joe.

“‘Oh, *shit*,’ I muttered to myself, crumpling the newspaper. ‘Oh *shit*...’

“Joe lived on one of the few sleazy side streets in the posh Main Line town of Bryn Mawr, in an upstairs apartment over a drugstore. I went up the back stairs—wooden stairs outside the building—and tapped gently on his door. No answer. I peered through the glass. The apartment was dark. It was just my luck. Maybe he was out picking up pennies again, hoping to find the secret of the universe that way—in my state of mind, I didn’t doubt he could actually do it—or else the pennies had revealed that he should move without telling me. I was ready to believe anything.

“Then I heard slow, shuffling footsteps, a metallic clang, and the sound of coins pouring onto the floor, followed by incoherent obscenities. But I knew that tired, almost sobbing voice.

“He opened the door, then lunged for my feet. I jumped back, startled. He picked up a penny off the mat, looked at it, then put it in his pocket and turned to go back inside.

“‘Not yet,’ he said to himself. ‘A little more time.’

“He made to shut the door, as if he hadn’t noticed me at all.

“‘Joe, aren’t you going to ask me in?’

“‘Uh, hello, Jim,’ he said, a little disoriented.

“I got a good look at him then, and I hardly recognized him. Now you’ll recall that there were still a lot of hippies then, and squalor hadn’t totally fallen into disfavor yet—but Joe had gone beyond acceptable limits. It was a cold, damp winter night, and there he was barefoot, wearing old jeans with both knees out, and a bathrobe held shut with safety pins. He hadn’t shaved in at least a week,

and he smelled like he hadn't bathed in twice that. And he was haggard, his face pale and sunken, his eyes bloodshot, his gaze wild and distracted. Like a crazy man's. Like the look you see on bag people, when they sit for hours in a corner somewhere, staring into nothing.

"How are you, Joe?"

"Jimbo, I'm...I knew you would come by eventually. I suppose you deserve an explanation. Come in.'

"I followed him silently along an unlighted corridor, stepping over boxes and piles of papers. His studio was a mess, paint chipping from the walls, trash in cardboard boxes heaped in corners, orange peels on the floor. Something moved behind the boxes. Maybe it was a cat, maybe not.

"I wondered how he could work here. The only window looked out on a brick wall. The overhead light apparently didn't work, so the only illumination came from a small lamp he'd clamped onto his drawing table.

"I waded forward, careful not to step on any artwork, and looked at the drawing on the table. It was a rough pencil sketch of the opening spread for what turned out to be the final issue of *Saint Toad*, the scene where they sacrifice Little Nell to Odin. I was selfishly relieved to see that, for all Joe Eisenberg might be going mad, his creative powers were not failing. His stuff would continue to sell comic books.

"Still Joe didn't say anything. I turned away from the table, and began to scan the bookshelves, reading titles as best I could in the gloom. You know, you can tell a lot about someone by what is on their bookshelves. Joe was full of surprises. Oh, there were lots of comics, and the hardcover reprints of the E.C. classics, but also lots of classics in the literary sense. He had most of the Elizabethans, and even Latin and Greek writers. And there were scholarly books on religion, folklore, magic, that sort of thing. I could only make out a few titles: Franz Cumont books on Roman paganism, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, the Joshi translation of *Al Azif*, and a few more. Not what you'd expect for the average cartoonist. Of course Joe wasn't the average cartoonist, and his strips were fantastically erudite sometimes.

"Jim,' he said at last, 'you are probably wondering...'

"You could say that.'

"I'll bet you have.' Then he bent over and I noticed something I hadn't seen before. All along one wall was a row of buckets, and they were indeed filled with pennies. He picked up a handful of them, and let them dribble through his fingers. '*See a penny, pick it up, all the day you'll have good luck.* Do you know

what the next verse is, Jimbo?’

“‘No, but I think you’re going to tell me.’

“‘*See a penny; leave it lay; death will claim you that same day.* I learned that from the Penny Elves. That’s one of the many things they told me.’

“‘The what kind of elves?’

“‘Penny Elves, Jim. Like tooth fairies who have been promoted, only they’re not good enough to work for Santa Claus. I used to think it was the old gods, and that was a grand and serene and beautiful way to look at it—the Olympian powers exiled, forgotten, reduced to communicating to the few mortals who still acknowledge them by penny-divination. There’s a certain pathos in the idea. But it isn’t true. It’s all the work of these loser elves. They resent the job. They want the prestige of being in the employ of the Big Claus, but they know they haven’t made the grade. So they put us humans through the paces, just to make us look ridiculous. They bait the trap with real knowledge, real predictions, and lead us on.’

“He said all this with such conviction, such passive, yet intense resignation that the effect was *scary*. I can’t put it any other way.

“‘Is this...like the Spooch Theory, Joe?’

“Suddenly he was angry. I had never seen him angry before. He threw the remaining pennies down hard, and started shooing me toward the door.

“‘Forget it, Jimbo. You keep asking me if I can be serious. Well you can’t. That’s pretty obvious. You won’t understand. Don’t worry about your Goddamn artwork. You’ll get it on time. What you need to worry about is *What are you going to do when this starts happening to you?* Huh, Jimbo? What?’

“He slammed the door in my face. I stood there for a minute at the top of the stairs, stunned, and then I headed for the Bryn Mawr train station. There was nothing I could do. I had never felt so helpless in all my life. Joe had no family that I knew of, and I couldn’t very well spend \$75.00 an hour—even if I had it—explaining to a shrink that I had *this friend* who was suffering from extraordinary delusions. What was left? Call up the police and tell them Joe was behaving irrationally? There are lots of irrational people in our society, and nobody cares a bit about them. You see them in every big city, sleeping on vents.

“So I caught the last train back into Philly and did nothing. “I was disturbed to notice that there was an unusual amount of loose change on the floor of the train car I was riding in. Nobody stooped to pick any of it up.

“Joe Eisenberg was as good as his word. He remained punctual until the end. His work came in on time, as brilliant and wonderful as ever. Somewhere in the

deep recesses of his tangled mind, *genius* still remained; I don't use the word lightly. *Genius...*

"My own behavior in the following couple of months was selfish, even shameful. That whole scene had been a cry for help from a very disturbed individual, but I tried to put him out of my mind. He was an adult, I told myself, his own responsibility. I was his publisher, not his daddy.

"Mostly I retreated into my work. When I'd started out publishing undergrounds, it was a lark, a mixture of joking and idealism, a way of showing what we called The Establishment in those days that the true spirit of freaky America had not been stifled. I never imagined that it would become a desperate, grinding *business* frequently interrupted by messages from the sponsor, that is to say the landlord, who swore he would turn me and mine out on the sidewalk if the rent was late one more time. Then there were the artists. I managed to pay some of them, some of the time. I felt bad about that.

"But Joe never complained. He was faithful till the end.

"The end came on the last evening of April, Walpurgisnacht. I suppose that figured. I had been out most of the day, trying to find a second-hand typewriter to replace my Selectric, which had rattled and gurgled its last. When I got back to the office-cumapartment, there was a package between the inner and outer doors, with no markings at all, save a single word scribbled on the back in magic marker: *GOOD-BYE*.

"I recognized Joe's handwriting, of course. I hurried inside and slit open the package. Several pennies fell out, onto the carpet. The package contained artwork, another, the final installment of *Saint Toad's Cracked Chimes*, beginning with the sacrifice scene I'd seen on his drawing table during my visit. Well fine, I thought. He's delivering them himself now.

"Then the phone rang. It was the printer, who wasn't going to print the next *Zipperhead* unless I paid him for the jobs he'd done on the previous four. As soon as I got myself out of that one, another artist called and threatened to *go on strike* if I didn't pay him what I owed him.

"One thing followed another, and I didn't manage to even think of Joe again until quite late that night. It must have been around eleven when I noticed that one of the coins on the rug was much larger than the others. I picked it up. It wasn't an American penny, but a very old, large-sized British one, with Queen Victoria on the front.

"On the back were the words: WATCH THIS SPACE FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS.

“I dropped it with a yelp, as if it were red hot. I was sure I was seeing things, going a bit mad myself. The coin lay on the rug at my feet, the message fading in and out: WATCH...WATCH...WATCH...

“Then the phone rang one more time. I assumed it was another creditor. It’s never too late at night when people are after you for money.

“‘Hello!’ I snarled.

“It was Joe. He sounded exhausted, his voice cracking as he spoke. I think he had been crying.

“‘Jim,’ he said. ‘You’ve been good to me, as good as anyone. I think you ought to know. It’s too late to do anything for me, but I ought to tell you the truth.’

“There was a long pause, as if he couldn’t bring himself to speak.

“‘What is it, Joe,’ I asked him gently. ‘You can tell me.’

“‘It isn’t elves. There are no such things as Penny Elves.’

I hoped that somehow Joe had snapped out of it, had become sane again. But he didn’t sound any saner. If anything, he sounded worse.

“‘It’s *devils*,’ he said. ‘Devils right out of Hell. A special subdivision of them. They work for Mammon, the demon of avarice, and they lead people to damnation through, well...*money*. I made a pact with them, Jim. I did it before I knew who they really were. It all started as a game, picking up pennies, tying them in to coincidences, pretending they were omens and prophecies. But then, somehow, I discovered that they *really worked*. Forbidden knowledge, Jim. That’s what it was. They told me...all sorts of things...wonderful, terrible. I made a deal. I wanted to be good, Jim. I wanted to be the best, so I made a deal, and I learned how to read the signs more closely than ever before. That’s where my inspiration came from, *Saint Toad*, all the rest. Made in Hell. You know what they say about me—devilishly funny.’

“‘No, Joe,’ I said. ‘This is crapola. It’s *you*. You’re a genius. It comes out of *your* head. You didn’t get it off the back of any stupid penny.’

“‘The back, Jimbo? How did you know the message is always on the back? I never told you that.’

“I looked down at the coin on the rug. There, on the back of it, was something new: *JOE IS DYING*.

“‘Joe!’ I said. ‘Don’t do anything! Stay where you are! I’m coming out there right now!’

“‘I appreciate the thought, my friend, but you can’t help me. They’re coming for me tonight. They’re coming to collect on an old debt. They told me this, on the last penny I found.’

“He babbled for a while after that. I could barely make out one word in five. Then he was weeping, and reciting poetry:

*‘Cut is the branch that might have grown full straight,
And burned is Apollo’s laurel-bough,
That sometime grew within this learned man.
Faustus is gone; regard his hellish fall,
Whose fiendful fortune may exhort the wise—’*

“‘I’m coming out there,’ I said, and hung up on him.

“I ran for the train station, only to find when I got there that I had missed the last train. I was desperate. I would have to take a cab, but then I realized that I didn’t have enough money on me.

“The floor of the train station was littered with coins, which no one else seemed to notice.

A cop paced calmly, kicking hundreds of nickels and dimes this way and that.

“I didn’t look at any of them. They burned in my hands as I gathered them, but after a few minutes I had my pockets full, just like the Penny Man the newspaper writer had found so amusing.

“It was a long ride to Bryn Mawr. I didn’t even bother to ask the cabby why there was so much loose change on the floor in the back of his cab. Something scratched beneath the seat, and I thought I caught a whiff of sulfur. This same cabby was more surprised than angry when I paid my fifteen-dollar fare with a double handful of coins.

“‘You count it!’ I yelled, as I ran up the stairs to Joe’s apartment.

“There was a thunderous racket coming from the alley beneath the studio window. Coins were pouring out, rattling off the tops of trash cans like rainwater. When I got to his door, the sound from inside was like what you’d hear if every slot machine in Atlantic City hit the jackpot at once.

“Of course I was too late. He was already dead by the time I forced open the door and crawled the length of that hall, through three or four *feet* of loose change, which seemed to wriggle and heave beneath me, while millions of coins poured out of the darkness overhead, battering, nearly suffocating me.

“I think Joe had been trying to draw at the very end. His table was still standing, and there were a few random lines across a sheet of paper clamped there. His stool was buried. I dug frantically.

“I found him at last, face down on the floor, half underneath the drawing table. I pulled him to the surface and clung to him, as if somehow that would do some

good, but he was already dead. I just sat there for a while as the coins rained down and the whole structure of the building creaked from the weight of them. My mind blanked out. His corpse was a kind of life preserver. I hung on because I couldn't let go. I was still holding him when the police arrived."

Jim Bowen stopped talking, and took another sip of his drink. My Wangadamburger had gotten cold on the plate. The waitress was staring at us.

"That's the story," he said. "I don't expect you to believe it, but that's the story."

"Wait a Goddamn minute," I said, almost convinced I was the victim of the most inscrutable, poker-faced put-on in history. "You can't end it there. I mean, the police find you half-buried in something like forty million dollars worth of small change, and Joe Eisenberg is in your arms, crushed to death—you must have had quite a time explaining."

"He wasn't crushed. He'd choked on a single coin. Otherwise the apartment was its usual mess. All those pennies were gone."

"Except the one he'd choked on."

"That wasn't a penny, Chuck. It was a *solidus*."

"A *what*?"

"An ancient Roman coin. Gold, about the size of a nickel. The figure on it was Julian the Apostate, who was the last emperor to honor the old gods. 'He was heavily into divination, I understand.'"

"But what has that got to do with—?"

"I think the devils, or whatever they were, thought it would make a particularly fine finishing touch, that's all. It was embedded in his esophagus. A doctor showed it to me after the autopsy."

I didn't know what to say next. Jim Bowen seemed so sincere about all this. That, as he'd put it, was the scary part.

I rose to leave.

"I suppose it is about that time," Jim said.

The waitress came with our checks on a little tray. I reached for my wallet, but Jim said, "No, you listened to my story. I'll treat you."

He put some bills down, and the waitress took them away.

Then he picked up his napkin. There were coins under it, nickels, dimes, but mostly pennies.

He recoiled in disgust, as if the tabletop were covered with live spiders.

What are you going to do when this starts happening to you? Joe Eisenberg had supposedly asked. Jim was clearly wondering. So was I, just a little bit.

I thought he was going to faint. But instead, very gingerly, he brushed the tabletop clear.

The waitress came back, offering him a little tray.

“For God’s sake! *Keep the change!*”

THE HOUND, by H. P. Lovecraft

In my tortured ears there sounds unceasingly a nightmare whirring and flapping, and a faint, distant baying as of some gigantic hound. It is not dream—it is not, I fear, even madness—for too much has already happened to give me these merciful doubts. St. John is a mangled corpse; I alone know why, and such is my knowledge that I am about to blow out my brains for fear I shall be mangled in the same way. Down unlit and illimitable corridors of eldritch phantasy sweeps the black, shapeless Nemesis that drives me to self-annihilation.

May heaven forgive the folly and morbidity which led us both to so monstrous a fate! Wearied with the commonplaces of a prosaic world, where even the joys of romance and adventure soon grow stale, St. John and I had followed enthusiastically every aesthetic and intellectual movement which promised respite from our devastating ennui. The enigmas of the Symbolists and the ecstasies of the pre-Raphaelites all were ours in their time, but each new mood was drained too soon of its diverting novelty and appeal. Only the sombre philosophy of the Decadents could hold us, and this we found potent only by increasing gradually the depth and diabolism of our penetrations. Baudelaire and Huysmans were soon exhausted of thrills, till finally there remained for us only the more direct stimuli of unnatural personal experiences and adventures. It was this frightful emotional need which led us eventually to that detestable course which even in my present fear I mention with shame and timidity—that hideous extremity of human outrage, the abhorred practice of grave-robbing.

I cannot reveal the details of our shocking expeditions, or catalogue even partly the worst of the trophies adorning the nameless museum we prepared in the great stone house where we jointly dwelt, alone and servantless. Our museum was a blasphemous, unthinkable place, where with the satanic taste of neurotic virtuosi we had assembled an universe of terror and decay to excite our jaded sensibilities. It was a secret room, far, far underground; where huge winged daemons carved of basalt and onyx vomited from wide grinning mouths weird green and orange light, and hidden pneumatic pipes ruffled into kaleidoscopic dances of death the lines of red charnel things hand in hand woven in voluminous black hangings. Through these pipes came at will the odours our moods most craved; sometimes the scent of pale funeral lilies, sometimes the narcotic incense of imagined Eastern shrines of the kingly dead, and sometimes—how I shudder to recall it!—the frightful, soul-upheaving stench of the

uncovered grave.

Around the walls of this repellent chamber were cases of antique mummies alternating with comely, life-like bodies perfectly stuffed and cured by the taxidermist's art, and with headstones snatched from the oldest churchyards of the world. Niches here and there contained skulls of all shapes, and heads preserved in various stages of dissolution. There one might find the rotting, bald pates of famous noblemen, and the fresh and radiantly golden heads of new-buried children. Statues and paintings there were, all of fiendish subjects and some executed by St. John and myself. A locked portfolio, bound in tanned human skin, held certain unknown and unnamable drawings which it was rumoured Goya had perpetrated but dared not acknowledge. There were nauseous musical instruments, stringed, brass, and wood-wind, on which St. John and I sometimes produced dissonances of exquisite morbidity and cacodaemoniacal ghastliness; whilst in a multitude of inlaid ebony cabinets reposed the most incredible and unimaginable variety of tomb-loot ever assembled by human madness and perversity. It is of this loot in particular that I must not speak—thank God I had the courage to destroy it long before I thought of destroying myself.

The predatory excursions on which we collected our unmentionable treasures were always artistically memorable events. We were no vulgar ghouls, but worked only under certain conditions of mood, landscape, environment, weather, season, and moonlight. These pastimes were to us the most exquisite form of aesthetic expression, and we gave their details a fastidious technical care. An inappropriate hour, a jarring lighting effect, or a clumsy manipulation of the damp sod, would almost totally destroy for us that ecstatic titillation which followed the exhumation of some ominous, grinning secret of the earth. Our quest for novel scenes and piquant conditions was feverish and insatiate—St. John was always the leader, and he it was who led the way at last to that mocking, that accursed spot which brought us our hideous and inevitable doom.

By what malign fatality were we lured to that terrible Holland churchyard? I think it was the dark rumour and legendry, the tales of one buried for five centuries, who had himself been a ghoul in his time and had stolen a potent thing from a mighty sepulchre. I can recall the scene in these final moments—the pale autumnal moon over the graves, casting long horrible shadows; the grotesque trees, drooping sullenly to meet the neglected grass and the crumbling slabs; the vast legions of strangely colossal bats that flew against the moon; the antique ivied church pointing a huge spectral finger at the livid sky; the phosphorescent

insects that danced like death-fires under the yews in a distant corner; the odours of mould, vegetation, and less explicable things that mingled feebly with the night-wind from over far swamps and seas; and worst of all, the faint deep-toned baying of some gigantic hound which we could neither see nor definitely place. As we heard this suggestion of baying we shuddered, remembering the tales of the peasantry; for he whom we sought had centuries before been found in this selfsame spot, torn and mangled by the claws and teeth of some unspeakable beast.

I remembered how we delved in this ghoul's grave with our spades, and how we thrilled at the picture of ourselves, the grave, the pale watching moon, the horrible shadows, the grotesque trees, the titanic bats, the antique church, the dancing death-fires, the sickening odours, the gently moaning night-wind, and the strange, half-heard, directionless baying, of whose objective existence we could scarcely be sure. Then we struck a substance harder than the damp mould, and beheld a rotting oblong box crusted with mineral deposits from the long undisturbed ground. It was incredibly tough and thick, but so old that we finally pried it open and feasted our eyes on what it held.

Much—amazingly much—was left of the object despite the lapse of five hundred years. The skeleton, though crushed in places by the jaws of the thing that had killed it, held together with surprising firmness, and we gloated over the clean white skull and its long, firm teeth and its eyeless sockets that once had glowed with a charnel fever like our own. In the coffin lay an amulet of curious and exotic design, which had apparently been worn around the sleeper's neck. It was the oddly conventionalised figure of a crouching winged hound, or sphinx with a semi-canine face, and was exquisitely carved in antique Oriental fashion from a small piece of green jade. The expression on its features was repellent in the extreme, savouring at once of death, bestiality, and malevolence. Around the base was an inscription in characters which neither St. John nor I could identify; and on the bottom, like a maker's seal, was graven a grotesque and formidable skull.

Immediately upon beholding this amulet we knew that we must possess it; that this treasure alone was our logical pelf from the centuried grave. Even had its outlines been unfamiliar we would have desired it, but as we looked more closely we saw that it was not wholly unfamiliar. Alien it indeed was to all art and literature which sane and balanced readers know, but we recognised it as the thing hinted of in the forbidden *Necronomicon* of the mad Arab Abdul Alhazred; the ghastly soul-symbol of the corpse-eating cult of inaccessible Leng, in Central

Asia. All too well did we trace the sinister lineaments described by the old Arab daemonologist; lineaments, he wrote, drawn from some obscure supernatural manifestation of the souls of those who vexed and gnawed at the dead.

Seizing the green jade object, we gave a last glance at the bleached and cavern-eyed face of its owner and closed up the grave as we found it. As we hastened from that abhorrent spot, the stolen amulet in St. John's pocket, we thought we saw the bats descend in a body to the earth we had so lately rifled, as if seeking for some cursed and unholy nourishment. But the autumn moon shone weak and pale, and we could not be sure. So, too, as we sailed the next day away from Holland to our home, we thought we heard the faint distant baying of some gigantic hound in the background. But the autumn wind moaned sad and wan, and we could not be sure.

II.

Less than a week after our return to England, strange things began to happen. We lived as recluses; devoid of friends, alone, and without servants in a few rooms of an ancient manor-house on a bleak and unfrequented moor; so that our doors were seldom disturbed by the knock of the visitor. Now, however, we were troubled by what seemed to be frequent fumbings in the night, not only around the doors but around the windows also, upper as well as lower. Once we fancied that a large, opaque body darkened the library window when the moon was shining against it, and another time we thought we heard a whirring or flapping sound not far off. On each occasion investigation revealed nothing, and we began to ascribe the occurrences to imagination alone—that same curiously disturbed imagination which still prolonged in our ears the faint far baying we thought we had heard in the Holland churchyard. The jade amulet now reposed in a niche in our museum, and sometimes we burned strangely scented candles before it. We read much in Alhazred's *Necronomicon* about its properties, and about the relation of ghouls' souls to the objects it symbolised; and were disturbed by what we read. Then terror came.

On the night of September 24, 19—, I heard a knock at my chamber door. Fancying it St. John's, I bade the knocker enter, but was answered only by a shrill laugh. There was no one in the corridor. When I aroused St. John from his sleep, he professed entire ignorance of the event, and became as worried as I. It was that night that the faint, distant baying over the moor became to us a certain and dreaded reality. Four days later, whilst we were both in the hidden museum, there came a low, cautious scratching at the single door which led to the secret library staircase. Our alarm was now divided, for besides our fear of the

unknown, we had always entertained a dread that our grisly collection might be discovered. Extinguishing all lights, we proceeded to the door and threw it suddenly open; whereupon we felt an unaccountable rush of air, and heard as if receding far away a queer combination of rustling, tittering, and articulate chatter. Whether we were mad, dreaming, or in our senses, we did not try to determine. We only realised, with the blackest of apprehensions, that the apparently disembodied chatter was beyond a doubt *in the Dutch language*.

After that we lived in growing horror and fascination. Mostly we held to the theory that we were jointly going mad from our life of unnatural excitements, but sometimes it pleased us more to dramatise ourselves as the victims of some creeping and appalling doom. Bizarre manifestations were now too frequent to count. Our lonely house was seemingly alive with the presence of some malign being whose nature we could not guess, and every night that daemonic baying rolled over the windswept moor, always louder and louder. On October 29 we found in the soft earth underneath the library window a series of footprints utterly impossible to describe. They were as baffling as the hordes of great bats which haunted the old manor-house in unprecedented and increasing numbers.

The horror reached a culmination on November 18, when St. John, walking home after dark from the distant railway station, was seized by some frightful carnivorous thing and torn to ribbons. His screams had reached the house, and I had hastened to the terrible scene in time to hear a whirl of wings and see a vague black cloudy thing silhouetted against the rising moon. My friend was dying when I spoke to him, and he could not answer coherently. All he could do was to whisper, "The amulet—that damned thing—" Then he collapsed, an inert mass of mangled flesh.

I buried him the next midnight in one of our neglected gardens, and mumbled over his body one of the devilish rituals he had loved in life. And as I pronounced the last daemonic sentence I heard afar on the moor the faint baying of some gigantic hound. The moon was up, but I dared not look at it. And when I saw on the dim-litten moor a wide nebulous shadow sweeping from mound to mound, I shut my eyes and threw myself face down upon the ground. When I arose trembling, I know not how much later, I staggered into the house and made shocking obeisances before the enshrined amulet of green jade.

Being now afraid to live alone in the ancient house on the moor, I departed on the following day for London, taking with me the amulet after destroying by fire and burial the rest of the impious collection in the museum. But after three nights I heard the baying again, and before a week was over felt strange eyes

upon me whenever it was dark. One evening as I strolled on Victoria Embankment for some needed air, I saw a black shape obscure one of the reflections of the lamps in the water. A wind stronger than the night-wind rushed by, and I knew that what had befallen St. John must soon befall me.

The next day I carefully wrapped the green jade amulet and sailed for Holland. What mercy I might gain by returning the thing to its silent, sleeping owner I knew not; but I felt that I must at least try any step conceivably logical. What the hound was, and why it pursued me, were questions still vague; but I had first heard the baying in that ancient churchyard, and every subsequent event including St. John's dying whisper had served to connect the curse with the stealing of the amulet. Accordingly I sank into the nethermost abysses of despair when, at an inn in Rotterdam, I discovered that thieves had despoiled me of this sole means of salvation.

The baying was loud that evening, and in the morning I read of a nameless deed in the vilest quarter of the city. The rabble were in terror, for upon an evil tenement had fallen a red death beyond the foulest previous crime of the neighbourhood. In a squalid thieves' den an entire family had been torn to shreds by an unknown thing which left no trace, and those around had heard all night above the usual clamour of drunken voices a faint, deep, insistent note as of a gigantic hound.

So at last I stood again in that unwholesome churchyard where a pale winter moon cast hideous shadows, and leafless trees drooped sullenly to meet the withered, frosty grass and cracking slabs, and the ivied church pointed a jeering finger at the unfriendly sky, and the night-wind howled maniacally from over frozen swamps and frigid seas. The baying was very faint now, and it ceased altogether as I approached the ancient grave I had once violated, and frightened away an abnormally large horde of bats which had been hovering curiously around it.

I know not why I went thither unless to pray, or gibber out insane pleas and apologies to the calm white thing that lay within; but, whatever my reason, I attacked the half-frozen sod with a desperation partly mine and partly that of a dominating will outside myself. Excavation was much easier than I expected, though at one point I encountered a queer interruption; when a lean vulture darted down out of the cold sky and pecked frantically at the grave-earth until I killed him with a blow of my spade. Finally I reached the rotting oblong box and removed the damp nitrous cover. This is the last rational act I ever performed.

For crouched within that centuried coffin, embraced by a close-packed

nightmare retinue of huge, sinewy, sleeping bats, was the bony thing my friend and I had robbed; not clean and placid as we had seen it then, but covered with caked blood and shreds of alien flesh and hair, and leering sentiently at me with phosphorescent sockets and sharp ensanguined fangs yawning twistedly in mockery of my inevitable doom. And when it gave from those grinning jaws a deep, sardonic bay as of some gigantic hound, and I saw that it held in its gory, filthy claw the lost and fateful amulet of green jade, I merely screamed and ran away idiotically, my screams soon dissolving into peals of hysterical laughter.

Madness rides the star-wind...claws and teeth sharpened on centuries of corpses...dripping death astride a Bacchanale of bats from night-black ruins of buried temples of Belial.... Now, as the baying of that dead, fleshless monstrosity grows louder and louder, and the stealthy whirring and flapping of those accursed web-wings circles closer and closer, I shall seek with my revolver the oblivion which is my only refuge from the unnamed and unnamable.

THE DUKE OF DEMOLITION GOES TO HELL, by John Gregory Betancourt

So this is hell, Big Jim Carnack, the self-proclaimed Duke of Demolition, thought to himself.

He remembered dying. He remembered the sterile smell of the hospital, with so many doctors and nurses looming over him, so many fruit bowls and flower baskets and potted plants oh-so-tastefully arranged around the room.

Reality had gotten a little weird at the end. He'd drifted through a painkiller haze as endless streams of relatives and business associates trooped through for one last look. They had no hope—he saw it in their eyes. They knew he was terminal. *He* knew he was terminal. Cancer was like that; it was just a matter of time.

Don Esmond—his junior partner in the construction and demolition business for the last eight years, the kid he'd brought in straight from business school to handle the financial side when the company got too big—shoved his young, tanned, sickeningly *healthy* face close to Big Jim's. "So this is it," Esmond whispered with a rictus grin. "I get it all, old man. Hurry up and die, will you? My wife and kids are waiting in the car."

I don't deserve this, Big Jim thought, but all the arguments had long ago leached out of him. He merely closed his eyes. When he opened them again, Esmond was gone.

That was the last thing he remembered.

The next thing he knew, he was walking along a twilit street. Victorian mansions with huge front lawns and wrought-iron fences faced him from both sides, looking not run down, but new, like they must've been at their prime. The soft yellow glow of oil lamps spilled from their windows.

"So this is hell," Big Jim said again, this time aloud. He gave a low chuckle.

His fate had a certain ironic quality. These were the houses he'd torn down his whole life, decaying relics of bygone days when coal had been cheap and ten-room houses the middle class standard—huge, drafty, inefficient monoliths to a lifestyle which no longer existed.

He'd enjoyed destroying them. Was that his sin? He'd made a career in buying Victorian mansions. Abandoned by their owners, too run-down to renovate, they went cheaply at public auctions. His men moved in like a swarm of army ants, stripping everything salvageable. Big Jim had an eye for art: stained glass was a prize plum. Lead-glass fixtures, old tile, old brick, oak floorboards...it all ended

up recycled into the new houses (“a touch of old-time class”) his company built on the foundations of the old. He squeezed every penny out of a mansion’s corpse before laying it in its grave.

In the old days, before he started his construction company, it had been just demolition and salvage. He’d worked fifteen-hour days with non-union kids he hired at minimum wage. He’d operated the wrecking ball himself, and he’d *enjoyed* the work, *enjoyed* the slow, ponderous motion of the ball as it swung back, gathered speed, then slammed into a building with killer force. He’d raised demolition to an art form. Shattering walls without caving in roofs, loosening mortar without pulverizing bricks, knocking out windows one by one: it brought an almost sexual fulfillment, a sense of satisfaction like no other. Was that so terrible?

He thought back to his wife, to his son and twin daughters. They’d seemed happy. He’d given them everything they wanted or needed...a nice home, a swimming pool, Catholic schools, two dogs and a cat, a car for each of them. Sure, they’d had fights and arguments, but what family didn’t? And when his son came to the hospital that last day, Big Jim could’ve sworn there were tears in his eyes. All past sins had been washed away, forgiven. They’d been friends.

And his wife...Big Jim knew it had broken her heart to see him in the hospital, slipping farther away each day. But that hadn’t been his fault, had it? And his daughters, sobbing in the corner as he made lame jokes... If there’d been any other way...if suicide hadn’t been a sin...

Perhaps it had been his business dealings that brought him to hell, Big Jim thought uneasily. He’d tried to run an honest company, but he’d paid his share of graft. The construction and demolition business floated on under-the-table cash. Even so, he’d never stabbed any partners in the back (literally or figuratively), never stolen, never cheated on his taxes—never done anything *overtly* illegal. All he’d done was tear down old houses and put up nice new ones. What had he done to end up in hell?

What if it’s not hell? he wondered suddenly. *What if it’s all been a dream—my dying, everything?* He stopped and held up his hands. They’d been yellow-gray and liverspotted with age in the hospital. He’d been sixty-three, after all, not young anymore. But *these* hands...he turned them over and over in the dim light. These hands looked young, healthy, like the hands he’d had in school.

Reincarnation? he wondered. Amnesia?

Shadows flickered in the windows of the Victorian opposite him. Had a person moved inside, or was it a trick of the light? Big Jim hesitated. He knew he

couldn't spend the rest of eternity wandering aimlessly. Better to check out the house than stand in the street and guess.

Having a plan made him feel better. He opened the Victorian's gate, strode up the brick walkway, then climbed the porch steps one by one. Stumbling on the top step, he almost fell—a loose board had caught his foot, he realized.

Be careful, he chided himself. He was used to Victorians; he knew how treacherous they became when they were old and decaying. Several of his workmen had fallen through rotted-out floors, or had walls unexpectedly cave in on them.

He knocked, paused a minute, knocked again. No answer came. When he tested the knob, though, it turned easily.

He pushed the door open with his fingertips. A needlelike pain jabbed his index finger, and he jerked his hand back with a startled cry. "Ahhh..." he muttered. *Damn splinter*. He pulled it out with his teeth, spat it away, then stumped in.

The place was deserted: not a stick of furniture anywhere. Varnished oak floorboards creaked underfoot. A cold draft touched his cheek. The place felt like nobody had been inside in years, even though a flame flickered in the old-fashioned oil lamp hanging from the ceiling.

Big Jim shivered. It was cold in here.

Crossing to the huge, cast-iron radiator, he reached out cautiously. He didn't feel any radiating heat. When he bent to check the valve, though, it burned his hand. He leaped back, cursing out loud this time, nursing burned fingers.

Another draft touched him. The house seemed to exhale, like it was alive. *Alive?*

Big Jim backed toward the door as dust began to sift down from the ceiling. The place seemed to exude hatred, he thought, as though it wanted to collapse on top of him, as though it wanted to *kill* him.

He ran for the door, made it through, didn't stop for the porch steps but leaped over them. On the brick walkway he came to a sudden stop.

A wrecking machine now sat directly in front of him. It hadn't been there when he entered the house, nor had he heard it drive up. *It must be a trick of some kind*, he thought

He circled the machine cautiously. Its huge stabilizing feet had been lowered and locked into place, spread out in a huge X to brace against movements of the wrecking ball. The ball itself, a five-hundred-pound steel slug at the end of a chain, hung from a forty-foot-tall steel tower.

The door to the operator's cab had "Carnack Demolition" stencilled across it. Big Jim climbed onto the tractor tread, then the stepping rung. The cab door opened easily. He slid into the padded bucket seat, the smells of plastic and new rubber surrounding him.

A manila folder lay across the controls. He flicked on the cab's light, opened the folder, and began to read.

JAMES HOUSE (1884-1973)

December 8, 1884. Leaking roof ruined 473-book library.

January 14, 1885. Child broke leg on steps.

January 19, 1885. Clogged flue filled house with smoke.

February 2, 1885. Ceiling fixture fell, injuring woman.

March 17, 1885. Maid slipped on wet kitchen floor.

March 24, 1885—

It was a list of the house's sins, Big Jim Carnack realized. He leafed through page after page of petty annoyances. Broken pipes, leaking gas valves, rotting wood, lots of burns and splinters and minor injuries for the people who lived there. The house had even killed: an old woman fell down the second-floor steps and broke her neck in 1904. It killed again in 1951, a teenage girl who slipped in the bathtub and hit her head on the sink.

As Big Jim skimmed the entries, he got a sense of the house's true nature. It wanted to hurt people, he realized, to make their lives as miserable as it could. He thought of the stumble he'd taken on the front steps, of the splinter the door had given him, of the burn he'd received from the radiator—even when it wasn't radiating heat.

The pettiness irked him. The house needed to be punished, he thought, and he was just the man to do it.

He turned the key in the wrecking machine's ignition. The engine purred to life. He changed gears; the steel ball began to swing back.

Big Jim knew then why he'd ended up in hell. It wasn't a punishment. He'd come to render justice. Throughout his life he'd specialized in destroying Victorians. *They must fear me*, he thought. *I must be their worst nightmare.*

He revved the motor.

The house began to scream even before the wrecking ball struck.

JUKE-BOX, by Henry Kuttner

Jerry Foster told the bartender that nobody loved him. The bartender, with the experience of his trade, said that Jerry was mistaken, and how about another drink.

“Why not?” said the unhappy Mr. Foster, examining the scanty contents of his wallet. “I’ll take the daughter of the vine to spouse. Nor heed the music of a distant drum.’ That’s Omar.”

“Sure,” the bartender said surprisingly. “But you want to look out you don’t go out by the same door that in you went. No brawls allowed here. This isn’t East Fifth, chum.”

“You may call me chum,” Foster said, reverting to the main topic, “but you don’t mean it. I’m nobody’s pal. Nobody loves me.”

“What about that babe you brought in last night?”

Foster tested his drink. He was a good-looking, youngish man with slick blond hair and a rather hazy expression in his blue eyes.

“Betty?” he murmured. “Well, the fact is, a while ago I was down at the Tom-Tom with Betty and this redhead came along. So I ditched Betty. Then the redhead iced me. Now I’m lonely, and everyone hates me.”

“You shouldn’t have ditched Betty, maybe,” the bartender suggested.

“I’m fickle,” Foster said, tears springing to his eyes. “I can’t help it. Women are my downfall. Gimme another drink and tell me your name.”

“Austin.”

“Austin. Well, Austin, I’m nearly in trouble. Did you notice who won the fifth at Santa Anita yesterday?”

“Pig’s Trotters, wasn’t it?”

“Yes,” Foster said, “but I laid my dough right on the nose of White Flash. That’s why I’m here. Sammy comes around to this joint now, doesn’t he?”

“That’s right.”

“I’m lucky,” Foster said. “I got the money to pay him. Sammy is a hard man when you don’t pay off.”

“I wouldn’t know,” the bartender said. “Excuse me.”

He moved off to take care of a couple of vodka collinses.

“So you hate me too,” Foster said and, picking up his drink, wandered away from the bar.

He was surprised to see Betty sitting alone in a booth, watching him. But he was not at all surprised to see that her blond hair, her limpid eyes, her pink-and-

white skin had lost all attraction for him. She bored him. Also, she was going to make a nuisance of herself.

Foster ignored the girl and went further back, to where a bulky oblong object was glowing in polychromatic colors against the far wall. It was what the manufacturers insist on terming an automatic phonograph, in spite of the more aptly descriptive word juke-box.

This was a lovely juke-box. It had lots of lights and colors. Moreover, it wasn't watching Foster, and it kept its mouth shut.

Foster draped himself over the juke-box and patted its sleek sides.

"You're my girl," he announced. "You're beautiful. I love you madly, do you hear? Madly."

He could feel Betty's gaze on his back. He swigged his drink and smoothed the juke-box's flanks, glibly protesting his sudden affection for the object. Once he glanced around. Betty was starting to get up.

Foster hastily found a nickel in his pocket and slipped it into the coin-lever, but before he could push it in, a stocky, man wearing horn-rimmed glasses entered the bar, nodded at Foster, and moved quickly to a booth where a fat person in tweeds was sitting. There was a short consultation, during which money changed hands, and the stocky man made a note in a small book he brought from his pocket.

Foster took out his wallet. He had had trouble with Sammy before and wanted no more. The bookie was insistent on his pound of flesh. Foster counted his money, blinked, and counted it again, while his stomach fell several feet. Either he had been short-changed, or he had lost some dough. He was short.

Sammy wouldn't like that.

Forcing his fogged brain to think, Foster wondered how he could gain time. Sammy had already seen him. If he could duck out the back...

It had become altogether too silent in the bar. He needed noise to cover his movements. He saw the nickel in the juke-box's coin-lever and hastily pushed it in.

Money began to spew out of the coin return slot.

Foster got his hat under the slot almost instantly. Quarters, dimes, and nickels popped out in a never-ending stream. The juke-box broke into song. A needle scratched over the black disc. The torchy mourning of "My Man" came out sadly. It covered the tinkling of the coins as they filled Foster's hat.

After a while the money stopped coming out of the juke-box. Foster stood there, thanking his personal gods, as he saw Sammy moving toward him. The

bookie glanced at Foster's hat and blinked.

"Hi, Jerry. What gives?"

"I hit a jackpot," Foster said.

"Not on the juke-box!"

"No, down at the Onyx," Foster said, naming a private club several blocks away. "Haven't had a chance to get these changed into bills yet. Want to help me out?"

"I'm no cash register," Sammy said. "I'll take mine in green."

The juke-box stopped playing "My Man" and broke into "Always." Foster put his jingling hat on top of the phonograph and counted out bills. He didn't have enough, but he made the balance up out of quarters he fished from the hat.

"Thanks," Sammy said. "Too bad your nag didn't make it."

"With a love that's true, always—" the juke-box sang fervently.

"Can't be helped," Foster said. "Maybe next time I'll hit 'em."

"Want anything on Oaklawn?"

"When the things you've planned, need a helping hand—"

Foster had been leaning on the juke-box. On the last two words, a tingling little shock raced through him. Those particular two words jumped out of nothing, impinged on the surface of his brain, and sank in indelibly, like the stamp of a die. He couldn't hear anything else. They echoed and re-echoed.

"Uh—helping hand," he said hazily. "Helping—"

"A sleeper?" Sammy said. "Okay, Helping Hand in the third, at Oaklawn. The usual?"

The room started to turn around. Foster managed to nod. After a time he discovered that Sammy was gone. He saw his drink on the juke-box, next to his hat, and swallowed the cool liquid in three quick gulps. Then he bent and stared into the cryptic innards of the automatic phonograph.

"It can't be," he whispered. "I'm drunk. But not drunk enough. I need another shot."

A quarter rolled out of the coin-return slot, and Foster automatically caught it.

"No!" he gulped. "Oh-h-h!" He stuffed his pockets with the booty from the hat, held on to his glass with the grip of a drowning man, and went toward the bar. On the way he felt someone touch his sleeve.

"Jerry," Betty said. "Please."

He ignored her. He went on to the bar and ordered another drink.

"Look, Austin," he said. "That juke-box you got back there. Is it working all right?"

Austin squeezed a lime. He didn't look up.

"I don't hear any complaints."

"But—"

Austin slid a replenished glass toward Foster.

"Excuse me," he said, and went to the other end of the bar.

Foster stole a look at the juke-box. It sat against the wall glowing enigmatically.

"I don't exactly know what to think," he said to no one in particular.

A record started playing. The juke-box sang throatily:

"Leave us face it, we're in love...."

The truth was, Jerry Foster was feeling pretty low in those days. He was essentially a reactionary, so it was a mistake for him to have been born in an era of great change. He needed the feel of solid ground under his feet. And the ground wasn't so solid any more, what with the newspaper headlines and new patterns for living emerging out of the vast technological and sociological changes the mid-Twentieth Century offered.

You've got to be elastic to survive in a changing culture. Back in the stable Twenties, Foster would have got along beautifully, but now, in a word, he just wasn't on the ball. A man like that seeks stable security as his ultimo, and security seemed to have vanished.

The result was that Jerry Foster found himself out of a job, badly in debt, and drinking far more than he should have. The only real advantage to that set-up was that alcohol buffered Foster's incredulity when he encountered the affectionate juke-box.

Not that he remembered it the next morning. He didn't recall what had happened for a couple of days, till Sammy looked him up and gave him nine hundred dollars, the result of Helping Hand coming in under the wire at Oaklawn. The long shot had paid off surprisingly.

Foster instantly went on a binge, finding himself eventually at a downtown bar he recognized. Austin was off duty, however, and Betty wasn't present tonight. So Foster, tanked to the gills, leaned his elbow on polished mahogany and stared around. Toward the back was the juke-box. He blinked at it, trying to remember.

The juke-box began to play "I'll Remember April." The whirling confusion of insobriety focused down to a small, clear, cold spot in Foster's brain. He started to tingle. His mouth formed words:

"Remember April—Remember April?"

"All right!" said a fat, unshaven, untidy man standing next to him. "I heard

you! I'll—What did you say?"

"Remember April," Foster muttered, quite automatically. The fat man spilled his drink.

"It isn't! It's March!"

Foster peered around dimly in search of a calendar.

"It's April third," he affirmed presently. "Why?"

"I've got to get back, then," said the fat man in desperation. He scrubbed at his sagging cheeks. "April already! How long have I been tight? You don't know? It's your business to know. April! One more drink, then." He summoned the bartender.

He was interrupted by the sudden appearance of a man with a hatchet. Foster, bleakly eying the apparition, almost decided to get out in search of a quieter gin-mill. This new figure, bursting in from the street, was a skinny blond man with wild eyes and the shakes. Before anyone could stop him, he had rushed the length of the room and lifted his hatchet threateningly above the juke-box.

"I can't stand it!" he cried hysterically. "You spiteful little—I'll fix you before you fix me!"

So saying, and ignoring the purposeful approach of the bartender, the blond man brought down his hatchet heavily on the juke-box. There was a blue crackle of flame, a tearing noise, and the blond man collapsed without a sound.

Foster stayed where he was. There was a bottle on the bar near him, and he captured it. Rather dimly, he realized what was happening. An ambulance was summoned. A doctor said the blond man had been painfully shocked, but was still alive. The juke-box had a smashed panel, but appeared uninjured otherwise. Austin came from somewhere and poured himself a shot from under the bar.

"Each man kills the thing he loves," Austin said to Foster. "You're the guy who was quoting Omar at me the other night, aren't you?"

"What?" Foster said.

Austin nodded at the motionless figure being loaded on a stretcher.

"Funny business. That fella used to come in all the time just to play the juke-box. He was in love with the thing. Sat here by the hour listening to it. Course, when I say he was in love with it, I'm merely using a figure of speech, catch?"

"Sure," Foster said.

"Then a couple of days ago he blows up. Crazy as a loon. I come in and find the guy on his knees in front of the juke-box, begging it to forgive him for something or other. I don't get it. Some people shouldn't drink, I guess. What's yours?"

“The same,” Foster said, watching the ambulance men carry the stretcher out of the bar.

“Just mild electric shock,” an intern said. “He’ll be all right.”

The juke-box clicked, and a new record swung across. Something must have gone wrong with the amplification, for the song bellowed out with deafening intensity.

“‘Chlo-eee!’” screamed the juke-box urgently, “‘Chlo-eeee!’”

Deafened, fighting the feeling that this was hallucination, Foster found himself beside the juke-box. He clung to it against the mad billows of sound. He shook it, and the roaring subsided.

“‘Chlo-eee!’” the juke-box sang softly and sweetly.

There was confusion nearby, but Foster ignored it. He had been struck by an idea. He peered into the phonograph’s innards through the glass pane. The record was slowing now, and as the needle lifted Foster could read the title on the circular label.

It said, “Springtime in the Rockies.”

The record hastily lifted itself and swung back to concealment among the others in the rack. Another black disc moved over under the needle. It was “Twilight in Turkey.”

But what the juke-box played, with great expression, was: “We’ll Always Be Sweethearts.”

After a while the confusion died down. Austin came over, examined the phonograph, and made a note to get the broken panel replaced. Foster had entirely forgotten the fat, unshaven, untidy man till he heard an irritated voice behind him say:

“It can’t be April!”

“What?”

“You’re a liar. It’s still March.”

“Oh, take a walk,” said Foster, who was profoundly shaken, though he did not quite know why. The obvious reasons for his nervousness, he suspected, weren’t the real ones.

“You’re a liar, I said,” the fat man snarled, breathing heavily in Foster’s face. “It’s March! You’ll either admit it’s March, or—or—”

But Foster had had enough. He pushed the fat man away and had taken two steps when a tingling shock raced through him and the small, cold, spot of clarity sprang into existence within his brain.

The juke-box started to play; “Accentuate the Positive, Eliminate the

Negative.”

“It’s March!” the fat man yelped. “Isn’t it March?”

“Yes,” Foster said thickly. “It’s March.”

All that night the song-title blazed in his mind. He went home with the fat man. He drank with the fat man. He agreed with the fat man. He never used a negative. And, by morning, he was surprised to find that the fat man had hired him as a song-writer for Summit Studios, simply because Foster didn’t say no when he was asked whether he could write songs.

“Good,” the fat man said. “Now I’d better get home. Oh, I am home, aren’t I? Well, I gotta go to the studio tomorrow. We’re starting a super-musical April second, and—this is April, isn’t it?”

“Sure.”

“Let’s get some sleep. No, not that door. The swimming-pool’s out there. Here, I’ll show you a spare bedroom. You’re sleepy, aren’t you?”

“Yes,” said Foster, who wasn’t.

But he slept, nevertheless, and the next morning found himself at Summit Studios with the fat man, putting his signature on a contract. Nobody asked his qualifications. Taliaferro, the fat man, had okayed him. That was enough. He was given an office with a piano and a secretary, and sat dazedly behind his desk for most of the day, wondering how the devil it had all happened. At the commissary, however, he picked up some scraps of information.

Taliaferro was a big shot—a very big shot. He had one idiosyncrasy. He couldn’t endure disagreement. Only yes-men were allowed around him. Those who worked for Taliaferro had to accentuate the positive, eliminate the negative.

Foster got his assignment. A romantic love song for the new picture. A duet. Everyone took it for granted that Foster knew one note from another. He did, having studied piano in his youth, but counterpoint and the mysteries of minor keys were far beyond him.

That night, he went back to the little downtown bar.

It was just a hunch, but he thought the juke-box might be able to help him. Not that he really believed in such things, but at worst, he could hoist a few shots and try to figure a way out. But the juke-box kept playing one song over and over.

The odd thing was that nobody else heard that particular song. Foster discovered that quite by accident. To Austin’s ears, the juke-box was going through an ordinary repertoire of modern popular stuff.

After that, Foster listened more closely. The song was a haunting duet, plaintive and curiously tender. It had overtones in it that made Foster’s spine

tingle.

“Who wrote that thing?” he asked Austin.

“Wasn’t it Hoagy Carmichael?”

But they were talking at cross-purposes. The juke-box suddenly sang “I Dood It,” and then relapsed into the duet.

“No,” Austin said. “I guess it wasn’t Hoagy. That’s an old one. ‘Dardanella.’”

But it wasn’t “Dardanella.”

Foster saw a piano at the back. He went to it and got out his notebook. First he wrote the lyrics. Then he tried to get the notes down, but they were beyond him, even with the piano as a guide. The best he could achieve was a sort of shorthand. His own voice was true and good, and he thought he might be able to sing the piece accurately, if he could find someone to put down the notes for him.

When he finished, he studied the juke-box more closely. The broken panel had been repaired. He patted the gadget in a friendly way and went away thinking hard.

His secretary’s name was Lois Kennedy. She came into his office the next day while Foster was tapping at the piano and helplessly endeavoring to write down the score.

“Let me help you, Mr. Foster,” she said competently, casting a practised eye over the messy pages.

“I—no, thanks,” Foster said.

“Are you bad on scores?” she asked as she smiled. “A lot of composers are that way. They play by ear, but they don’t know G sharp from A flat.”

“They don’t, eh?” Foster murmured.

The girl eyed him intently. “Suppose you run through it, and I’ll mark down a rough scoring.”

Foster hit a few chords. “Phooey!” he said at last, and picked up the lyrics. Those were readable, anyway. He began to hum.

“Swell,” Lois said. “Just sing it. I’ll catch the melody.”

Foster’s voice was true, and he found it surprisingly easy to remember the love song the juke-box had played. He sang it, and Lois presently played it on the piano, while Foster corrected and revised. At least he could tell what was wrong and what was right. And, since Lois had studied music since her childhood, she had little difficulty in recording the song on paper.

Afterwards she was enthusiastic. “It’s swell,” she said. “Something really new! Mr. Foster, you’re good. And you’re not lifting from Mozart, either. I’ll shoot

this right over to the big boy. Usually it's smart not to be in too much of a hurry, but since this is your first job here, we'll chance it."

Taliaferro liked the song. He made a few useless suggestions, which Foster, with Lois's aid, incorporated, and sent down a list of what else was needed for the super-musical. He also called a conclave of the song-writers to listen to Foster's opus.

"I want you to hear what's good," Taliaferro told them. "This new find of mine is showing you up. I think we need new blood," he finished darkly, eying the wretched song-writers with ominous intensity.

But Foster quaked in his boots. For all he knew, his song might have been plagiarized. He expected someone in the audience to spring up and shout: "That new find of yours swiped his song from Berlin!" Or Gershwin or Porter or Hammerstein, as the case might be.

Nobody exposed him. The song was new. It established Foster as a double-threat man, since he had done both melody and lyrics himself.

He was a success.

Every night he had his ritual. Alone, he visited a certain downtown bar. When necessary, the juke-box helped him with his songs. It seemed to know exactly what was needed. It asked little in return. It served him with the unquestioning fidelity of 'Cigarette' in "Under Two Flags." And sometimes it played love songs aimed at Foster's ears and heart. It serenaded him. Sometimes, too, Foster thought he was going crazy.

Weeks passed. Foster got all his assignments done at the little downtown bar, and later whipped them into suitable shape with his secretary's assistance. He had begun to notice that she was a strikingly pretty girl, with attractive eyes and lips. Lois seemed amenable, but so far Foster had held back from any definite commitment. He felt unsure of his new triumphs.

But he blossomed like the rose. His bank account grew fat, he looked sleeker and drank much less, and he visited the downtown bar every night. Once he asked Austin about it.

"That juke-box. Where'd it come from?"

"I don't know," Austin said. "It was here before I came."

"Well, who puts new records in it?"

"The company, I suppose."

"Ever see 'em do it?"

Austin thought. "Can't say I have. I guess the man comes around when the other bartender's on duty. It's got a new set of records on every day, though.

That's good service."

Foster made a note to ask the other bartender about it. But there was no time. For, the next day, he kissed Lois Kennedy.

That was a mistake. It was the booster charge. The next thing Jerry Foster knew, he was making the rounds with Lois, and it was after dark, and they were driving unsteadily along the Sunset Strip, discussing life and music.

"I'm going places," Foster said, dodging an oddly ambulatory telephone pole. "We're going places together."

"Oh, honey!" Lois said.

Foster stopped the car and kissed her.

"That calls for another drink," he remarked. "Is that a bar over there?"

The night wore on. Foster hadn't realized he had been under a considerable strain. Now the lid was off. It was wonderful to have Lois in his arms, to kiss her, to feel her hair brushing his cheek. Everything became rosy.

Through the rosy mist, he suddenly saw the face of Austin.

"The same?" Austin inquired.

Foster blinked. He was sitting in a booth, with Lois beside him. He had his arm around the girl, and he had an idea he had just kissed her.

"Austin," he said, "how long have we been here?"

"About an hour. Don't you remember, Mr. Foster?"

"Darling," Lois murmured, leaning heavily against her escort.

Foster tried to think. It was difficult. "Lois," he finally said, "haven't I got another song to write?"

"It'll keep."

"No. That torch song. Taliaferro wants it Friday."

"That's four days away."

"Now I'm here, I might as well get the song," Foster said, with alcoholic insistence and stood up.

"Kiss me," Lois murmured, leaning toward him.

He obeyed, though he had a feeling that there was more important business to be attended to. Then he stared around, located the juke-box, and went toward it.

"Hello, there," he said, patting the sleek, glowing sides. "I'm back. Drunk, too. But that's all right. Let's have that song."

The juke-box was silent. Foster felt Lois touch his arm.

"Come on back. We don't want music."

"Wait a minute, hon."

Foster stared at the juke-box. Then he laughed.

“I know,” he said, and pulled out a handful of change. He slid a nickel into the coin-lever and pushed the lever hard.

Nothing happened.

“Wonder what’s wrong with it?” Foster muttered. “I’ll need that song by Friday.”

He decided that there were a lot of things he didn’t know about and ought to. The muteness of the juke-box puzzled him.

All of a sudden, he remembered something that had happened weeks ago, the blond man who had attacked the juke-box with a hatchet and had only got shocked for his pains. The blond man he vaguely recalled, used to spend hours en tête-à-tête with the juke-box.

“What a dope!” Foster said thickly.

Lois asked a question.

“I should have checked up before,” he answered her. “Maybe I can find—oh, nothing, Lois. Nothing at all.”

Then he went after Austin. Austin gave him the blond man’s name and, an hour later, Foster found himself sitting by a white hospital bed, looking down at a man’s ravaged face under faded blond hair. Brashness, judicious tipping, and a statement that he was a relative had got him this far. Now he sat there and watched and felt questions die as they formed on his lips.

When he finally mentioned the juke-box, it was easier. He simply sat and listened.

“They carried me out of the bar on a stretcher,” the blond man said. “Then a car skidded and came right at me. I didn’t feel any pain. I still don’t feel anything. The driver—she said she’d heard somebody shouting her name. Chloe. That startled her so much she lost control and hit me. You know who yelled ‘Chloe,’ don’t you?”

Foster thought back. There was a memory somewhere.

The juke-box had begun to play “Chloe,” and the amplification had gone haywire, so the song had bellowed out thunderously for a short time.

“I’m paralyzed,” the blond man said. “I’m dying, too. I might as well. I think I’ll be safer. She’s vindictive and plenty smart.”

“She?”

“A spy. Maybe there’s all sorts of gadgets masquerading as—as things we take for granted. I don’t know. They substituted that juke-box for the original one. It’s alive. No, not it! She! It’s a she, all right!”

And—“Who put her there?” the blond man said, in answer to Foster’s

question. “Who are—they? People from another world or another time? Martians? They want information about us, I’ll bet, but they don’t dare appear personally. They plant gadgets that we’ll take for granted, like that juke-box, to act as spies. Only this one got out of control a little. She’s smarter than the others.”

He pushed himself up on the pillow, his eyes glaring at the little radio beside him.

“Even that!” he whispered. “Is that an ordinary, regular radio? Or is it one of their masquerading gadgets, spying on us?”

He fell back.

“I began to understand quite a while ago,” the man continued weakly. “She put the ideas in my head. More than once, she pulled me out of a jam. Not now, though. She won’t forgive me. Oh, she’s feminine, all right. When I got on her bad side, I was sunk. She’s smart, for a juke-box. A mechanical brain? Or—I don’t know. I’ll never know, now. I’ll be dead pretty soon. And that’ll be all right with me.”

The nurse came in then, and the blond man refused to speak any more.

Jerry Foster was coldly frightened. And he was drunk. Main Street was bright and roaring as he walked back, but by the time he had made up his mind, it was after closing hour and a chill silence went hand in hand with the darkness. The street lights didn’t help much.

“If I were sober, I wouldn’t believe this,” he mused, listening to his hollow footfalls on the pavement. “But I do believe it. I’ve got to fix things up with that —juke-box!”

Part of his mind guided him into an alley. Part of his mind told him to break a window, muffling the clash with his coat, and the same urgent, sober part of his mind guided him through a dark kitchen and a swinging door.

Then he was in the bar. The booths were vacant. A faint, filtered light crept through the Venetian blinds shielding the street windows. Against a wall stood the black, silent bulk of the juke-box.

Silent and unresponsive. Even when Foster inserted a nickel, nothing happened. The electric cord was plugged in the socket, and he threw the activating switch, but that made no difference.

“Look,” he said. “I was drunk. Oh, this is crazy. It can’t be happening. You’re not alive—Are you alive? Did you put the finger on that guy I just saw in the hospital? Listen!”

It was dark and cold. Bottles glimmered against the mirror behind the bar.

Foster went over and opened one. He poured the whiskey down his throat.

After a while, it didn't seem so fantastic for him to be standing there arguing with a juke-box.

"So you're feminine," he said. "I'll bring you flowers tomorrow. I'm really beginning to believe! Of course I believe! I can't write songs. Not by myself. You've got to help me. I'll never look at a—another girl."

He tilted the bottle again.

"You're just in the sulks," he said. "You'll come out of it. You love me. You know you do. This is crazy!"

The bottle had mysteriously vanished. He went behind the bar to find another. Then, with a conviction that made him freeze motionless, he knew that there was someone else in the room.

He was hidden in the shadows where he stood. Only his eyes moved as he looked toward the newcomers. There were two of them, and they were not human.

They—moved—toward the juke-box, in a rather indescribable fashion. One of them pulled out a small, shining cylinder from the juke-box's interior.

Foster, sweat drying on his cheeks, could hear them thinking.

"Current report for the last twenty-four hours, Earth time. Put in a fresh recording cylinder. Change the records, too."

Foster watched them change the records. Austin had said that the discs were replaced daily. And the blond man, dying in the hospital, had said other things. It couldn't be real. The creatures he stared at could not exist. They blurred before his eyes.

"A human is here," one of them thought. "He has seen us. We had better eliminate him."

The blurry, inhuman figures came toward him. Foster, trying to scream, dodged around the end of the bar and ran toward the juke-box. He threw his arms around its unresponsive sides and gasped:

"Stop them! Don't let them kill me!"

He couldn't see the creatures now, but he knew that they were immediately behind him. The clarity of panic sharpened his vision. One title on the juke-box's list of records stood out vividly. He thrust his forefinger against the black button beside the title "Love Me Forever."

Something touched his shoulder and tightened, drawing him back.

Lights flickered within the juke-box. A record swung out. The needle lowered into its black groove.

The juke-box started to play “I’ll Be Glad When You’re Dead, You Rascal You.”

THE MUMMY'S FOOT, by Théophile Gautier

I had entered, in an idle mood, the shop of one of those curiosity venders who are called *marchands de bric-à-brac* in that Parisian argot which is so perfectly unintelligible elsewhere in France.

You have doubtless glanced occasionally through the windows of some of these shops, which have become so numerous now that it is fashionable to buy antiquated furniture, and that every petty stockbroker thinks he must have his *chambre au moyen âge*.

There is one thing there which clings alike to the shop of the dealer in old iron, the ware-room of the tapestry maker, the laboratory of the chemist, and the studio of the painter: in all those gloomy dens where a furtive daylight filters in through the window-shutters the most manifestly ancient thing is dust. The cobwebs are more authentic than the gimp laces, and the old pear-tree furniture on exhibition is actually younger than the mahogany which arrived but yesterday from America.

The warehouse of my *bric-à-brac* dealer was a veritable Capharnaum. All ages and all nations seemed to have made their rendezvous there. An Etruscan lamp of red clay stood upon a *Boule* cabinet, with ebony panels, brightly striped by lines of inlaid brass; a duchess of the court of Louis XV nonchalantly extended her fawn-like feet under a massive table of the time of Louis xiii., with heavy spiral supports of oak, and carven designs of chimeras and foliage intermingled.

Upon the denticulated shelves of several sideboards glittered immense Japanese dishes with red and blue designs relieved by gilded hatching, side by side with enamelled works by Bernard Palissy, representing serpents, frogs, and lizards in relief.

From disembowelled cabinets escaped cascades of silver-lustrous Chinese silks and waves of tinsel, which an oblique sunbeam shot through with luminous beads, while portraits of every era, in frames more or less tarnished, smiled through their yellow varnish.

The striped breastplate of a damascened suit of Milanese armour glittered in one corner; loves and nymphs of porcelain, Chinese grotesques, vases of *céladon* and crackleware, Saxon and old *Sèvres* cups encumbered the shelves and nooks of the apartment.

The dealer followed me closely through the tortuous way contrived between the piles of furniture, warding off with his hand the hazardous sweep of my coat-skirts, watching my elbows with the uneasy attention of an antiquarian and a

usurer.

It was a singular face, that of the merchant; an immense skull, polished like a knee, and surrounded by a thin aureole of white hair, which brought out the clear salmon tint of his complexion all the more strikingly, lent him a false aspect of patriarchal bonhomie, counteracted, however, by the scintillation of two little yellow eyes which trembled in their orbits like two louis-d'or upon quicksilver. The curve of his nose presented an aquiline silhouette, which suggested the Oriental or Jewish type. His hands—thin, slender, full of nerves which projected like strings upon the finger-board of a violin, and armed with claws like those on the terminations of bats' wings—shook with senile trembling; but those convulsively agitated hands became firmer than steel pincers or lobsters' claws when they lifted any precious article—an onyx cup, a Venetian glass, or a dish of Bohemian crystal. This strange old man had an aspect so thoroughly rabbinical and cabalistic that he would have been burnt on the mere testimony of his face three centuries ago.

“Will you not buy something from me to-day, sir? Here is a Malay krees with a blade undulating like flame. Look at those grooves contrived for the blood to run along, those teeth set backward so as to tear out the entrails in withdrawing the weapon. It is a fine character of ferocious arm, and will look well in your collection. This two-handed sword is very beautiful. It is the work of Josepe de la Hera; and this colichemarde with its fenestrated guard—what a superb specimen of handicraft!”

“No; I have quite enough weapons and instruments of carnage. I want a small figure—something which will suit me as a paper-weight, for I cannot endure those trumpery bronzes which the stationers sell, and which may be found on everybody's desk.”

The old gnome foraged among his ancient wares, and finally arranged before me some antique bronzes, so-called at least; fragments of malachite, little Hindoo or Chinese idols, a kind of poussah-toys in jade-stone, representing the incarnations of Brahma or Vishnoo, and wonderfully appropriate to the very undivine office of holding papers and letters in place.

I was hesitating between a porcelain dragon, all constellated with warts, its mouth formidable with bristling tusks and ranges of teeth, and an abominable little Mexican fetich, representing the god Vitziliputzili au naturel, when I caught sight of a charming foot, which I at first took for a fragment of some antique Venus.

It had those beautiful ruddy and tawny tints that lend to Florentine bronze that

warm living look so much preferable to the gray-green aspect of common bronzes, which might easily be mistaken for statues in a state of putrefaction. Satiny gleams played over its rounded forms, doubtless polished by the amorous kisses of twenty centuries, for it seemed a Corinthian bronze, a work of the best era of art, perhaps moulded by Lysippus himself.

“That foot will be my choice,” said to the merchant, who regarded me with an ironical and saturnine air, and held out the object desired that I might examine it more fully.

I was surprised at its lightness. It was not a foot of metal, but in sooth a foot of flesh, an embalmed foot, a mummy’s foot. On examining it still more closely the very grain of the skin, and the almost imperceptible lines impressed upon it by the texture of the bandages, became perceptible. The toes were slender and delicate, and terminated by perfectly formed nails, pure and transparent as agates. The great toe, slightly separated from the rest, afforded a happy contrast, in the antique style, to the position of the other toes, and lent it an aerial lightness—the grace of a bird’s foot. The sole, scarcely streaked by a few almost imperceptible cross lines, afforded evidence that it had never touched the bare ground, and had only come in contact with the finest matting of Nile rushes and the softest carpets of panther skin.

“Ha, ha, you want the foot of the Princess Hermonthis!” exclaimed the merchant, with a strange giggle, fixing his owlish eyes upon me. “Ha, ha, ha! For a paper-weight! An original idea!—artistic idea!—Old Pharaoh would certainly have been surprised had some one told him that the foot of his adored daughter would be used for a paper-weight after he had had a mountain of granite hollowed out as a receptacle for the triple coffin, painted and gilded, covered with hieroglyphics and beautiful paintings of the Judgment of Souls,” continued the queer little merchant, half audibly, as though talking to himself.

“How much will you charge me for this mummy fragment?”

“Ah, the highest price I can get, for it is a superb piece. If I had the match of it you could not have it for less than five hundred francs. The daughter of a Pharaoh! Nothing is more rare.”

“Assuredly that is not a common article, but still, how much do you want? In the first place let me warn you that all my wealth consists of just five louis. I can buy anything that costs five louis, but nothing dearer. You might search my vest pockets and most secret drawers without even finding one poor five-franc piece more.”

“Five louis for the foot of the Princess Hermonthis! That is very little, very

little indeed. 'Tis an authentic foot," muttered the merchant, shaking his head, and imparting a peculiar rotary motion to his eyes. "Well, take it, and I will give you the bandages into the bargain," he added, wrapping the foot in an ancient damask rag. "Very fine? Real damask—Indian damask which has never been redyed. It is strong, and yet it is soft," he mumbled, stroking the frayed tissue with his fingers, through the trade-acquired habit which moved him to praise even an object of such little value that he himself deemed it only worth the giving away.

He poured the gold coins into a sort of mediaeval alms-purse hanging at his belt, repeating:

"The foot of the Princess Hermonthis to be used for a paper-weight!"

Then turning his phosphorescent eyes upon me, he exclaimed in a voice strident as the crying of a cat which has swallowed a fish-bone:

"Old Pharaoh will not be well pleased. He loved his daughter, the dear man!"

"You speak as if you were a contemporary of his. You are old enough, goodness knows! but you do not date back to the Pyramids of Egypt," I answered, laughingly, from the threshold.

I went home, delighted with my acquisition.

With the idea of putting it to profitable use as soon as possible, I placed the foot of the divine Princess Hermonthis upon a heap of papers scribbled over with verses, in themselves an undecipherable mosaic work of erasures; articles freshly begun; letters forgotten, and posted in the table drawer instead of the letter-box, an error to which absent-minded people are peculiarly liable. The effect was charming, bizarre, and romantic.

Well satisfied with this embellishment, I went out with the gravity and pride becoming one who feels that he has the ineffable advantage over all the passers-by whom he elbows, of possessing a piece of the Princess Hermonthis, daughter of Pharaoh.

I looked upon all who did not possess, like myself, a paper-weight so authentically Egyptian as very ridiculous people, and it seemed to me that the proper occupation of every sensible man should consist in the mere fact of having a mummy's foot upon his desk.

Happily I met some friends, whose presence distracted me in my infatuation with this new acquisition. I went to dinner with them, for I could not very well have dined with myself.

When I came back that evening, with my brain slightly confused by a few glasses of wine, a vague whiff of Oriental perfume delicately titillated my

olfactory nerves. The heat of the room had warmed the natron, bitumen, and myrrh in which the paraschistes, who cut open the bodies of the dead, had bathed the corpse of the princess. It was a perfume at once sweet and penetrating, a perfume that four thousand years had not been able to dissipate.

The Dream of Egypt was Eternity. Her odours have the solidity of granite and endure as long.

I soon drank deeply from the black cup of sleep. For a few hours all remained opaque to me. Oblivion and nothingness inundated me with their sombre waves.

Yet light gradually dawned upon the darkness of my mind. Dreams commenced to touch me softly in their silent flight.

The eyes of my soul were opened, and I beheld my chamber as it actually was. I might have believed myself awake but for a vague consciousness which assured me that I slept, and that something fantastic was about to take place.

The odour of the myrrh had augmented in intensity, and I felt a slight headache, which I very naturally attributed to several glasses of champagne that we had drunk to the unknown gods and our future fortunes.

I peered through my room with a feeling of expectation which I saw nothing to justify. Every article of furniture was in its proper place. The lamp, softly shaded by its globe of ground crystal, burned upon its bracket; the water-colour sketches shone under their Bohemian glass; the curtains hung down languidly; everything wore an aspect of tranquil slumber.

After a few moments, however, all this calm interior appeared to become disturbed. The woodwork cracked stealthily, the ash-covered log suddenly emitted a jet of blue flame, and the discs of the pateras seemed like great metallic eyes, watching, like myself, for the things which were about to happen.

My eyes accidentally fell upon the desk where I had placed the foot of the Princess Hermonthis.

Instead of remaining quiet, as behoved a foot which had been embalmed for four thousand years, it commenced to act in a nervous manner, contracted itself, and leaped over the papers like a startled frog. One would have imagined that it had suddenly been brought into contact with a galvanic battery. I could distinctly hear the dry sound made by its little heel, hard as the hoof of a gazelle.

I became rather discontented with my acquisition, inasmuch as I wished my paper-weights to be of a sedentary disposition, and thought it very unnatural that feet should walk about without legs, and I commenced to experience a feeling closely akin to fear.

Suddenly I saw the folds of my bed-curtain stir, and heard a bumping sound,

like that caused by some person hopping on one foot across the floor. I must confess I became alternately hot and cold, that I felt a strange wind chill my back, and that my suddenly rising hair caused my night-cap to execute a leap of several yards.

The bed-curtains opened and I beheld the strangest figure imaginable before me.

It was a young girl of a very deep coffee-brown complexion, like the bayadère Amani, and possessing the purest Egyptian type of perfect beauty. Her eyes were almond shaped and oblique, with eyebrows so black that they seemed blue; her nose was exquisitely chiselled, almost Greek in its delicacy of outline; and she might indeed have been taken for a Corinthian statue of bronze but for the prominence of her cheek-bones and the slightly African fulness of her lips, which compelled one to recognise her as belonging beyond all doubt to the hieroglyphic race which dwelt upon the banks of the Nile.

Her arms, slender and spindle-shaped like those of very young girls, were encircled by a peculiar kind of metal bands and bracelets of glass beads; her hair was all twisted into little cords, and she wore upon her bosom a little idol-figure of green paste, bearing a whip with seven lashes, which proved it to be an image of Isis; her brow was adorned with a shining plate of gold, and a few traces of paint relieved the coppery tint of her cheeks.

As for her costume, it was very odd indeed.

Fancy a pagne, or skirt, all formed of little strips of material bedizened with red and black hieroglyphics, stiffened with bitumen, and apparently belonging to a freshly unbandaged mummy.

In one of those sudden flights of thought so common in dreams I heard the hoarse falsetto of the bric-à-brac dealer, repeating like a monotonous refrain the phrase he had uttered in his shop with so enigmatical an intonation:

“Old Pharaoh will not be well pleased He loved his daughter, the dear man!”

One strange circumstance, which was not at all calculated to restore my equanimity, was that the apparition had but one foot; the other was broken off at the ankle!

She approached the table where the foot was starting and fidgeting about more than ever, and there supported herself upon the edge of the desk. I saw her eyes fill with pearly gleaming tears.

Although she had not as yet spoken, I fully comprehended the thoughts which agitated her. She looked at her foot—for it was indeed her own—with an exquisitely graceful expression of coquettish sadness, but the foot leaped and ran

hither and thither, as though impelled on steel springs.

Twice or thrice she extended her hand to seize it, but could not succeed.

Then commenced between the Princess Hermonthis and her foot—which appeared to be endowed with a special life of its own—a very fantastic dialogue in a most ancient Coptic tongue, such as might have been spoken thirty centuries ago in the syrinxes of the land of Ser. Luckily I understood Coptic perfectly well that night.

The Princess Hermonthis cried, in a voice sweet and vibrant as the tones of a crystal bell:

“Well, my dear little foot, you always flee from me, yet I always took good care of you. I bathed you with perfumed water in a bowl of alabaster; I smoothed your heel with pumice-stone mixed with palm-oil; your nails were cut with golden scissors and polished with a hippopotamus tooth; I was careful to select tatbebs for you, painted and embroidered and turned up at the toes, which were the envy of all the young girls in Egypt. You wore on your great toe rings bearing the device of the sacred Scarabseus, and you supported one of the lightest bodies that a lazy foot could sustain.”

The foot replied in a pouting and chagrined tone:

“You know well that I do not belong to myself any longer. I have been bought and paid for. The old merchant knew what he was about. He bore you a grudge for having refused to espouse him. This is an ill turn which he has done you. The Arab who violated your royal coffin in the subterranean pits of the necropolis of Thebes was sent thither by him. He desired to prevent you from being present at the reunion of the shadowy nations in the cities below. Have you five pieces of gold for my ransom?”

“Alas, no! My jewels, my rings, my purses of gold and silver were all stolen from me,” answered the Princess Hermonthis with a sob.

“Princess,” I then exclaimed, “I never retained anybody’s foot unjustly. Even though you have not got the five louis which it cost me, I present it to you gladly. I should feel unutterably wretched to think that I were the cause of so amiable a person as the Princess Hermonthis being lame.”

I delivered this discourse in a royally gallant, troubadour tone which must have astonished the beautiful Egyptian girl.

She turned a look of deepest gratitude upon me, and her eyes shone with bluish gleams of light.

She took her foot, which surrendered itself willingly this time, like a woman about to put on her little shoe, and adjusted it to her leg with much skill.

This operation over, she took a few steps about the room, as though to assure herself that she was really no longer lame.

“Ah, how pleased my father will be! He who was so unhappy because of my mutilation, and who from the moment of my birth set a whole nation at work to hollow me out a tomb so deep that he might preserve me intact until that last day when souls must be weighed in the balance of Amenthi! Come with me to my father. He will receive you kindly, for you have given me back my foot.”

I thought this proposition natural enough. I arrayed myself in a dressing-gown of large-flowered pattern, which lent me a very Pharaonic aspect, hurriedly put on a pair of Turkish slippers, and informed the Princess Hermonthis that I was ready to follow her.

Before starting, Hermonthis took from her neck the little idol of green paste, and laid it on the scattered sheets of paper which covered the table.

“It is only fair,” she observed, smilingly, “that I should replace your paper-weight.”

She gave me her hand, which felt soft and cold, like the skin of a serpent, and we departed.

We passed for some time with the velocity of an arrow through a fluid and grayish expanse, in which half-formed silhouettes flitted swiftly by us, to right and left.

For an instant we saw only sky and sea.

A few moments later obelisks commenced to tower in the distance; pylons and vast flights of steps guarded by sphinxes became clearly outlined against the horizon.

We had reached our destination.

The princess conducted me to a mountain of rose-coloured granite, in the face of which appeared an opening so narrow and low that it would have been difficult to distinguish it from the fissures in the rock, had not its location been marked by two stelae wrought with sculptures.

Hermonthis kindled a torch and led the way before me.

We traversed corridors hewn through the living rock. Their walls, covered with hieroglyphics and paintings of allegorical processions, might well have occupied thousands of arms for thousands of years in their formation. These corridors of interminable length opened into square chambers, in the midst of which pits had been contrived, through which we descended by cramp-irons or spiral stairways. These pits again conducted us into other chambers, opening into other corridors, likewise decorated with painted sparrow-hawks, serpents coiled in circles, the

symbols of the tau and pedum—prodigious works of art which no living eye can ever examine—interminable legends of granite which only the dead have time to read through all eternity.

At last we found ourselves in a hall so vast, so enormous, so immeasurable, that the eye could not reach its limits. Files of monstrous columns stretched far out of sight on every side, between which twinkled livid stars of yellowish flame; points of light which revealed further depths incalculable in the darkness beyond.

The Princess Hermonthis still held my hand, and graciously saluted the mummies of her acquaintance.

My eyes became accustomed to the dim twilight, and objects became discernible.

I beheld the kings of the subterranean races seated upon thrones—grand old men, though dry, withered, wrinkled like parchment, and blackened with naphtha and bitumen—all wearing pshents of gold, and breastplates and gorgets glittering with precious stones, their eyes immovably fixed like the eyes of sphinxes, and their long beards whitened by the snow of centuries. Behind them stood their peoples, in the stiff and constrained posture enjoined by Egyptian art, all eternally preserving the attitude prescribed by the hieratic code. Behind these nations, the cats, ibixes, and crocodiles contemporary with them—rendered monstrous of aspect by their swathing bands—mewed, flapped their wings, or extended their jaws in a saurian giggle.

All the Pharaohs were there—Cheops, Chephrenes, Psammetichus, Sesostris, Amenotaph—all the dark rulers of the pyramids and syrinxes. On yet higher thrones sat Chronos and Xixouthros, who was contemporary with the deluge, and Tubal Cain, who reigned before it.

The beard of King Xixouthros had grown seven times around the granite table upon which he leaned, lost in deep reverie, and buried in dreams.

Further back, through a dusty cloud, I beheld dimly the seventy-two pre-adamite kings, with their seventy-two peoples, for ever passed away.

After permitting me to gaze upon this bewildering spectacle a few moments, the Princess Hermonthis presented me to her father Pharaoh, who favoured me with a most gracious nod.

“I have found my foot again! I have found my foot!” cried the princess, clapping her little hands together with every sign of frantic joy. “It was this gentleman who restored it to me.”

The races of Kemi, the races of Nahasi—all the black, bronzed, and copper-

coloured nations repeated in chorus:

“The Princess Hermonthis has found her foot again!”

Even Xixouthros himself was visibly affected.

He raised his heavy eyelids, stroked his moustache with his fingers, and turned upon me a glance weighty with centuries.

“By Oms, the dog of Hell, and Tmei, daughter of the Sun and of Truth, this is a brave and worthy lad!” exclaimed Pharaoh, pointing to me with his sceptre, which was terminated with a lotus-flower.

“What recompense do you desire?”

Filled with that daring inspired by dreams in which nothing seems impossible, I asked him for the hand of the Princess Hermonthis. The hand seemed to me a very proper antithetic recompense for the foot.

Pharaoh opened wide his great eyes of glass in astonishment at my witty request.

“What country do you come from, and what is your age?”

“I am a Frenchman, and I am twenty-seven years old venerable Pharaoh.”

“Twenty-seven years old, and he wishes to espouse the Princess Hermonthis who is thirty centuries old!” cried out at once all the Thrones and all the Circles of Nations.

Only Hermonthis herself did not seem to think my request unreasonable.

“If you were even only two thousand years old,” replied the ancient king, “I would willingly give you the princess, but the disproportion is too great; and, besides, we must give our daughters husbands who will last well. You do not know how to preserve yourselves any longer. Even those who died only fifteen centuries ago are already no more than a handful of dust. Behold, my flesh is solid as basalt, my bones are bars of steel!

“I will be present on the last day of the world with the same body and the same features which I had during my lifetime. My daughter Hermonthis will last longer than a statue of bronze.

“Then the last particles of your dust will have been scattered abroad by the winds, and even Isis herself, who was able to find the atoms of Osiris, would scarce be able to recompose your being.

“See how vigorous I yet remain, and how mighty is my grasp,” he added, shaking my hand in the English fashion with a strength that buried my rings in the flesh of my fingers.

He squeezed me so hard that I awoke, and found my friend Alfred shaking me by the arm to make me get up.

“Oh, you everlasting sleeper! Must I have you carried out into the middle of the street, and fireworks exploded in your ears? It is afternoon. Don’t you recollect your promise to take me with you to see M. Aguado’s Spanish pictures?”

“God! I forgot all, all about it,” I answered, dressing myself hurriedly. “We will go there at once. I have the permit lying there on my desk.”

I started to find it, but fancy my astonishment when I beheld, instead of the mummy’s foot I had purchased the evening before, the little green paste idol left in its place by the Princess Hermonthis!

PIT OF MADNESS, by E. Hoffmann Price

Bayonne seemed incredibly ancient and lovely to Denis Crane as he headed from the wine shop to the Biarritz Highway and across the sombre parkway toward the Gate of Spain. The cathedral spires were silver lance-heads reaching into the moonglow, and the city was a pearl gray enchantment afloat on a sea of writhing river mists: yet that blood soaked soil whispered to Denis Crane as he walked.

This was unholy ground, honeycombed with crypts in which Roman legionnaires had worshiped Mithra, and watched frenzied devotees slash and mutilate and emasculate themselves in honor of bloodthirsty Cybele. This corner of France was the home of witch and wizard and warlock.

A shiver rippled down Crane's lean, broad-shouldered body as he glanced to his left and saw the ominous cluster of ancient trees that overshadowed the low gray cupola of the spring where Satan and Saint Leon once had met—

Another medieval legend. Well, and here is the causeway, and just ahead, rue d'Espagne, with the yellow glow from the windows of Basque wine shops breaking its narrow gloom.

But the scream that came from his left told him how far from warm humanity he was, however near the lights might be. It was the sobbing, desperate outcry of some woman whose last gasp could not quite voice her terror.

Crane's suntan became a sickly yellow in that spectral, mist-filtered moonlight. He wheeled, stared into the swirling grayness of the dry moat that girdled the thirty-foot city wall. His face lengthened, tightened into grim angles, and his eyes narrowed as he listened. Silence—sinister...poisonous....Then that dreadful wail again. It was closer now, and though it was inarticulate he knew that the woman was crying for help and despaired of getting it.

An everlasting instant, and she burst from the mist and into the foreground at the foot of the causeway that blocked the moat. Her abrupt appearance shocked Crane, though he knew that it was but the illusion of fog and moonlight.

Her hair was a streaming blackness, and her body a pearl-white glow. Her feet and legs were as bare as her torso. All she wore was a flimsy shawl caught at the shoulder, draping slantwise to veil one breast, and flaring out, to shroud the opposite hip. Crane distinguished no feature but her mouth. It was distorted in a cry she could not utter.

He plunged down the steep slope of the causeway and into the moat. Her legs gave way, pitching her headlong to the sand. She lay there, arms sprawled out.

As he reached her side, she shuddered and slumped flat, no longer making instinctive efforts to protect herself.

Crane rolled her over into the crook of his arm. He saw then what mist and motion had masked: her throat was savagely torn, her breast and stomach clawed and lacerated. Her face was a gory crisscross of bruises and slashes. The filmy fragility of the shoulder-to-hip shawl had not hampered her assailant enough for him to tear it from her body.

Neither pulse nor breath was perceptible. Though her sweetly curved body was blood-splashed, her wounds could not have killed her; but terror and despair could have.

Her face must have been as lovely as her body; but horror blinded him to the sleekness of her hips and the shapeliness of her legs and firm young breasts. His eyes narrowed as he recovered sufficiently from the shock to interpret certain significant signs.

Her hands had the incredible softness of one utterly a stranger to the lightest work; but what she still clenched in her fingers was a startling revelation.

It was similar in shape to a military campaign badge; purple, with a rosette of the same color. A decoration awarded to an elect few.

But most revealing of all was the silken shawl. It placed her beyond any question. There was only one house in Bayonne where the girls paraded in such costume; and that place was on the street that ran along the city wall.

Then he noted that she was breathing; and a slash on her inside arm was bleeding. It might not be dangerous, but it was near an artery. He drew a clean handkerchief from his breast pocket, and devised a tourniquet.

The town was asleep, and he'd have to carry her to the house on the wall; but first give that tourniquet a twist. He fumbled for a pencil—

But Crane's first aid was not completed.

The sand of the moat bottom gave no betraying crunch; the mist thinned moonlight cast no warning shadow; and Crane's intuition was an instant too late. He dropped the battered girl, but before he caught more than a fleeting glimpse of the dark figure which loomed monstrously above him in the grayness, a flying tackle carried him crashing to the ground.

The impact knocked him breathless. Iron hands clutched his throat; but Crane's fist hammered home. Splintered teeth lacerated his knuckles, and blood gushed, drenching his face. His opponent, snarling scarcely articulate curses, jerked back. Crane's boot lashed out.

But the moonlight was blocked by another figure with monstrous, outspread

wings. Bat wings, it seemed. It dropped, boring headlong, toppling Crane backward. A spicy, pungent odor, an odd blend of incense and cosmetics stung his nostrils. Then, still grappling with the thing which had swooped out of the upper mist, he crashed against the gray masonry of the bastioned wall. Crane's hard head had not a chance against a fortress built to defy a battering ram, but his shoulders absorbed enough of the terrific impact to save his skull. Some lingering vestige of wits told him that once out of action, he no longer interested the enemy.

Minutes elapsed before he could fight off the numbness and inertia that clogged his will. But he finally rolled over and clambered to his knees.

He was alone in that gray, ghoulish moonglow. The girl was gone. He saw the prints of his own feet and those of the mysterious assailants that had swooped down on him. Blood flecked the sand, and one untrampled spot still held the imprint of that savagely slashed girl's breasts. It had not been illusion; but for a moment Crane's blood became ice.

The laundry marks and monogram on the handkerchief he had bound to the girl's arm would damn him beyond redemption when her body was found. And aside from that, he could not hope to obliterate the traces of the struggle in the moat.

The French police, inhumanly efficient, would inevitably connect him with the outrage. When he returned to his quarters, the *concierge* would note the time of his arrival. The proprietor of the wine shop on the Biarritz Road would remember when he had left, and the direction he had taken. And every foreigner is conspicuous in sleepy Bayonne.

Damn those experts with their omniscient microscopes! Their chemical tests which would detect the faintest trace of blood on his clothing.

And someone, watching from some darkened window of a house on the wall, might observe him as he left the moat, might already have heard and noted the encounter.

Only one move for Crane: find that girl, dead or alive. Hit first before the merciless *Sûreté Générale* connected him with the work of night-roving ghouls. And find the man whose decoration she had clutched.

As he hastened down the moat, he followed the girl's small, shapely footprints along the sand. Wrath burned him as his first fear left. Though that gaudy shawl branded her, she was still a woman, and the victim of something monstrous and deadly; something too eager for her torn flesh to bother with Crane beyond hammering him out of action.

Or had the two spectral assailants already arranged to frame him?

Half way to the sombre Lachepaillet Gate he noted the spot where her bare feet first marked the moat-bottom sand. He entered the walled city and hastened to his room at the Panier-Fleuri. The concière regarded him with bleary eyes that suddenly sharpened. But she said nothing.

Once in his room, he cleaned up, then stretched long legs toward rue Lachepaillet. He should report to the police; but who would believe such a story, told by an insane American, trying to implicate one who wore that coveted purple decoration the size of an A.E.F. campaign badge?

Crane jabbed a pushbutton. A trim, sharp-eyed girl in black admitted him and led the way to a spacious hall whose walls and ceiling were a solid expanse of mirror.

A bell tinkled, and a half a dozen girls lounging on upholstered benches lined up on parade as several others emerged from a rear apartment to join them.

They wore satin slippers and knee length silk hosiery. Their professional smiles, and the flimsy chiffon shawls draped from right breast to left hip completed their costume. Not a bad array; though some had over-plump legs, and breasts that would have been the better for a brassiere. A few were lovely in face and body, but there was something infinitely repulsive about that grotesque multiplication of bare flesh in those mirrored panels whose angles probed the concealment of chiffon shawls and made the glaring room a patchwork of feminine curves.

Crane caught a freshly mirrored whiteness and turned toward the door. The shock for an instant numbed him. A full moment elapsed before he realized that he was not looking at the girl who had vanished from the moat.

She had the same gracious inward dip at the waist, the same heart-warming flare of the hips, and one lovely breast peeped alluringly through the heavy strands of hair that trailed down over her left shoulder. Her blue eyes were almost black. Their troubled darkness matched the sombre droop of her lips.

Tears had smudged the mascara of her lashes and a trace of redness lingered. Crane perceived the tensiety of her body and saw her fingers twisting the trailing fringe of her shawl.

Why had she been reserved from the lineup? Why that startling resemblance to that savagely mutilated girl in the moat? Why that black fear in her eyes?

The girl's fingers sank insistently into his wrist, and he felt the firm pressure of her hip and shoulder against him as she paused in the doorway.

More than her resemblance to the girl in the moat told Crane that this was the

one who could give him the most help—or damn him soonest. He followed his hunch.

“*Allons!*” he whispered. “Let’s go.”

He tossed the three hundred pound keeper of the house a purple Banque de France note, and followed the girl in the scarlet shawl up a flight of stairs and into a sombrely furnished room.

Her name was Madeline, but all the coquetry of the game was missing, though she contrived a friendly smile as her fingers plucked the shoulder knot of her shawl.

Crane checked her.

“What’s wrong?” he demanded.

“Diane—my sister,” she answered. “I’m terribly worried. She hasn’t come back. That awful Arab—or Turk—”

Crane frowned. That was an odd touch. Who ever heard of an Algerian wearing that decoration?

As she spoke, she abstractedly kicked off her slippers and leaned back among the cushions. She regarded Crane curiously, seeing that his face was gray and grim.

“What’s the matter...don’t you like me?”

“That will keep!” His voice was harsh and low. “Tell me about that Arab. What was wrong with him?”

“Some of the things he did, the first night he was here. Before he took Diane—wherever he’s taken her. It was in the room next door, No, he didn’t hurt her at all—I mean the other girl, not Diane. But he frightened her terribly. I saw him leave. His pupils were like black saucers. *Mon Dieu!* Such eyes. Like Satan eating opium.”

She was wrong. Opium contracted the pupils, but her very intensity gave Crane the picture.

“Are you sure he didn’t wear the Order of Saint Léon?”

“Mumm...no, of course not! But he dropped something in her room, and she showed it to me, and left it here.” Madeline slid to her feet and stepped to the dresser. She returned with a small silver watch charm. It was a tiny peacock with ruby eyes; an exquisitely tooled bit of metal.

“A soldier who’d served in Syria once told me,” explained Madeline, “that that is a symbol of the devil-worshipers. That’s what’s been worrying me. If I’d known in time, I’d never have let her go. But why should you care?”

“I’m a damn’ fool who can’t mind his business,” Crane smiled grimly. “I’ve

got to find your sister.” She sceptically eyed him.

“Then you don’t want me? But you paid—”

Crane shrugged. “If you knew, you’d understand.”

“Oh...” Very slowly, like a dying echo. She caught him by the shoulders, stared him full in the face; and bit by bit she read that the sombre riddle in his gray eyes concerned her missing sister.

“I didn’t realize you knew Diane...” Her arm slipped about his neck and she drew closer as she continued, “I’ll go with you. I’ll help.”

She had guts. Crane’s smile lost his bleakness. For a long moment their glances blended. She sighed, and her breasts crept through their screen of dark curls. Her smile was a revelation, and suddenly Crane’s blood quickened from the soft caress of her arm and the warmth of her body.

“*Tenez!*” protested Crane. “Stop it, you damn’ little fool. I’ve got some business to attend to—”

“You wouldn’t buy me,” she whispered. “Somehow, that’s rather wonderful... but you like me just a little, don’t you? Wouldn’t that make it different?”

Somehow, it did; and Crane’s sensible effort to break away failed. She was lonely and worried. He couldn’t repulse her friendliness.

“Cut it out!” he growled, though his protest was weakening. He laughed harshly, thinking of the one about the mail-carrier who hiked on Sundays; but Madeline seemed no longer one of those who lined up in that mirrored hell glare. She had become a bright flame in the foulness that crept through the mists of that fiend-haunted gray city.

Those were not bought lips that clung thirstily to Crane’s mouth, and the shudder that rippled down her throbbing body was instinctive...and as her arms closed about him, Crane defied the peril that was gathering outside. He could not repulse the first glow of friendliness in that drab lupanar...

Madeline’s eyes were tear-sparkling when she slipped from Crane’s arms and said, “I know now that she is dead.”

“The devil you do!”he snapped, feeling decidedly stupid about the interlude that might in the end cost him all but his head—literally, as they use the guillotine in France.

“Yes. Or you’d not have lingered, with that wrath in your eyes. So I know you can’t find her alive.”

No use explaining his true motives. He took a key from his pocket.

“Go to the Panier-Fleuri. Stay under cover. What you told me about an Arab has entirely upset my assumption. I thought you could tell me about someone

wearing the Order of Saint Léon. But no matter—I've got a fresh hunch. Now run along."

They waited for the cessation of laughter and footsteps in the hall. A latch click. Silence, except metallic voices from the reception room on the ground floor.

Crane watched Madeline slip toward the further stairway. A moment later, looking from the window that overlooked the narrow black alley that skirted the rear of the house, he saw the white blur of her face, and caught the gesture of her hand.

She was on her way. He slammed the door and strode down the main stairway. He forced a laugh at the doorkeeper's vulgar farewell; but as he crossed the threshold, he began to see that his investigation, despite the delay, had gained him an ally if the police should catch up with him.

But that silver peacock was an ominous hint. Devil worship...some damnable Asiatic cult. He'd heard it existed in the mountains of Kurdistan.

Yet for all that thickening menace, the riddle in some respects was less baffling in the light of reflection.

Diane had been headed off by the monsters that had swooped down on Crane from the lip of the moat. They must have held to a straight line across the parkway. That gave him a start toward tracing the point from which she had made her futile break.

The mist was thinning, yet enough remained to envelop Crane in a spectral veil that protected and at the same time hampered him. He was unarmed; but he paused long enough to remove his socks, stuff one inside the other, and then slip in a rock the size of his fist. Very pleasant, if he got the edge on the two who had laid him out.

For half an hour he circled, trying to pick a course that the two monsters would have used to head off the mangled fugitive.

"Her instinct would drive her to the closest route to safety," he reasoned. "To her sister. Then if the Gate of Spain was the closest, her direction must have been more to my left. Otherwise she'd have gone through the Lachepaillet Gate."

Half an hour search vindicated the hunch. A shred of scarlet chiffon. A splash of blood.

He looped left. He found footprints heading toward the Gate of Spain—her pursuers, eager to cut off a flight that would betray their rendezvous.

Ahead of him a masonry lunette loomed low in the mist. One of the outer

defenses erected by Vauban—or perhaps something much more ancient, and conceived by no honest engineer.

Crane now crept through the mists until a whiff of stale tobacco warned him of a watcher's presence.

He rose and boldly stalked toward the lunette. A jet of light flared in his face, blinding him. He was challenged in French.

"I've got to see the *émir* at once!" Crane bluffed, using a plausible Arabic title that would flatter anyone of lower rank.

The sentry protested. The *émir* was not to be disturbed. The ceremony had started. Crane shrugged and offered him the silver peacock.

"Hurry, idiot!" growled Crane. "Tell him I'm here!"

The flash shifted toward the silver token. The drawn pistol was holstered and an empty hand reached for the symbol. And then Crane's bludgeon cracked down. The guardian collapsed. Crane caught him and the flashlight.

The fellow was wearing a gown, and a hood from which hung a mask to conceal his face. Crane donned the disguise. This was no time for qualms.

The memory of that mangled girl nerved his arm. He raised the pistol, smashed down with the barrel. Then he picked his way down a narrow casemate inclining sharply into the earth.

Furtive flashes of his light guided Crane. He descended a stairway of archaic masonry, crumbled treads whose rubbish litter had been swept against the walls. A splash of fresh blood guided him.

Finally there was an indirect glow ahead. Drums were thumping, and voices muttered in eerie rhythm. Some satanic ritual was in progress.

Reasonably, Crane should now notify the police; but that brained sentry left him with no retreat. More than ever, his story had to be good.

He halted at the jamb of an arch opening into a vaulted chamber illuminated by flickering wax tapers. Its circular walls were pierced with other arches that led to further and darker crypts.

Upward of a score of scarlet-robed and hooded figures were informally gathered in groups. They sat on low wooden tripods the size of coffee tables. Their muttered conversation was low-voiced and unintelligible, but Crane sensed the tension that gripped them, felt their awe and soul-stabbing anticipation.

There was one, tall and commanding, who strode from group to group. Red-masked faces jerked abruptly upward at his approach.

But most revealing of all was the blank arch opposite Crane. Stretched out on a massive block of stone lay a woman, bound hand and foot: Diane, recaptured for

the ritual from which she had escaped. Her body was to serve as an altar, perhaps to feel the thrust of a sacrificial knife. Black candles burned about her, diffusing acrid fumes which half obscured her; but Crane saw that she breathed. The tourniquet with his initials, however, had been removed.

Since Diane was alive; he need not find that damning handkerchief, provided that he could extricate her. But though he was armed with the sentry's pistol, the odds were far too great for open attack.

Then he saw that the figure on the two foot, brazen crucifix behind that altar of bare, lacerated flesh was inverted. That final detail sent frost racing through his blood. Those hooded figures had gathered for the Black Mass, the evil ritual of modern satanism, utterly different from the oriental devil-worship. Crane wondered how that silver peacock fitted into the tangle.

From one of the passages at the left came bestial snarls and half human mutterings: some monster held in reserve for the ultimate horror of that mad gathering.

The lordly figure in black clapped his hands. The devotees shifted into crescent formation. Crane joined them as they moved toward the altar.

The Black Monster was donning a priest's stole and cope. Six red-robed acolytes filed from a passageway. Three carried thuribles from which poured blue-black, pungent fumes; the others had trays of hammered copper, all heaped with diamond shaped lozenges. They passed among the gathering, swinging their thuribles and offering wafers to the devotees.

Crane tasted one of the confections; but instead of swallowing, he palmed it. It reeked with hasheesh and datura, blended with other oriental drugs he could not identify; but the two he recognized warned him. Both were brain-searing aphrodisiacs. Those wafers of illusion would make the partaker a crazed beast gnawed by outrageous fancies and delusions. That would give Crane his chance to act.

And all the while that bestial mumbling and groaning and the vibration of pounded iron echoed from the further crypt.

Crane watched the high priest of Satan make a foul mockery of the genuflections of the Mass, saw him spit upon the reversed crucifix, heard him chanting in a high, malignant voice.

Crane could scarcely understand the ritual, but some phrases of ultimate blasphemy were all too clearly burned into his reeling brain.

"Satan, Lord of the World, defend us against an unjust god who created only to damn...defend us against hypocrisy that mocks with the lure of redemption...

hear the voice of the damned, O Lucifer, Son of the Morning! Satan, to you we make our prayer, Just and Logical God..."

Finally, the priest faced about and mocked the caricatured crucifix.

"And You, O Thief of Homage and Deceiver of Mankind, I compel you to become incarnate in this bread...by the mockery you have ordained, I who am ordained command you and you will obey...yea, while we draw blood anew from your wounds...and press fresh thorns of vengeance on your brow...this I can and this I will do...Accursed Nazarene...Traitor Son of a Traitor God..."

A low rumbling mutter drowned his amen; then with an inverse gesture of his left hand, the priest blessed the gathering and in mocking accents completed the blasphemy: "*Hoc est enim corpus meum!*"

He spat upon the consecrated bread, stolen from some consecrated altar; he scattered the fragments among the frothing, slaving devotees. They closed in, maddened with blasphemy and Asiatic drugs. They groveled, clawing and growling as they fought for the fragments.

Crane joined them. It was too early for a break. He had to outwit the undrugged acolytes.

First voices, then the tearing of the scarlet robes told him that women were among those who writhed and panted and grappled on the floor. Hoods and masks yielded to clawing fingers. Soon they forgot blasphemy. The Asiatic drugs were biting deep.

In a moment the vault had become an animation of the bestial carvings of a Tantric temple, Women in jewels and costly gowns, and men in formal evening dress were clawing each other with a fury that stripped clothing to shreds.

A golden-haired fiend with crazed eyes and hungry red mouth emerged unpaired from the tangle and twined eager arms about Crane. A few scraps that glittered with green sequins trailed from her hips and what remained of a brassiere clung to breasts that throbbed from her fierce, drugged passion. Her legs were white serpents and her quivering body was a multitude of consuming flames, and her loose hair blinded and choked Crane as he swallowed his horror of that uncontrollable madness.

Yet he had to play his part. That black-robed demon's eyes glittered fiercely from behind his mask as he circled the arena, watching their ever fouler fancies cropping out...

That golden-haired woman's madness was cleaner than what was on every side. And despite his qualms, Crane's blood surged in irrepressible response to her savage frenzy...

Yet even as he yielded to that vortex of passion, a remote corner of his brain remained untainted. He plied her with answering kisses, felt the shudder of her hot flesh, but that one sane morsel was wondering. And at times he saw what was about him.

He recognized a black-bearded man whose face had appeared in every major newspaper of the world...another, who had led a victorious army...and one who from the sidelines told premiers what to say...

The Master gestured, and an acolyte dashed to the passageway at the left.

Crane's fist smashed home, driving away a black-haired woman who sought to displace his companion. Her body was raked and bitten and slashed, but she was seeking more savage company...Crane saw how Diane had been mangled. Her terror hinted that she had not been drugged...

Then Crane saw what had been released when those unseen iron bars clanged open. A tall, gray-haired man whose deeply lined face had once been handsome and commanding. He wore what remained of full evening dress. The ribbon that had crossed his shirtfront trailed like a streamer as he approached; and on it Crane saw the ribbons of civil and military decorations.

He recognized the man. He knew now from whose formal garb that purple rosette had been torn. His mouth frothed, and his eyes burned insanely. He snarled bestially and plunged into the surging orgy.

This was a man whose whispers shook Europe. Now he rolled vilely in that tangle of writhing flesh.

But why—Great God, *why*?

The Master laughed and gestured. The sullen ruddy glow of the tapers was drowned in a blue white, dazzling radiance, pitilessly revealing what shadows had shrouded.

Then Crane saw and understood.

A motion picture camera was covering the hideous show. That damnable film would place those drugged dignitaries forever in the power of that master of blasphemy. He had tricked them from Biarritz with hints of sensational ritual, drugged them, and the record of their unspeakable wallowings would doom them. Satanism had a logical purpose: political blackmail.

Time to move. The Master was distracted by his own show. Crane kicked clear of his companion, reached for his pistol.

It was gone! Lost in that writhing vortex.

He bounded to the altar, snatched that mockery of a crucifix, and whirled toward the Master. A pistol crackled. Crane felt the stab of hot lead, hurled

himself aside as bullets spattered the masonry. The acolytes closed in. The brazen crucifix crunched home. But the survivors overwhelmed him, hammering and kicking and grinding him into the flagstones.

The Master joined them. Crane, battered and stunned, heaved up out of the gory tangle, clawed the mask aside. He slashed at that swarthy, aquiline face. He missed, ducked a knife thrust, and closed in. This was the *émir*, the Asiatic enemy whose grip on the drugged dignitaries would buy state and army secrets, upset an African colonial empire.

Crane bored in, but the enemy was fresh and he was dizzy and battered. They crashed to the floor, Crane underneath, vainly trying to drive home one good blow. He jerked clear of a second knife thrust; but the next raked his ribs. The vault became a roaring redness until he perceived nothing but those implacable eyes and that savage, brazen leer.

But that last stroke did not fall. The surging tangle of madmen, sated of all but blood lust, swept Crane and his enemies against the wall. As the acolytes strove to club them into reason, Crane made the most of his respite.

He snatched an abandoned thurible by the chains, swung it like a flail, flattening the Master's skull. He swung again, but the chains whipped athwart a devotee who intervened, and the weapon was jerked from Crane's grasp. He turned toward the altar, ploughing through the writhing tangle. He tripped and was dragged back into the whirlpool of madness, a yard short of his goal.

A pistol roared as he struggled to his feet.

Madeline had followed him.

Crane jerked the weapon from her fingers and blasted the acolytes back as she struggled with her sister's bonds.

Another shot. The cameraman toppled from his perch behind the altar. The pistol was empty. Crane seized the machine and smashed it across the head of a surviving enemy. The film reservoir spewed out its reel of yellow celluloid, fogged beyond redemption in an instant.

The knots yielded. Crane seized the half conscious girl and with Madeline at his heels, skirted the groveling tangle of drugged devil-worshippers. There were no acolytes left to pursue. And presently they reached the mist and moonlight...

"As you learned," explained Diane, hours later, in Crane's rooms, "I was just frightened helpless by your dashing down to meet me. The *émir* didn't intend for me to be clawed to ribbons. But *Monsieur le Général Mar*—"

"Forget his name!" interrupted Crane, "Later, I'll tell you why."

"*Eh bien*," resumed Diane, "through error he prematurely took some of those

drugs sooner than the *émir* intended. Before the ritual started. And you saw—”

“Plenty.” Crane shuddered. Then he glanced at Madeline. “You little fool, you had to follow me!”

“But yes. I suspected that through no fault of your own you had been involved and were following some insane American impulse to do what you thought the right thing. So I followed, to help if I could. I feared she was dead, so I hesitated to call the police.”

“Damn lucky you didn’t!”

And then Diane interposed, “Monsieur Denis, how can I ever express my gratitude—”

“Madeline,” interrupted Crane, “has already taken care of that. And having had my fill of sunny France, I think I’ll leave for Spain in the morning.”

THE GHOST OF TOWNELEY TOWERS, by Seabury Quinn

I

PROFESSOR HARVEY FORRESTER sank his chin deeper into the fur collar of his overcoat and gazed disconsolately about the desolate midwinter prospect. Festoons of dripping icicles hung from the disused wharf, patches of half-melted snow alternated with larger patches of foot-fettering mud, and a chill wind whipped the waters of the Potomac into angry whitecaps and howled dismally around the eaves and corners of the shuttered and boarded-up summer hotel. Furthermore, look where he would, the Professor could descry no one who remotely resembled a messenger from Towneley Towers.

“This,” announced the Professor in a manner which admitted no gainsay or denial, “is a deuce of a fix we’re in, my dear.”

“Are you sure we got off at the right landing?” his pretty blonde ward inquired, thrusting her small hands deeper into the pockets of her otter skin coat.

“Sure?” echoed the Professor tartly. “Of course, I’m sure. See, here’s Towneley’s letter.” From his pocket he produced the crumpled sheet and read:

“‘...take the steamer Swordsmith to Piny Point landing. I’ll come for you in my launch or send somebody to bring you over to the Towers.’

“And if that ‘somebody’ doesn’t show up pretty soon we’re in a fine pickle,” he added bitterly, once more surveying the scenery with marked disfavor.

“There’s a man with a boat over by the pier,” the girl replied. “Maybe he knows the way.”

“Excellent idea,” the Professor commended, putting down his kit bag and approaching the aged colored man who had just made his “buckeye” one-master fast to the pierhead.

“How much will you charge to take the young lady and me to Towneley Towers—if you know where it is?”

The ancient negro hitched his greasy sheepskin reefer about his shoulders and regarded the Professor solemnly. “Yas, suh, Ah knows whar it is,” he vouchsafed. “Hit’s up de St. Mary’s crick a piece, ’tother side o’ Inigo’s Landing. Yas, suh, Ah knows it.”

Professor Forrester suppressed a sigh of vexation. Primitive peoples were alike the world over, he reflected, whether you encountered them in darkest Africa or

St. Mary's County, Maryland. The white man's direct methods seldom appealed to them, and nothing was to be gained by losing his temper. "Well," he repeated, "how much will you charge to take us over?"

"Cap'n," the negro shifted his gaze from one of his broken boots to the other, then looked intently at the ramshackle wharfhouse, as though seeking inspiration from its battered plank walls, "Cap'n, de feeshin' ain't ben very good dis winter, wid de oyster policemen chasin' me all ovah de river, an' Ah ain't made no money ter speak ob sence Thanksgivin'."

"Umpf?" Forrester grunted. "I suppose that means I'll have to underwrite your overhead. Very well, how much?"

"Cap'n, suh," the other returned solemnly, "Ah sho'ly would lak fer ter git fo' bits, or mebbe a dollah; but, Cap'n, suh, dere ain't enough money in yo' pockets ter git me ober to no Towneley Towahs. Naw, suh. Ah don' crave ter mess 'round wid no daid folks' business."

"What do you mean, you black rascal?" the Professor demanded. "I offer you your own price for taking the young lady and me a few miles down river, and you refuse—"

"Cap'n, suh," the other broke in, softening the discourtesy by removing his battered slouch hat and bobbing an obsequious bow, "yuh all don' want ter go to no Towneley Towahs. Dat place is all right fo' Yankees, but Ah knows quality folks when Ah sees 'em, an' Ah knows yuh all ain't gwine ter do yo' sefs no good by goin' dere. Cap'n, suh—" his voice sank to a husky whisper, and his rheumy old eyes rolled apprehensively—"hit's ha'nted! Yassuh."

"Bosh!" the Professor returned. "Don't you know there aren't any such things as ghosts?"

"Yassuh, Ah knows it in de daytime; but it'll be dark befo' we can make de landin' dere, an' Ah don' crave no parts o' dat place after de sun hides his face, suh."

That ended the argument. Meanwhile the sun was sinking behind the Virginia hills and long shadows were creeping down to the water's edge.

"Uncle Harvey," Rosalie's joyous hail broke in, "there's a motor boat standing in!" Two minutes later a long, cabined cruiser pulled alongside the wharf and Eugene Towneley himself, wrapped from throat to ankles in a chinchilla ulster, and radiating health and hospitality, clambered up the sea-ladder and wrung Forrester's hand.

"Mighty glad you got here, Harvey, my boy," he announced in his big voice. "Hope my little breakdown didn't inconvenience you too much. The engine got

the willies just as I was shoving off from the landing and I had to stop and repair a feed-line. All ready?"

"We'd begun to feel like Robinson Crusoe on his desert island when you showed up," Professor Forrester confided as the big power boat gathered speed and bucked her way through the rising rollers. "The steamer cast off the minute we'd landed, and there wasn't a soul in sight but an old oyster pirate who vowed he'd rather starve than ferry Rosalie and me over to your place. In fact, he intimated rather broadly that Towneley Towers is—"

"Haunted eh?" his host cut in with one of his big laughs. "Yes, that's getting to be an old story, now. We've had the devil's own time keeping any help about the place since the rumor of the ghost got about."

"Oh, it's not an ancestral spook, then?"

"No, it's this year's model, with all improvements," Towneley returned, swinging the trim craft into the creek. "The Towers dates back to the Lords Proprietaries' days, you know, and I dare say enough dark deeds were done under its roof at one time or other to justify a whole battalion of ghosties moving in, but the fact is no one ever heard of a 'ha'nt' in the neighborhood until after we came here to live. Usually it's deserted houses which get the reputation of harboring spirits, you know, but the rule's reversed in our case. Everything was quiet as a Quaker meeting until I decided to recondition the old place and live here, and the carpenters and plumbers had hardly moved out before the ghost moved in and began scaring my cooks and laundresses out of seven years' growth. I've had about five hundred percent labor turnover since the first of October, and if things keep on the way they're going I may have to shut the place up and move back to Baltimore, or do my own cooking and washing."

"I've tried every way possible to trap whatever it is that's scaring my niggers white, but so far I haven't got a bite. I've got a standing offer of a thousand dollars to any one who can prove the ghost is some malicious human playing a practical joke on me, too; but no one's made good on the offer to date." He bit savagely at the end of a cigar, set it aglow with an electric lighter attached to the cabin dashboard, and spun his steering wheel over sharply. "Here we are," he announced, warping the boat into her slip with the skill of a practical yachtsman, then clambering out to the cement landing and giving the painter a half turn about an iron stanchion. "Welcome to spooky hollow! Watch your step getting up that ladder, there's half an inch of ice on the rungs."

It was a royal feast which Towneley spread before his Christmas-week guests that night. About forty people from New York, Baltimore and Washington were

gathered at the old country seat at the invitation of the financier and his twin daughters, and nothing had been left undone to make the guests' visit an outstanding experience. Canvasback ducks, killed in the Potomac marshes a week before, and "gamed" to perfection, stewed green celery tops, quince jelly after the recipe of a seventy-year-old colored cook, spoon bread as golden as new coin from the mint and port as mellow as summer moonlight combined to make dinner a Lucullian banquet, and ten o'clock had struck on the tall mahogany clock in the hall and echoed by the library banjo clock and the ormolu timepiece on the drawing room mantel before the long Madeira cloth was cleared of gold plate and Wedgwood.

"Now, as a little surprise," the host announced, gazing benevolently about the company, "I propose giving you something you don't often find these days. Procter—" he turned to the solemn-faced Englishman who presided over the household domestics, and tendered him a bunch of keys—"two bottles of the Napoleon brandy."

A hum of respectful, expectant voices went round the table as the butler stalked majestically from the room. Napoleon brandy is a comparative luxury in Europe. In prohibitionized America it is rarer than roast pork at a Jewish wedding breakfast.

"Mr. Towneley, sir, if you please—" Procter returned to the dining room, his florid face slightly paler than its wont, his long, smooth-shaven upper lip trembling visibly, and no bottles in his hands—"may I speak with you a moment in private, sir?"

"What's the matter?"

"If you please, sir, I'd rather not enter the smoke house. I thought I saw—"

"Oh, good Lord! You, too? Take a couple of the stable boys—take half a dozen, if two aren't enough—and go get that brandy!"

"Yes, sir." The servant bowed with frigid respect and departed.

"I hope the superstitious fools don't get scared at their own shadows and drop one of those bottles," the host remarked as he cast a worried glance toward the door through which the butler had vanished. "If anything more were required to make me go mad—"

"Mr. Towneley!" The butler was once more in the dining room, his face positively gray with fright.

"Well, what's the matter now?"

"Oh, sir," the servant interrupted, his thick, throaty voice gone high with terror, "it's Thomas, sir; Thomas, the 'ostler. 'E's dead, sir!" Excitement had played

havoc with Procter's aspirates, and his h's dropped like autumn leaves in Vallombrosa.

"Dead?" repeated Towneley. "Yes, sir. You see, sir, I asked 'im and James and Thaddeus to accompany me to the smoke 'ouse, as you said, sir, and they went, though most reluctantly. When we got there, and I hopened the door, sir, somethink hinside laughed right in our faces, most 'ornble, 'ha-ha-ha!' just like that, sir. I thought it might be some of the servants making game of us, if I may use the hexpression, sir, and was about to hadmonish 'im, sir, when Thomas—who always was a vexatious little fighter, sir, if you don't mind me saying so—rushes into the 'ouse, sir, and the next thing we knows we 'eard 'im scream and choke, and when I played the light from my flash hinto the 'ouse, there 'e lay, all sprawled hout, as you might say, with a broken bottle on the floor beside 'im, and a great 'ole in 'is throat, sir!"

"And—"

"Yes, sir. Quite dead. The hother boys are bringing 'is body back now, sir. I ran along to tell you—"

"I'll bet you did," his master cut in. "Very well, that'll do, Procter.

"By Heaven, this is too much!" he stormed as the servant withdrew. "This foolishness has gone too far. It was bad enough when this 'ghost' hung around scaring my servants into fits; but murder is no joke and murder's been done here tonight. I suppose I'll have to communicate with the county authorities, and I'll have to ask you to remain here overnight, at least. You're at liberty to leave, if you wish, as soon as the inquest has been held. Meantime, I'm going to increase my offer to anyone who captures this supposed ghost to twenty-five hundred dollars, spot cash. Maybe that'll get some action."

"I'll take you on, sir," Rodney Phillips, a young Baltimore lawyer, who had pretensions to the hand of one of the Towneley twins, remarked in a voice rendered somewhat unsteady by excitement and too much port. "I'll get your ghost for you and make a clean job of it, too."

"I'll go with you, Rod," announced Waterford Richie, rising and extending his hand, but the volunteer ghost-breaker waved the offer aside.

"This is my personally conducted spook hunt, old son," he replied. "I'll get Mr. Towneley's ghost single-handed, or perish mis'rably in the attempt."

Details of the ghost hunt were quickly arranged. With a pair of double blankets, two serviceable revolvers and a thermos bottle of hot coffee, young Phillips was accompanied to the smoke house by the rest of the company. At his request the single door and window of the building were sealed with gummed

paper to testify to the continuity of his vigil when the other members of the party should come for him the following morning.

"I'll be here, ready and waiting," he boasted as the door closed behind him, "and if any of you chaps think you can get my goat with some monkey tricks, you'd better put on your bullet-proof vests before you start, for I'm going to shoot the first thing that tries to cross that doorsill between now and six o'clock tomorrow morning."

"Hum, the more I think of it, the less I'm inclined to believe there's been a murder, after all," declared Mr. Towneley as the company turned toward the house. "What probably happened was an accident. Poor Thomas ran into the dark house and stumbled over something, and that broken bottle was standing on the floor and gashed his throat. It's a ghastly business, I'll admit, but I'm beginning to think we sha'n't need the county officers, after all."

It was Gladys Towneley who put the consensus of opinion into bald words: "Well," she announced, "I'm terribly sorry for poor Thomas, and all that sort of thing, but we can't bring him back by being gloomy. I'm going to dance. Who's with me?"

Apparently they all were, for the radio was soon relaying the latest jazz from New York, and the faint whisper of thin-soled shoes slipping over the drawing room's polished floor mingled with the crooning of the saxophone and the titillation of mandolins two hundred miles away.

About half-past eleven Professor Forrester excused himself from the group of older men gathered in the library and turned toward the stairs. "Not dancing, dear?" he asked as he espied Rosalie sitting in the hallway, a thoughtful look on her face.

"No, Uncle Harvey," she replied, "it is an evil thing to dance in the house of death, and brings no good to those who do it. Moreover, I have a feeling that more misfortune is to follow."

The Professor smiled understandingly. Born in the Philippines, reared and tutored in the household of a ringleader of Singapore's criminal population, the girl had been less than two years in American society, and her mental attitude was still fundamentally that of the Oriental. Also, while she spoke English proficiently, there were times when she expressed herself after the manner of the East, and when she became greatly excited she was wont to lapse into Hindustani or one of the Malay dialects which had been the tongues of her childhood and youth.

"I agree with you, my dear," he nodded. "As Gladys said, our being gloomy

won't revive the poor fellow, but it does seem heartless to indulge in a dance while—"

"Wallah," the girl burst out, "while his soul still hovers over us? Thou hast said." She recovered herself with a flush of confusion, and added in conversational English:

"Are you going up? I'll go, too, if you don't mind, for I want to rise early tomorrow."

"Something special to do in the morning?"

"Yes, I'm afraid—I think so," she returned. "Will you rap on my door early in the morning? I want to go down to the smoke house before the others and see that all is well."

"You don't think young Phillips will stick it out?"

"I'm afraid he'll try to, and—"

"Why, you don't actually believe there's anything supernatural in this business, do you?" he demanded. His ward's affirmed belief in djinn, ghosts and devils was a never-failing source of amusement to him.

The girl turned big, serious eyes up to him.

"This is an old, old house, Uncle Harvey," she replied, "and old houses often grow evil spirits, even as they grow poisonous mosses. Who knows what wicked thing may seek to do him harm this night?"

"H'm, well," the Professor returned, "the young man appears quite able to look after himself."

"But you will call me—early?" she persisted.

"Of course, if you wish it. Goodnight, dear," he responded, bending to kiss the lips she turned up to him as naively as a child.

II

A shrieking blast of north wind, driving a rout of scurrying snowflakes before it, hallooed through the open window of the Professor's room, shaking the chintz curtains furiously and raising the blankets and coverlet of the bed. The Professor drew the disturbed bedclothes tighter about his chin, then, realizing that a faint gray light showed at the window's square, reached beneath his pillow, fished out his watch and inspected it. "Half-past six," he muttered gloomily. "I suppose I might as well go for Rosalie; she seemed set on making an early inspection of that confounded smoke house." Reluctantly, he disengaged himself from the bed, dashed across the chamber and slammed down the window, then started the

water running in the bath room.

Already dressed in sweater, knickers, knitted barret and brushed wool muffler, Rosalie was awaiting his tap on her door half an hour later.

A heavy fall of wind-driven snow greeted them as they let themselves out the back door of the silent house and floundered across the rear yard toward the small brick building where Rodney Phillips watched for ghostly visitants.

"I don't quite see the urgency of this call," the Professor grumbled as he bent his head against the howling December blast, "and I'm not so sure Phillips will thank us for our interest. He's probably just settling down for his second nap—"

"Uncle Harvey!" the girl's exclamation cut his observations in two, "Look!" Her mittened hand pointed dramatically to the door before them.

Professor Forrester obeyed her imperative gesture and a grin spread over his cold-stiffened features. "Umpf," he remarked with a chuckle, "he lost his taste for it, eh?" The seals of gummed paper with which the door had been fixed were broken from their places and the door itself swung open some five or six inches.

Taking one of her guardian's hands in hers, the girl crept across the intervening stretch of snow, her head thrust forward, her big, amber eyes wide with apprehension.

"No use going in," the Professor decided as they neared the threshold. "Phillips has probably been gone since midnight. He must have found it too cold for comfort in there and decided—ha?"

The sharp exclamation ended his speculations as he stepped over the low doorsill and accustomed his eyes to the dull light inside the little building. Three feet before them something half leaned, half knelt in the gloom, its outlines proclaiming it a man, but its attitude terrifyingly inhuman.

It was, or rather had been, Rodney Phillips—Rodney Phillips, fully clothed, even to his hat and gloves. Rodney Phillips, leaning obliquely forward with half bent knees and dangling hands, his head oddly twisted sidewise and his mouth partly opened to permit half an inch of livid, empurpled tongue to protrude between his lips. A three-foot strand of knotted rope was about his neck and made fast to a hook halfway up the smoke house wall.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed the Professor. Shrinking from the contact, yet impelled to act, no matter how his instincts rebelled, he put out a hand and felt the young man's cheeks. They were cold as the surrounding atmosphere, and stiff with the chill of the December snowstorm.

"Poor chap," he murmured, attempting ineffectually to undo the knot about the dead boy's throat, finally taking out his pocket knife and severing the strand.

“Whatever could have possessed him to do it?”

Rosalie looked steadily at the contorted body which her guardian eased to the brick floor. “Made him do what, Uncle Harvey?” she asked, removing her woolen mittens and bending to loosen the thick hempen loop from the young man’s neck.

“Why, kill himself,” the Professor responded, looking at her in amazement. “You can see it was suicide, and a mighty determined one, at that. The rope wasn’t long enough to lift his feet from the floor, and the poor boy actually had to lean forward—almost kneel—in order to get sufficient downward drag to strangle himself. H’m, I’ve heard of such cases, but I never thought I’d see one. When they set their minds to it, there’s nothing that will stop them. He could have saved himself easily, simply by straightening his knees, but he persisted until unconsciousness came; then, of course, it was too late.”

“Uncle Harvey,” Rosalie spoke slowly, choosing her words with deliberate care, for when she was excited her English was apt to become unintelligible, “I do not think this poor young man slew himself. The marks do not match.” She placed one slender, perfectly-manicured forefinger on the livid indentation showing on the dead man’s throat. “This rope, my master—” she threw aside the attempt at English and lapsed unconsciously into Hindustani—“it is a thick one, worthy to tether a cow or make a boat fast to its dock, while the scar on the poor one’s throat is much narrower—and double.”

“Why—” Professor Forrester knelt beside the body and struck a match to aid his inspection—“why, by George, you’re right, my dear! You can see the depression left by the rope he was hanged with here—” he laid a finger on the cold, white flesh—“and here, underneath the wide rope mark, is a well-defined spiral encircling the neck. Much deeper than the wider indentation, too. H’m, I wonder what the deuce that means?”

Rosalie’s long, almond shaped eyes were almost round with excitement, her breath came hissing between parted lips and her slender bosom rose and fell with suddenly increased respiration. “My lord,” she whispered, glancing fearfully about, as though to make sure no eavesdropper lurked near, “my lord, it is the mark of the roomal!”

“The—what?”

“The roomal of Bhowanee the Black—the thags’ strangling-cord! I have seen its mark a score of times while I dwelt in the house of Chandre Roi, the accursed, my lord. See, ’twas a slim, strong cord, and nothing else, which killed the young Phillips sahib. From behind him—see where the cord crosses lightly

at the front and heavily at the back?—the murderer tossed his roomal, and drew it tight, shutting off breath and cries for help at the same time. It is not long that a man can live without air, my lord. One minute will render him senseless, two more will kill him, even if the killer does not jerk his head forward and break his neck. Believe me, master, I know, for I have seen!”

Forrester bent down and examined the man’s bruised neck again under the flare of another match. As the girl had said, there was a well-defined double circular mark about the throat, the lines running in a spiral form and crossing each other at the front slightly above the Adam’s apple, while at the base of the skull the horizontal X-shaped bruise was more pronounced. These circles were less than a half-inch in width, and of slightly purple shade, while running around, and almost obscuring them, was a line of white bruise, considerably wider, and with a marked depression, the indentation slightly deeper at the left side and rising gradually toward the base of the right ear, where the crude slip-knot of the noose had been tied.

“H’m, my dear, you’re right about these narrower bruises being made first,” the Professor conceded at the conclusion of his examination. “They have the familiar black-and-blue tint of a pressure applied to living flesh while the wider rope’s mark is dead-white, an almost certain sign of pressure applied after circulation of blood has ceased. But who would use a roomal here? We’re six thousand miles or so from India, and thaggee is a rather rare commodity in southern Maryland.”

“Even so, my lord,” the girl persisted, “the murderer has written his signature large for those to read who can.”

“Umpf,” the Professor murmured thoughtfully, “one thing is fairly certain; Rodney Phillips didn’t kill himself. It remains for us to find out who killed him, and why.”

“Thou hast said, my master,” his ward agreed, nodding solemnly. “Once more shall the secret deeds of the evil-doers be made manifest by the wisdom of Forrester sahib.”

III

A smartly uniformed negro maid with a silver tray of coffee, rolls and marmalade, passed them in the hall as they mounted the stairs to their apartments. Towneley prided himself on his hospitality, and one item of its perfection was the presentation of petit déjeuner at his guests’ rooms promptly at

seven o'clock each morning.

The girl was a West Indian, proud of her British citizenship and despising the superstitions of the southern negroes with haughty disdain. "Good morning, sir; good morning, madame," she greeted formally as she tripped down the corridor with her salver held high and paused before a bedroom door, raising one hand to knock.

The Professor and Rosalie saw her lift her knuckles, then press against the panels with her open hand, swing the door back and enter the room. Both had noticed the door was slightly ajar when the maid approached it, and the Professor was speculating idly whether the occupant of the room had been abroad and what the cause of his early rising was, when the crash of falling silver and china, followed immediately by a rasping, terrified scream, tore through the early morning quiet. Next instant the maid dashed wildly from the room, her eyes staring and glassy with terror, her mouth squared tragically as she emitted another shrill cry.

"Sir—Madame!" she panted, approaching Forrester and Rosalie with faltering, fear-hampered steps and fairly clawing at them in her acute terror. "Mr. Richie—he's lying on his bath room floor, and the place is flooded with blood!"

"What?" shouted the Professor. "Richie—dead?"

"Ye—yes, sir, I think so, sir; I didn't stop to see, but—oh, my God, it's terrible!"

Clothed in a suit of blood-soaked linen pajamas, an old-fashioned straight-bladed razor in his open right hand, Waterford Richie lay in an oddly contorted posture on the tiled floor beneath the long mirror.

Forrester viewed the ghastly scene in sickened horror a moment, then shook himself like a dog emerging from the water, leaned far forward across the doorsill and gently turned the young man's head so that he obtained a clear view of the ghastly, gaping wound in the throat. "By Jupiter!" he murmured softly, allowing the head to roll into its original position again and straightening abruptly. "My dear," he turned solemnly to his ward, "I think we have another pseudo-suicide to puzzle over."

"How so, my lord?" the girl asked, averting her face from the gruesome sight before her.

"Because, while everything seems to point to suicide in this case, just as it did in the other, that wound runs from the point of Richie's right jaw downward across his throat, nearly to his larynx, and the razor is in his right hand."

"But—" the girl began wonderingly.

“Try it yourself,” her guardian ordered. “Run your right forefinger across your throat, as though it were a knife!”

“See?” he demanded, as the girl complied. She nodded understandingly. Obeying his order, she had held her finger horizontally, as though it were a knife blade, and drawn it across her smooth, white neck, as if with suicidal intent. The digit, following its natural course, had described a slightly oblique line, running from a spot immediately beneath the point of her left jaw to a spot slightly to the right of the center of her throat.

“My lord is all-knowing. He was suckled at the fox’s breast and fed on the broth of the owl. His wisdom never faileth.”

“Never mind the efflorescent compliments. It doesn’t take a mental giant to figure out the natural course of a man’s right hand, my dear; besides, I’d be a Class Z moron if I couldn’t read such a sign after years of studying the phenomena of wounds. Remember, dear, an anthropologist’s chief work lies among the temples and tombs of forgotten peoples, and we’ve got to make reports on what we find which will bear the strictest inspection. I remember distinctly a lovely little wrangle I once had with a curator at the Cairo Museum concerning the manner in which a certain mummified Egyptian gentleman came to his end. He insisted a wound in the breast was due to the embalmer’s tools, and I claimed it was a spear-thrust. I silenced the fellow by taking a spear from his own collection and fitting it into the wound.

“Now,” he turned abruptly from the bath room and stalked toward the hall, “the first thing for us to do is to notify Towneley. After that we’ll be governed by circum—what the deuce?”

Beside a chair on which the dead man’s clothing lay he paused, his eyes intently narrowed. “By Jove, who would have suspected it?” he murmured.

“What is it, lord?” the girl asked.

“That,” he replied, pointing to a glittering metal plate showing on the under side of Richie’s half-folded waistcoat.

Rosalie leaned closer to inspect the find. It was a shield of gold-plated metal decorated with the device of an American eagle, and on the scroll above and beneath the imposing bird was the legend: Department of Justice—Bureau of Investigation.

“H’m,” muttered Professor Forrester thoughtfully. “H’m-m. So that’s it, eh?”

As they tiptoed from the death-room, he remarked dryly; “My dear, as they say in England, ‘There’s dirty work at the crossroads.’ Nobody knew it, but Waterford Richie, Baltimore society man and supposed gentleman of

independent means, was a member of the United States Secret Service. That may or may not explain why he was murdered and his murder camouflaged to simulate suicide, but—" he drew a deep breath, and his long, narrow face set suddenly in grim lines—"I'm inclined to think it does."

III

It was a dismayed, half hysterical company which gathered at the dining table that morning. Knowledge of the three tragedies sat with them like skeletons at a feast, dampening every spirit and taking the edge from the keenest appetites. Added to the gruesome proximity of sudden death was the realization that for the day, at least, they were marooned at Towneley Towers, for, though the snow flurry had ceased, the wind had risen steadily, making it impossible for the house power boat to venture out on the Potomac, and since the Towers was situated up the creek a considerable distance, the only method of communication with the outside world was by private ferry to Piny Point or St. George's Island, where the Baltimore and Washington boats might be had every second day during the winter. The inevitable result of this forced companionship was that the guests, gathered for mutual amusement, suddenly discovered how terrifyingly uncongenial they were, and turned from each other with aversion amounting almost to loathing. Sporadic attempts at bridge, dancing and outdoor sports fell through almost as soon as begun, and by the time luncheon was announced scarcely any two of the party were on speaking terms.

Professor Forrester spent an hour in his room, going over the details of the case, adding together the scraps of information he had gleaned, attempting to fit them together like the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, but finding himself no wiser at the end of his cogitations than when he began.

Rosalie and he had tacitly agreed to keep their discovery that the supposed suicides were really nothing of the sort to themselves, for the girl, with the practicality which was her heritage from a youth educated in the devious ways of crime, had summed the situation up concisely when she remarked: "We know not whom to trust or to suspect. We did not dream Richie sahib was of the Secret Service, and if one among us was secretly enlisted in the cause of the law, how can we be certain that there are not others here who have some evil connections to hide?"

"Very aptly put, my dear," her guardian agreed. "If there is another member of the Service in the company, he'll find out what he can without our help. If there

is someone with criminal connections in the crowd, we'll do well to keep our knowledge to ourselves, and thus avoid putting him on his guard."

At the Professor's suggestion, Rosalie circulated among the guests, carefully refraining from giving any cause for offense and deliberately refusing to be drawn into a wrangle, but always noting the actions and remarks of those with whom she came in contact. There was a remote possibility that someone in the gathering would let slip his mask for a moment and thus proclaim himself identified with one of the three mysterious crimes.

"Umpf, I'll never get anywhere sitting here and fretting myself into a funk," the Professor told himself as he knocked the ashes from his aged-blackened briar pipe and slipped into his overcoat and galoshes. "A little walk in the air may freshen my thinking apparatus.

"Two things stand out thus far," he murmured as he crossed the back garden of the Towers. "First, the door of the smoke house was open when Rosalie and I came here this morning; second, the door of Richie's room was unfastened when the maid rapped. Now, does that mean the murderers obtained entrance through those doors, or that they got in some other way and left the doors ajar to mislead us? H'm, I rather think not. They'd hardly have taken so much pains to make the murders seem suicide if they'd wanted to make us think it an outside job. On the other hand—" his voice trailed off into thoughtful silence as he neared the smoke house door and paused a moment, looking carefully about to make sure no one observed him.

"H'm," he murmured musingly as he pushed the door open, "wonder why they didn't lock up after taking poor Phillips away?" A moment's inspection furnished him the answer. The door's lock had been broken.

"U'm!" He swung the door to behind him and struck a match. "That's queer. How could anyone force that lock without waking Phillips, or warning him, if he weren't asleep? I wish we'd noticed whether that lock was broken when we were here this morning. Too bad; couldn't think of everything at once, though."

Striking a second match, he held it high above his head and gazed about him. On all sides of the single room were the heavy, iron-bound cases holding Towneley's prized reserve of liquors and vintages. The floor was of brick, so was the vaulted ceiling, and no means of ingress was apparent save the narrow door through which he had just come and the small, barred window set high in the rear wall.

"Here's where poor Thomas fell," he told himself, bending down to scan the telltale spot of brownish-red on the brick pavement, "and here's the hook from

which Phillips was hanged. Phillips must have spread his blankets here, and—ha? What the deuce is this?” Leaning forward suddenly he snatched a small oblong of cardboard from the pavement close to the spot where the murdered youth had been suspended from the hook.

His find was slightly larger than the ordinary playing card, backed with an ornamental scroll design and bearing the device of a comely youth, hanged head-downward from a grape-arbor, on its obverse side. The rope encircled the hanged man’s left ankle, permitting his right foot and hands to hang free. Above the picture was the Roman figure XII.

“H’m,” murmured the Professor, eyeing the square of pasteboard curiously. “H’m-m. Where did this come from? I’m sure it wasn’t here this morning. Who the dickens could have dropped it? It’s not a gambler’s card. No-o—” thoughtfully—“it’s—by Jupiter, what’s that?”

Skilled in detecting significant sounds while burrowing in the earth in search of buried Egyptians, or the long-forgotten civilizations of Ur and Susa, Professor Forrester had caught the faint, persistent echo of some strange noise, apparently rising from the ground to the west of the little room in which he stood.

Carefully, creeping forward like a cat stalking a sparrow, he moved on hands and knees in the direction from which the sound came, stopped, listening intently a moment, then sprawled full length on the brick pavement, putting his ear to the cold clay blocks.

Clang—pause—clang—pause—clang, the sound repeated itself with rhythmical insistence.

“Now, what the dickens is it?” the Professor asked himself petulantly after several moments’ listening. “I’ve heard that noise before, somewhere, but where?” He rose, dusting his trousers methodically, and turned toward the door.

“Who’s there?” challenged a gruff, unfamiliar voice as the portal was suddenly blocked by a bulky form, and the gray winter light glinted evilly on the barrel of leveled revolver.

“Er—” began the Professor, but the intruder lowered his weapon with an apologetic laugh.

“I begs your parding, Professor Forrester, sir,” said the familiar, half-whining tones of Procter, the butler. “Master sent me out ’ere to get ’im some whiskey, sir, and, not hexpecting to find you here, as you might say you gave me quite a start, if you don’t mind me saying so, sir.”

“Not at all,” the Professor assured him as he edged through the door. Almost unconsciously, he noted that the butler eyed him suspiciously, and kept his pistol

raised and ready until the corner of the building separated them.

“Quaint character, Procter,” the Professor mused, “I wonder how long he’d been watching me before he announced himself. Now, let’s see, where next?”

Idly, he turned toward the creek above the spot where the Towers’ private landing lay. The stream provided an ideal feeding ground for ducks, with its reed-bordered shores and channel choked with water-weeds which would permit the passage of only the smallest craft.

As the Professor approached the creek he was startled by the sudden wheeling flight of a flock of canvasbacks, and a moment later the hum of a high-powered motor struck his ear. Next instant a long, sharp-prowed speed boat shot past him like the shadow of a flying cloud, rounded a little headland and disappeared as abruptly as though submerged in the quiet water of the creek.

“Umpf!” Forrester muttered. “That’s not Towneley’s boat, and there’s no house up the stream for ten miles or more. Where the deuce were those chaps going, and who are they?” He leaned against a convenient tree, listening intently for the hum of the boat’s engine.

“Now, that’s odd,” he reflected after a moment. “They were going like old Harry, it’s true, but they shouldn’t be out of sound so soon. I wonder—”

Creeping forward stealthily, he reached the margin of the stream, leaned out as far as possible with the aid of a low-growing sapling, and looked up the creek in the wake of the vanished boat. No sign or token of it was to be seen. A moment’s scramble brought him to the top of the miniature bluff behind which the craft had disappeared. The creek widened out to a sort of basin behind the small peninsula, and beyond that narrowed abruptly to a width of scarcely more than six feet, and even that tiny channel was choked to suffocation with matted reeds and water-hyacinth. A canoe would have had difficulty in negotiating the passage. Any craft driven by a propeller would have been utterly disabled within its own length by the water weeds.

“By George,” the Professor whispered, “I’ve seen some queer doings, but never anything to beat this. One moment a speed boat dashes past, the next it dematerializes. I wasn’t seeing things, either, for those ducks didn’t leave their meal just for exercise. There’s—something—darn—queer—here.”

Undoubtedly, there was. Its queerness was accentuated a moment later when from the solid ground beneath his feet the Professor suddenly heard the subdued strains of the csardas, a favorite folk-song of the Horolane, or Turkish gypsies. Trained anthropologist that he was, Forrester recognized the tune instantly, and with recognition of the music came enlightenment in another quarter. The card

in the smoke house!

Turning on his heel, he hastened to the house, bending his head against the rising storm wind and breathing fast with exertion and excitement.

“My dear,” he demanded, drawing Rosalie into a corner as soon as he could extricate her from a languishing bridge game, “do you recognize this?” He displayed the scrap of pasteboard retrieved from the smoke house half an hour earlier.

The girl studied the card with wide, thoughtful eyes a moment, then nodded her golden head slowly in affirmation. “Yes, Uncle Harvey,” she replied. “It is the twelfth card of the tarot of the homeless ones—the gypsy fortune-teller’s pack. They call it ‘the Hanged Man,’ and regard it as the emblem of atonement or revenge satisfied. Where did you find it? It is not well that such things be spread about.”

“Never mind now where I got it,” he responded, narrowing his eyes intently. He was thinking, and thinking fast. Things were beginning to take shape in his mind. A vaguely remembered, but unclassified noise coming apparently from the ground beneath the smoke house floor where two men had been killed, a fast motor boat seen one moment, vanished the next, gypsy music emanating from beneath the earth—Turkish gypsies. Ah, that was it! The recollection of whispers heard in Stamboul during the reign of “Abdul the Damned,” stories of men strangled with the bowstring and flung into the Bosphorus at night. The bowstring! The Turkish executioner’s strangling cord—the purple line about young Phillips’ dead throat! Ha, he was beginning to get somewhere, now.

“By Jupiter, I’ll do it!” he declared suddenly, leaping to his feet and striding across the hall, then half turning and beckoning Rosalie to follow. “Stand here, dear, if you please, and see that I’m not interrupted while I ’phone,” he ordered. “Tell me the moment any one comes within twice hearing distance of us. I must talk to Baltimore right away.”

IV

“Excuse me, sir, you’re wanted on the wire,” Procter bowed respectfully behind the Professor’s chair as the gentlemen lingered over cigars and liqueurs after dinner that evening.

“Pardon me,” Forrester murmured, rising and making for the hall telephone. “Probably the school wanting to know when I can come back to mark some examinations, or something equally silly.” He strolled toward the ’phone with

exaggerated nonchalance, but once he had rounded the corner of the wall, his indifference dropped from him like a cloak, and he fairly sprinted to the instrument.

“Forrester talking,” he almost whispered through the transmitter. “Yes. Ah, is that so? I’d suspected as much. Yes, I found out Richie’s connection by accident after he died, but I didn’t suspect Phillips until—Very well; I’ll await developments. Goodbye.” He hung the receiver back on its hook and sauntered into the drawing room where the ladies talked in muted whispers.

“Rosalie, may I speak with you a moment?” he asked from the doorway, and, as his ward obeyed his summons and joined him, he breathed: “Make your excuses as soon as you decently can, and go upstairs. Sneak into the room where we found young Richie this morning, and bring me every scrap of paper you can find there. I’ll be waiting in my room as soon as I can get away.”

Half an hour later he rose from his chair in the library with a rueful grin. “Sorry, gentlemen,” he admitted, “but our host’s excellent liqueur has been a little too much for me. That’s the penalty of poverty; those who can’t afford Benedictine as a rule don’t know how to carry it when they get it. If you’ll excuse me, I’ll take my headache up to bed with me.”

Followed by a chorus of chaffing laughter, he walked unsteadily to the stairs and mounted them slowly, leaning heavily on the handrail, and pausing as though for breath every few steps.

Once round the bend, his intoxication left him abruptly, and with swift, steady strides he ran down the hall to his room. Rosalie was nowhere in sight, but on his dressing table was a pile of blank white note paper, a fresh blotter with a single smear across its virgin surface lying on top.

Hastily seizing the blotter, Forrester held it before the mirror, and began spelling out the words which had been soaked from the message it had been used to dry. “H’m,” he muttered, “what—the devil?”

In the mirror’s brilliant surface he read:

“Try again, old fox. Others have eyes and ears, too.”

Again and yet again he read the curt, one-line note, then turned to the pile of paper underneath and scrambled through it frantically. Every sheet was clear and unspotted, mocking him with its virginal purity.

“Good heavens!” he ejaculated, letting the sheets fall from hands gone suddenly nerveless. “This is dreadful! If Rosalie—”

Down the hall on stumbling feet he raced to the room occupied by his ward, and beat upon the panels with frantic fists.

No answer.

Once again he hammered his summons on the white door, then seized the handle with a savage wrench and bore his weight against it. The door swung open readily, and he half ran, half stumbled, into his ward's room.

Every electric bulb in the apartment was aglow. Not a corner of the place but was flooded with sharp, brilliant light. In the glass ash tray on the bureau lay a long Philippine cigarette, half consumed, a thin spiral of smoke slowly ascending from its glowing tip. Forrester knew the speed with which the dry, black Island tobacco burned. The cigarette could not have been lighted more than two minutes before. Rosalie must have been here then. Where was she now? Across the foot of the bed hung a bright orange and blue coolie coat; beneath its trailing hem, toes inward, stood a pair of blue and yellow satin Chinese slippers. But Rosalie was nowhere in sight.

"Rosalie," the Professor called softly, gazing wildly about the room. "Rosalie—ha?" The exclamation was fairly jerked from him as his eye fell on a long, vertical crack in the wall. Half an inch wide it was, running from baseboard to cornice, and showing behind the black, impenetrable background of utter darkness.

One long stride carried the frenzied Professor across the room, one furious tug swung back a section of the wall like a door, and left him gazing down a flight of narrow, winding stairs, tunnel-like and unlighted, and leading, apparently, to the very nadir of the earth.

As he stared horrified down the twisting spiral of the stairway, he felt a tug at his hand. Operated by some cunningly hidden spring, the secret door he had wrenched open was closing slowly, resistlessly. In a moment, despite his utmost efforts to hold it open, it would be shut.

The Professor gave one desperate look about the deserted room, searching for something which might serve as a weapon, found nothing suitable, drew one quick, sharp breath and squeezed through the rapidly narrowing opening of the secret panel. The door shut behind him with a sharp click, latching firmly with a snap-lock, and he was sealed in total darkness at the stairhead as securely as a corpse desposited in the crypt of a mausoleum.

V

Professor Forrester paused a moment on the topmost of the stone steps, seeking vainly to pierce the Stygian darkness of the downward-spiraling passage.

Thrusting a hand into his pocket, he felt for a match, but his questing fingers encountered nothing but an accumulation of snuff-like powder where the longcut black tobacco he habitually smoked had leaked from its paper carton and crumbled to dust. "Confound it!" he lamented, remembering too late that he had laid his book of matches on his dresser just before picking up the blotter on which he had read the defiant message.

Slowly, putting first one, then the other foot forward in tentative, experimental steps, the Professor began descending the curving stairs.

Down, down, endlessly down, he crept, through the impenetrable dark, pausing now and again to feel the walls on each side for a possible connecting passageway. Nothing but iron-cold, smooth masonry met his hands. At last, when it seemed he must be in the immediate vicinity of Hongkong, his searching foot encountered level ground, and he stepped forward over a pavement of smooth, moist stones which seemed to incline upward at a gentle grade.

"This thing must lead in the general direction of the creek," Forrester told himself, striding forward carefully, for much experience with underground passages had taught him they often contained deep fissures, or even wells, and he had no desire to step over the brink of such an opening in the dark. "Yes, I'm sure we're going toward the creek. Those circular stairs threw me off my bearings to some extent; but—oh!"

Rounding a sudden angle in the passage, the Professor found himself at the entrance of a sizeable subterranean chamber, roughly circular in shape, floored, walled and vaulted with slabs of ancient freestone, and lighted by two ship's lanterns hanging from the ceiling. A charcoal brazier, evidently used to furnish some measure of heat for the cavern, stood in the center of the floor, and just beyond it, her hands and elbows bound behind her, and her wrists secured to her ankles by a sailor's knot, knelt Rosalie, the loose ends of the cord which fettered her limbs made fast to a rusty iron staple let into the cement between two blocks of stone. A wide band of dirty cotton cloth was wrapped over her mouth, effectually gagging her, but her big yellow eyes were uncovered, and looked with feline fury on the corduroy-clad young man who lounged on a dirty mattress and leered at her.

Facing the entrance of the chamber was a second man, a tall, wide-shouldered fellow with thick, curling black hair and a broad Tartar face. As the Professor came to an abrupt halt the fellow grinned broadly, displaying a set of astonishingly white teeth in the midst of which two gold crowns gleamed opulently. The lamplight also gleamed on a pair of gold rings in his thick-lobed

ears and on the blade of a long, murderous dirk-knife.

“Ah, Meestair,” he greeted, advancing a step, “I t’eenk you come for you gal, an’ wait here for you. You not make any noise w’ile we tie you opp, or—” he raised the dirk and drew it horizontally through the air some six inches before his throat in a gesture more expressive than agreeable. “You stan’ steel w’ile we tie you, no?” he concluded.

“After you get tied opp all nice an’ tight, maybe we decide w’at we do afterwards. Maybe we leave you ’ere; maybe we put you out your suffering queek, lak dees—” again the knife-blade performed the murderous gesture. “Maybe we let you ’ave some fon w’ile we enjoy ourself wiz you gal. She ver’ prett’ gal, Meestair, bot I t’eenk she tak some leetle beating before she gentle enoff for us.”

As he concluded, he drew up immediately before Professor Forrester and reached forward a noosed rope. “You put you ’and in heem now, an’ not mak no foss,” he advised, “or—”

Professor Forrester dropped both hands into his dinner coat pockets and faced the burly scoundrel defiantly. “Stand out of my way!” he commanded sharply.

“Ha-ha, ho!” the other burst into a laugh, towering over the diminutive Forrester like a turkey-cock above a bantam. “You mak foss, eh? I show you dam’ queek who’s boss ’round ’ere—

“Devla!” the exclamation was a scream as he staggered back, pawing furiously at his eyes.

Professor Forrester had hurled a handful of the powdered, dry tobacco fairly into the man’s face as he bent forward to loop the rope about his arms.

The gypsy’s knife fell clattering to the stone floor as the fiery powder stung his eyes almost past endurance, and Professor Forrester placed one foot upon it, drawing it toward him. Next instant, before his disabled antagonist had time to lower his hands from his blinded eyes, the Professor’s right heel landed in the pit of his stomach with devastating force, doubling him forward like a closing jack-knife. As the man’s head came level with his waist, Forrester lashed out with his fist, putting every ounce of his strength, weight and anger behind the blow. Fist and jaw collided with a sharp, smacking impact, the gypsy dropped limply to the floor and lay there, twitching spasmodically, but showing no other sign of life.

“Mahrimé!” with a lithe bound the younger man was up from his pallet, his knife flashing wickedly.

He was a muscular young man, and was obviously anxious to use his weapon. There was no time to temporize, no chance to achieve victory by some such trick

as that which conquered the first Romany. Professor Forrester grasped the knife let fall by his first opponent and threw himself into a defensive position.

Eyes glaring, lips pinched, the two men circled one another like a pair of hostile game cocks. Feinting, striking, dashing in to slash quickly at each other's throats, then leaping nimbly back, they crept round the room.

Clink! the blades struck together.

Clash! steel rattled wickedly on steel. The gypsy was evidently an adept knife-fighter, and displayed every trick known to that deadly type of fencing. Forrester had never before wielded such a weapon, but a thorough grounding in the art of boxing made him no mean antagonist. Each time the Romany struck, the Professor managed to parry the thrust with his own blade or avoid it by a deft dodge, such as he would have employed in a fist-fight. Each blow the Professor aimed at his enemy was met by the gypsy's ready steel or evaded by a nimble side-step.

Sweat was pouring down their faces, their breath came hot and fast in their throats, both were tiring fast, but the Professor, ten years older than his adversary, and unused to the violent exertion, was losing strength more rapidly.

A drop of perspiration trickled over his left eyebrow and ran down his lid behind his glasses. With an impatient shake of his head he sought to clear his vision.

Cling! His rimless pince-nez flew from his nose and landed on the stone floor with a thin, bell-like tinkle. He stumbled forward blindly, tripped over an uneven stone in the pavement, and sprawled toward the floor, instinctively flinging both hands out to save himself.

"Hai!" shrilled his opponent exultantly, raising his dirk for a slashing blow.

As Forrester's right hand shot out in an attempt to break his fall, he felt his point strike something which resisted, yet yielded before the keen steel. The Professor hung his weight on the knife handle, striving desperately to recover his balance. The blade slipped downward, as though the substance in which it was imbedded were too soft to hold it, came free, and the Professor staggered backward two stumbling steps, regaining his footing by a supreme effort.

"Whs-s-s-sh!" hissed the gypsy sibilantly, a look of shocked surprise on his dark, handsome face, and fell forward limply, a spate of sudden blood dyeing his soiled gingham shirt. He was ripped open from sternum to navel as neatly as a hog disemboweled by a butcher.

The Professor gasped, regarding his handiwork with a kind of unbelieving horror. A feeling of deadly, weakening nausea rose in him, and he all but fell

prostrate beside his dying foe, when the memory of Rosalie's plight revived him like a stimulant.

Stooping to retrieve his glasses, he hastened to the girl, and with two quick slashes of his razor-edged dagger severed the cords binding her to the wall, then turned to fling the murderous weapon from him.

"Not so, master of my life!" the girl besought in tumultuous Hindu. "Throw not away the emblem of thy triumph. Wallah, thou art the king of fighters! In all the world there is none who handles the steel like thee—my king!"

"S-s-s-sh, someone's coming!"

He took a fresh grip on his dripping knife, and Rosalie, nimble as a fox, leaped across the room and seized the weapon dropped by the dead man, then flattened herself to the wall beside the door so that whoever entered the room from the passage beyond must necessarily offer his back to her blade as he crossed the threshold.

"Put 'em up, you!" the sharp hail rang out authoritatively, as Procter strode into the circular chamber, leveling an ugly-looking automatic pistol at the Professor. "You may be a fair ripe 'un with the cold steel, but I'll trade you hot lead for it if you don't stick 'em up lively. Thought you could sneak round here and spy on us—Gawd!"

His pistol fell crashing and bouncing to the pavement, and his left hand flew upward to grasp his right arm.

Standing to his right and rear, Rosalie had slashed downward with her knife, and the keen steel had almost severed the butler's triceps, paralyzing his pistol-hand.

"Wah, son of a filthy and very unvirtuous female hog, descendant of countless generations of stinking cockroaches!" she shrilled. "Verily, this night shall I cut thy evil heart from out thy bosom. I shall slit thy eyes and send thee sightless to beg thy bread at the street crossings, thou son of an evil smell!"

Matter-of-factly, to her guardian, she remarked: "Tie him fast, my lord, that we may deliver him into the hands of justice."

The Professor complied with alacrity. Rosalie's hyperbolic threats, voiced in Hindustani, might be only the reflex of her oriental upbringing; on the other hand, her usually gentle nature was transformed into that of a fury when any one so much as annoyed her guardian, and there was every likelihood that she would do the butler further injury unless he were removed from her presence.

Tethering Procter and the still unconscious gypsy to a pair of iron staples in the wall, the Professor took down one of the lanterns from the ceiling, and, with the

butler's captured pistol in his right hand and Rosalie close to his left elbow, began a systematic exploration of the connecting passage.

Twenty feet farther down the narrow tunnel, there was a second room, and here he found the source of the noise which had puzzled him that morning. Completely equipped, a foot-power printing press stood in the center of the chamber, a work table beside it neatly stocked with inks, packets of small, oblong slips of paper and a series of finely made halftone plates. It was the rhythmic clatter of the press, not entirely silenced by the intervening earth and bricks, which he had heard as he lay on the smoke house floor that morning.

"So that's it, eh?" he exclaimed, examining one of the finished pieces of printing with interest. It was an excellent imitation of a ten dollar national banknote. Though showing its illegitimate origin in its fresh state, after a little handling and crumpling, it would have passed muster almost anywhere among people not trained to detect counterfeit bills.

Neatly stacked on the floor were enough other spurious notes to flood an entire state, and as many more were ready for the finishing touches on the press.

At the farther end of the room a heavy curtain hung before a low arched doorway. Putting it aside, the Professor was not surprised to find a small underground boathouse in which the speed boat he had seen that morning was securely moored, the entrance to the subterranean anchorage being screened by a neatly woven blind of reeds and ivy.

"Umpf," he commented, "everything seems fairly clear thus far, but I think we might do well to ask our friend Procter a few questions before going back."

Rosalie deposited her knife in the glowing charcoal brazier and blew upon the coals until the steel blade took on a brilliant orange glow. This done, she wrapped her fingers in the cotton cloth with which she had been gagged, took the red-hot knife up gingerly and advanced until she stood directly before the bound and helpless butler.

"Swine!" she admonished, speaking slowly, and in her most careful English, that every word might be understood, "Forrester sahib, who is the mightiest detector of evil in all the world, would honor your unclean ears by addressing a few questions to them. See to it that you answer quickly and truthfully, or I shall give myself the pleasure of burning out your unworthy eyes with this iron. Say, then, will it be talk or torture which you choose?"

Procter, regarding the implacable eyes she bent upon him, made a wise decision.

VI

"I say, Towneley, I'll trouble you for that twenty-five hundred dollar reward you offered for laying the ghost," Professor Forrester announced as he and Rosalie let themselves in the front door of Towneley Towers and surveyed a surprised group in the lower hall.

"Eh, what's that?" demanded his host, eyeing him suspiciously. "Where have you been? I thought you went upstairs drunk a while ago. Speak up, man, if you're sober. We're in the devil of a fix. Now it's Procter who's disappeared, and—"

"Wrong, my boy, quite wrong you are," the Professor contradicted with a grin. "Procter may not be present, but I'll guarantee to produce him when wanted. He's the ghost of Towneley Towers."

"What?"

"Your ghost's name is James Allerton Procter, sometime butler to Eugene Towneley, Esquire, of Baltimore and St. Mary's County, Maryland. Before he entered your employ he was popularly known to the aristocracy of the underworld as English Jimmie, and he was one of the cleverest counterfeiters—'queer shooters,' I believe the technical term is—in the entire nefarious business. I suppose you'll recall that, no matter how much dread of the ghost he displayed, Procter never offered to leave your service?"

"Er—yes, that's right," Towneley agreed.

"Quite so. But he was forever harping on the subject to the other servants, and was largely responsible for your big labor turnover.

"You'll also remember that he presented himself as an applicant for the position of butler after three negro butlers had been scared off the premises. Very well. I've been talking with Mr. Procter, and he's been quite confidential. Miss Osterhaut—" he shot a sidelong, humorous glance at the demure Rosalie, who stood at his elbow—"seemed to have quite an influence over him, and I'm sure she induced him to tell me things he never would have divulged without her persuasion.

"Now, to go back a little while. This Procter person had been head of a counterfeiting gang for some time, and had been using this location as a manufacturing plant. It's conveniently inaccessible, you know, and offered an ideal location. When you decided to recondition the Towers and live here, while it didn't materially interfere with his work, since it was literally carried on underground, it did render the danger of detection much greater, so he and his

two associates, both of whom were Turkish gypsies, decided to manufacture a little ghost-scare for the benefit of your servants.

“When he’d managed to frighten the two colored men off the job, and scare half the other servants out of their senses, he applied for the post of butler to you—you’ll recall he was rather vague concerning how he came to hear you were in need of a butler just at that time?—and came down here where he could supervise the printing operations and keep watch on you and your guests at the same time.

“I dare say you’ll be surprised to learn that two of the guests at this party, Rodney Phillips and Waterford Richie, were members of the United States Secret Service.

“It was a surprise to Procter, a most unpleasant surprise, I imagine, and threw him into something of a panic. To do him justice, Procter was a mild-mannered sort of criminal, and never resorted to violence when he could help it, but his two associates had no such scruples. They believed fervently in the adage that dead men tell no tales. When Thomas, the stable boy, surprised one of them snooping about the smoke house last night, he was unceremoniously put to death by having his throat cut with a broken bottle.

“When young Phillips went out to spend the night in the smoke house, he did it in hope of finding some lead to the counterfeiters’ lair, for he’d received a tip the spurious bills were coming from this part of the state. There’s a secret entrance to that smoke house, and while Phillips was looking around one of the gypsies let himself through it and strangled the poor lad, then hanged him to make it appear he’d committed suicide.

“I hate to say it, Towneley, but your ancestors must have done a considerable amount of smuggling in the pre-Revolutionary days, for your entire grounds are honeycombed with secret passages, and there’s a perfect rabbit warren of hidden stairways from the underground storehouses to your house. Practically every room in the place can be entered, or left, by one of those unsuspected doorways. It was easy for the gypsies to enter Richie’s room last night, cut the poor chap’s throat, then leave the razor in his hand as though he had done the deed himself.

“I don’t claim any particular credit in the matter, but I’ve made a little study of crime detection as a hobby, as has Miss Osterhaut, and we both became suspicious concerning the suicides supposed to have been committed. We weren’t greatly impressed with Procter’s version of Thomas’ death, either, and decided to do a little investigating of our own.

“I got the Baltimore headquarters of the Treasury Department on the wire this

morning and advised them what was going on. It was then I learned that they'd narrowed their search for the counterfeiters' den down to this locality, and that you'd been under investigation, Towneley."

"Good God!" exclaimed his host.

"Precisely," the Professor responded. "I'm sorry to say that I didn't entirely divorce my mind from that suspicion for a while. You see, we didn't know whom to suspect, so we decided to regard everyone as guilty until the contrary appeared.

"Procter was not caught napping, though. He must have listened in on my talk with Baltimore this evening, and decided that I, too, was a Treasury man. At any rate, he and one of his companions entered Miss Osterhaut's room by a secret doorway and kidnapped her, holding her as bait for a clever little trap they laid for me. I walked into it, too—just marched into it with both eyes open—but my luck held, and the result—"

He paused, surveying the circle of faces with his benign, slightly diffident smile.

"Yes, the result is—" chorused a dozen voices.

"Treasury officers are on their way here now. I fear they'll have no use for one of the gypsies. Unfortunately, the poor fellow met with an accident while discussing the merits of the situation with me; but the other one and your butler will probably be allowed to put their names in cold storage for several years while they use numbers for identification purposes at Moundsville or Atlanta."

"Well, you funny, clever little devil," Eugene Towneley fairly roared, striking Professor Forrester such a blow on the back that he nearly collapsed, "you've surely earned that reward! Here, I'll make the check out right now!"

"Er—I believe, on the whole, you'd best make it payable to Miss Osterhaut," the Professor remarked as his host removed the cap from his fountain pen and unfolded his check book. "It was really her persuasion which made Procter talk and enabled us to catch up the loose ends of the case, you see."

"Uncle Harvey," Rosalie protested as she paused at her bedroom door to say goodnight, "you must take this check. What's mine is yours, you know, for I owe everything I have—home, food, education, even liberty and life, to you. I know you don't like me to refer to myself as your slave, but if ever one person belonged to another by right of conquest and purchase, I am yours—"

"Nonsense!" the Professor cut in. "Keep the money, child. Some day you'll be getting married—" his voice became harsh, and he looked quickly away as he spoke—"some day you'll be getting married, and the reward will come in handy

to buy your trousseau.”

SMALL WORLD, by William F. Nolan

In the waiting windless dark, Lewis Stillman pressed into the building-front shadows along Wilshire Boulevard. Breathing softly, the automatic poised and ready in his hand, he advanced with animal stealth toward Western, gliding over the night-cool concrete, past ravaged clothing shops, drug and ten-cent stores, their windows shattered, their doors ajar and swinging. The city of Los Angeles, painted in cold moonlight, was an immense graveyard; the tall white tombstone buildings thrust up from the silent pavement, shadow-carved and lonely. Overturned metal corpses of trucks, busses and automobiles littered the streets.

He paused under the wide marquee of the FOX WILTERN. Above his head, rows of splintered display bulbs gaped—sharp glass teeth in wooden jaws. Lewis Stillman felt as though they might drop at any moment to pierce his body.

Four more blocks to cover. His destination: a small corner delicatessen four blocks south of Wilshire, on Western. Tonight he intended bypassing the larger stores like Safeway or Thriftmart, with their available supplies of exotic foods; a smaller grocery was far more likely to have what he needed. He was finding it more and more difficult to locate basic food stuffs. In the big supermarkets only the more exotic and highly spiced canned and bottled goods remained—and he was sick of caviar and oysters!

Crossing Western, he had almost reached the far curb when he saw some of them. He dropped immediately to his knees behind the rusting bulk of an Olds 88. The rear door on his side was open, and he cautiously eased himself into the back seat of the deserted car. Releasing the safety catch on the automatic, he peered through the cracked window at six or seven of them, as they moved toward him along the street. God! Had he been seen? He couldn't be sure. Perhaps they were aware of his position! He should have remained on the open street where he'd have a running chance. Perhaps, if his aim were true, he could kill most of them; but, even with its silencer, the gun would be heard and more of them would come. He dared not fire until he was certain they discovered him.

They came closer, their small dark bodies crowding the walk, six of them, chattering, leaping, cruel mouths open, eyes glittering under the moon. Closer. The shrill pipings increased, rose in volume. Closer. Now he could make out their sharp teeth and matted hair. Only a few feet from the car... His hand was moist on the handle of the automatic; his heart thundered against his chest. Seconds away...

Now!

Lewis Stillman fell heavily back against the dusty seat-cushion, the gun loose in his trembling hand. They had passed by; they had missed him. Their thin pipings diminished, grew faint with distance.

The tomb silence of late night settled around him.

The delicatessen proved a real windfall. The shelves were relatively untouched and he had a wide choice of tinned goods. He found an empty cardboard box and hastily began to transfer the cans from the shelf nearest him.

A noise from behind—a padding, scraping sound.

Lewis Stillman whirled around, the automatic ready.

A huge mongrel dog faced him, growling deep in its throat, four legs braced for assault. The blunt ears were laid flat along the short-haired skull and a thin trickle of saliva seeped from the killing jaws. The beast's powerful chest-muscles were bunched for the spring when Stillman acted.

The gun, he knew, was useless; the shots would be heard. Therefore, with the full strength of his left arm, he hurled a heavy can at the dog's head. The stunned animal staggered under the blow, legs buckling. Hurriedly, Stillman gathered his supplies and made his way back to the street.

How much longer can my luck hold? Lewis Stillman wondered, as he bolted the door. He placed the box of tinned goods on a wooden table and lit the tall lamp nearby. Its flickering orange glow illumined the narrow, low-ceilinged room as Stillman seated himself on one of three chairs facing the table.

Twice tonight, his mind told him, twice you've escaped them—and they could have seen you easily on both occasions if they had been watching for you. They don't know you're alive. But when they find out...

He forced his thoughts away from the scene in his mind away from the horror; quickly he stood up and began to unload the box, placing the cans on a long shelf along the far side of the room.

He began to think of women, of a girl named Joan, and of how much he had loved her...

The world of Lewis Stillman was damp and lightless; it was narrow and its cold stone walls pressed in upon him as he moved. He had been walking for several hours; sometimes he would run, because he knew his leg muscles must be kept strong, but he was walking now, following the thin yellow beam of his hooded lantern. He was searching.

Tonight, he thought, I might find another like myself. Surely, someone is down here; I'll find someone if I keep searching. I must find someone!

But he knew he would not. He knew he would find only chill emptiness ahead of him in the tunnels.

For three long years he had been searching for another man or woman down here in this world under the city. For three years he had prowled the seven hundred miles of storm drains which threaded their way under the skin of Los Angeles like the veins in a giant's body—and he had found nothing. Nothing.

Even now, after all the days and nights of search, he could not really accept the fact that he was alone, that he was the last man alive in a city of seven million, that all the others were dead.

He paused, resting his back against the cold stone. Some of them were moving over the street above his head. He listened to the sharp scuffling sounds on the pavement and swore bitterly.

“Damn you,” said Lewis Stillman levelly. “Damn all of you!”

Lewis Stillman was running down the long tunnels. Behind him a tide of midget shadows washed from wall to wall; high keening cries, doubled and tripled by echoes, rang in his ears. Claws reached for him; he felt panting breath, like hot smoke, on the back of his neck; his lungs were bursting, his entire body aflame.

He looked down at his fast-pumping legs, doing their job with pistoned precision. He listened to the sharp slap of his heels against the floor of the tunnel—and he thought: I might die at any moment, but my legs will escape! They will run on down the endless drains and never be caught. They move so fast while my heavy awkward upper-body rocks and sways above them, slowing them down, tiring them—making them angry. How my legs must hate me! I must be clever and humor them, beg them to take me along to safety. How well they run, how sleek and fine!

Then he felt himself coming apart. His legs were detaching themselves from his upper-body. He cried out in horror, flailing the air with his arms, beseeching them not to leave him behind. But the legs cruelly continued to unfasten themselves. In a cold surge of terror, Lewis Stillman felt himself tipping, falling toward the damp floor—while his legs raced on with a wild animal life of their own. He opened his mouth, high above the insane legs, and screamed.

Ending the nightmare.

He sat up stiffly in his cot, gasping, drenched in sweat. He drew in a long shuddering breath and reached for a cigarette. He lit it with a trembling hand.

The nightmares were getting worse. He realized that his mind was rebelling as he slept, spilling forth the bottled-up fears of the day during the night hours.

He thought once more about the beginning six years ago, about why he was still alive, the last of his kind. The alien ships had struck Earth suddenly, without warning. Their attack had been thorough and deadly. In a matter of hours the aliens had accomplished their clever mission—and the men and women of Earth were destroyed. A few survived, he was certain. He had never met any of them, but he was convinced they existed. Los Angeles was not the world, after all, and if he escaped so must have others around the globe. He'd been working alone in the drains when the alien ships appeared, finishing a special job for the construction company on B tunnel. He could still hear the weird sound of the mammoth ships and feel the intense heat of their passage.

Hunger had forced him out and overnight he became a curiosity. The last man alive. For three years he was not harmed. He worked with them, taught them many things, and tried to win their confidence. But, eventually, certain ones came to hate him, to be jealous of his relationship with the others. Luckily he had been able to escape to the drains. That was three years ago and now they had forgotten him.

His later excursions to the upper level of the city had been made under cover of darkness—and he never ventured out unless his food supply dwindled. Water was provided by rain during the wet-months—and by bottled liquids during the dry.

He had built his one-room structure directly to the side of an overhead grating—not close enough to risk their seeing it, but close enough for light to seep in during the sunlight hours. He missed the warm feel of open sun on his body almost as much as he missed the companionship of others, but he could not think of risking himself above the drains by day.

Sometimes he got insane thoughts. Sometimes, when the loneliness closed in like an immense fist and he could no longer stand the sound of his own voice, he would think of bringing one of them down with him, into the drains. One at a time, they could be handled. Then he'd remember their sharp savage eyes, their animal ferocity, and he would realize that the idea was impossible. If one of their kind disappeared, suddenly and without trace, others would certainly become suspicious, begin to search for him—and it would all be over.

Lewis Stillman settled back into his pillow, pulling the blankets tight about his body. He closed his eyes and tried not to listen to the distant screams, pipings and reedy cries filtering down from the street above his head.

Finally he slept.

He spent the afternoon with paper women. He lingered over the pages of some

yellowed fashion magazines, looking at all the beautifully photographed models in their fine clothes. All slim and enchanting, these page-women, with their cool enticing eyes and perfect smiles, all grace and softness and glitter and swirled cloth. He touched their images with gentle fingers, stroking the tawny paper hair, as though, by some magic formula, he might imbue them with life. It was easy to imagine that these women had never really lived at all—that they were simply painted, in microscopic detail, by sly artists to give the illusion of photos. He didn't like to think about these women and how they died.

That evening Lewis Stillman watched the moon, round and high and yellow in the night sky, and he thought of his father, and of the long hikes through the moonlit Maine countryside, of hunting trips and warm campfires, of the Maine woods, rich and green in summer. He thought of his father's hopes for his future and the words of that tall, gray-haired figure came back to him.

"You'll be a fine doctor, Lewis. Study and work hard and you'll succeed. I know you will."

He remembered the long winter evenings of study at his father's great mahogany desk, pouring over medical books and journals, taking notes, sifting and re-sifting facts. He remembered one set of books in particular—Erickson's monumental three-volume text on surgery, richly bound and stamped in gold. He had always loved these books, above all others.

What had gone wrong along the way? Somehow, the dream had faded, the bright goal vanished and was lost. After a year of pre-med at the University of Southern Cal, he had given up medicine; he had become discouraged and quit college to take a laborer's job with a construction company. How ironic that this move should have saved his life! He'd wanted to work with his hands, to sweat and labor with the muscles of his body. He'd wanted to earn enough to marry Joan and then, later perhaps, he would have returned to finish his courses. It all seemed so far away now, his reason for quitting, for letting his father down.

Now, at this moment, an overwhelming desire gripped him, a desire to pour over Erickson's pages once again, to re-create, even for a brief moment, the comfort and happiness of his childhood.

He'd seen a duplicate set on the second floor of Pickwick's book store in Hollywood, in their used book department, and now he knew he must go after them, bring the books back with him to the drains. It was a dangerous and foolish desire, but he knew he would obey it. Despite the risk of death, he would go after the books tonight. Tonight.

One corner of Lewis Stillman's room was reserved for weapons. His prize, a

Thompson submachine, had been procured from the Los Angeles police arsenal. Supplementing the Thompson were two semi-automatic rifles, a Luger, a Colt .45 and a .22-caliber Hornet pistol, equipped with a silencer. He always kept the smallest gun in a spring-clip holster beneath his armpit, but it was not his habit to carry any of the larger weapons with him into the city. On this night, however, things were different.

The drains ended two miles short of Hollywood—which means he would be forced to cover a long and particularly hazardous stretch of ground in order to reach the book store. He therefore decided to take along the .30-caliber Savage rifle in addition to the small hand weapon.

You're a fool, Lewis, he told himself, as he slid the oiled Savage from its leather case. Are the books important enough to risk your life? Yes, another part of him replied, they are that important. If you want a thing badly enough and the thing is worthwhile, then you must go after it. If fear holds you like a rat in the dark, then you are worse than a coward; you betray yourself and the civilization you represent. Go out and bring the books back.

Running in the chill night wind. Grass, now pavement, now grass, beneath his feet. Ducking into shadows, moving stealthily past shops and theatres, rushing under the cold moon. Santa Monica Boulevard, then Highland, the Hollywood Boulevard, and finally—after an eternity of heartbeats—the book store.

Pickwick's.

Lewis Stillman, his rifle over one shoulder, the small automatic gleaming in his hand, edged silently into the store.

A paper battleground met his eyes.

In the filtered moonlight, a white blanket of broken-backed volumes spilled across the entire lower floor. Stillman shuddered; he could envision them, shrieking, scrabbling at the shelves, throwing books wildly across the room at one another. Screaming, ripping, destroying.

What of the other floors? What of the medical section?

He crossed to the stairs, spilled pages crackling like a fall of dry leaves under his step, and sprinted up the first short flight to the mezzanine. Similar chaos!

He hurried up to the second floor, stumbling, terribly afraid of what he might find. Reaching the top, his heart thudding, he squinted into the dimness.

The books were undisturbed. Apparently they had tired of their game before reaching these.

He slipped the rifle from his shoulder and placed it near the stairs. Dust lay thick all around him, powdering up and swirling, as he moved down the narrow

aisles; a damp, leathery mustiness lived in the air, an odor of mold and neglect.

Lewis Stillman paused before a dim hand-lettered sign: MEDICAL SECTION. It was just as he had remembered it. Holstering the small automatic, he struck a match, shading the flame with a cupped hand as he moved it along the rows of faded titles. Carter...Davidson...Enright...Erickson. He drew in his breath sharply. All three volumes, their gold stamping dust-dulled but readable, stood in tall and perfect order on the shelf.

In the darkness, Lewis Stillman carefully removed each volume, blowing it free of dust. At last all three books were clean and solid in his hands.

Well, you've done it. You've reached the books and now they belong to you.

He smiled, thinking of the moment when he would be able to sit down at the table with his treasure, and linger again and again over the wondrous pages.

He found an empty carton at the rear of the store and placed the books inside. Returning to the stairs, he shouldered the rifle and began his descent to the lower floor.

So far, he told himself, my luck is still holding.

But as Lewis Stillman's foot touched the final stair, his luck ran out.

The entire lower floor was alive with them!

Rustling like a mass of great insects, gliding toward him, eyes gleaming in the half-light, they converged upon the stairs. They had been waiting for him.

Now, suddenly, the books no longer mattered. Now only his life mattered and nothing else. He moved back against the hard wood of the stair-rail, the carton of books sliding from his hands. They had stopped at the foot of the stair; they were silent, looking up at him, the hate in their eyes.

If you can reach the street, Stillman told himself, then you've still got half a chance. That means you've got to get through them to the door. All right then, move.

Lewis Stillman squeezed the trigger of the automatic and three shots echoed through the silent store. Two of them fell under the bullets as Stillman rushed into their midst.

He felt sharp nails claw at his shirt and trousers, heard the cloth ripping away in their grasp. He kept firing the small automatic into them, and three more dropped under the hail of bullets, shrieking in pain and surprise. The others spilled back, screaming, from the door.

The gun was empty. He tossed it away, swinging the heavy Savage rifle free from his shoulder as he reached the street. The night air, crisp and cool in his lungs, gave him instant hope.

I can still make it, thought Stillman, as he leaped the curb and plunged across the pavement. If those shots weren't heard, then I've still got the edge. My legs are strong; I can outdistance them.

Luck, however, had failed him completely on this night. Near the intersection of Hollywood Boulevard and Highland, a fresh pack of them swarmed toward him over the street.

He dropped to one knee and fired into their ranks, the Savage jerking in his hands. They scattered to either side.

He began to run steadily down the middle of Hollywood Boulevard, using the butt of the heavy rifle like a battering ram as they came at him. As he neared Highland, three of them darted directly into his path. Stillman fired. One doubled over, lurching crazily into a jagged plate-glass store front. Another clawed at him as he swept around the corner to Highland. He managed to shake free.

The street ahead of him was clear. Now his superior leg-power would count heavily in his favor. Two miles. Could he make it back before others cut him off?

Running, re-loading, firing. Sweat soaking his shirt, rivering down his face, stinging his eyes. A mile covered. Half way to the drains. They had fallen back.

But more of them were coming, drawn by the rifle shots, pouring in from side streets, stores and houses.

His heart jarred in his body, his breath was ragged. How many of them around him? A hundred? Two hundred? More coming. God!

He bit down on his lower lip until the salt taste of blood was on his tongue. You can't make it, a voice inside him shouted, they'll have you in another block and you know it!

He fitted the rifle to his shoulder, adjusted his aim, and fired. The long rolling crack of the big weapon filled the night. Again and again he fired, the butt jerking into the flesh of his shoulder, the smell of powder in his nostrils.

It was no use. Too many of them.

Lewis Stillman knew that he was going to die.

The rifle was empty at last, the final bullet had been fired. He had no place to run because they were all around him, in a slowly closing circle.

He looked at the ring of small cruel faces and he thought: The aliens did their job perfectly; they stopped Earth before she could reach the age of the rocket, before she could threaten planets beyond her own moon. What an immensely clever plan it had been! To destroy every human being on Earth above the age of six—and then to leave as quickly as they had come, allowing our civilization to

continue on a primitive level, knowing that Earth's back had been broken, that her survivors would revert to savagery as they grew into adulthood.

Lewis Stillman dropped the empty rifle at his feet and threw out his hands. "Listen," he pleaded, "I'm really one of you. You'll all be like me soon. Please, listen to me."

But the circle tightened relentlessly around Lewis Stillman. He was screaming when the children closed in.

THE BELL IN THE FOG, by Gertrude Atherton

I

The great author had realized one of the dreams of his ambitious youth, the possession of an ancestral hall in England. It was not so much the good American's reverence for ancestors that inspired the longing to consort with the ghosts of an ancient line, as artistic appreciation of the mellowness, the dignity, the aristocratic aloofness of walls that have sheltered, and furniture that has embraced, generations and generations of the dead. To mere wealth, only his astute and incomparably modern brain yielded respect; his ego raised its goose-flesh at the sight of rooms furnished with a single check, conciliatory as the taste might be. The dumping of the old interiors of Europe into the glistening shells of the United States not only roused him almost to passionate protest, but offended his patriotism—which he classified among his unworked ideals. The average American was not an artist, therefore he had no excuse for even the affectation of cosmopolitanism. Heaven knew he was national enough in everything else, from his accent to his lack of repose; let his surroundings be in keeping.

Orth had left the United States soon after his first successes, and, his art being too great to be confounded with locality, he had long since ceased to be spoken of as an American author. All civilized Europe furnished stages for his puppets, and, if never picturesque nor impassioned, his originality was as overwhelming as his style. His subtleties might not always be understood—indeed, as a rule, they were not—but the musical mystery of his language and the penetrating charm of his lofty and cultivated mind induced raptures in the initiated, forever denied to those who failed to appreciate him.

His following was not a large one, but it was very distinguished. The aristocracies of the earth gave to it; and not to understand and admire Ralph Orth was deliberately to relegate one's self to the ranks. But the elect are few, and they frequently subscribe to the circulating libraries; on the Continent, they buy the Tauchnitz edition; and had not Mr. Orth inherited a sufficiency of ancestral dollars to enable him to keep rooms in Jermyn Street, and the wardrobe of an Englishman of leisure, he might have been forced to consider the tastes of the middle-class at a desk in Hampstead. But, as it mercifully was, the fashionable and exclusive sets of London knew and sought him. He was too wary to become a fad, and too sophisticated to grate or bore; consequently, his popularity

continued evenly from year to year, and long since he had come to be regarded as one of them. He was not keenly addicted to sport, but he could handle a gun, and all men respected his dignity and breeding. They cared less for his books than women did, perhaps because patience is not a characteristic of their sex. I am alluding however, in this instance, to men-of-the-world. A group of young literary men—and one or two women—put him on a pedestal and kissed the earth before it. Naturally, they imitated him, and as this flattered him, and he had a kindly heart deep among the cere-cloths of his formalities, he sooner or later wrote “appreciations” of them all, which nobody living could understand, but which owing to the subtitle and signature answered every purpose.

With all this, however, he was not utterly content. From the 12th of August until late in the winter—when he did not go to Homburg and the Riviera—he visited the best houses in England, slept in state chambers, and meditated in historic parks; but the country was his one passion, and he longed for his own acres.

He was turning fifty when his great-aunt died and made him her heir: “as a poor reward for his immortal services to literature,” read the will of this phenomenally appreciative relative. The estate was a large one. There was a rush for his books; new editions were announced. He smiled with cynicism, not unmixed with sadness; but he was very grateful for the money, and as soon as his fastidious taste would permit he bought him a country-seat.

The place gratified all his ideals and dreams—for he had romanced about his sometime English possession as he had never dreamed of woman. It had once been the property of the Church, and the ruin of cloister and chapel above the ancient wood was sharp against the low pale sky. Even the house itself was Tudor, but wealth from generation to generation had kept it in repair; and the lawns were as velvety, the hedges as rigid, the trees as aged as any in his own works. It was not a castle nor a great property, but it was quite perfect; and for a long while he felt like a bridegroom on a succession of honeymoons. He often laid his hand against the rough ivied walls in a lingering caress.

After a time, he returned the hospitalities of his friends, and his invitations, given with the exclusiveness of his great distinction, were never refused. Americans visiting England eagerly sought for letters to him; and if they were sometimes benumbed by that cold and formal presence, and awed by the silences of Chillingsworth—the few who entered there—they thrilled in anticipation of verbal triumphs, and forthwith bought an entire set of his books. It was characteristic that they dared not ask him for his autograph.

Although women invariably described him as “brilliant,” a few men affirmed that he was gentle and lovable, and any one of them was well content to spend weeks at Chillingsworth with no other companion. But, on the whole, he was rather a lonely man.

It occurred to him how lonely he was one gay June morning when the sunlight was streaming through his narrow windows, illuminating tapestries and armor, the family portraits of the young profligate from whom he had made this splendid purchase, dusting its gold on the black wood of wainscot and floor. He was in the gallery at the moment, studying one of his two favorite portraits, a gallant little lad in the green costume of Robin Hood. The boy’s expression was imperious and radiant, and he had that perfect beauty which in any disposition appealed so powerfully to the author. But as Orth stared to-day at the brilliant youth, of whose life he knew nothing, he suddenly became aware of a human stirring at the foundations of his aesthetic pleasure.

“I wish he were alive and here,” he thought, with a sigh. “What a jolly little companion he would be! And this fine old mansion would make a far more complementary setting for him than for me.”

He turned away abruptly, only to find himself face to face with the portrait of a little girl who was quite unlike the boy, yet so perfect in her own way, and so unmistakably painted by the same hand, that he had long since concluded they had been brother and sister. She was angelically fair, and, young as she was—she could not have been more than six years old—her dark-blue eyes had a beauty of mind which must have been remarkable twenty years later. Her pouting mouth was like a little scarlet serpent, her skin almost transparent, her pale hair fell waving—not curled with the orthodoxy of childhood—about her tender bare shoulders. She wore a long white frock, and clasped tightly against her breast a doll far more gorgeously arrayed than herself. Behind her were the ruins and the woods of Chillingsworth.

Orth had studied this portrait many times, for the sake of an art which he understood almost as well as his own; but to-day he saw only the lovely child. He forgot even the boy in the intensity of this new and personal absorption.

“Did she live to grow up, I wonder?” he thought. “She should have made a remarkable, even a famous woman, with those eyes and that brow, but—could the spirit within that ethereal frame stand the enlightenments of maturity? Would not that mind—purged, perhaps, in a long probation from the dross of other existences—flee in disgust from the commonplace problems of a woman’s life? Such perfect beings should die while they are still perfect. Still, it is possible that

this little girl, whoever she was, was idealized by the artist, who painted into her his own dream of exquisite childhood.”

Again he turned away impatiently. “I believe I am rather fond of children,” he admitted. “I catch myself watching them on the street when they are pretty enough. Well, who does not like them?” he added, with some defiance.

He went back to his work; he was chiselling a story which was to be the foremost excuse of a magazine as yet unborn. At the end of half an hour he threw down his wondrous instrument—which looked not unlike an ordinary pen—and making no attempt to disobey the desire that possessed him, went back to the gallery. The dark splendid boy, the angelic little girl were all he saw—even of the several children in that roll call of the past—and they seemed to look straight down his eyes into depths where the fragmentary ghosts of unrecorded ancestors gave faint musical response.

“The dead’s kindly recognition of the dead,” he thought. “But I wish these children were alive.”

For a week he haunted the gallery, and the children haunted him. Then he became impatient and angry. “I am mooning like a barren woman,” he exclaimed. “I must take the briefest way of getting those youngsters off my mind.”

With the help of his secretary, he ransacked the library, and finally brought to light the gallery catalogue which had been named in the inventory. He discovered that his children were the Viscount Tancred and the Lady Blanche Mortlake, son and daughter of the second Earl of Teignmouth. Little wiser than before, he sat down at once and wrote to the present earl, asking for some account of the lives of the children. He awaited the answer with more restlessness than he usually permitted himself, and took long walks, ostentatiously avoiding the gallery.

“I believe those youngsters have obsessed me,” he thought, more than once. “They certainly are beautiful enough, and the last time I looked at them in that waning light they were fairly alive. Would that they were, and scampering about this park.”

Lord Teignmouth, who was intensely grateful to him, answered promptly.

“I am afraid,” he wrote, “that I don’t know much about my ancestors—those who didn’t do something or other; but I have a vague remembrance of having been told by an aunt of mine, who lives on the family traditions—she isn’t married—that the little chap was drowned in the river, and that the little girl died too—I mean when she was a little girl—wasted away, or something—I’m such a

bestly idiot about expressing myself, that I wouldn't dare to write to you at all if you weren't really great. That is actually all I can tell you, and I am afraid the painter was their only biographer."

The author was gratified that the girl had died young, but grieved for the boy. Although he had avoided the gallery of late, his practised imagination had evoked from the throngs of history the high-handed and brilliant, surely adventurous career of the third Earl of Teignmouth. He had pondered upon the deep delights of directing such a mind and character, and had caught himself envying the dust that was older still. When he read of the lad's early death, in spite of his regret that such promise should have come to naught, he admitted to a secret thrill of satisfaction that the boy had so soon ceased to belong to any one. Then he smiled with both sadness and humor.

"What an old fool I am!" he admitted. "I believe I not only wish those children were alive, but that they were my own."

The frank admission proved fatal. He made straight for the gallery. The boy, after the interval of separation, seemed more spiritedly alive than ever, the little girl to suggest, with her faint appealing smile, that she would like to be taken up and cuddled.

"I must try another way," he thought, desperately, after that long communion. "I must write them out of me."

He went back to the library and locked up the tour de force which had ceased to command his classic faculty. At once, he began to write the story of the brief lives of the children, much to the amazement of that faculty, which was little accustomed to the simplicities. Nevertheless, before he had written three chapters, he knew that he was at work upon a masterpiece—and more: he was experiencing a pleasure so keen that once and again his hand trembled, and he saw the page through a mist. Although his characters had always been objective to himself and his more patient readers, none knew better than he—a man of no delusions—that they were so remote and exclusive as barely to escape being mere mentalities; they were never the pulsing living creations of the more full-blooded genius. But he had been content to have it so. His creations might find and leave him cold, but he had known his highest satisfaction in chiselling the statuettes, extracting subtle and elevating harmonies, while combining words as no man of his tongue had combined them before.

But the children were not statuettes. He had loved and brooded over them long ere he had thought to tuck them into his pen, and on its first stroke they danced out alive. The old mansion echoed with their laughter, with their delightful and

original pranks. Mr. Orth knew nothing of children, therefore all the pranks he invented were as original as his faculty. The little girl clung to his hand or knee as they both followed the adventurous course of their common idol, the boy. When Orth realized how alive they were, he opened each room of his home to them in turn, that evermore he might have sacred and poignant memories with all parts of the stately mansion where he must dwell alone to the end. He selected their bedrooms, and hovered over them—not through infantile disorders, which were beyond even his imagination—but through those painful intervals incident upon the enterprising spirit of the boy and the devoted obedience of the girl to fraternal command. He ignored the second Lord Teignmouth; he was himself their father, and he admired himself extravagantly for the first time; art had chastened him long since. Oddly enough, the children had no mother, not even the memory of one.

He wrote the book more slowly than was his wont, and spent delightful hours pondering upon the chapter of the morrow. He looked forward to the conclusion with a sort of terror, and made up his mind that when the inevitable last word was written he should start at once for Homburg. Incalculable times a day he went to the gallery, for he no longer had any desire to write the children out of his mind, and his eyes hungered for them. They were his now. It was with an effort that he sometimes humorously reminded himself that another man had fathered them, and that their little skeletons were under the choir of the chapel. Not even for peace of mind would he have descended into the vaults of the lords of Chillingsworth and looked upon the marble effigies of his children. Nevertheless, when in a superhumorous mood, he dwelt upon his high satisfaction in having been enabled by his great-aunt to purchase all that was left of them.

For two months he lived in his fool's paradise, and then he knew that the book must end. He nerved himself to nurse the little girl through her wasting illness, and when he clasped her hands, his own shook, his knees trembled. Desolation settled upon the house, and he wished he had left one corner of it to which he could retreat unhaunted by the child's presence. He took long tramps, avoiding the river with a sensation next to panic. It was two days before he got back to his table, and then he had made up his mind to let the boy live. To kill him off, too, was more than his augmented stock of human nature could endure. After all, the lad's death had been purely accidental, wanton. It was just that he should live—with one of the author's inimitable suggestions of future greatness; but, at the end, the parting was almost as bitter as the other. Orth knew then how men feel

when their sons go forth to encounter the world and ask no more of the old companionship.

The author's boxes were packed. He sent the manuscript to his publisher an hour after it was finished—he could not have given it a final reading to have saved it from failure—directed his secretary to examine the proof under a microscope, and left the next morning for Homburg. There, in inmost circles, he forgot his children. He visited in several of the great houses of the Continent until November; then returned to London to find his book the literary topic of the day. His secretary handed him the reviews; and for once in a way he read the finalities of the nameless. He found himself hailed as a genius, and compared in astonished phrases to the prodigiously clever talent which the world for twenty years had isolated under the name of Ralph Orth. This pleased him, for every writer is human enough to wish to be hailed as a genius, and immediately. Many are, and many wait; it depends upon the fashion of the moment, and the needs and bias of those who write of writers. Orth had waited twenty years; but his past was bedecked with the headstones of geniuses long since forgotten. He was gratified to come thus publicly into his estate, but soon reminded himself that all the adulation of which a belated world was capable could not give him one thrill of the pleasure which the companionship of that book had given him, while creating. It was the keenest pleasure in his memory, and when a man is fifty and has written many books, that is saying a great deal.

He allowed what society was in town to lavish honors upon him for something over a month, then cancelled all his engagements and went down to Chillingsworth.

His estate was in Hertfordshire, that county of gentle hills and tangled lanes, of ancient oaks and wide wild heaths, of historic houses, and dark woods, and green fields innumerable—a Wordsworthian shire, steeped in the deepest peace of England. As Orth drove towards his own gates he had the typical English sunset to gaze upon, a red streak with a church spire against it. His woods were silent. In the fields, the cows stood as if conscious of their part. The ivy on his old gray towers had been young with his children.

He spent a haunted night, but the next day stranger happenings began.

II

He rose early, and went for one of his long walks. England seems to cry out to be walked upon, and Orth, like others of the transplanted, experienced to the full

the country's gift of foot-restlessness and mental calm. Calm flees, however, when the ego is rampant, and to-day, as upon others too recent, Orth's soul was as restless as his feet. He had walked for two hours when he entered the wood of his neighbor's estate, a domain seldom honored by him, as it, too, had been bought by an American—a flighty hunting widow, who displeased the fastidious taste of the author. He heard children's voices, and turned with the quick prompting of retreat.

As he did so, he came face to face, on the narrow path, with a little girl. For the moment he was possessed by the most hideous sensation which can visit a man's being—abject terror. He believed that body and soul were disintegrating. The child before him was his child, the original of a portrait in which the artist, dead two centuries ago, had missed exact fidelity, after all. The difference, even his rolling vision took note, lay in the warm pure living whiteness and the deeper spiritual suggestion of the child in his path. Fortunately for his self-respect, the surrender lasted but a moment. The little girl spoke.

“You look real sick,” she said. “Shall I lead you home?”

The voice was soft and sweet, but the intonation, the vernacular, were American, and not of the highest class. The shock was, if possible, more agonizing than the other, but this time Orth rose to the occasion.

“Who are you?” he demanded, with asperity. “What is your name? Where do you live?”

The child smiled, an angelic smile, although she was evidently amused. “I never had so many questions asked me all at once,” she said. “But I don't mind, and I'm glad you're not sick. I'm Mrs. Jennie Root's little girl—my father's dead. My name is Blanche—you are sick! No?—and I live in Rome, New York State. We've come over here to visit pa's relations.”

Orth took the child's hand in his. It was very warm and soft.

“Take me to your mother,” he said, firmly; “now, at once. You can return and play afterwards. And as I wouldn't have you disappointed for the world, I'll send to town to-day for a beautiful doll.”

The little girl, whose face had fallen, flashed her delight, but walked with great dignity beside him. He groaned in his depths as he saw they were pointing for the widow's house, but made up his mind that he would know the history of the child and of all her ancestors, if he had to sit down at table with his obnoxious neighbor. To his surprise, however, the child did not lead him into the park, but towards one of the old stone houses of the tenantry.

“Pa's great-great-great-grandfather lived there,” she remarked, with all the

American's pride of ancestry. Orth did not smile, however. Only the warm clasp of the hand in his, the soft thrilling voice of his still mysterious companion, prevented him from feeling as if moving through the mazes of one of his own famous ghost stories.

The child ushered him into the dining-room, where an old man was seated at the table reading his Bible. The room was at least eight hundred years old. The ceiling was supported by the trunk of a tree, black, and probably petrified. The windows had still their diamond panes, separated, no doubt, by the original lead. Beyond was a large kitchen in which were several women. The old man, who looked patriarchal enough to have laid the foundations of his dwelling, glanced up and regarded the visitor without hospitality. His expression softened as his eyes moved to the child.

"Who 'ave ye brought?" he asked. He removed his spectacles. "Ah!" He rose, and offered the author a chair. At the same moment, the women entered the room.

"Of course you've fallen in love with Blanche, sir," said one of them. "Everybody does."

"Yes, that is it. Quite so." Confusion still prevailing among his faculties, he clung to the naked truth. "This little girl has interested and startled me because she bears a precise resemblance to one of the portraits in Chillingsworth—painted about two hundred years ago. Such extraordinary likenesses do not occur without reason, as a rule, and, as I admired my portrait so deeply that I have written a story about it, you will not think it unnatural if I am more than curious to discover the reason for this resemblance. The little girl tells me that her ancestors lived in this very house, and as my little girl lived next door, so to speak, there undoubtedly is a natural reason for the resemblance."

His host closed the Bible, put his spectacles in his pocket, and hobbled out of the house.

"He'll never talk of family secrets," said an elderly woman, who introduced herself as the old man's daughter, and had placed bread and milk before the guest. "There are secrets in every family, and we have ours, but he'll never tell those old tales. All I can tell you is that an ancestor of little Blanche went to wreck and ruin because of some fine lady's doings, and killed himself. The story is that his boys turned out bad. One of them saw his crime, and never got over the shock; he was foolish like, after. The mother was a poor scared sort of creature, and hadn't much influence over the other boy. There seemed to be blight on all the man's descendants, until one of them went to America. Since

then, they haven't prospered, exactly, but they've done better, and they don't drink so heavy."

"They haven't done so well," remarked a worn patient-looking woman. Orth typed her as belonging to the small middle-class of an interior town of the eastern United States.

"You are not the child's mother?"

"Yes, sir. Everybody is surprised; you needn't apologize. She doesn't look like any of us, although her brothers and sisters are good enough for anybody to be proud of. But we all think she strayed in by mistake, for she looks like any lady's child, and, of course, we're only middle-class."

Orth gasped. It was the first time he had ever heard a native American use the term middle-class with a personal application. For the moment, he forgot the child. His analytical mind raked in the new specimen. He questioned, and learned that the woman's husband had kept a hat store in Rome, New York; that her boys were clerks, her girls in stores, or type-writing. They kept her and little Blanche—who had come after her other children were well grown—in comfort; and they were all very happy together. The boys broke out, occasionally; but, on the whole, were the best in the world, and her girls were worthy of far better than they had. All were robust, except Blanche. "She coming so late, when I was no longer young, makes her delicate," she remarked, with a slight blush, the signal of her chaste Americanism; "but I guess she'll get along all right. She couldn't have better care if she was a queen's child."

Orth, who had gratefully consumed the bread and milk, rose. "Is that really all you can tell me?" he asked.

"That's all," replied the daughter of the house. "And you couldn't pry open father's mouth."

Orth shook hands cordially with all of them, for he could be charming when he chose. He offered to escort the little girl back to her playmates in the wood, and she took prompt possession of his hand. As he was leaving, he turned suddenly to Mrs. Root. "Why did you call her Blanche?" he asked.

"She was so white and dainty, she just looked it."

Orth took the next train for London, and from Lord Teignmouth obtained the address of the aunt who lived on the family traditions, and a cordial note of introduction to her. He then spent an hour anticipating, in a toy shop, the whims and pleasures of a child—an incident of paternity which his book-children had not inspired. He bought the finest doll, piano, French dishes, cooking apparatus, and playhouse in the shop, and signed a check for thirty pounds with a sensation

of positive rapture. Then he took the train for Lancashire, where the Lady Mildred Mortlake lived in another ancestral home.

Possibly there are few imaginative writers who have not a leaning, secret or avowed, to the occult. The creative gift is in very close relationship with the Great Force behind the universe; for aught we know, may be an atom thereof. It is not strange, therefore, that the lesser and closer of the unseen forces should send their vibrations to it occasionally; or, at all events, that the imagination should incline its ear to the most mysterious and picturesque of all beliefs. Orth frankly dallied with the old dogma. He formulated no personal faith of any sort, but his creative faculty, that ego within an ego, had made more than one excursion into the invisible and brought back literary treasure.

The Lady Mildred received with sweetness and warmth the generous contributor to the family sieve, and listened with fluttering interest to all he had not told the world—she had read the book—and to the strange, Americanized sequel.

“I am all at sea,” concluded Orth. “What had my little girl to do with the tragedy? What relation was she to the lady who drove the young man to destruction—?”

“The closest,” interrupted Lady Mildred. “She was herself!”

Orth stared at her. Again he had a confused sense of disintegration. Lady Mildred, gratified by the success of her bolt, proceeded less dramatically:

“Wally was up here just after I read your book, and I discovered he had given you the wrong history of the picture. Not that he knew it. It is a story we have left untold as often as possible, and I tell it to you only because you would probably become a monomaniac if I didn’t. Blanche Mortlake—that Blanche—there had been several of her name, but there has not been one since—did not die in childhood, but lived to be twenty-four. She was an angelic child, but little angels sometimes grow up into very naughty girls. I believe she was delicate as a child, which probably gave her that spiritual look. Perhaps she was spoiled and flattered, until her poor little soul was stifled, which is likely. At all events, she was the coquette of her day—she seemed to care for nothing but breaking hearts; and she did not stop when she married, either. She hated her husband, and became reckless. She had no children. So far, the tale is not an uncommon one; but the worst, and what makes the ugliest stain in our annals, is to come.

“She was alone one summer at Chillingsworth—where she had taken temporary refuge from her husband—and she amused herself—some say, fell in love—with a young man of the yeomanry, a tenant of the next estate. His name

was Root. He, so it comes down to us, was a magnificent specimen of his kind, and in those days the yeomanry gave us our great soldiers. His beauty of face was quite as remarkable as his physique; he led all the rural youth in sport, and was a bit above his class in every way. He had a wife in no way remarkable, and two little boys, but was always more with his friends than his family. Where he and Blanche Mortlake met I don't know—in the woods, probably, although it has been said that he had the run of the house. But, at all events, he was wild about her, and she pretended to be about him. Perhaps she was, for women have stooped before and since. Some women can be stormed by a fine man in any circumstances; but, although I am a woman of the world, and not easy to shock, there are some things I tolerate so hardly that it is all I can do to bring myself to believe in them; and stooping is one. Well, they were the scandal of the county for months, and then, either because she had tired of her new toy, or his grammar grated after the first glamour, or because she feared her husband, who was returning from the Continent, she broke off with him and returned to town. He followed her, and forced his way into her house. It is said she melted, but made him swear never to attempt to see her again. He returned to his home, and killed himself. A few months later she took her own life. That is all I know."

"It is quite enough for me," said Orth.

The next night, as his train travelled over the great wastes of Lancashire, a thousand chimneys were spouting forth columns of fire. Where the sky was not red it was black. The place looked like hell. Another time Orth's imagination would have gathered immediate inspiration from this wildest region of England. The fair and peaceful counties of the south had nothing to compare in infernal grandeur with these acres of flaming columns. The chimneys were invisible in the lower darkness of the night; the fires might have leaped straight from the angry caldron of the earth.

But Orth was in a subjective world, searching for all he had ever heard of occultism. He recalled that the sinful dead are doomed, according to this belief, to linger for vast reaches of time in that borderland which is close to earth, eventually sent back to work out their final salvation; that they work it out among the descendants of the people they have wronged; that suicide is held by the devotees of occultism to be a cardinal sin, abhorred and execrated.

Authors are far closer to the truths enfolded in mystery than ordinary people, because of that very audacity of imagination which irritates their plodding critics. As only those who dare to make mistakes succeed greatly, only those who shake free the wings of their imagination brush, once in a way, the secrets of the

great pale world. If such writers go wrong, it is not for the mere brains to tell them so.

Upon Orth's return to Chillingsworth, he called at once upon the child, and found her happy among his gifts. She put her arms about his neck, and covered his serene unlined face with soft kisses. This completed the conquest. Orth from that moment adored her as a child, irrespective of the psychological problem.

Gradually he managed to monopolize her. From long walks it was but a step to take her home for luncheon. The hours of her visits lengthened. He had a room fitted up as a nursery and filled with the wonders of toyland. He took her to London to see the pantomimes; two days before Christmas, to buy presents for her relatives; and together they strung them upon the most wonderful Christmas-tree that the old hall of Chillingsworth had ever embraced. She had a donkey-cart, and a trained nurse, disguised as a maid, to wait upon her. Before a month had passed she was living in state at Chillingsworth and paying daily visits to her mother. Mrs. Root was deeply flattered, and apparently well content. Orth told her plainly that he should make the child independent, and educate her, meanwhile. Mrs. Root intended to spend six months in England, and Orth was in no hurry to alarm her by broaching his ultimate design.

He reformed Blanche's accent and vocabulary, and read to her out of books which would have addled the brains of most little maids of six; but she seemed to enjoy them, although she seldom made a comment. He was always ready to play games with her, but she was a gentle little thing, and, moreover, tired easily. She preferred to sit in the depths of a big chair, toasting her bare toes at the log-fire in the hall, while her friend read or talked to her. Although she was thoughtful, and, when left to herself, given to dreaming, his patient observation could detect nothing uncanny about her. Moreover, she had a quick sense of humor, she was easily amused, and could laugh as merrily as any child in the world. He was resigning all hope of further development on the shadowy side when one day he took her to the picture-gallery.

It was the first warm day of summer. The gallery was not heated, and he had not dared to take his frail visitor into its chilly spaces during the winter and spring. Although he had wished to see the effect of the picture on the child, he had shrunk from the bare possibility of the very developments the mental part of him craved; the other was warmed and satisfied for the first time, and held itself aloof from disturbance. But one day the sun streamed through the old windows, and, obeying a sudden impulse, he led Blanche to the gallery.

It was some time before he approached the child of his earlier love. Again he

hesitated. He pointed out many other fine pictures, and Blanche smiled appreciatively at his remarks, that were wise in criticism and interesting in matter. He never knew just how much she understood, but the very fact that there were depths in the child beyond his probing riveted his chains.

Suddenly he wheeled about and waved his hand to her prototype. "What do you think of that?" he asked. "You remember, I told you of the likeness the day I met you."

She looked indifferently at the picture, but he noticed that her color changed oddly; its pure white tone gave place to an equally delicate gray.

"I have seen it before," she said. "I came in here one day to look at it. And I have been quite often since. You never forbade me," she added, looking at him appealingly, but dropping her eyes quickly. "And I like the little girl—and the boy—very much.

"Do you? Why?"

"I don't know"—a formula in which she had taken refuge before. Still her candid eyes were lowered; but she was quite calm. Orth, instead of questioning, merely fixed his eyes upon her, and waited. In a moment she stirred uneasily, but she did not laugh nervously, as another child would have done. He had never seen her self-possession ruffled, and he had begun to doubt he ever should. She was full of human warmth and affection. She seemed made for love, and every creature who came within her ken adored her, from the author himself down to the litter of puppies presented to her by the stable-boy a few weeks since; but her serenity would hardly be enhanced by death.

She raised her eyes finally, but not to his. She looked at the portrait.

"Did you know that there was another picture behind?" she asked.

"No," replied Orth, turning cold. "How did you know it?"

"One day I touched a spring in the frame, and this picture came forward. Shall I show you?"

"Yes!" And crossing curiosity and the involuntary shrinking from impending phenomena was a sensation of aesthetic disgust that he should be treated to a secret spring.

The little girl touched hers, and that other Blanche sprang aside so quickly that she might have been impelled by a sharp blow from behind. Orth narrowed his eyes and stared at what she revealed. He felt that his own Blanche was watching him, and set his features, although his breath was short.

There was the Lady Blanche Mortlake in the splendor of her young womanhood, beyond a doubt. Gone were all traces of her spiritual childhood,

except, perhaps, in the shadows of the mouth; but more than fulfilled were the promises of her mind. Assuredly, the woman had been as brilliant and gifted as she had been restless and passionate. She wore her very pearls with arrogance, her very hands were tense with eager life, her whole being breathed mutiny.

Orth turned abruptly to Blanche, who had transferred her attention to the picture.

“What a tragedy is there!” he exclaimed, with a fierce attempt at lightness. “Think of a woman having all that pent up within her two centuries ago! And at the mercy of a stupid family, no doubt, and a still stupider husband. No wonder—To-day, a woman like that might not be a model for all the virtues, but she certainly would use her gifts and become famous, the while living her life too fully to have any place in it for yeomen and such, or even for the trivial business of breaking hearts.” He put his finger under Blanche’s chin, and raised her face, but he could not compel her gaze. “You are the exact image of that little girl,” he said, “except that you are even purer and finer. She had no chance, none whatever. You live in the woman’s age. Your opportunities will be infinite. I shall see to it that they are. What you wish to be you shall be. There will be no pent-up energies here to burst out into disaster for yourself and others. You shall be trained to self-control—that is, if you ever develop self-will, dear child—every faculty shall be educated, every school of life you desire knowledge through shall be opened to you. You shall become that finest flower of civilization, a woman who knows how to use her independence.”

She raised her eyes slowly, and gave him a look which stirred the roots of sensation—a long look of unspeakable melancholy. Her chest rose once; then she set her lips tightly, and dropped her eyes.

“What do you mean?” he cried, roughly, for his soul was chattering. “Is—it—do you—?” He dared not go too far, and concluded lamely, “You mean you fear that your mother will not give you to me when she goes—you have divined that I wish to adopt you? Answer me, will you?”

But she only lowered her head and turned away, and he, fearing to frighten or repel her, apologized for his abruptness, restored the outer picture to its place, and led her from the gallery.

He sent her at once to the nursery, and when she came down to luncheon and took her place at his right hand, she was as natural and childlike as ever. For some days he restrained his curiosity, but one evening, as they were sitting before the fire in the hall listening to the storm, and just after he had told her the story of the erl-king, he took her on his knee and asked her gently if she would

not tell him what had been in her thoughts when he had drawn her brilliant future. Again her face turned gray, and she dropped her eyes.

"I cannot," she said. "I—perhaps—I don't know."

"Was it what I suggested?"

She shook her head, then looked at him with a shrinking appeal which forced him to drop the subject.

He went the next day alone to the gallery, and looked long at the portrait of the woman. She stirred no response in him. Nor could he feel that the woman of Blanche's future would stir the man in him. The paternal was all he had to give, but that was hers forever.

He went out into the park and found Blanche digging in her garden, very dirty and absorbed. The next afternoon, however, entering the hall noiselessly, he saw her sitting in her big chair, gazing out into nothing visible, her whole face settled in melancholy. He asked her if she were ill, and she recalled herself at once, but confessed to feeling tired. Soon after this he noticed that she lingered longer in the comfortable depths of her chair, and seldom went out, except with himself. She insisted that she was quite well, but after he had surprised her again looking as sad as if she had renounced every joy of childhood, he summoned from London a doctor renowned for his success with children.

The scientist questioned and examined her. When she had left the room he shrugged his shoulders.

"She might have been born with ten years of life in her, or she might grow up into a buxom woman," he said. "I confess I cannot tell. She appears to be sound enough, but I have no X-rays in my eyes, and for all I know she may be on the verge of decay. She certainly has the look of those who die young. I have never seen so spiritual a child. But I can put my finger on nothing. Keep her out-of-doors, don't give her sweets, and don't let her catch anything if you can help it."

Orth and the child spent the long warm days of summer under the trees of the park, or driving in the quiet lanes. Guests were unbidden, and his pen was idle. All that was human in him had gone out to Blanche. He loved her, and she was a perpetual delight to him. The rest of the world received the large measure of his indifference. There was no further change in her, and apprehension slept and let him sleep. He had persuaded Mrs. Root to remain in England for a year. He sent her theatre tickets every week, and placed a horse and phaeton at her disposal. She was enjoying herself and seeing less and less of Blanche. He took the child to Bournemouth for a fortnight, and again to Scotland, both of which outings benefited as much as they pleased her. She had begun to tyrannize over him

amiably, and she carried herself quite royally. But she was always sweet and truthful, and these qualities, combined with that something in the depths of her mind which defied his explorations, held him captive. She was devoted to him, and cared for no other companion, although she was demonstrative to her mother when they met.

It was in the tenth month of this idyl of the lonely man and the lonely child that Mrs. Root flurriedly entered the library of Chillingsworth, where Orth happened to be alone.

“Oh, sir,” she exclaimed, “I must go home. My daughter Grace writes me—she should have done it before—that the boys are not behaving as well as they should—she didn’t tell me, as I was having such a good time she just hated to worry me—Heaven knows I’ve had enough worry—but now I must go—I just couldn’t stay—boys are an awful responsibility—girls ain’t a circumstance to them, although mine are a handful sometimes.”

Orth had written about too many women to interrupt the flow. He let her talk until she paused to recuperate her forces. Then he said quietly:

“I am sorry this has come so suddenly, for it forces me to broach a subject at once which I would rather have postponed until the idea had taken possession of you by degrees

“I know what it is you want to say, sir,” she broke in, “and I’ve reproached myself that I haven’t warned you before, but I didn’t like to be the one to speak first. You want Blanche—of course, I couldn’t help seeing that; but I can’t let her go, sir, indeed, I can’t.

“Yes,” he said, firmly, “I want to adopt Blanche, and I hardly think you can refuse, for you must know how greatly it will be to her advantage. She is a wonderful child; you have never been blind to that; she should have every opportunity, not only of money, but of association. If I adopt her legally, I shall, of course, make her my heir, and—there is no reason why she should not grow up as great a lady as any in England.”

The poor woman turned white, and burst into tears. “I’ve sat up nights and nights, struggling,” she said, when she could speak. “That, and missing her. I couldn’t stand in her light, and I let her stay. I know I oughtn’t to, now—I mean, stand in her light—but, sir, she is dearer than all the others put together.”

“T’hen live here in England—at least, for some years longer. I will gladly relieve your children of your support, and you can see Blanche as often as you choose.”

“I can’t do that, sir. After all, she is only one, and there are six others. I can’t

desert them. They all need me, if only to keep them together—three girls unmarried and out in the world, and three boys just a little inclined to be wild. There is another point, sir—I don't exactly know how to say it."

"Well?" asked Orth, kindly. This American woman thought him the ideal gentleman, although the mistress of the estate on which she visited called him a boor and a snob.

"It is—well—you must know—you can imagine—that her brothers and sisters just worship Blanche. They save their dimes to buy her everything she wants—or used to want. Heaven knows what will satisfy her now, although I can't see that she's one bit spoiled. But she's just like a religion to them; they're not much on church. I'll tell you, sir, what I couldn't say to any one else, not even to these relations who've been so kind to me—but there's wildness, just a streak, in all my children, and I believe, I know, it's Blanche that keeps them straight. My girls get bitter, sometimes; work all the week and little fun, not caring for common men and no chance to marry gentlemen; and sometimes they break out and talk dreadful; then, when they're over it, they say they'll live for Blanche—they've said it over and over, and they mean it. Every sacrifice they've made for her—and they've made many—has done them good. It isn't that Blanche ever says a word of the preachy sort, or has anything of the Sunday-school child about her, or even tries to smooth them down when they're excited. It's just herself. The only thing she ever does is sometimes to draw herself up and look scornful, and that nearly kills them. Little as she is, they're crazy about having her respect. I've grown superstitious about her. Until she came I used to get frightened, terribly, sometimes, and I believe she came for that. So—you see! I know Blanche is too fine for us and ought to have the best; but, then, they are to be considered, too. They have their rights, and they've got much more good than bad in them. I don't know! I don't know! It's kept me awake many nights."

Orth rose abruptly. "Perhaps you will take some further time to think it over," he said. "You can stay a few weeks longer—the matter cannot be so pressing as that."

The woman rose. "I've thought this," she said; "let Blanche decide. I believe she knows more than any of us. I believe that whichever way she decided would be right. I won't say anything to her, so you won't think I'm working on her feelings; and I can trust you. But she'll know."

"Why do you think that?" asked Orth, sharply. "There is nothing uncanny about the child. She is not yet seven years old. Why should you place such a responsibility upon her?"

“Do you think she’s like other children?”

“I know nothing of other children.”

“I do, sir. I’ve raised six. And I’ve seen hundreds of others. I never was one to be a fool about my own, but Blanche isn’t like any other child living—I’m certain of it.”

“What do you think?”

And the woman answered, according to her lights: “I think she’s an angel, and came to us because we needed her.”

“And I think she is Blanche Mortlake working out the last of her salvation,” thought the author; but he made no reply, and was alone in a moment.

It was several days before he spoke to Blanche, and then, one morning, when she was sitting on her mat on the lawn with the light full upon her, he told her abruptly that her mother must return home.

To his surprise, but unutterable delight, she burst into tears and flung herself into his arms.

“You need not leave me,” he said, when he could find his own voice. “You can stay here always and be my little girl. It all rests with you.”

“I can’t stay,” she sobbed. “I can’t!”

“And that is what made you so sad once or twice?” he asked, with a double eagerness.

She made no reply.

“Oh!” he said, passionately, “give me your confidence, Blanche. You are the only breathing thing that I love.”

“If I could I would,” she said. “But I don’t know—not quite.”

“How much do you know?”

But she sobbed again and would not answer. He dared not risk too much. After all, the physical barrier between the past and the present was very young.

“Well, well, then, we will talk about the other matter. I will not pretend to disguise the fact that your mother is distressed at the idea of parting from you, and thinks it would be as sad for your brothers and sisters, whom she says you influence for their good. Do you think that you do?”

“Yes.”

“How do you know this?”

“Do you know why you know everything?”

“No, my dear, and I have great respect for your instincts. But your sisters and brothers are now old enough to take care of themselves. They must be of poor stuff if they cannot live properly without the aid of a child. Moreover, they will

be marrying soon. That will also mean that your mother will have many little grandchildren to console her for your loss. I will be the one bereft, if you leave me. I am the only one who really needs you. I don't say I will go to the bad, as you may have very foolishly persuaded yourself your family will do without you, but I trust to your instincts to make you realize how unhappy, how inconsolable I shall be. I shall be the loneliest man on earth!"

She rubbed her face deeper into his flannels, and tightened her embrace. "Can't you come, too?" she asked.

"No; you must live with me wholly or not at all. Your people are not my people, their ways are not my ways. We should not get along. And if you lived with me over there you might as well stay here, for your influence over them would be quite as removed. Moreover, if they are of the right stuff, the memory of you will be quite as potent for good as your actual presence."

"Not unless I died."

Again something within him trembled. "Do you believe you are going to die young?" he blurted out.

But she would not answer.

He entered the nursery abruptly the next day and found her packing her dolls. When she saw him, she sat down and began to weep hopelessly. He knew then that his fate was sealed. And when, a year later, he received her last little scrawl, he was almost glad that she went when she did.

THE CORPSE ON THE GRATING, by Hugh B. Cave

It was ten o'clock on the morning of December 5 when M. S. and I left the study of Professor Daimler. You are perhaps acquainted with M. S. His name appears constantly in the pages of the Illustrated News, in conjunction with some very technical article on psycho-analysis or with some extensive study of the human brain and its functions. He is a psycho-fanatic, more or less, and has spent an entire lifetime of some seventy-odd years in pulling apart human skulls for the purpose of investigation. Lovely pursuit!

For some twenty years I have mocked him, in a friendly, half-hearted fashion. I am a medical man, and my own profession is one that does not sympathize with radicals.

As for Professor Daimler, the third member of our triangle—perhaps, if I take a moment to outline the events of that evening, the Professor's part in what follows will be less obscure. We had called on him, M. S. and I, at his urgent request. His rooms were in a narrow, unlighted street just off the square, and Daimler himself opened the door to us. A tall, loosely built chap he was, standing in the doorway like a motionless ape, arms half extended.

"I've summoned you, gentlemen," he said quietly, "because you two, of all London, are the only persons who know the nature of my recent experiments. I should like to acquaint you with the results!"

He led the way to his study, then kicked the door shut with his foot, seizing my arm as he did so. Quietly he dragged me to the table that stood against the farther wall. In the same even, unemotional tone of a man completely sure of himself, he commanded me to inspect it.

For a moment, in the semi-gloom of the room, I saw nothing. At length, however, the contents of the table revealed themselves, and I distinguished a motley collection of test tubes, each filled with some fluid. The tubes were attached to each other by some ingenious arrangement of thistles, and at the end of the table, where a chance blow could not brush it aside, lay a tiny phial of the resulting serum. From the appearance of the table, Daimler had evidently drawn a certain amount of gas from each of the smaller tubes, distilling them through acid into the minute phial at the end. Yet even now, as I stared down at the fantastic paraphernalia before me, I could sense no conclusive reason for its existence.

I turned to the Professor with a quiet stare of bewilderment. He smiled.

“The experiment is over,” he said. “As to its conclusion, you, Dale, as a medical man, will be sceptical. And you”—turning to M. S.—“as a scientist you will be amazed. I, being neither physician nor scientist, am merely filled with wonder!”

He stepped to a long, square table-like structure in the center of the room. Standing over it, he glanced quizzically at M. S., then at me.

“For a period of two weeks,” he went on, “I have kept, on the table here, the body of a man who has been dead more than a month. I have tried, gentlemen, with acid combinations of my own origination, to bring that body back to life. And...I have—failed!

“But,” he added quickly, noting the smile that crept across my face, “that failure was in itself worth more than the average scientist’s greatest achievement! You know, Dale, that heat, if a man is not truly dead, will sometimes resurrect him. In a case of epilepsy, for instance, victims have been pronounced dead only to return to life—sometimes in the grave.

“I say ‘if a man be not truly dead.’ But what if that man *is* truly dead? Does the cure alter itself in any manner? The motor of your car dies—do you bury it? You do not; you locate the faulty part, correct it, and infuse new life. And so, gentlemen, after remedying the ruptured heart of this dead man, by operation, I proceeded to bring him back to life.

“I used heat. Terrific heat will sometimes originate a spark of new life in something long dead. Gentlemen, on the fourth day of my tests, following a continued application of electric and acid heat, the patient—”

Daimler leaned over the table and took up a cigarette. Lighting it, he dropped the match and resumed his monologue.

“The patient turned suddenly over and drew his arm weakly across his eyes. I rushed to his side. When I reached him, the body was once again stiff and lifeless. And—it has remained so.”

The Professor stared at us quietly, waiting for comment. I answered him, as carelessly as I could, with a shrug of my shoulders.

“Professor, have you ever played with the dead body of a frog?” I said softly. He shook his head silently.

“You would find it interesting sport,” I told him. “Take a common dry cell battery with enough voltage to render a sharp shock. Then apply your wires to various parts of the frog’s anatomy. If you are lucky, and strike the right set of muscles, you will have the pleasure of seeing a dead frog leap suddenly forward. Understand, he will not regain life. You have merely released his dead muscles

by shock, and sent him bolting.”

The Professor did not reply. I could feel his eyes on me, and had I turned, I should probably have found M. S. glaring at me in honest hate. These men were students of mesmerism, of spiritualism, and my commonplace contradiction was not over welcome.

“You are cynical, Dale,” said M. S. coldly, “because you do not understand!”

“Understand? I am a doctor—not a ghost!”

But M. S. had turned eagerly to the Professor.

“Where is this body—this experiment?” he demanded.

Daimler shook his head. Evidently he had acknowledged failure and did not intend to drag his dead man before our eyes, unless he could bring that man forth alive, upright, and ready to join our conversation!

“I’ve put it away,” he said distantly. “There is nothing more to be done, now that our reverend doctor has insisted in making a matter of fact thing out of our experiment. You understand, I had not intended to go in for wholesale resurrection, even if I had met with success. It was my belief that a dead body, like a dead piece of mechanism, can be brought to life again, provided we are intelligent enough to discover the secret. And by God, it is *still* my belief!”

That was the situation, then, when M. S. and I paced slowly back along the narrow street that contained the Professor’s dwelling-place. My companion was strangely silent. More than once I felt his eyes upon me in an uncomfortable stare, yet he said nothing. Nothing, that is, until I had opened the conversation with some casual remark about the lunacy of the man we had just left.

“You are wrong in mocking him, Dale,” M. S. replied bitterly. “Daimler is a man of science. He is no child, experimenting with a toy; he is a grown man who has the courage to believe in his powers. One of these days....”

He had intended to say that some day I should respect the Professor’s efforts. One of these days! The interval of time was far shorter than anything so indefinite. The first event, with its succeeding series of horrors, came within the next three minutes.

We had reached a more deserted section of the square, a black, uninhabited street extending like a shadowed band of darkness between gaunt, high walls. I had noticed for some time that the stone structure beside us seemed to be unbroken by door or window—that it appeared to be a single gigantic building, black and forbidding. I mentioned the fact to M. S.

“The warehouse,” he said simply. “A lonely, God-forsaken place. We shall

probably see the flicker of the watchman's light in one of the upper chinks."

At his words, I glanced up. True enough, the higher part of the grim structure was punctured by narrow, barred openings. Safety vaults, probably. But the light, unless its tiny gleam was somewhere in the inner recesses of the warehouse, was dead. The great building was like an immense burial vault, a tomb—silent and lifeless.

We had reached the most forbidding section of the narrow street, where a single arch-lamp overhead cast a halo of ghastly yellow light over the pavement. At the very rim of the circle of illumination, where the shadows were deeper and more silent, I could make out the black mouldings of a heavy iron grating. The bars of metal were designed, I believe, to seal the side entrance of the great warehouse from night marauders. It was bolted in place and secured with a set of immense chains, immovable.

This much I saw as my intent gaze swept the wall before me. This huge tomb of silence held for me a peculiar fascination, and as I paced along beside my gloomy companion, I stared directly ahead of me into the darkness of the street. I wish to God my eyes had been closed or blinded!

He was hanging on the grating. Hanging there, with white, twisted hands clutching the rigid bars of iron, straining to force them apart. His whole distorted body was forced against the barrier, like the form of a madman struggling to escape from his cage. His face—the image of it still haunts me whenever I see iron bars in the darkness of a passage—was the face of a man who has died from utter, stark horror. It was frozen in a silent shriek of agony, staring out at me with fiendish maliciousness. Lips twisted apart. White teeth gleaming in the light. Bloody eyes, with a horrible glare of colorless pigment. And—*dead*.

I believe M. S. saw him at the very instant I recoiled. I felt a sudden grip on my arm; and then, as an exclamation came harshly from my companion's lips, I was pulled forward roughly. I found myself staring straight into the dead eyes of that fearful thing before me, found myself standing rigid, motionless, before the corpse that hung within reach of my arm.

And then, through that overwhelming sense of the horrible, came the quiet voice of my comrade—the voice of a man who looks upon death as nothing more than an opportunity for research.

"The fellow has been frightened to death, Dale. Frightened most horribly. Note the expression of his mouth, the evident struggle to force these bars apart and escape. Something has driven fear to his soul, killed him."

I remember the words vaguely. When M. S. had finished speaking, I did not

reply. Not until he had stepped forward and bent over the distorted face of the thing before me, did I attempt to speak. When I did, my thoughts were a jargon.

“What, in God’s name,” I cried, “could have brought such horror to a strong man? What—”

“Loneliness, perhaps,” suggested M. S. with a smile. “The fellow is evidently the watchman. He is alone, in a huge, deserted pit of darkness, for hours at a time. His light is merely a ghostly ray of illumination, hardly enough to do more than increase the darkness. I have heard of such cases before.”

He shrugged his shoulders. Even as he spoke, I sensed the evasion in his words. When I replied, he hardly heard my answer, for he had suddenly stepped forward, where he could look directly into those fear twisted eyes.

“Dale,” he said at length, turning slowly to face me, “you ask for an explanation of this horror? There *is* an explanation. It is written with an almost fearful clearness on this fellow’s mind. Yet if I tell you, you will return to your old skepticism—your damnable habit of disbelief!”

I looked at him quietly. I had heard M. S. claim, at other times, that he could read the thoughts of a dead man by the mental image that lay on that man’s brain. I had laughed at him. Evidently, in the present moment, he recalled those laughs. Nevertheless, he faced me seriously.

“I can see two things, Dale,” he said deliberately. “One of them is a dark, narrow room—a room piled with indistinct boxes and crates, and with an open door bearing the black number 4167. And in that open doorway, coming forward with slow steps—alive, with arms extended and a frightful face of passion—is a decayed human form. A corpse, Dale. A man who has been dead for many days, and is now—*alive!*”

M. S. turned slowly and pointed with upraised hand to the corpse on the grating.

“That is why,” he said simply, “this fellow died from horror.”

His words died into emptiness. For a moment I stared at him. Then, in spite of our surroundings, in spite of the late hour, the loneliness of the street, the awful thing beside us, I laughed.

He turned upon me with a snarl. For the first time in my life I saw M. S. convulsed with rage. His old, lined face had suddenly become savage with intensity.

“You laugh at me, Dale,” he thundered. “By God, you make a mockery out of a science that I have spent more than my life in studying! You call yourself a medical man—and you are not fit to carry the name! I will wager you, man, that

your laughter is not backed by courage!”

I fell away from him. Had I stood within reach, I am sure he would have struck me. Struck me! And I have been nearer to M. S. for the past ten years than any man in London. And as I retreated from his temper, he reached forward to seize my arm. I could not help but feel impressed at his grim intentness.

“Look here, Dale,” he said bitterly, “I will wager you a hundred pounds that you will not spend the remainder of this night in the warehouse above you! I will wager a hundred pounds against your own courage that you will not back your laughter by going through what this fellow has gone through. That you will not prowl through the corridors of this great structure until you have found room 4167—and *remain in that room until dawn!*”

There was no choice. I glanced at the dead man, at the face of fear and the clutching, twisted hands, and a cold dread filled me. But to refuse my friend’s wager would have been to brand myself an empty coward. I had mocked him. Now, whatever the cost, I must stand ready to pay for that mockery.

“Room 4167?” I replied quietly, in a voice which I made every effort to control, lest he should discover the tremor in it. “Very well, I will do it!”

It was nearly midnight when I found myself alone, climbing a musty, winding ramp between the first and second floors of the deserted building. Not a sound, except the sharp intake of my breath and the dismal creak of the wooden stairs, echoed through that tomb of death. There was no light, not even the usual dim glow that is left to illuminate an unused corridor. Moreover, I had brought no means of light with me—nothing but a half empty box of safety matches which, by some unholy premonition, I had forced myself to save for some future moment. The stairs were black and difficult, and I mounted them slowly, groping with both hands along the rough wall.

I had left M. S. some few moments before. In his usual decisive manner he had helped me to climb the iron grating and lower myself to the sealed alley-way on the farther side. Then, leaving him without a word, for I was bitter against the triumphant tone of his parting words, I proceeded into the darkness, fumbling forward until I had discovered the open door in the lower part of the warehouse.

And then the ramp, winding crazily upward—upward—upward, seemingly without end. I was seeking blindly for that particular room which was to be my destination. Room 4167, with its high number, could hardly be on the lower floors, and so I had stumbled upward....

It was at the entrance of the second floor corridor that I struck the first of my desultory supply of matches, and by its light discovered a placard nailed to the

wall. The thing was yellow with age and hardly legible. In the drab light of the match I had difficulty in reading it—but, as far as I can remember, the notice went something like this:

WAREHOUSE RULES

No light shall be permitted in any room or corridor, as a prevention against fire.

No person shall be admitted to rooms or corridors unless accompanied by an employee.

A watchman shall be on the premises from 7 P.M. until 6 A.M. He shall make the round of the corridors every hour during that interval, at a quarter past the hour.

Rooms are located by their numbers: the first figure in the room number indicating its floor location.

I could read no further. The match in my fingers burned to a black thread and dropped. Then, with the burnt stump still in my hand, I groped through the darkness to the bottom of the second ramp.

Room 4167, then, was on the fourth floor—the topmost floor of the structure. I must confess that the knowledge did not bring any renewed burst of courage! The top floor! Three black stair-pits would lie between me and the safety of escape. There would be no escape! No human being in the throes of fear could hope to discover that tortured outlet, could hope to grope his way through Stygian gloom down a triple ramp of black stairs. And even though he succeeded in reaching the lower corridors, there was still a blind alley-way, sealed at the outer end by a high grating of iron bars....

Escape! The mockery of it caused me to stop suddenly in my ascent and stand rigid, my whole body trembling violently.

But outside, in the gloom of the street, M. S. was waiting, waiting with that fiendish glare of triumph that would brand me a man without courage. I could not return to face him, not though all the horrors of hell inhabited this gruesome place of mystery. And horrors must surely inhabit it, else how could one account for that fearful thing on the grating below? But I had been through horror before. I had seen a man, supposedly dead on the operating table, jerk suddenly to his feet and scream. I had seen a young girl, not long before, awake in the midst of an operation, with the knife already in her frail body. Surely, after those definite horrors, no *unknown* danger would send me cringing back to the man who was waiting so bitterly for me to return.

Those were the thoughts pregnant in my mind as I groped slowly, cautiously along the corridor of the upper floor, searching each closed door for the

indistinct number 4167. The place was like the center of a huge labyrinth, a spider-web of black, repelling passages, leading into some central chamber of utter silence and blackness. I went forward with dragging steps, fighting back the dread that gripped me as I went farther and farther from the outlet of escape. And then, after losing myself completely in the gloom, I threw aside all thoughts of return and pushed on with a careless, surface bravado, and laughed aloud.

So, at length, I reached that room of horror, secreted high in the deeper recesses of the deserted warehouse. The number—God grant I never see it again!—was scrawled in black chalk on the door—4167. I pushed the half-open barrier wide, and entered.

It was a small room, even as M. S. had forewarned me—or as the dead mind of that thing on the grate had forewarned M. S. The glow of my out-thrust match revealed a great stack of dusty boxes and crates, piled against the farther wall. Revealed, too, the black corridor beyond the entrance, and a small, upright table before me.

It was the table, and the stool beside it, that drew my attention and brought a muffled exclamation from my lips. The thing had been thrust out of its usual place, pushed aside as if some frenzied shape had lunged against it. I could make out its former position by the marks on the dusty floor at my feet. Now it was nearer to the center of the room, and had been wrenched sideways from its holdings. A shudder took hold of me as I looked at it. A living person, sitting on the stool before me, staring at the door, would have wrenched the table in just this manner in his frenzy to escape from the room!

The light of the match died, plunging me into a pit of gloom. I struck another and stepped closer to the table. And there, on the floor, I found two more things that brought fear to my soul. One of them was a heavy flash-lamp—a watchman's lamp—where it had evidently been dropped. Been dropped in flight! But what awful terror must have gripped the fellow to make him forsake his only means of escape through those black passages? And the second thing—a worn copy of a leather-bound book, flung open on the boards below the stool!

The flash-lamp, thank God! had not been shattered. I switched it on, directing its white circle of light over the room. This time, in the vivid glare, the room became even more unreal. Black walls, clumsy, distorted shadows on the wall, thrown by those huge piles of wooden boxes. Shadows that were like crouching men, groping toward me. And beyond, where the single door opened into a passage of Stygian darkness, that yawning entrance was thrown into hideous detail. Had any upright figure been standing there, the light would have made an

unholy phosphorescent specter out of it.

I summoned enough courage to cross the room and pull the door shut. There was no way of locking it. Had I been able to fasten it, I should surely have done so; but the room was evidently an unused chamber, filled with empty refuse. This was the reason, probably, why the watchman had made use of it as a retreat during the intervals between his rounds.

But I had no desire to ponder over the sordidness of my surroundings. I returned to my stool in silence, and stooping, picked up the fallen book from the floor. Carefully I placed the lamp on the table, where its light would shine on the open page. Then, turning the cover, I began to glance through the thing which the man before me had evidently been studying.

And before I had read two lines, the explanation of the whole horrible thing struck me. I stared dumbly down at the little book and laughed. Laughed harshly, so that the sound of my mad cackle echoed in a thousand ghastly reverberations through the dead corridors of the building.

It was a book of horror, of fantasy. A collection of weird, terrifying, supernatural tales with grotesque illustrations in funereal black and white. And the very line I had turned to, the line which had probably struck terror to that unlucky devil's soul, explained M. S.'s "decayed human form, standing in the doorway with arms extended and a frightful face of passion!" The description—the same description—lay before me, almost in my friend's words. Little wonder that the fellow on the grating below, after reading this orgy of horror, had suddenly gone mad with fright. Little wonder that the picture engraved on his dead mind was a picture of a corpse standing in the doorway of room 4167!

I glanced at that doorway and laughed. No doubt of it, it was that awful description in M. S.'s untempered language that had made me dread my surroundings, not the loneliness and silence of the corridors about me. Now, as I stared at the room, the closed door, the shadows on the wall, I could not repress a grin.

But the grin was not long in duration. A six-hour siege awaited me before I could hear the sound of human voice again—six hours of silence and gloom. I did not relish it. Thank God the fellow before me had had foresight enough to leave his book of fantasy for my amusement!

I turned to the beginning of the story. A lovely beginning it was, outlining in some detail how a certain Jack Fulton, English adventurer, had suddenly found himself imprisoned (by a mysterious black gang of monks, or something of the sort) in a forgotten cell at the monastery of El Toro. The cell, according to the

pages before me, was located in the “empty, haunted pits below the stone floors of the structure....” Lovely setting! And the brave Fulton had been secured firmly to a huge metal ring set in the farther wall, opposite the entrance.

I read the description twice. At the end of it I could not help but lift my head to stare at my own surroundings. Except for the location of the cell, I might have been in the same setting. The same darkness, same silence, same loneliness. Peculiar similarity!

And then: “Fulton lay quietly, without attempt to struggle. In the dark, the stillness of the vaults became unbearable, terrifying. Not a suggestion of sound, except the scraping of unseen rats—”

I dropped the book with a start. From the opposite end of the room in which I sat came a half inaudible scuffling noise—the sound of hidden rodents scrambling through the great pile of boxes. Imagination? I am not sure. At the moment, I would have sworn that the sound was a definite one, that I had heard it distinctly. Now, as I recount this tale of horror, I am not sure.

But I am sure of this: There was no smile on my lips as I picked up the book again with trembling fingers and continued.

“The sound died into silence. For an eternity, the prisoner lay rigid, staring at the open door of his cell. The opening was black, deserted, like the mouth of a deep tunnel, leading to hell. And then, suddenly, from the gloom beyond that opening, came an almost noiseless, padded footfall!”

This time there was no doubt of it. The book fell from my fingers, dropped to the floor with a clatter. Yet even through the sound of its falling, I heard that fearful sound—the shuffle of a living foot! I sat motionless, staring with bloodless face at the door of room 4167. And as I stared, the sound came again, and again—the *slow tread of dragging footsteps, approaching along the black corridor without!*

I got to my feet like an automaton, swaying heavily. Every drop of courage ebbed from my soul as I stood there, one hand clutching the table, waiting....

And then, with an effort, I moved forward. My hand was outstretched to grasp the wooden handle of the door. And—I did not have the courage. Like a cowed beast I crept back to my place and slumped down on the stool, my eyes still transfixed in a mute stare of terror.

I waited. For more than half an hour I waited, motionless. Not a sound stirred in the passage beyond that closed barrier. Not a suggestion of any living presence came to me. Then, leaning back against the wall with a harsh laugh, I wiped away the cold moisture that had trickled over my forehead into my eyes.

It was another five minutes before I picked up the book again. You call me a fool for continuing it? A fool? I tell you, even a story of horror is more comfort than a room of grotesque shadows and silence. Even a printed page is better than grim reality!

And so I read on. The story was one of suspense, madness. For the next two pages I read a cunning description of the prisoner's mental reaction. Strangely enough, it conformed precisely with my own.

"Fulton's head had fallen to his chest," the script read. "For an endless while he did not stir, did not dare to lift his eyes. And then, after more than an hour of silent agony and suspense, the boy's head came up mechanically. Came up—and suddenly jerked rigid. A horrible scream burst from his dry lips as he stared—stared like a dead man—at the black entrance to his cell. There, standing without motion in the opening, stood a shrouded figure of death. Empty eyes, glaring with awful hate, bored into his own. Great arms, bony and rotten, extended toward him. Decayed flesh—"

I read no more. Even as I lunged to my feet, with that mad book still gripped in my hand, I heard the door of my room grind open. I screamed, screamed in utter horror at the thing I saw there. Dead? Good God, I do not know. It was a corpse, a dead human body, standing before me like some propped-up thing from the grave. A face half eaten away, terrible in its leering grin. Twisted mouth, with only a suggestion of lips, curled back over broken teeth. Hair—writhing, distorted—like a mass of moving, bloody coils. And its arms, ghastly white, bloodless, were extended toward me, with open, clutching hands.

It was alive! Alive! Even while I stood there, crouching against the wall, it stepped forward toward me. I saw a heavy shudder pass over it, and the sound of its scraping feet burned its way into my soul. And then, with its second step, the fearful thing stumbled to its knees. The white, gleaming arms, thrown into streaks of living fire by the light of my lamp, flung violently upwards, twisting toward the ceiling. I saw the grin change to an expression of agony, of torment. And then the thing crashed upon me—dead.

With a great cry of fear I stumbled to the door. I groped out of that room of horror, stumbled along the corridor. No light. I left it behind, on the table, to throw a circle of white glare over the decayed, living-dead intruder who had driven me mad.

My return down those winding ramps to the lower floor was a nightmare of fear. I remember that I stumbled, that I plunged through the darkness like a man gone mad. I had no thought of caution, no thought of anything except escape.

And then the lower door, and the alley of gloom. I reached the grating, flung myself upon it and pressed my face against the bars in a futile effort to escape. The same—as the fear-tortured man—who had—come before—me.

I felt strong hands lifting me up. A dash of cool air, and then the refreshing patter of falling rain.

It was the afternoon of the following day, December 6, when M. S. sat across the table from me in my own study. I had made a rather hesitant attempt to tell him, without dramatics and without dwelling on my own lack of courage, of the events of the previous night.

“You deserved it, Dale,” he said quietly. “You are a medical man, nothing more, and yet you mock the beliefs of a scientist as great as Daimler. I wonder—do you still mock the Professor’s beliefs?”

“That he can bring a dead man to life?” I smiled, a bit doubtfully.

“I will tell you something, Dale,” said M. S. deliberately. He was leaning across the table, staring at me. “The Professor made only one mistake in his great experiment. He did not wait long enough for the effect of his strange acids to work. He acknowledged failure too soon, and got rid of the body.” He paused.

“When the Professor stored his patient away, Dale,” he said quietly, “he stored it in room 4170, at the great warehouse. If you are acquainted with the place, you will know that room 4170 is directly across the corridor from 4167.”

THE MAN WHO COLLECTED KNIVES, by John Gregory Betancourt

“Jason? Are you listening to me?”

He stood at the kitchen counter chopping vegetables that last fateful day, *snick-snick-snick* the butcher knife through onions and green peppers, half dreaming himself away in a bubble of time.

Escape. Yes, escape.

He felt the room darkening, dropping out of focus. He longed for his freedom.

And the glittery sharp blade of the knife did it. Like always when he immersed himself in his work, when he held a knife of some kind, its edge pulled him like a moth to a flame.

He drew a deep breath and abruptly stood someplace else, someplace far away. A hot, dry wind blew in his face. A sky black with clouds glowered overhead. Jagged rocks crunched underfoot as he took a hesitant step.

“I’m here,” the creature said.

Jason turned, smiling for the first time.

“Jason?” a distant voice cried. *“You bastard, listen to me! Jason!”*

It had started innocently enough, in the summer of 1971, when Jason’s father gave him a Boy Scout knife for his thirteenth birthday. He had stared at it hesitantly before pulling it from its box. Mother never had let him have one before—they were too dangerous, she said.

“You’re almost a man, and a man needs a good knife,” Pa had told him, grinning and winking. “Treat her well and she’ll last a lifetime.”

“She?” he asked slowly.

“Every knife has a personality. Take this one here.”

Pa unfolded the parts one at a time—how could there be so many?—two bright steel blades, an awl, a bottle opener, and even a magnifying glass. Perhaps it was the magnifying glass that did it, pushed him from mere childish interest to awed fascination.

“This knife,” Pa went on, “can do just about anything, from starting a fire to skinning a skunk.”

“Pa!”

“It’s true!” And Pa had laughed and folded all the parts away and pressed it back into his hand. “Just don’t tell your mother I gave it to you, okay? It’ll be our secret, man to man.”

“Cool,” he said solemnly.

Throughout June and July and August he carried it always, carving his initials into every tree he met until a ten-block radius of their house bore his mark. But the knife didn’t last a lifetime; it didn’t last the summer before it fell to pieces, the parts inside worn out from the countless times he’d opened and closed them.

Then Jason started saving his allowance for real hunting knives, not kids’ toys like the one his father had given him. He bought his first real Bowie knife that October, and the strong steel blade fascinated him—certainly better at carving wood than his scout knife had been.

A few months later, he found a set of meat cleavers on sale at Walmart, an impulse buy that left him broke for a month. That Christmas he found his grandfather’s old army sword in the attic and took it to hang on his bedroom wall.

His mania grew through high school. Ginsu knives from television ads. Bayonettes from flea markets. Dirks and daggers and cutlasses and epees and scythes and Japanese throwing stars—

When he graduated, his parents bundled him off to the far-distant University of Pennsylvania, hoping a change of friends and environment might broaden his interests. Instead, it served to focus them. The college fencing team found him an eager student. History courses provided information on ancient arms he might never have encountered otherwise.

He also met Joanne Bleiler there. She had like interests in history (though it was politics that drew her), and they found themselves paired in a little study group that led to a romance that led to marriage in their senior year.

But their interests were perhaps a bit too far apart. While Joanne joined a law firm as a clerk, pushing, always pushing, he found himself left behind. Alone, most evenings, with nothing but his collection of knives.

Then the creature came to him. Small and gray and vaguely batlike, with silvery eyes and needle-sharp teeth, it seemed disturbingly familiar. Perhaps it had always been there, he thought, just waiting to be heard. Or perhaps his desperate, lonely need brought it to him.

Whatever, the creature came whispering soft words, telling him how bright and beautiful his blades were (why did Joanne never see that?), telling him everything he wanted to hear.

He listened. Perhaps that was his greatest mistake.

And as Joanne grew more shrill and insistent, he fled to the creature for comfort and understanding. It always knew what to say. It always made him feel

good.

Now, in their little apartment, as Jason chopped vegetables for dinner and his mind floated on some other plane talking to a thing which could not possibly exist but somehow did, his wife's voice broke through the perfection of the moment. It felt like fingernails scratching on slate.

"Jason!"

He sighed. He blinked. The alien landscape faded. The creature with the eyes like steel faded, too.

"Yes?" he said, looking at her for the first time that night.

"At last." She struck her classic Angry Woman pose: hands on hips, feet set, neck tense. "Sometimes," she said, "I wonder if you're all here, Jason. And sometimes I know you're not. What do you think this is?" She held out her hand. In it, crumpled but still recognizable, lay his paycheck.

"Money, dear," he said. He went back to chopping. "We've gone over this before."

"Only twenty-two dollars! Where's the rest?"

"I took it in merchandise. Dueling knives, a matched set. They're the best I've ever seen, with ivory hilts and scrimshaw on the—"

"How could you?" she cried. She waved one hand at the racks of cutlery over the cabinets, at the knives under the counters, at the spray of axes mounted on the wall, at the guillotine in the corner. The guillotine was his prize. He'd built himself, and the blade (he had a letter of provenance saying so) had actually snicked off several aristocratic heads in those wondrous days of the *La Revolution*.

"Enough is enough!" she cried.

"It makes sense," he insisted. "Weapons hold their value. They're an excellent investment."

"Try pearls," Joanne said bitterly. She turned and stalked from the room. A second later, Jason heard the front door slam.

He winced. And turned back to his knives. And in a moment stood on that barren plain with his only friend.

When Joanne's father, a prominent local lawyer, filed the divorce papers two weeks later, Jason felt the loss more keenly than he wanted to admit. His wife's leaving left a hole like a missing tooth, and as he probed the edges he felt a dull unfocussed pain. Realizing she wasn't coming back, he cried himself to sleep for the first time in his life.

The creature came in a dream to comfort him. “Relax,” it said. “You don’t need her. Now your apartment has more room for weapons.”

Giggling, it told him where to go, what to buy. He sat up and began taking mental notes, distracted for the moment from his grief.

A bankrupt jewelry store sold him display cases. The Velvet Handcuff Novelty Shoppe provided padded hooks for his walls and ceilings. Under the creature’s guidance, he set up a private museum. Sabers filled one wall of the living room, axes another, Swiss army knives a third. In his bedroom, greatswords hung over the bed, blades polished until they shone like mirrors. He lay there naked, late one night, with the lights on, and just stared at the reflections.

“So beautiful,” the creature told him, “so beautiful.”

He smiled to himself. And the creature told him he was happy. But still he felt the hole in his life where Joanne had been.

The jump from collecting to using those blades came not long after that. He’d worked late at the antique shop cataloguing a new shipment from Canada, and as part of his commission he took a pair of matched dueling knives, both with intricately worked ivory handles. By the time he finished for the evening, he found midnight had come and gone.

He might have made it home all right if it hadn’t been drizzling. Because of the cold and the wet, the streets lay deserted, and the night had an eerie quality. Jason stuck the knives in his overcoat’s pocket and huddled under his umbrella as he trudged homeward.

He started down the subway steps, same as always, same as he’d done a thousand times before on a thousand nights just like this one. But then footsteps echoed behind him. The lightbulb overhead suddenly crunched and went out, little bits of hot glass raining down in the darkness.

Run! something inside him cried, and he dropped his umbrella and fled in terror down the steps. *Mugger wolf pack—*

Time seemed to stretch. Outside, beyond him, thunder rumbled, lightning flickered. He glanced over his shoulder, saw a black kid of maybe fifteen laughing hysterically, his hair slick with water, his eyes wild. Then it was dark again and Jason slipped and fell, rolling down the last few steps, feeling nothing in the rush of the moment but certain somewhere inside that he hurt.

“Watcha got, man?” The kid stood over him—how had he moved so fast?—and started pawing Jason’s pockets.

Jason grabbed for his billfold, but instead came up with one of the knives. How

it got in his hand, he didn't know. The whole scene was moving too fast for him to follow, too fast for him to comprehend.

"Now!" the creature cried.

Without thinking, he stabbed up, into the black kid's belly. The blade slit cloth and skin and muscle with ease.

The kid stopped laughing. For a horrible second they just stared at each other in a flash of lightning, both surprised, both too shocked to move. Then the kid began to scream, like a hurt animal, like nothing Jason had ever heard before.

"Excellent," the creature whispered.

Jason surged to his feet and ran. A train was just pulling up when he reached the platform, and he staggered into it. An empty car, thank God.

A whistle blew. The doors hissed shut, and the train lurched forward. After a minute, Jason realized he still held the knife.

He stared at it in amazement for a few seconds, then quickly stuck it back into his pocket. Shuddering helplessly, he pressed his eyes shut and tried not to throw up. The smell of blood, the kid's blood, hung on his clothes like a cloying perfume. He gave a sob.

He didn't remember walking home or going to bed. When he woke the next morning, he still had his coat on, and the knife, its blade stained a muddy red-brown, lay in his pocket.

At first he threw it away. But the creature murmured incessantly about what a prize it was, what a *trophy*, completely unique in his collection. He covered his ears and still the voice nagged him, prodded him, whispering, whispering, whispering.

Finally, screaming for silence, he rose and fished the knife from the trashcan. Held it in a trembling hand. Admired it, the curve of the blade, the way dried blood picked out the design in its ivory hilt (how had he missed it before?) in the shape of a dragon devouring its own tail.

After breakfast, he carved a new notch in its handle. The physical act of crediting his kill gave him a rush like nothing he had ever felt before, better than drugs, better than sex. He didn't need a letter to prove this blade had tasted blood!

And, deep inside, at the back of his consciousness, the creature urged him on.

The next night, Jason made sure he worked late at the store. Payday. Same as always, he took most of his salary in hard, cold steel, this time a cavalry saber, circa 1860. Engraved on its side were the letters CSA. Perhaps it had fought the

Civil War at some southern gentleman's side. Later perhaps it had carried civilization west, helping defeat the hordes of Indians who waited behind every rock and tree to ambush innocent settlers.

His boss had brought it back from Illinois along with a truckload of other antiques. It had been love at first sight. The worn leather grip fit his hand like a glove. It had been meant for him.

"Feels good, doesn't it?"

Nodding, he hefted the saber. Eight little nocks in the hilt; eight deaths attributed to its might. If only Joanne could see it, share it with him. Then life would be perfect.

Slowly, he tested the blade with his thumb. Dull as a butter knife. (*"Can't have that, not with such a fine weapon,"* the creature inside him said, and he agreed.) Such a waste otherwise.

Taking a whetstone from his desk, he began to work the saber's edge back toward razor sharpness. The touch of the steel made his hands tingle.

Finally finished, he wrapped brown paper around it, but loosely, so it could be drawn. Turning off the lights, he set the alarms and locked the doors. Then, trembling, he stood in the doorway for an instant, just watching his breath mist the air. This felt like a turning point in his life, as though he stood on the brink of something tremendous, something great and good and powerful, like knowing God or being the first man to walk on the moon. It felt like that, only more so, because it was happening to *him* and not some stranger on TV.

He could feel the sword's weight. When he eased his hand into the paper and touched its hilt, an almost electric tingle ran through his arm. *Ecstasy.*

"You can win her heart again!" the creature inside him cried. *"She'll see reason. She loves you."*

"But—"

"Trust me," it said. *"Do it! Doitdoitdoit!"*

He hugged the saber to his chest and cast his lot.

Two blocks' walk and he came to the subway. He fed the machine his token, then pushed through to stand impatiently waiting. Why did it seem to take forever tonight, when for the first time it truly mattered?

Finally a train came. He boarded with a couple of old men, then sat alone at the opposite end of the car with the saber across his knees. He watched graffitied walls flow away on either side of the car.

At last he reached the right stop. Joanne's parents' house lay two blocks away. She was staying with them till she got herself on her feet again—that's what her

father had told him the one time he'd gotten up the nerve to call. He'd just hung up, been too scared to ask to speak to her. But now, tonight, it would all be different.

He climbed the steps. Stood breathing the cool night air. Turned and walked slowly and purposefully toward the right house. In his mind, he rehearsed what he'd say to her. Something debonair, something romantic.

When he rang the bell, she answered. Her eyes widened when she saw him, and she started to close the door.

He blocked it with his foot.

"Joanne—"

"I have nothing to say to you," she said. "Go away or I'll call the police!"

"I—I'm sorry," he said. "I miss you. I just wanted you to know that. And..."

"What?" she said. She opened the door a bit.

"I'm sorry." Her eyes, he saw, brimmed with tears. She missed him! She still loved him! "May I come in?" he asked. "Please?"

She moved back. He entered. The TV blared from the living room, showing the end of some weepy romance. Hugh Grant skidded across a room, a bunch of red roses in his hand.

"Are your parents here?" he asked.

"They went to a play."

"Good," he said. "I wanted—I needed—to talk to you. Alone. I love you, Joanne."

She bit her lip and said nothing.

"Look," he said. "I brought you something."

He began to unwrap the cavalry saber. As soon as she saw it, she'd know what it meant to him, to them, and then she'd come to her senses and everything would be perfect. The saber would do it. The creature had promised.

But when she saw what he held, she flinched back.

"Get out!" she screamed. "I'm sick of you and your swords! *Get out!*"

He stepped forward, and she hit him. He blinked in surprise.

She hit him again and again, flailing wildly, shrieking and screaming

"*Now!*" the creature commanded.

And he swept the saber up, backhanded, cleanly severing her head. Blood sprayed across the far wall in a huge, silent arc. Her body slumped, twitching; her head bounced a dozen feet, then fetched up against the coffee-table and stopped, grinning back at him with an impossibly happy expression.

He hacked at her body again and again, stabbing, chopping, *killing* until blood

flowed like water underfoot and the creature inside him roared its approval.

And then her chest lay open and he saw her heart. It pulsed briefly, then lay still.

“No,” he whispered. What had he done? He shuddered. “*No!*”

He knelt and hugged her body close. Her heart came out in his hands, and he cradled it to his face, softly whispering of his love.