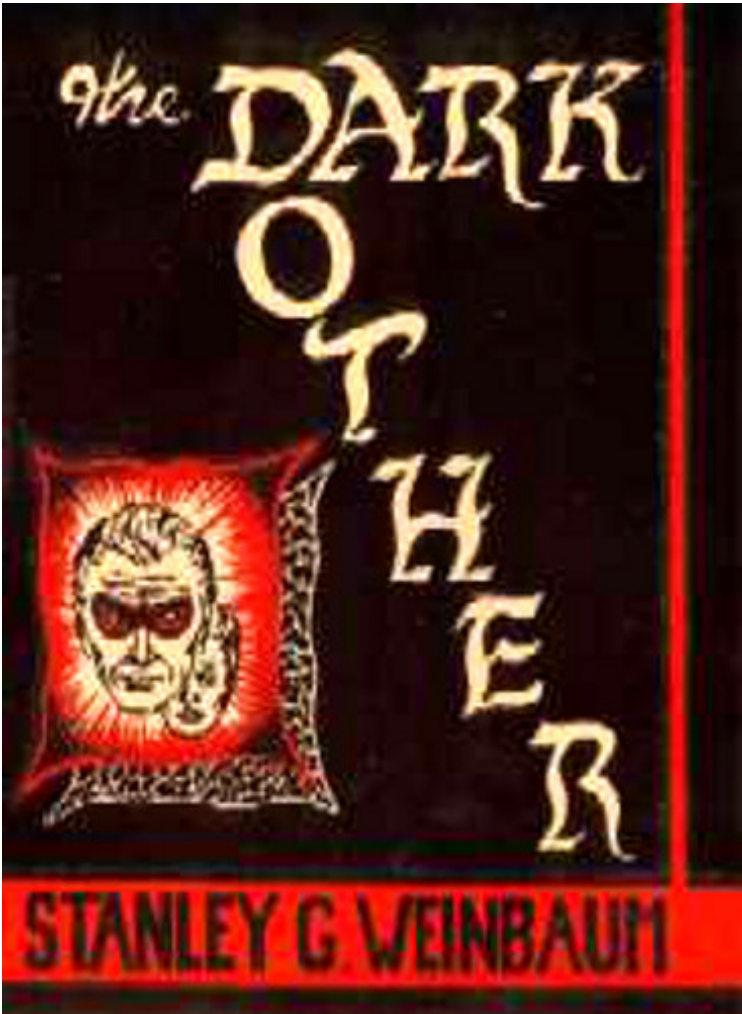


# The Dark Other

Weinbaum, Stanley G. (Stanley Grauman), 1902-1935



By Stanley G. Weinbaum

*Fantasy Publishing Co., Inc.*  
LOS ANGELES 1950

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*Other Books by Stanley G. Weinbaum*

DAWN OF FLAME  
THE NEW ADAM  
THE BLACK FLAME  
A MARTIAN ODYSSEY

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# The Dark Other

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## 1 Pure Horror

"That isn't what I mean," said Nicholas Devine, turning his eyes on his companion. "I mean pure horror in the sense of horror detached from experience, apart from reality. Not just a formless fear, which implies either fear of something that *might* happen, or fear of unknown dangers. Do you see what I mean?"

"Of course," said Pat, letting her eyes wander over the black expanse of night-dark Lake Michigan. "Certainly I see what you mean but I don't quite understand how you'd do it. It sounds—well, difficult."

She gazed at his lean profile, clear-cut against the distant light. He had turned, staring thoughtfully over the lake, idly fingering the levers on the steering wheel before him. The girl wondered a little at her feeling of contentment; she, Patricia Lane, satisfied to spend an evening in nothing more exciting than conversation! And they must have parked here a full two hours now. There was something about Nick—she didn't understand exactly what; sensitivity, charm, personality. Those were meaningless cliches, handles to hold the unexplainable nuances of character.

"It is difficult," resumed Nick. "Baudelaire tried it, Poe tried it. And in painting, Hogarth, Goya, Dore. Poe came

closest, I think; he caught the essence of horror in an occasional poem or story. Don't you think so?"

"I don't know," said Pat. "I've forgotten most of my Poe."

"Remember that story of his—"The Black Cat'?"

"Dimly. The man murdered his wife."

"Yes. That isn't the part I mean. I mean the cat itself—the second cat. You know a cat, used rightly, can be a symbol of horror."

"Indeed yes!" The girl shuddered. "I don't like the treacherous beasts!"

"And this cat of Poe's," continued Nick, warming to his subject. "Just think of it—in the first place, it's black; element of horror. Then, it's gigantic, unnaturally, abnormally large. And then it's not all black—that would be inartistically perfect—but has a formless white mark on its breast, a mark that little by little assumes a fantastic form—do you remember what?"

"No."

"The form of a gallows!"

"Oh!" said the girl. "Ugh!"

"And then—climax of genius—the eyes! Blind in one eye, the other a baleful yellow orb! Do you feel it? A black cat, an enormous black cat marked with a gallows, and lacking one eye, to make the other even more terrible! Literary tricks, of course, but they work, and *that's* genius! Isn't it?"

"Genius! Yes, if you call it that. The perverse genius of the Devil!"

"That's what I want to write—what I will write some day." He watched the play of lights on the restless surface of the waters. "Pure horror, the epitome of the horrible. It could be written, but it hasn't been yet; not even by Poe."

"That little analysis of yours was bad enough, Nick! Why should you want to improve on his treatment of the theme?"

"Because I like to write, and because I'm interested in the horrible. Two good reasons."

"Two excuses, you mean. Of course, even if you'd succeed, you couldn't force anyone to read it."

"If I succeed, there'd be no need to force people. Success would mean that the thing would be great literature, and even today, in these times, there are still people to read that. And besides—" He paused.

"Besides what?"

"Everybody's interested in the horrible. Even you are, whether or not you deny it."

"I certainly do deny it!"

"But you are, Pat. It's natural to be."

"It isn't!"

"Then what is?"

"Interest in people, and life, and gay times, and pretty things, and—and one's self and one's own feelings. And the feelings of the people one loves."

"Yes. It comes to exactly the point I've been stressing. People are sordid, life is hopeless, gay times are stupid, beauty is sensual, one's own feelings are selfish. And love is carnal. That's the array of horrors that holds your interest!"

The girl laughed in exasperation. "Nick, you could out-argue your name-sake, the Devil himself! Do you really believe that indictment of the normal viewpoint?"

"I do—often!"

"Now?"

"Now," he said, turning his gaze on Pat, "I have no feeling of it at all. Now, right now, I don't believe it."

"Why not?" she queried, smiling ingenuously at him.

"You, obviously."

"Gracious! I had no idea my logic was as convincing as that."

"Your logic isn't. The rest of you is."

"That sounds like a compliment," observed Pat. "If it is," she continued in a bantering tone, "it's the only one I can recall obtaining from you."

"That's because I seldom call attention to the obvious."

"And that's another," laughed the girl. "I'll have to mark this date in red on my calendar. It's entirely unique in our—let's see—nearly a month's acquaintance."

"Is it really so short a time? I know you so well that it must have taken years. Every detail!" He closed his eyes. "Hair like black silk, and oddly dark blue eyes—if I were writing a poem at the moment, I'd call them violet. Tiny lips, the sort the Elizabethan called bee-stung. Straight nose, and a figure that is a sort of vest-pocket copy of Diana. Right?" He opened his eyes.

"Nice, but exaggerated. And even if you were correct, that isn't Pat Lane, the real Pat Lane. A camera could do better on a tenth of a second's acquaintance!"

"Check!" He closed his eyes again. "Personality, piquant. Character, loyal, naturally happy, intelligent, but not serious. An intellectual butterfly; a dilettante. Poised, cool, self-possessed, yet inherently affectionate. A being untouched by reality, as yet, living in Chicago and in a make-believe world at the same time." He paused, "How old are you, Pat?"

"Twenty-two. Why?"

"I wondered how long one could manage to stay in the world of make-believe. I'm twenty-six, and I'm long exiled."

"I don't think you know what you mean by a make-believe world. I'm sure I don't."

"Of course you don't. You can't know and still remain there. It's like being happy; once you realize it, it's no longer perfect."

"Then don't explain!"

"Wouldn't make any difference if I did, Pat. It's a queer world, like the Sardoodledom of Sardou and the afternoon-tea school of playwrights. All stage-settings and pretense, but it looks real while you're watching, especially if you're one of the characters."

The girl laughed. "You're a deliciously solemn sort, Nick. How would you like to hear my analysis of you?"

"I wouldn't!"

"You inflicted yours on me, and I'm entitled to revenge. And so—you're intelligent, lazy, dreamy, and with a fine perception of artistic values. You're very alert to impressions of the senses—I mean you're sensuous without being sensual. You're delightfully serious without being somber, except sometimes. Sometimes I feel a hint, just a thrilling hint, in your character, of something dangerously darker—"

"Don't!" said Nick sharply.

Pat shot him a quick glance. "And you're frightened to death of falling in love," she concluded imperturbably.

"Oh! Do you think so?"

"I do."

"Then you're wrong! I can't be afraid of it, since I've known for the better part of a month that I've been in love."

"With me," said the girl.

"Yes, with you!"

"Well!" said Pat. "It never before took me a month to extract that admission from a man. Is twenty-two getting old?"

"You're a tantalizing imp!"

"And so?" She pursed her lips, assuming an air of disappointment. "What am I to do about it—scream for help? You haven't given me anything to scream about."

The kiss, Pat admitted to herself, was quite satisfactory. She yielded herself to the pleasure of it; it was decidedly the best kiss she had, in her somewhat limited experience, encountered. She pushed herself away finally, with a little gasp, gazing bright-eyed at her companion. He was staring down at her with serious eyes; there was a tense twist to his mouth, and a curiously unexpected attitude of unhappiness.

"Nick!" she murmured. "Was it as bad as all that?"

"Bad! Pat, does it mean you—care for me? A little, anyway?"

"A little," she admitted. "Maybe more. Is that what makes you look so forlorn?"

He drew her closer to him. "How could I look forlorn, Honey, when something like this has happened to me? That was just my way of looking happy."

She nestled as closely as the steering wheel permitted, drawing his arm about her shoulders. "I hope you mean that, Nick."

"Then *you* mean it? You really do?"

"I really do."

"I'm glad," he said huskily. The girl thought she detected a strange dubious note in his voice. She glanced at his face; his eyes were gazing into the dim remoteness of the night horizon.

"Nick," she said, "why were you so—well, so reluctant about admitting this? You must have known I—like you. I showed you that deliberately in so many ways."

"I—I wasn't quite sure."

"You were! That isn't it, Nick. I had to practically browbeat you into confessing you cared for me. Why?"

He stepped on the starter; the motor ground into sudden life. The car backed into the road, turning toward Chicago, that glared like a false dawn in the southern sky.

"I hope you never find out," he said.

---

## 2

### Science of Mind

"She's out," said Pat as the massive form of Dr. Carl Horker loomed in the doorway. "Your treatments must be successful; Mother's out playing bridge."

The Doctor gave his deep, rumbling chuckle. "So much the better, Pat. I don't feel professional anyway." He moved into

the living room, depositing his bulk on a groaning davenport. "And how's yourself?"

"Too well to be a patient of yours," retorted the girl. "Psychiatry! The new religion! Just between friends, it's all applesauce, isn't it?"

"If I weren't trying to act in place of your father, I'd resent that, young lady," said the Doctor placidly. "Psychiatry is a definite science, and a pretty important one. Applied psychology, the science of the human mind."

"If said mind exists," added the girl, swinging her slim legs over the arm of a chair.

"Correct," agreed the Doctor. "In my practice I find occasional evidence that it does. Or did; your generation seems to have found substitutes."

"Which appears to work just as well!" laughed Pat. "All our troubles are more or less inherited from your generation."

"Touche!" admitted Dr. Horker. "But my generation also bequeathed you some solid values which you don't know how to use."

"They've been weighed and found wanting," said Pat airily. "We're busy replacing them with our own values."

"Which are certainly no better."

"Maybe not, Doc, but at least they're ours."

"Yours and Tom Paine's. I can't see that you young moderns have brought any new ideas to the social scheme."

"New or not, we're the first ones to give 'em a try-out. Your crowd took it out in talk."

"That's an insult," observed the Doctor cheerfully. "If I weren't acting *in loco parentis*—"

"I know! You'd give me a few licks in the spot popularly supposed to do the most good! Well, that's part of a parent's privilege, isn't it?"

"You've grown beyond the spanking age, my dear. Physically, if not mentally—though I don't say the process would hurt me as much as you. I'd doubtless enjoy it."

"Then you might try sending me to bed without my dinner," the girl laughed.

"That's a doctor's prerogative, Pat. I've even done that to your Mother."

"In other words, you're a complete flop as a parent. All the responsibilities, and none of the privileges."

"That expresses it."

"Well, you elected yourself, Doc. It's not my fault you happened to live next door."

"No. It's my misfortune."

"And I notice," remarked Pat wickedly, "that you're not too thoroughly *in loco* to neglect sending Mother a bill for services rendered!"

"My dear girl, that's part of the treatment!"

"So? And how?"

"I furnish a bill just steep enough to keep your mother from indulging too frequently in medical services. Without that little practical check on her inclinations, she'd be a confirmed neurotic. One of those sweet, resigned, professional invalids, you know."

"Then why not send her a bill tall enough to cure her altogether?"

"She might change to psychoanalysis or New Thought," chuckled the Doctor. "Besides, your father wanted me to look after her, and besides that, I like having the run of the house."

"Well, I'm sure I don't mind," observed Pat. "We've a dog and a canary bird, too."

"You're in fine fettle this afternoon!" laughed her companion. "Must've been a successful date last night."

"It was." Her eyes turned suddenly dreamy.

"You're in love again, Pat!" he accused.

"Again? Why the 'again'?"

"Well, there was Billy, and that Paul—"

"Oh, those!" Her tone was contemptuous. "Merely passing fancies, Doc. Just whims, dreams of the moment—in other words, puppy love."

"And this? I suppose this is different—a grand passion?"

"I don't know," she said, frowning abruptly. "He's nice, but—odd. Attractive as—well, as the devil."

"Odd? How?"

"Oh, he's one of those minds you think we moderns lack."

"Intellectual, eh? New variety for you; out of the usual run of your dancing collegiates. I've often suspected that you picked your swains by the length and lowness of their cars."

"Maybe I did. That was one of the chief differences between them."

"How'd you meet this mental paragon?"

"Billy Fields dragged him around to one of those literary evenings he affects—where they read Oscar Wilde and Eugene O'Neil aloud. Bill met him at the library."

"And he out-shone all the local lights, I perceive."

"He surely did!" retorted Pat. "And he hardly said a word the whole evening."

"He wouldn't have to, if they're all like Billy! What's this prodigy's specialty?"

"He writes. I think—laugh if you want to!—I think perhaps he's a genius."

"Well," said Doctor Horker, "even that's possible. It's been known to occur, but rarely, to my knowledge, in your generation."

"Oh, we're just dimmed by the glare of brilliance from yours." She swung her legs to the floor, facing the Doctor. "Do you psychiatrists actually *know* anything about love?" she queried.

"We're supposed to."

"What is it, then?"

"Just a device of Nature's for perpetuating the species. Some organisms manage without it, and do pretty well."

"Yes. I've heard references to the poor fish!"

"Then they're inaccurate; fish have primitive symptoms of eroticism. But below the vertebrates, notably in the amoeba, I don't recall any amorous habits."

"Then your definition doesn't explain a thing, does it?"

"Not to one of the victims, perhaps."

"Anyway," said Pat decisively, "I've heard of the old biological urge before your kind analysis. It doesn't begin to

explain why one should be attracted to this person and repelled by that one. Does it?"

"No, but Freud does. The famous Oedipus Complex."

"That's the love of son for mother, or daughter for father, isn't it? And I don't see how that clears up anything; for example, I can just barely remember my father."

"That's plenty. It could be some little trait in these swains of yours, some unimportant mannerism that recalls that memory. Or there's that portrait of him in the hall—the one under the mellow red light. It might happen that you'd see one of these chaps under a similar light in some attitude that brings the picture to mind—or a hundred other possibilities."

"Doesn't sound entirely convincing," objected Pat with a thoughtful frown.

"Well, submit to the proper treatments, and I'll tell you exactly what caused each and every one of your little passing fancies. You can't expect me to hit it first guess."

"Thanks, no! That's one of these courses where you tell the doctor all your secrets, and I prefer to keep what few I have."

"Good judgment, Pat. By the way, you said this chap was odd. Does that mean merely that he writes? I've known perfectly normal people who wrote."

"No," she said, "it isn't that. It's—he's so sweet and gentle and manageable most of the time, but sometimes he has such a thrilling spark of mastery that it almost scares me. It's puzzling but fascinating, if you grasp my import."

"Huh! He's probably a naturally selfish fellow who's putting on a good show of gentleness for your benefit. Those flashes of tyranny are probably his real character in moment of forgetfulness."

"You doctors can explain anything, can't you?"

"That's our business. It's what we're paid for."

"Well, you're wrong this time. I know Nick well enough to know if he's acting. His personality is just what I said—gentle, sensitive, and yet—It's perplexing, and that's a good part of his charm."

"Then it's not such a serious case you've got," mocked the doctor. "When you're cool enough to analyze your own feelings, and dissect the elements of the chap's attraction, you're not in any danger."

"Danger! I can look out for myself, thanks. That's one thing we mindless moderns learn young, and don't let me catch you puttering around in my romances! *In loco parentis* or just plain loco, you'll get the licking instead of me!"

"Believe me, Pat, if I wanted to experiment with affairs of the heart, I'd not pick a spit-fire like you as the subject."

"Well, Doctor Carl, you're warned!"

"This Nick," observed the Doctor, "must be quite a fellow to get the princess of the North Side so het up. What's the rest of his cognomen?"

"Nicholas Devine. Romantic, isn't it?"

"Devine," muttered Horker. "I don't know any Devines. Who are his people?"

"Hasn't any."

"How does he live? By his writing?"

"Don't know. I gathered that he lives on some income left by his parents. What's the difference, anyway?"

"None. None at all." The other wrinkled his brows thoughtfully. "There was a colleague of mine, a Dr. Devine; died a good many years ago. Reputation wasn't anything to brag about; was a little off balance mentally."



"Well, Nick isn't!" snapped Pat with some asperity.

"I'd like to meet him."

"He's coming over tonight."

"So'm I. I want to see your mother." He rose ponderously. "If she's not playing bridge again!"

"Well, look him over," retorted Pat. "And I think your knowledge of love is a decided flop. I think you're woefully ignorant on the subject."

"Why's that?"

"If you'd known anything about it, you could have married mother some time during the last seventeen years. Lord knows you've tried, and all you've attained is the state of *in loco parentis* instead of *parens*."

---

### 3

## Psychiatrics of Genius

"How do you charge—by the hour?" asked Pat, as Doctor Horker returned from the hall. The sound of her mother's departing footsteps pattered on the porch.

"Of course, Young One; like a plumber."

"Then your rates per minute must be colossal! The only time you ever see Mother is a moment or so between bridge games."

"I add on the time I waste with you, my dear. Such as now, waiting to look over that odd swain of yours. Didn't you say he'd be over this evening?"

"Yes, but it's not worth your rates to have him psychoanalyzed. I can do as well myself."

"All right, Pat. I'll give you a sample analysis free," chuckled the Doctor, distributing his bulk comfortably on the davenport.

"I don't like free trials," she retorted. "I sent for a beauty-culture book once, on free trial. I was twelve years only, and returned it in seven days, but I'm still getting sales letters in the mails. I must be on every sucker list in the country."

"So that's the secret of your charm."

"What is?"

"You must have read the book, I mean. If you remember the title, I might try it myself. Think it'd help?"

"Dr. Carl," laughed the girl, "you don't need a book on beauty culture—you need one on bridge! It's that atrocious game you play that's bothering Mother."

"Indeed? I shouldn't be surprised if you were right; I've suspected that."

"Save your surprise for when I'm wrong, Doc. You'll suffer much less from shock."

"Confident little brat! You're apt to get that knocked out of you some day, though I hope you never do."

"I can take it," grinned Pat.

"No doubt you can, but you're an adept at handing it out. Where's this chap of yours?"

"He'll be along. No one's ever stood me up on a date yet."

"I can understand that, you imp! Is that the famous Nick?" he queried as a car purred to a stop beyond the windows.

"No one else!" said the girl, glancing out. "The Big Thrill in person."

She darted to the door. Horker turned casually to watch her as she opened it, surveying Nicholas Devine with professional nonchalance. He entered, tall, slender, with his thin sensitive features sharply outlined in the light of the hall. He cast a quick glance toward the Doctor; the latter noted the curious amber-green eyes of the lad, set wide in the lean face, deep, speculative, the eyes of a dreamer.

"Evening, Nick," Pat was bubbling. The newcomer gave her a hasty smile, with another glance at the Doctor. "Don't mind Dr. Carl," she continued. "Aren't you going to kiss me? It irks the medico, and I never miss a chance."

Nicholas flushed in embarrassment; he gestured hesitantly, then placed a hasty peck of a kiss on the girl's forehead. He reddened again at the Doctor's rumble of "Young imp of Satan!"

"Not very good," said Pat reflectively, obviously enjoying the situation. "I've known you to do better." She pulled him toward the arch of the living room. "Come meet Dr. Horker. Dr. Carl, this is the aforesaid Nicholas Devine."

"Dr. Horker," repeated the lad, smiling diffidently. "You're the psychiatrist and brain specialist, aren't you, Sir?"

"So my patients believe," rumbled the massive Doctor, rising at the introduction, and grasping the youth's hand. "And you're the genius Patricia has been raving about. I'm glad to have the chance of looking you over."

Nick gave the girl a harassed glance, shifting uncomfortably, and patently at a loss for a reply. She grinned mischievously.

"Sit down, both of you," she suggested helpfully. She seized his hat from the reluctant hands of Nick, sailing it carelessly to a chair.

"So!" boomed the Doctor, lowering his great bulk again to the davenport. He eyed the youth sitting nervously before him. "Devine, did you say?"

"Yes, sir."

"I knew a Devine once. Colleague of mine."

"A doctor? My father was a doctor."

"Dr. Stuart Devine?"

"Yes, sir." He paused. "Did you say you knew him, Dr. Horker?"

"Slightly," rumbled the other. "Only slightly."

"I don't remember him at all, of course, I was very young when he—and my mother too—died."

"You must have been. Patricia claims you write."

"I try."

"What sort of material?"

"Why—any sort. Prose or poetry; what I feel like writing."

"Whatever inspires you, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir." The lad flushed again.

"Ever have anything published?"

"Yes, sir. In *Nation's Poetry*."

"Never heard of it."

"It has a large circulation," said Nick apologetically.

Humph! Well, that's something. Whom do you like?"

"Whom do I like?" The youth's tone was puzzled.

"What authors—writers?"

"Oh." He cast another uncomfortable glance at Pat. "Why—I like Baudelaire, and Poe, and Swinburne, and Villon, and —"

"Decadents, all of them!" sniffed the Doctor. "What prose writers?"

"Well—" He hesitated—"Poe again, and Stern, and Rabelais—"

"Rabelais!" Horker's voice boomed. "Well! Your taste can't be as bad as I thought, then. There's one we agree on, anyway. And I notice you name no moderns, which is another good point."

"I haven't read many moderns, sir."

"That's in your favor."

"Cut it!" put in Pat with assumed sharpness. "You've taken enough whacks at my generation for one day."

"I'm glad to find one of your generation who agrees with me," chuckled the Doctor. "At least to the extent of not reading its works."

"I'll teach him," grinned Pat. "I'll have him writing *vess libre*, and maybe even dadaism, in a week."

"Maybe it won't be much loss," grunted Horker. "I haven't seen any of his work yet."

"We'll bring some around sooner or later. We will, won't we, Nick?"

"Of course, if you want to. But—"

"He's going to say something modest," interrupted the girl. "He's in the retiring mood now, but he's apt to change any moment, and snap your surly head off."

"Humph! I'd like to see it."

"So'd I," retorted Pat. "You've had it coming all day; maybe I'll do it myself."

"You have, my dear, innumerable times. But I'm like the Hydra, except that I grow only one head to replace the one you snap off." He turned again to Nicholas. "Do you work?"

"Yes, sir. At my writing."

"I mean how do you live?"

"Why," said the youth, reddening again in embarrassment, "my parents—"

"Listen!" said Pat. "That's enough of Dr. Carl's cross examination. You'd think he was a Victorian father who had just been approached for his daughter's hand. We haven't whispered any news of an engagement to you, have we, Doc?"

"No, but I'm acting—"

"Sure. *In loco parentis*. We know that."

"You're incorrigible, Pat! I wash my hands of you. Run along, if you're going out."

"You'll be telling me never to darken my own door again in the next breath!" She stretched forth a diminutive foot at the extremity of a superlatively attractive ankle, caught Nick's hat on her toe, and kicked it expertly to his lap. "Come on, Nick. There's a moon."

"There is not!" objected the Doctor huffily. "It rises at four, as you ought to know. You didn't see it last night, did you?"

"I didn't notice," said the girl. "Come on, Nick, and we'll watch it rise tonight. We'll check up on the Doctor's astronomy, or is it chronology?"

"You do and I'll know it! I can hear you come home, you imp!"

"Nice neighbor," observed Pat airily, as she stepped to the door. "I'll bet you peek out of the window, too."

She ignored the Doctor's irritated rumble as she passed into the hall, where Nick, after a diffident murmur of farewell to Horker, followed. She caught up a light cape, which he draped about her shoulders.

"Nick," she said, "suppose you run out to the car and wait. I think I've stepped too hard on Dr. Carl's corns, and I want to give him a little cheering up. Will you?"

"Of course, Pat."

She darted back into the living room, perching on the arm of the davenport beside the Doctor.

"Well?" she said, running her hand through his grizzled hair. "What's the verdict?"

"Seems like a nice kid," grumbled Horker reluctantly. "Nice enough, but introverted, repressed, and I shouldn't be surprised to find him anti-social. Doesn't adjust easily to his environment; takes refuge in a dream world of his own."

"That's what he accuses me of doing," grinned Pat. "That all you've got against him?"

"That's all, but where's that streak of mastery you mentioned? You lead him around on a leash!"

"It didn't show up tonight. That's the thrill—the unexpectedness of it."

"Bah! You must've dreamed it. There's no more aggressiveness in that lad than in KoKo, your canary."

"Don't you believe it, Dr. Carl! The trouble is that he's a genius, and that's where your psychology falls flat."

"Genius," said the Doctor oracularly, "is a sublimation of qualities—"

"I'll tell you tomorrow how sublime the qualities are," called Pat as she skipped out of the door.

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## 4 The Transfiguration

The car slid smoothly along a straight white road that stretched ahead into the darkness like an earth-bound Milky Way. In the dim distance before them, red as Antares, glowed the tail-light of some automobile; except for this lone evidence of humanity, reflected Pat, they might have been flashing through the cosmic depths of interstellar space, instead of following a highway in the very shadow of Chicago. The colossal city of the lake-shore was invisible behind them, and the clustering suburbs with it.

"Queer, isn't it?" said Pat, after a silence, "how contented we can be with none of the purchased amusement people crave—shows, movies, dancing, and all that."

"It doesn't seem queer to me," answered Nick. "Not when I look at you here beside me."

"Nice of you!" retorted Pat. "But it's never happened to me before." She paused, then continued, "How do you like the Doctor?"

"How does he like me? That's considerably more to the point, isn't it?"

"He thinks you're nice, but—let's see—introverted, repressed, and ill-adjusted to your environment. I think those were the points."

"Well, *I* liked *him*, in spite of your manoeuvres, and in spite of his being a doctor."

"What's wrong with being a doctor?"

"Did you ever read 'Tristram Shandy'?" was Nick's irrelevant response.

"No, but I read the newspapers!"

"What's the connection, Pat?"

"Just as much connection as there is between the evils of being a doctor and reading 'Tristram Shandy'. I know that much about the book, at least."

"You're nearly right," laughed Nick. "I was just referring to one of Tristram's remarks on doctors and lawyers. It fits my attitude."

"What's the remark?"

"Well, he had the choice of professions, and it occurred to him that medicine and law were the vulture professions, since lawyers live by men's quarrels and doctors by men's misfortunes. So—he became a writer."

"And what do writers live by?" queried Pat mischievously. "By men's stupidity!"

"You're precious, Pat!" Nick chuckled delightedly. "If I'd created you to order, I couldn't have planned you more to taste—pepper, tabasco sauce, vinegar, spice, and honey!"

"And to be taken with a grain of salt," retorted the girl, puckering her piquant, impish features. She edged closer to him, locking her arm through his where it rested on the steering wheel.

"Nick," she said, her tones suddenly gentle, "I think I'm pretty crazy about you. Heaven knows why I should be, but it's a fact."

"Pat, dear!"

"I'm crazy about you in this meek, sensitive pose of yours, and I'm fascinated by those masterful moments you flash occasionally. Really, Nick, I almost wish you flamed out oftener."

"Don't!" he said sharply.

"Why not?"

"Let's not talk about me, Pat. It—embarrasses me."

"All right, Mr. Modesty! Let's talk about me, then. I'll promise we won't succeed in embarrassing me."

"And it's quite the most interesting subject in the world, Pat."

"Well, then?"

"What?"

"Why don't you start talking? The topic is all attention."

He chuckled. "How many men have told you you were beautiful, Pat?"

"I never kept account."

"And in many different ways?"

"Why? Have you, perchance, discovered a new way, Nick?"

"Not at all. The oldest way of any, the way of Sappho and Pindar."

"O-ooh!" She clapped her hands in mock delight. "Poetry!"

"The only medium that could possibly express how lovely you are," said Nick.

"Nicholas, have you gone and composed a poem to me?"

"Composed? No. It isn't necessary, with you here beside me."

"What's that? Some very subtle compliment?"

"Not subtle, Pat. You're the poem yourself; all I need do is look at you, listen to you, and translate."

"Neat!" applauded the girl. "Do I hear the translation?"

"You certainly do." He turned his odd amber-green eyes on her, then bent forward to the road. He began to speak in a low voice.

"In no far country's silent ways

Shall I forget one little thing—

The soft intentness of your gaze,

The sweetness of your murmuring

Your generously tender praise,

The words just hinted by a breath—

In no far country's silent way,

Unless that country's name be Death—"

He paused abruptly, and drove silently onward.

"Oh," breathed Pat. "Why don't you go on, Nick? Please."

"No. It isn't the mood for this night, Dear. Not this night, alone with you."

"What is, then?"

"Nothing sentimental. Something lighter, something—oh, Elizabethan. That's it."

"And what's stopping you?"

"Lack of an available idea. Or—wait. Listen a moment." He began, this time in a tone of banter.

"When mornings, you attire yourself

For riding in the city,

You're such a lovely little elf,

Extravagantly pretty!

And when at noon you deign to wear

The habit of the town,

I cannot call to mind as fair

A symphony in brown.

"Then evenings, you blithely don

A daintiness of white,

To flash a very paragon

Of lightsomeness—and light!

But when the rounds of pleasure cease,

And you retire at night,

The Godling on your mantelpiece

Must know a fairer sight!"

"Sweet!" laughed Pat. "But personal. And anyway, how do you know I've a godling on my mantel? Don't you credit me with any modesty?"

"If you haven't, you should have! The vision I mentioned ought to enliven even a statue."

"Well," said the girl, "I have one—a jade Buddha, and with all the charms I flash before him nightly, he's never batted an eyelash. Explain that!"

"Easily. He's green with envy, and frozen with admiration, and struck dumb by wonder."

"Heavens! I suppose I ought to be thankful you didn't say he was petrified with fright!" Pat laughed. "Oh Nick," she continued, in a voice gone suddenly dreamy, "this *is* marvelous, isn't it? I mean our enjoying ourselves so completely, and our being satisfied to be so alone. Why, we've never even danced together."

"So we haven't. That's a subterfuge we haven't needed, isn't it?"

"It is," replied the girl, dropping her glossy gleaming black head against his shoulder. "And besides, it's much more satisfactory to be held in your arms in private, instead of in the midst of a crowd, and sitting down, instead of standing up. But I should like to dance with you, Nick," she concluded.

"We'll go dancing, then, whenever you like."

"You're delightfully complaisant, Nick. But—you're puzzling." She glanced up at him. "You're so—so reluctant. Here we've been driving an hour, and you haven't tried to kiss me a single time, and yet I'm quite positive you care for me."

"Lord, Pat!" he muttered. "You never need doubt that."

"Then what is it? Are you so spiritual and ethereal, or is my attraction for you just sort of intellectual? Or—are you afraid?" As he made no reply, she continued, "Or are those poems you spout about my physical charms just—poetic license?"

"They're not, and you know it!" he snapped. "You've a mirror, haven't you? And other fellows than I have taken you around, haven't they?"

"Oh, I've been taken around! That's what perplexes me about you, Nick. I'd think you were actually afraid of kissing me if it weren't—" Her voice trailed into silence, and she stared speculatively ahead at the ribbon of road that rolled steadily into the headlights' glare.

She broke the interval of wordlessness. "What is it, Nick?" she resumed almost pleadingly. "You've hinted at something now and then. Please—you don't have to hesitate to tell me; I'm modern enough to forgive things past, entanglements, affairs, disgraces, or anything like that. Don't you think I should know?"

"You'd know," he said huskily, "if I could tell you."

"Then there is something, Nick!" She pressed his arm against her. "Tell me, isn't there?"

"I don't know." There was the suggestion of a groan in his voice.

"You don't know! I can't understand."

"I can't either. Please, Pat, let's not spoil tonight; if I could tell you, I would. Why, Pat, I love you—I'm terribly, deeply, solemnly in love with you."

"And I with you, Nick." She gazed ahead, where the road rose over the arch of a narrow bridge. The speeding car lifted to the rise like a zooming plane.

And suddenly, squarely in the center of the road, another car, until now concealed by the arch of the bridge, appeared almost upon them. There was a heart-stopping moment when a collision seemed inevitable, and Pat felt the arm against her tighten convulsively into a bar of steel. She heard her own sobbing gasp, and then, somehow, they had slipped unscathed between the other car and the rail of the bridge.

"Oh!" she gasped faintly, then with a return of breath, "That was nice, Nick!"

Beyond the bridge, the road widened once more; she felt the car slowing, edging toward the broad shoulder of the road.

"There was danger," said her companion in tones as emotionless as the rasping of metal. "I came to save it."

"Save what?" queried Pat as the car slid to a halt on the turf.

"Your body." The tones were still cold, like grinding wheels. "The beauty of your body!"

He reached a thin hand toward her, suddenly seized her skirt and snatched it above the silken roundness of her knees. "There," he rasped. "That is what I mean."

"Nick!" Pat half-screamed in appalled astonishment. "How—" She paused, shocked into abrupt silence, for the face turned toward her was but a remote, evil caricature of Nicholas Devine's. It leered at her out of blood-shot eyes, as if behind the mask of Nick's face peered a red-eyed demon.

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## 5 A Fantasy of Fear

The satyr beside pat was leaning toward her; the arm about her was tightening with a brutal ruthlessness, and while still staring in fascination at the incredible eyes, she realized that another arm and a white hand was moving relentlessly, exploratively, toward her body. It was the cold touch of this hand as it slipped over her silk-sheathed legs that broke the chilling spell of her fascination.

"Nick!" she screamed. "Nick!" She had a curious sensation of calling him back from far distances, the while she strove with both hands and all her strength to press him back from her. But the ruthless force of his arms was overcoming her resistance; she saw the red eyes a hand's breadth from her own.

"Nick!" she sobbed in terror.

There was a change. Abruptly, she was looking into Nick's eyes, blood-shot, frightened, puzzled, but indubitably Nick's eyes. The flaming orbs of the demon were no more; it was as if they had receded into Nick's head. The arm about her body relaxed, and they were staring at each other in a medley of consternation, amazement and unbelief. The youth drew back, huddled in his corner of the car, and Pat, breathing in sobs, smoothed out her rumpled apparel with a convulsive movement.

"Pat!" he gasped. "Oh, my God! He couldn't have—" He paused abruptly. The girl gazed at him without reply.

"Pat, Dear," he spoke in a low, tense murmur, "I'm—sorry. I don't know—I don't understand how—"

"Never mind," she said, regaining a vestige of her customary composure. "It's—all right, Nick."

"But—oh, Pat—!"

"It was that near accident," she said. "That upset you—both of us, I mean."



"Yes!" he said eagerly. "That's what it was, Pat. It must have been that, but Dear, can you forgive? Do you want to forgive me?"

"It's all right," she repeated. "After all, you just complimented my legs, and I guess I can stand that. It's happened before, only not quite so—convincingly!"

"You're sweet, Pat!"

"No; I just love you Nick." She felt a sudden pity for the misery in his face. "Kiss me, Nick—only gently."

He pressed his lips to hers, very lightly, almost timidly. She lay back against the seat for a moment, her eyes closed.

"That's you again," she murmured. "This other—wasn't."

"Please, Pat! Don't refer to it,—not ever."

"But it wasn't you, Nick. It was just the strain of that narrow escape. I don't hold it against you."

"You're—Lord, Pat, I don't deserve you. But you know that I—I myself—could never touch you except in tenderness, even in reverence. You're too dainty, too lovely, too spirited, to be hurt, or to be held roughly, against your will. You know I feel that way about you, don't you?"

"Of course. It was nothing, Nick. Forget it."

"If I can," he said somberly. He switched on the engine, backed out upon the pavement, and turned the car toward the glow that marked Chicago. Neither of them spoke as the machine hummed over the arching bridge and down the slope, where, so few minutes before, the threat of accident had thrust itself at them.

"We won't see a moon tonight," said Pat in a small voice, after an interval. "We'll never check up on Dr. Carl's astronomy."

"You don't want to tonight, Pat, do you?"

"I guess perhaps we'd better not," she replied. "We're both upset, and there'll be other nights."

Again they were silent. Pat felt strained, shaken; there was something uncanny about the occurrence that puzzled her. The red eyes that had glared out of Nick's face perplexed her, and the curious rasping voice he had used still sounded inhumanly in her memory. Out of recollection rose still another mystery.

"Nick," she said, "what did you mean—then—when you said there was danger and you came to save me?"

"Nothing," he said sharply.

"And then, afterwards, you started to say something about 'He couldn't have—'. Who's 'he'?"

"It meant nothing, I tell you. I was frantic to think you might have been hurt. That's all."

"I believe you, Honey," she said, wondering whether she really did. The thing was beginning to grow hazy; already it was assuming merely the proportions of an upheaval of youthful fervor. Such occurrences were not unheard of, though never before had it happened to Patricia Lane! Still, even that was conceivable, far more conceivable than the dark, unformed, inchoate suspicions she had been harboring. They hadn't even been definite enough to be called suspicions; indefinite apprehensions came closer.

And yet—that strange, wild face that had formed itself of Nick's fine features, and the terrible red eyes! Were they elements in a picture conjured out of her own imagination? They must be, of course. She had been frightened by that hairbreadth escape, and had seen things that didn't exist. And the rest of it—well, that might be natural enough. Still, there was something—she knew that; Nick had admitted it.

Horker's words concerning Nick's father rose in her mind. Suspected of being crazy! Was that it? Was that the cause of Nick's curious reluctance where she was concerned? Was the face that had glared at her the visage of a maniac? It couldn't be. It couldn't be, she told herself fiercely. Not her fine, tender, sensitive Nick! And besides, that face, if she hadn't imagined it, had been the face, not of a lunatic, but of a devil. She shook her head, as if to deny her thoughts, and

placed her hand impulsively on Nick's.

"I don't care," she said. "I love you, Nick."

"And I you," he murmured. "Pat, I'm sorry about spoiling this evening. I'm sorry and ashamed."

"Never mind, Honey. There'll be others."

"Tomorrow?"

"No," she said. "Mother and I are going out to dinner. And Friday we're having company."

"Really, Pat? You're not just trying to turn me off gently."

"Really, Nick. Try asking me for Saturday evening and see!"

"You're asked, then."

"And it's a date." Then, with a return of her usual insouciance, she added. "If you're on good behavior."

"I will be. I promise."

"I hope so," said Pat. An inexplicable sense of foreboding had come over her; despite her self-given assurances, something unnameable troubled her. She gave a mental shrug, and deliberately relegated the unpleasant cogitations to oblivion.

The car turned into Dempster Road; the lights of the teeming roadhouses, dance halls, road-side hamburger and barbecue stands flashed by. There were many cars here; there was no longer any impression of solitude now, in the overflow from the vast city in whose shadow they moved. The incessant flow of traffic gave the girl a feeling of security; these were tangible things about her, and once more the memory of that disturbing occurrence became dim and dreamlike. This was Nick beside her, gentle, intelligent, kind; had he ever been otherwise? It seemed highly unreasonable, a fantasy of fear and the hysteria of the moment.

"Hungry?" asked Nick unexpectedly.

"I could use a barbecue, I guess. Beef."

The car veered to the graveled area before a brightly lit stand. Nick gave the order to an attendant. He chuckled as Pat, with the digestive disregard of youth attacked the greasy combination.

"That's like a humming bird eating hay!" he said. "Or better, like a leprechaun eating that horse-meat they can for dogs."

"You might as well discover that I don't live on honey and rose-petals," said Pat. "Not even on caviar and terrapin—at least, not exclusively. I leave the dainty palate for Mother to indulge."

"Which is just as well. Hamburger and barbecue are more easily budgeted."

"Nicholas," said the girl, tossing the paper napkin out of the car window, "is that an indirect and very evasive proposal of marriage?"

"You know it could be, if you wished it!"

"And do I?" she said, assuming a pensive air. "I wonder. Suppose we say I'll let you know later."

"And meanwhile?"

"Oh, meanwhile we can be sort of engaged. Just the way we've been."

"You're sweet, Pat," he murmured, as the car edged into the line of traffic. "I don't know just how to convey my appreciation, but it's there!"

The buildings drew more closely together; the road was suddenly a lighted street, and then, almost without realizing it, they were before Pat's home. Nick walked beside her to the door; he stood facing her hesitantly.

"Good night, Pat," he said huskily. He leaned down, kissing her very gently, turned, and departed.

The girl watched him from the open doorway, following the lights of his car until they vanished down the street. Dear, sweet Nick! Then the disturbing memory of that occurrence of the evening returned; she frowned in perplexity as the thought rose. That was all of a piece with the puzzling character of him, and the curious veiled references he'd made. References to what? She didn't know, couldn't imagine. Nick had said he didn't know either, which added still another quirk to the maze.

She thought of Dr. Horker's words. With the thought, she glanced at his house, adjacent to her own home. A light gleamed in the library; he was still awake. She closed the door behind her, and darted across the narrow strip of lawn to his porch. She rang the bell.

"Good evening, Dr. Carl," she said as the massive form of Horker appeared. She puckered her lips impudently at him as she slipped by him into the house.

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## 6

### A Question of Science

"Not that I'm displeased at this visit, Pat," rumbled the Doctor, seating himself in one of the great chairs by the fireplace, "but I'm curious. I thought you were dating your ideal tonight, yet here you are, back alone a little after eleven. How come?"

"Oh," said the girl nonchalantly, dropping crosswise in the other chair, "we decided we needed our beauty sleep."

"Then why are you here, you young imp?"

"Thought you might be lonesome."

"I'll bet you did! But seriously, Pat, what is it? Any trouble?"

"No-o," she said dubiously. "No trouble. I just wanted to ask you a few hypothetical questions. About science."

"Go to it, then, and quickly. I was ready to turn in."

"Well," said Pat, "about Nick's father. He was a doctor, you said, and supposed to be cracked. Was he really?"

"Humph! That's curious. I just looked up a brochure of his tonight in the American Medical Journal, after our conversation of this afternoon. Why do you ask that?"

"Because I'm interested, of course."

"Well, here's what I remember about him, Pat. He was an M.D., all right, but I see by his paper there—the one I was reading—that he was on the staff of Northern U. He did some work at the Cook County Asylum, some research work, and there was a bit of talk about his maltreating the patients. Then, on top of that, he published a paper that medical men considered crazy, and that started talk of his sanity. That's all I know."

"Then Nick—."

"I thought so! So it's come to the point where you're investigating his antecedents, eh? With an eye to marriage, or what?"

"Or what!" snapped Pat. "I was curious to know, naturally."

"Naturally." The Doctor gave her a keen glance from his shrewd eyes. "Did you think you detected incipient dementia in your ideal?"

"No," said the girl thoughtfully. "Dr. Carl, is there any sort of craziness that could take an ordinarily shy person and make a passionate devil of him? I don't mean passionate, either," she added. "Rather cold, ruthless, domineering."

"None that I know of," said Horker, watching her closely. "Did this Nick of yours have one of his masterful moments?"

"Worse than that," admitted Pat reluctantly. "We had a near accident, and it startled both of us, and then suddenly, he was looking at me like a devil, and then—" She paused. "It frightened me a little."

"What'd he do?" demanded Horker sharply.

"Nothing." She lied with no hesitation.

"Were there any signs of Satyromania?"

"I don't know. I never heard of that."

"I mean, in plain Americanese, did he make a pass at you?"

"He—no, he didn't."

"Well, what *did* he do?"

"He just looked at me." Somehow a feeling of disloyalty was rising in her; she felt a reluctance to betray Nick further.

"What did he say, then? And don't lie this time."

"He just said—He just looked at my legs and said something about their being beautiful, and that was all. After that, the look on his face faded into the old Nick."

"Old Nick is right—the impudent scoundrel!" Horker's voice rumbled angrily.

"Well, they're nice legs," said Pat defiantly, swinging them as evidence. "You've said it yourself. Why shouldn't *he* say it? What's to keep him from it?"

"The code of a gentleman, for one thing!"

"Oh, who cares for your Victorian codes! Anyway, I came here for information, not to be cross-examined. I want to ask the questions myself."

"Pat, you're a reckless little spit-fire, and you're going to get burned some day, and deserve it," the Doctor rumbled ominously. "Ask your fool questions, and then I'll ask mine."

"All right," said the girl, still defiant. "I don't guarantee to answer yours, however."

"Well, ask yours, you imp!"

"First, then—Is that Satyro-stuff you mentioned intermittent or continuous?"

"It's necessarily intermittent, you numb-skull! The male organism can't function continuously!"

"I mean, does the mania lie dormant for weeks or months, and then flare up?"

"Not at all. It's a permanent mania, like any other psychopathic sex condition."

"Oh," said Pat thoughtfully, with a sense of relief.

"Well, go on. What next?"

"What are these dual personalities you read about in the papers?"

"They're aphasias. An individual forgets his name, and he picks, or is given, another, if he happens to wander among strangers. He forgets much of his past experience; the second personality is merely what's left of the first—sort of a vestige of his normal character. There isn't any such thing as a dual personality in the sense of two distinct characters living in one body."

"Isn't there?" queried the girl musingly. "Could the second personality have qualities that the first one lacked?"

"Not any more than it could have an extra finger! The second is merely a split off the first, a forgetfulness, a loss of

memory. It couldn't have *more* qualities than the whole, or normal, character; it *must* have fewer."

"Isn't that just too interesting!" said Pat in a bantering tone. "All right, Dr. Carl. It's your turn."

"Then what's the reason for all this curiosity about perversions and aphasias? What's happened to your genius now?"

"Oh, I'm thinking of taking up the study of psychiatry," replied the girl cheerfully.

"Aren't you going to answer me seriously?"

"No."

"Then what's the use of my asking questions?"

"I know the right answer to that one. None!"

"Pat," said Horker in a low voice, "you're an impudent little hoyden, and too clever for your own good, but you and your mother are very precious to me. You know that."

"Of course I do, Dr. Carl," said the girl, relenting. "You're a dear, and I'm crazy about you, and you know that, too."

"What I'm trying to say," proceeded the other, "is simply that I'm trying to help you. I want to help you, if you need help. Do you?"

"I guess I don't, Dr. Carl, but you're sweet."

"Are you in love with this Nicholas Devine?"

"I think perhaps I am," she admitted softly.

"And is he in love with you?"

"Frankly, could he help being?"

"Then there's something about him that worries you. That's it, isn't it?"

"I thought there was, Dr. Carl. I was a little startled by the change in him right after we had that narrow escape, but I'm sure it was nothing—just imagination. Honestly, that's all that troubled me."

"I believe you, Pat," said the Doctor, his eyes fixed on hers. "But guard yourself, my dear. Be sure he's what you think he is; be sure you know him rightly."

"He's clean and fine," murmured the girl. "I *am* sure."

"But this puzzling yourself about his character, Pat—I don't like it. Make doubly sure before you permit your feelings to become too deeply involved. That's only common sense, child, not psychiatry or magic."

"I'm sure," repeated Pat. "I'm not puzzled or troubled any more. And thanks, Dr. Carl. You run along to bed and I'll do likewise."

He rose, accompanying her to the door, his face unusually grave.

"Patricia," he said, "I want you to think over what I've said. Be sure, be doubly sure, before you expose yourself to the possibility of suffering. Remember that, won't you?"

"I'll try to. Don't fret yourself about it, Dr. Carl; I'm a hard-boiled young modern, and it takes a diamond to even scratch me."

"I hope so," he said soberly. "Run along; I'll watch until you're inside."

Pat darted across the strip of grass, turned at her door to blow a goodnight kiss to the Doctor, and slipped in. She tiptoed quietly to her room, slipped off her dress, and surveyed her long, slim legs in the mirror.

"Why shouldn't he say they were beautiful?" she queried of the image. "I can't see any reason to get excited over a simple compliment like that."

She made a face over her shoulder at the green Buddha above the fireplace.

"And as for you, fat boy," she murmured, "I expect to see you wink at me tonight. And every night hereafter!"

She prepared herself for slumber, slipped into the great bed. She had hardly closed her lids before the image of a leering face with terrible bloody eyes flamed out of memory and set her trembling and shuddering.

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## 7 The Red Eyes Return

"I suppose I really ought to meet your friends, Patricia," said Mrs. Lane, peering out of the window, "but they all seem to call when I'm not at home."

"I'll have some of them call in February," said Pat. "You're not out as often in February."

"Why do you say I'm not out as often in February?" demanded her mother. "I don't see what earthly difference the month makes."

"There are fewer days in February," retorted Pat airily.

"Facetious brat!"

"So I've been told. You needn't worry, though, Mother; I'm sober, steady, and reliable, and if I weren't, Dr. Carl would see to it that my associates were."

"Yes; Carl is a gem," observed her mother. "By the way, who's this Nicholas you're so enthusiastic about?"

"He's a boy I met."

"What's he like?"

"Well, he speaks English and wears a hat."

"Imp! Is he nice?"

"That means is his family acceptable, doesn't it? He hasn't any family."

Mrs. Lane shrugged her attractive shoulders. "You're a self-reliant sort, Patricia, and cool as iced lettuce, like your father. I don't doubt that you can manage your own affairs, and here comes Claude with the car." She gave the girl a hasty kiss. "Good-bye, and have a good time, as I'm sure I shan't with Bret Cutter in the game."

Pat watched her mother's trim, amazingly youthful figure as she entered the car. More like a companion than a parent, she mused; she liked the independence her mother's attitude permitted her.

"Better than being watched like a prize-winning puppy," she thought. "Maybe Dr. Carl as a father would have a detriment or two along with the advantages. He's a dear, and I'm mad about him, but he does lean to the nineteenth century as far as parental duties are concerned."

She saw Nick's car draw to the curb; as he emerged she waved from the window and skipped into the hall. She caught up her wrap and bounded out to meet him just ascending the steps.

"Let's go!" she greeted him. She cast an apprehensive glance at his features, but there was nothing disturbing about him. He gave her a diffident smile, the shy, gentle smile that had taken her in that first moment of meeting. This was certainly no one but her own Nick, with no trace of the unsettling personality of their last encounter.

He helped her into the car, seating himself at her side. He leaned over her, kissing her very tenderly; suddenly she was clinging to him, her face against the thrilling warmth of his cheek.

"Nick!" she murmured. "Nick! You're just safely you, aren't you? I've been imagining things that I knew couldn't be so!"

He slipped his arm caressingly about her, and the pressure of it was like the security of encircling battlements. The world was outside the circle of his arms; she was within, safe, inviolable. It was some moments before she stirred, lifting her pert face with tear-bright eyes from the obscurity of his shoulder.

"So!" she exclaimed, patting the black glow of her hair into composure. "I feel better, Nick, and I hope you didn't mind."

"Mind!" he ejaculated. "If you mean that as a joke, Honey, it's far too subtle for me."

"Well, I didn't think you'd mind," said Pat demurely, settling herself beside him. "Let's be moving, then; Dr. Carl is nearly popping his eyes out in the window there."

The car hummed into motion; she waved a derisive arm at the Doctor's window by way of indicating her knowledge of his surveillance. "Ought to teach him a lesson some time," she thought. "One of these fine evenings I'll give him a real shock."

"Where'll we go?" queried Nick, veering skilfully into the swift traffic of Sheridan Road.

"Anywhere!" she said blithely. "Who cares as long as we go together?"

"Dancing?"

"Why not? Know a good place?"

"No." He frowned in thought. "I haven't indulged much."

"The Picador?" she suggested. "The music's good, and it's not too expensive. But it's 'most across town, and besides, Saturday nights we'd be sure to run into some of the crowd."

"What of it?"

"I want to dance with you, Nick—all evening. I want to be without distractions."

"Pat, dear! I could kiss you for that."

"You will," she murmured softly.

They moved aimlessly south with the traffic, pausing momentarily at the light-controlled intersections, then whirring again to rapid motion. The girl leaned against his arm silently, contentedly; block after block dropped behind.

"Why so pensive, Honey?" he asked after an interval. "I've never known you so quiet before."

"I'm enjoying my happiness, Nick."

"Aren't you usually happy?"

"Of course, only these last two or three days, ever since our last date, I've been making myself miserable. I've been telling myself foolish things, impossible things, and it's only now that I've thrown off the blues. I'm happy, Dear!"

"I'm glad you are," he said. His voice was strangely husky, and he stared fixedly at the street rushing toward them. "I'm glad you are," he repeated, a curious tensi in his tones.

"So'm I."

"I'll never do anything to make you unhappy, Pat—never. Not—if I can help it."

"You can help it, Nick. You're the one making me happy; please keep doing it."

"I—hope to." There was a queer catch in his voice. It was almost as if he feared something.

"Selah!" said Pat conclusively. She was thinking, "Wrong of me to refer to that accident. After all it was harmless; just a

natural burst of passion. Might happen to anyone."

"Where'll we go?" asked Nick as they swung into the tree-shadowed road of Lincoln Park. "We haven't decided that."

"Anywhere," said the girl dreamily. "Just drive; we'll find a place."

"You must know lots of them."

"We'll find a new place; we'll discover it for ourselves. It'll mean more, doing that, than if we just go to one of the old places where I've been with every boy that ever dated me. You don't want me dancing with a crowd of memories, do you?"

"I shouldn't mind as long as they stayed merely memories."

"Well, I should! This evening's to be ours—exclusively ours."

"As if it could ever be otherwise!"

"Indeed?" said Pat. "And how do you know what memories I might choose to carry along? Are you capable of inspecting my mental baggage?"

"We'll check it at the door. You're traveling light tonight, aren't you?"

"Pest!" she said, giving his cheek an impudent vicious pinch. "Nice, pleasurable pest!"

He made no answer. The car was idling rather slowly along Michigan Boulevard; half a block ahead glowed the green of a traffic light. Faster traffic flowed around them, passing them like water eddying about a slow floating branch.

Suddenly the car lurched forward. The amber flame of the warning light had flared out; they flashed across the intersection a split second before the metallic click of the red light, and a scant few feet before the converging lines of traffic from the side street swept in with protesting horns.

"Nick!" the girl gasped. "You'll rate yourself a traffic ticket! Why'd you cut the light like that?"

"To lose your guardian angel," he muttered in tones so low she barely understood his words.

Pat glanced back; the lights of a dozen cars showed beyond the barrier of the red signal.

"Do you mean one of those cars was following us? What on earth makes you think that, and why should it, anyway?"

The other made no answer; he swerved the car abruptly off the avenue, into one of the nondescript side streets. He drove swiftly to the corner, turned south again, and turned again on some street Pat failed to identify—South Superior or Grand, she thought. They were scarcely a block from the magnificence of Michigan Avenue and its skyscrapers, its brilliant lights, and its teeming night traffic, yet here they moved down a deserted dark thoroughfare, a street lined with ramshackle wooden houses intermingled with mean little shops.

"Nick!" Pat exclaimed. "Where are we going?"

The low voice sounded. "Dancing," he said.

He brought the car to the curb; in the silence as the motor died, the faint strains of a mechanical piano sounded. He opened the car door, stepped around to the sidewalk.

"We're here," he said.

Something metallic in his tone drew Pat's eyes to his face. The eyes that returned her stare were the bloody orbs of the demon of last Wednesday night!



Pat stared curiously at the apparition but made no move to alight from the vehicle. She was conscious of no fear, only a sense of wonder and perplexity. After all, this was merely Nick, her own harmless, adoring Nick, in some sort of mysterious masquerade, and she felt full confidence in her ability to handle him under any circumstances.

"Where's here?" she said, remaining motionless in her place.

"A place to dance," came the toneless reply.

Pat eyed him; a street car rumbled past, and the brief glow from its lighted windows swept over his face. Suddenly the visage was that of Nick; the crimson glare of the eyes was imperceptible, and the features were the well-known appurtenances of Nicholas Devine, but queerly tensed and strained.

"A trick of the light," she thought, as the street car lumbered away, and again a faint gleam of crimson appeared. She gazed curiously at the youth, who stood impassively returning her survey as he held the door of the car. But the face was the face of Nick, she perceived, probably in one of his grim moods.

She transferred her glance to the building opposite which they had stopped. The strains of the mechanical piano had ceased; blank, shaded windows faced them, around whose edges glowed a subdued light from within. A drab, battered, paintless shack, she thought, dismal and unpleasant; while she gazed, the sound of the discordant music recommenced, adding, it seemed, the last unprepossessing item.

"It doesn't look very attractive, Nick," she observed dubiously.

"I find it so, however."

"Then you've been here?"

"Yes."

"But I thought you said you didn't know any place to go."

"This one hadn't occurred to me—then."

"Well," she said crisply, "I could have done as well as this with my eyes closed. It doesn't appeal to me at all, Nick."

"Nevertheless, here's where we'll go. You're apt to find it—interesting."

"Look here, Nicholas Devine!" Pat snapped, "What makes you think you can bully me? No one has ever succeeded yet!"

"I said you'd find it interesting." His voice was unchanged; she stared at him in complete bafflement.

"Oh, Nick!" she exclaimed in suddenly softer tones. "What difference does it make? Didn't I say anywhere would do, so we went together?" She smiled at him. "This will do if you wish, though really, Honey, I'd prefer not."

"I do wish it," the other said.

"All right, Honey," said Pat the faintest trace of reluctance in her voice as she slipped from the car. "I stick to my bargains."

She winced at the intensity of his grip as he took her arm to assist her. His fingers were like taunt wires biting into her flesh.

"Nick!" she cried. "You're hurting me! You're bruising my arm!"

He released her; she rubbed the spot ruefully, then followed him to the door of the mysterious establishment. The unharmonious jangle of the piano dinned abruptly louder as he swung the door open. Pat entered and glanced around her at the room revealed.

Dull, smoky, dismal—not the least exciting or interesting as yet, she thought. A short bar paralleled one wall, behind which lounged a little, thin, nondescript individual with a small mustache. Half a dozen tables filled the remainder of the room; four or five occupied by the clientele of the place, as unsavory a group as the girl could recall having

encountered on the hither side of the motion picture screen. Two women tittered as Nick entered; then with one accord, the eyes of the entire group fixed on Pat, where she stood drawing her wrap more closely about her, standing uncomfortably behind her escort. And the piano tinkled its discords in the far corner.

"Same place," said Nick shortly to the bartender, ignoring the glances of the others. Pat followed him across the room to a door, into a hall, thence into a smaller room furnished merely with a table and four chairs. The nondescript man stood waiting in the doorway as Nick took her wrap and seated her in one of the chairs.

"Quart," he said laconically, and the bartender disappeared.

Pat stared intently, studiously, into the face of her companion. Nick's face, certainly; here in full light there was no trace of the red-eyed horror she had fancied out there in the semi-darkness of the street. Or was there? Now—when he turned, when the light struck his eyes at an angle, was that a glint of crimson? Still, the features were Nick's, only a certain grim intensity foreign to him lurked about the set of his mouth, the narrowed eye-lids.

"Well!" she said. "So this is Paris! What are you trying to do—teach me capital L—life? And where do we dance?"

"In here."

"And what kind of quart was that you ordered? You know how little I drink, and I'm darned particular about even that little."

"You'll like this."

"I doubt it."

"I said you'll like it," he reiterated in flat tones.

"I heard you say it." She regarded him with a puzzled frown. "Nick," she said suddenly, "I've decided I like you better in your gentle pose; this masterful attitude isn't becoming, and you can forget what I said about wishing you'd display it oftener."

"You'll like that, too."

"Again I doubt it. Nick, dear, don't spoil another evening like that last one!"

"This one won't be like the last one!"

"But Honey—" she paused at the entrance of the bartender bearing a tray, an opened bottle of ginger ale, two glasses of ice, and a flask of oily amber liquid. He deposited the assortment on the red-checked table cloth.

"Two dollars," he said, pocketed the money and silently retired.

"Nicholas," said the girl tartly, "there's enough of that poison for a regiment."

"I don't think so."

"Well, I won't drink it, and I won't let you drink it! So now what?"

"I think you'll do both."

"I don't!" she snapped. "And I don't like this, Nick—the place, or the liquor, or your attitude, or anything. We're going to leave!"

Instead of answering, he pulled the cork from the bottle, pouring a quantity of the amber fluid into each of the tumblers. To one he added an equal quantity of ginger ale, and set it deliberately squarely in front of Pat. She frowned at it distastefully, and shook her head.

"No," she said. "Not I. I'm leaving."

She made no move, however; her eyes met those of her companion, gazing at her with a cold intentness in their curious amber depths. And again—was that a flash of red? Impulsively she reached out her hand, touched his.

"Oh, Nick!" she said in soft, almost pleading tones. "Please, Honey—I don't understand you. Don't you know I love you, Nick? You can hear me say it: I love you. Don't you believe that?"

He continued his cold, intense stare; the grim set of his mouth was as unrelaxing as marble. Pat felt a shiver of apprehension run through her, and an almost hypnotic desire to yield herself to the demands of the inexplicable eyes. She tore her glance away, looking down at the red checks of the table cloth.

"Nick, dear," she said. "I can't understand this. Will you tell me what you—will you tell me why we're here?"

"It is out of your grasp."

"But—I know it has something to do with Wednesday night, something to do with that reluctance of yours, the thing you said you didn't understand. Hasn't it?"

"Do you think so?"

"Yes," she said. "I do! And Nick, Honey—didn't I tell you I could forgive you anything? I don't care what's happened in the past; all I care for is now, now and the future. Don't you understand me? I've told you I loved you, Honey! Don't you love me?"

"Yes," said the other, staring at her with no change in the fixity of his gaze.

"Then how can you—act like this to me?"

"This is my conception of love."

"I don't understand!" the girl said helplessly. "I'm completely puzzled—it's all topsy-turvy."

"Yes," he said in impassive agreement.

"But what is this, Nick? Please, please—what is this? Are you mad?" She had almost added, "Like your father."

"No," he said, still in those cold tones. "This is an experiment."

"An experiment!"

"Yes. An experiment in evil."

"I don't understand," she repeated.

"I said you wouldn't."

"Do you mean," she asked, struck by a sudden thought, "that discussion of ours about pure horror? What you said that night last week?"

"That!" His voice was icy and contemptuous. "That was the drivel of a weakling. No; I mean evil, not horror—the living evil that can be so beautiful that one walks deliberately, with open eyes, into Hell only to prevent its loss. That is the experiment."

"Oh," said Pat, her own voice suddenly cool. "Is that what you wish to do—experiment on me?"

"Yes."

"And what am I supposed to do?"

"First you are to drink with me."

"I see," she said slowly. "I see—dimly. I am a subject, a reagent, a guinea pig, to provide you material for your writing. You propose to use me in this experiment of yours—this experiment in evil. All right!" She picked up the tumbler; impulsively she drained it. The liquor, diluted as it was, was raw and strong enough to bring tears smarting to her eyes. Or *was* it the liquor?

"All right!" she cried. "I'll drink it all—the whole bottle!" She seized the flask, filling her tumbler to the brim, while her

companion watched her with impassive gaze. "You'll have your experiment! And then, Nicholas Devine, we're through! Do you hear me? Through!"

She caught up the tumbler, raised it to her lips, and drained the searing liquid until she could see her companion's cold eyes regarding her through the glass of its bottom.

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## 9

### Descent into Avernus

Pat slammed the empty tumbler down on the checked table cloth and buried her face in her hands, choking and gasping from the effects of the fiery liquor. Her throat burned, her mouth was parched by the acrid taste, and a conflagration seemed to be raging somewhere within her. Then she steadied, raised her eyes, and stared straight into the strange eyes of Nicholas Devine.

"Well?" she said fiercely. "Is that enough?"

He was watching her coldly as an image or a painting; the intensity of his gaze was more cat-like than human. She moved her head aside; his eyes, without apparent shift, were still on hers, like the eyes of a pictured face. A resurgence of anger shook her at his immobility; his aloofness seemed to imply that nothing she could do would disturb him.

"Wasn't it enough?" she screamed. "Wasn't it? Then look!"

She seized the bottle, poured another stream of the oily liquid into her glass, and raised it to her lips. Again the burning fluid excoriated her tongue and throat, and then suddenly, the tumbler was struck from her hand, spilling the rest of its contents on the table.

"That is enough," said the icy voice of her companion.

"Oh, it is? We'll see!" She snatched at the bottle, still more than half full. The thin hand of Nicholas Devine wrenched it violently away.

"Give me that!" she cried. "You wanted what you're getting!" The warmth within her had reached the surface now; she felt flushed, excited, reckless, and desperately angry.

The other set the bottle deliberately on the floor; he rose, circled the table, and stood glaring down at her with that same inexplicable expression. Suddenly he raised his hand; twisting her black hair in his fist, he dealt her a stinging blow across the lips half-opened to scream, then flung her away so violently that she nearly sprawled from her chair.

The scream died in her throat; dazed by the blow, she dropped her head to the table, while sobs of pain and fear shook her. Coherent thought had departed, and she knew only that her lips stung, that her clear, active little mind was caught in a mesh of befuddlement. She couldn't think; she could only sob in the haze of dizziness that encompassed her. After a long interval, she raised her head, opened her eyes upon a swaying, unsteady world, and faced her companion, who had silently resumed his seat.

"Nicholas Devine," she said slowly, speaking as if each word were an effort, "I hate you!"

"Ah!" he said and was again silent.

She forced her eyes to focus on his face, while his features danced vaguely as if smoke flowed between the two of them. It was as if there were smoke in her mind as well; she made a great effort to rise above the clouds that bemused her thoughts.

"Take me home," she said. "Nicholas, I want to go home."

"Why should I?" he asked impassively. "The experiment is hardly begun."

"Experiment?" she echoed dully. "Oh, yes—experiment. I'm an experiment."

"An experiment in evil," he said.

"Yes—in evil. And I hate you! That's evil enough, isn't it?"

He reached down, lifted the bottle to the table, and methodically poured himself a drink of the liquor. He raised it, watching the oily swirls in the light, then tipped the fluid to his lips while the girl gazed at him with a sullen set to her own lips. A tiny crimson spot had appeared in the corner of her mouth; at its sting, she raised her hand and brushed it away. She stared as if in unbelief at the small red smear it left on her fingers.

"Nicholas," she said pleadingly, "won't you take me home? Please, Nicholas, I want to leave here."

"Do you hate me?" he asked, a queer twisting smile appearing on his lips.

"If you'll take me home I won't," said Pat, snatching through the rising clouds of dizziness at a straw of logic. "You're going to take me home, aren't you?"

"Let me hear you say you hate me!" he demanded, rising again. The girl cringed away with a little whimper as he approached. "You hate me, don't you?"

He twisted his hand again in her ebony hair, drawing her face back so that he stared down at it.

"There's blood on your lips," he said as if gloating. "Blood on your lips!"

He clutched her hair more tightly; abruptly he bent over her, pressing his mouth to hers. Her bruised lips burned with pain at the fierce pressure of his; she felt a sharp anguish at the impingement of his teeth. Yet the cloudy pall of dizziness about her was unbroken; she was too frightened and bewildered for resistance.

"Blood on your lips!" he repeated exultingly. "Now is the beauty of evil!"

"Nicholas," she said wearily, clinging desperately to a remnant of logic, "what do you want of me? Tell me what you want and then let me go home."

"I want to show you the face of evil," he said. "I want you to know the glory of evil, the loveliness of supreme evil!"

He dragged his chair around the table, placing it beside her. Seated, he drew her into his arms, where she lay passive, too limp and befuddled to resist. With a sudden movement, he turned her so that her back rested across his knees, her face gazing up into his. He stared intently down at her, and the light, shining at an angle into his eyes, suddenly struck out the red glow that lingered in them.

"I want you to know the power of evil," he murmured. "The irresistible, incomprehensible fascination of it, and the unspeakable pleasures of indulgence in it."

Pat scarcely heard him; she was struggling now in vain against the overwhelming fumes of the alcohol she had consumed. The room was wavering around her, and behind her despair and terror, a curious elation was thrusting itself into her consciousness.

"Evil," she echoed vaguely.

"Blood on your lips!" he muttered, peering down at her. "Taste the unutterable pleasure of kisses on bloody lips; drain the sweet anguish of pain, the fierce delight of suffering!"

He bent down; again his lips pressed upon hers, but this time she felt herself responding. Some still sane portion of her brain rebelled, but the intoxication of sense and alcohol was dominant. Suddenly she was clinging to him, returning his kisses, glorying in the pain of her lacerated lips. A red mist suffused her; she had no consciousness of anything save the exquisite pain of the kiss, that somehow contrived to transform itself into an ecstasy of delight. She lay gasping as the other withdrew his lips.

"You see!" he gloated. "You understand! Evil is open to us, and all the unutterable pleasures of the damned, who cry out in transports of joy at the bite of the flames of Hell. Do you see?"

The girl made no answer, sobbing in a chaotic mingling of pain and excruciating pleasure. She was incapable of speech or connected thought; the alcohol beat against her brain with a persistence that defied resistance. After a moment, she stirred, struggling erect to a sitting posture.

"Evil!" she said dizzily. "Evil and good—what's difference? All in a lifetime!"

She felt a surge of tipsy elation, and then the muffled music of the mechanical piano, drifting through the closed door, penetrated her befuddled consciousness.

"I want to dance!" she cried. "I'm drunk and I want to dance! Am I drunk?" she appealed to her companion.

"Yes," he said.

"I am not! I just want to dance, only it's hot in here. Dance with me, Nicholas—show me an evil dance! I want to dance with the Devil, and I will! You're the Devil, name and all! I want to dance with Old Nick himself!"

She rose unsteadily from her chair; instantly the room reeled crazily about her and she fell sprawling. She felt the grasp of arms beneath her shoulders, raising her erect; she leaned against the wall and heard herself laughing wildly.

"Funny room!" she said. "Evil room—on pivots!"

"You're still to learn," came the toneless voice of Nicholas Devine. "Do you want to see the face of evil?"

"Sure!" she said. "Got a good memory for faces!"

She realized that he was fumbling with the catch of her dress on her left shoulder; again some remnant, some vestige of sanity deep in her brain warned her.

"Mustn't," she said vaguely.

Then suddenly the catch was open; the dress dropped away around her, crumpling to a shapeless blob of cloth about her diminutive feet. She covered her face with her hands, fighting to hold that last, vanishing vestige of sobriety, while she stood swaying drunkenly against the wall.

Then Nicholas Devine's arms were about her again; she felt the sharp sting of his kisses on her throat. He swung her about, bent her backwards across the low table; she was conscious of a bewildered sensation of helplessness and of little else.

"Now the supreme glory of evil!" he was muttering in her ear. She felt his hands on her bare shoulders as he pressed her backward.

Then, abruptly, he paused, releasing her. She sat dizzily erect, following the direction of his gaze. In the half open door stood the nondescript bartender leering in at them.

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## 10

### Rescue from Abaddon

Pat slid dizzily from her perch on the table and sank heavily to a chair. The interruption of the mustached keeper of this den of contradictions struck her as extremely humorous; she giggled hysterically as her wavering gaze perceived the consternation in his sharp little face. Some forlorn shred of modesty asserted itself, and she dragged a corner of the red-checked table cloth across her knees.

"Get out!" said Nicholas Devine in that voice of rasping metal. "Get out!" he repeated in unchanging tones.

The other made no move to leave. "Yeah?" he said. "Listen, Bud—this place is respectable, see? You want to pull something like this, you go upstairs, see? And pay for your room."

"Get out!" There was no variation in the voice.

"*You* get out! The both of you, see?"

Nicholas Devine stepped slowly toward him; his back, as he advanced upon the bartender, was toward Pat, yet through the haze of intoxication, she had an impression of evil red eyes in a chill, impassive face. "Get out!"

The other had no stomach for such an adversary. He backed out of the door, closing it as he vanished. His voice floated in from the hall.

"I'm telling you!" he called. "Clear out!"

Nicholas Devine turned back toward the girl. He surveyed her sitting in her chair; she had dropped her chin to her hand to steady the whirling of her head.

"We'll go," he said. "Come on."

"I just want to sit here," she said. "Just let me sit here. I'm tired."

"Come on," he repeated.

"Why?" she muttered petulantly. "I'm tired."

"I want no interruptions. We'll go elsewhere."

"Must dress!" she murmured dazedly, "can't go on street without dress."

Nicholas Devine swept her frock from its place in the corner, gathered her wrap from the chair, and flung them over his arm. He grasped her wrist, tugging her to an unsteady standing position.

"Come on," he said.

"Dress!"

He snatched the red checked table cloth from its place, precipitating bottles, ash-tray, and glasses into an indiscriminate pile, and threw the stained and odorous fabric across her shoulders. She gathered it about her like a toga; it hung at most points barely below her waist, but it satisfied the urge of her muddled mind for a covering of some sort.

"We'll go through the rear," her companion said. "Into the alley. I want no trouble with that rat in the bar—yet!"

He still held Pat's wrist; she stumbled after him as he dragged her into the darkness of the hall. They moved through it blindly to a door at the far end; Nicholas swung it open upon a dim corridor flanked by buildings on either side, with a strip of star-sprinkled sky above.

Pat's legs were somehow incapable of their usual lithe grace; she failed to negotiate the single step, and crashed heavily to the concrete paving. The shock and the cooler air of the open steadied her momentarily; she felt no pain from her bruised knees, but a temporary rift in the fog that bound her mind. She gathered the red-checked cloth more closely about her shoulders as her companion, still clutching her wrist, jerked her violently to her feet.

They moved into the gulch of the alley, and here she found difficulty in following. Her tiny high-heeled pumps slipped at every step on the uneven cobbles of the paving, and the unsteady footing made her lurch and stumble until the dusty stretch of the alley was a writhing panorama of shadows and lighted windows and stars. Nicholas Devine turned an impatient glare on her, and here in the semi-darkness, his face was again the face of the red-eyed demon. She dragged him to a halt, laughing strangely.

"There it is!" she cried, pointing at him with her free hand. He turned again, staring at her with grim features.

"What?"

"There! Your face—the face of evil!" Again she laughed hysterically.

The other stepped to her side; the disturbing eyes were inches from her own. He raised his hand as she laughed, slapped her sharply, so that her head reeled. He seized her shoulders, shaking her until the checkered cloth billowed like a flag in a wind.

"Now come!" he muttered.

But the girl, laughing no longer, leaned pale and weak against a low board fence. Her limbs seemed paralyzed, and movement was quite impossible. She was conscious of neither the blow nor the shaking, but only of a devastating

nausea and an all-encompassing weakness. She bent over the fence; she was violently ill.

Then the nausea had vanished, and a weariness, a strange lassitude, was all that remained. Nicholas Devine stood over her; suddenly he pressed her body to him in a convulsive embrace, so that her head dropped back, and his face loomed above her, obliterating the stars.

"Ah!" he said. He seemed about to kiss her when a sound—voices—filtered out of somewhere in the maze of dark courts and littered yards along the alley. He released her, seized her wrist, and once more she was stumbling wretchedly behind him over the uneven surface of the cobblestones.

A numbness had come over her; consciousness burned very low as she wavered doggedly along through the darkness. She perceived dimly that they were approaching the end of the alley; the brighter glow of the street loomed before them, and a passing motor car cut momentary parallel shafts of luminescence across the opening.

Nicholas Devine slowed his pace, still clutching her wrist in a cold grip; he paused, moving cautiously toward the corner of the building. He peered around the edge of the structure, surveying the now deserted street, while Pat stood dully behind him, incapable alike of thought or voluntary movement, clutching desperately at the dirty cloth that hung about her shoulders.

Her companion finished his survey; apparently satisfied that progress was safe, he dragged her after him, turning toward the corner beyond which his car was parked. The girl staggered behind him with diminishing vigor; consciousness was very nearly at the point of disappearance, and her steps were wavering unsteadily, and doggedly slow. She dragged heavily on his arm; he gave a gesture of impatience at her weakness.

"Come on!" he growled. "We're just going to the corner." His voice rose slightly in pitch, still sounding harsh as rasping metals. "There still remains the ultimate evil!" he said. "There is still a depth of beauty unplumbed, a pain whose exquisite pleasure is yet to find!"

They approached the corner; abruptly Nicholas Devine drew back as two figures came unexpectedly into view from beyond it. He turned back toward the alley-way, dragging the girl in a dizzy circle. He took a few rapid steps.

But Pat was through, exhausted. At his first step she stumbled and sprawled, dragging prone behind him. He released her hand and turned defiantly to face the approaching men, while the girl lying on the pavement struggled to a sitting posture with her back against the wall. She turned dull, indifferent eyes on the scene, then was roused to a somewhat higher pitch of interest by the sound of a familiar voice.

"There he is! I told you it was his car."

Dr. Horker! She struggled for clarity of thought; she realized dimly that she ought to feel relief, happiness—but all she could summon was a faint quickening of interest, or rather, a diminution of the lassitude that held her. She drew the rag of a table cloth about her and huddled against the wall, watching. The Doctor and some strange man, burly and massive in the darkness, dashed upon them, while Nicholas Devine waited, his red-orbed face a demoniac picture of cold contempt. Then the Doctor glanced at her huddled, bedraggled figure; she saw his face aghast, incredulous, as he perceived the condition of her clothing.

"Pat! My God, girl! What's happened? Where've you been?"

She found a hidden reserve somewhere within her. Her voice rose, shrill and hysterical.

"We've been in Hell!" she said. "You came to take me back, didn't you? Orpheus and Eurydice!" She laughed. "Dr. Orpheus Horker!"

The Doctor flashed her another incredulous glance and a grim and very terrible expression flamed in his face. He turned toward Nicholas Devine, his hands clenching, his mouth twisting without utterance, with no sound save a half-audible snarl. Then he spoke, a low, grating phrase flung at his thick-set companion.

"Bring the car," was all he said. The man lumbered away toward the corner, and he turned again toward Nicholas Devine, who faced him impassively. Suddenly his fist shot out; he struck the youth or demon squarely between the red eyes, sending him reeling back against the building. Then the Doctor turned, bending over Pat; she felt the pressure of his arms beneath knees and shoulders. He was carrying her toward a car that drew up at the curb; he was placing her gently in the back seat. Then, without a glance at the figure still leaning against the building, he swept from the



sidewalk the dark mass that was Pat's dress and her wrap, and re-entered the car beside her.

"Shall I turn him in?" asked the man in the front seat.

"We can't afford the publicity," said the Doctor, adding grimly, "I'll settle with him later."

Pat's head lurched as the car started; she was losing consciousness, and realized it vaguely, but she retained one impression as the vehicle swung into motion. She perceived that the face of the lone figure leaning against the building, a face staring at her with horror and unbelief, was no longer the visage of the demon of the evening, but that of her own Nick.

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## 11 Wreckage

Pat opened her eyes reluctantly, with the impression that something unpleasant awaited her return to full consciousness. Something, as yet she could not recall just what, had happened to her; she was not even sure where she was awakening.

However, her eyes surveyed her own familiar room; there opposite the bed grinned the jade Buddha on his stand on the mantel—the one that Nick had—Nick! A mass of troubled, terrible recollections thrust themselves suddenly into consciousness. She visioned a medley of disturbing pictures, as yet disconnected, unassorted, but waiting only the return of complete wakefulness. And she realized abruptly that her head ached miserably, that her mouth was parched, that twinges of pain were making themselves evident in various portions of her anatomy. She turned her head and caught a glimpse of a figure at the bed-side; her startled glance revealed Dr. Horker, sitting quietly watching her.

"Hello, Doctor," she said, wincing as her smile brought a sharp pain from her lips. "Or should I say, Good morning, Judge?"

"Pat!" he rumbled, his growling tones oddly gentle. "Little Pat! How do you feel, child?"

"Fair," she said. "Just fair. Dr. Carl, what happened to me last night? I can't seem to remember—Oh!"

A flash of recollection pierced the obscure muddle. She remembered now—not all of the events of that ghastly evening, but enough. Too much!

"Oh!" she murmured faintly. "Oh, Dr. Carl!"

"Yes," he nodded. "'Oh!'—and would you mind very much telling me what that 'Oh' of yours implies?"

"Why—". She paused shuddering, as one by one the events of that sequence of horrors reassembled themselves. "Yes, I'd mind very much," she continued. "It was nothing—" She turned to him abruptly. "Oh, it was, though, Dr. Carl! It was horrible, unspeakable, incomprehensible!—But I can't talk about it! I can't!"

"Perhaps you're right," said the Doctor mildly. "Don't you really want to discuss it?"

"I do want to," admitted the girl after a moment's reflection. "I want to—but I can't. I'm afraid to think of all of it."

"But what in Heaven's name did you do?"

"We just started out to go dancing," she said hesitatingly. "Then, on the way to town, Nick—changed. He said someone was following us."

"Some one was," said Horker. "*I* was, with Mueller. That Nick of yours has the Devil's own cleverness!"

"Yes," the girl echoed soberly. "The Devil's own!—Who's Mueller, Dr. Carl?"

"He's a plain-clothes man, friend of mine. I treated him once. What do you mean by changed?"

"His eyes," she said. "And his mouth. His eyes got reddish and terrible, and his mouth got straight and grim. And his voice turned sort of—harsh."

Ever happen before, that you know of?"

"Once. When—" She paused.

"Yes. Last Wednesday night, when you came over to ask those questions about pure science. What happened then?"

"We went to a place to dance."

"And that's the reason, I suppose," rumbled the Doctor sardonically, "that I found you wandering about the streets in a table cloth, step-ins, and a pair of hose! That's why I found you on the verge of passing out from rotten liquor, and looking like the loser of a battle with an airplane propellor! What happened to your face?"

"My face? What's wrong with it?"

The Doctor rose from his chair and seized the hand-mirror from her dressing table.

"Look at it!" he commanded, passing her the glass.

Pat gazed incredulously at the reflection the surface presented; a dark bruise colored her cheek, her lips were swollen and discolored, and her chin bore a jagged scratch. She stared at the injuries in horror.

"Your knees are skinned, too," said Horker. "Both of them."

Pat slipped one pajamaed limb from the covers, drawing the pants-leg up for inspection. She gasped in startled fright at the great red stain on her knee.

"That's mercurochrome," said the Doctor. "I put it there."

"You put it there. How did I get home last night, Dr. Carl? How did I get to bed?"

"I'm responsible for that, too. I put you to bed." He leaned forward. "Listen, child—your mother knows nothing about this as yet. She wasn't home when I brought you in, and she's not awake yet this morning. We'll tell her you had an automobile accident; explain away those bruises.—And now, how did you get them?"

"I fell, I guess. Two or three times."

"That bruise on your cheek isn't from falling."

The girl shuddered. Now in the calm light of morning, the events of last night seemed doubly horrible; she doubted her ability to believe them, so incredible did they seem. She was at a loss to explain even her own actions, and those of Nicholas Devine were simply beyond comprehension, a chapter from some dark and blasphemous book of ancient times—the Kabbala or the Necronomicon.

"What happened, Pat?" queried the Doctor gently. "Tell me," he urged her.

"I—can't explain it," she said doubtfully. "He took me to that place, but drinking the liquor was my own fault. I did it out of spite because I saw he didn't—care for me. And then—" She fell silent.

"Yes? And then?"

"Well—he began to talk about the beauty of evil, the delights of evil, and his eyes glared at me, and—I don't understand it all, Dr. Carl, but all of a sudden I was—yielding. Do you see?"

"I see," he said gently, soberly.

"Suddenly I seemed to comprehend what he meant—all that about the supreme pleasure of evil. And I was sort of—swept away. The dress—was his fault, but I—somehow I'd lost the power to resist. I guess I was drunk."

"And the bruises? And your cut lips?" queried the Doctor grimly.

"Yes," she said in a low voice. "He—struck me. After a while I didn't care. He could have—would have done other things, only we were interrupted, and had to leave. And that's all, Dr. Carl."

"Isn't that enough?" he groaned. "Pat, I should have killed the fiend there!"

"I'm glad you didn't."

"Do you mean to say you'd care?"

"I—don't know."

"Are you intimating that you still love him?"

"No," she said thoughtfully. "No, I don't love him, but—Dr. Carl, there's something inexplicable about this. There's something I don't understand, but I'm certain of one thing!"

"What's that?"

"That it wasn't Nick—not *my* Nick—who did those things to me last night. It wasn't, Dr. Carl!"

"Pat, you're being a fool!"

"I know it. But I'm sure of it, Dr. Carl. I *know* Nick; I loved him, and I know he couldn't have done—that. Not the same gentle Nick that I had to beg to kiss me!"

"Pat," said the Doctor gently, "I'm a psychiatrist; it's my business to know all the rottenness that can hide in a human being. My office is the scene of a parade of misfits, failures, potential criminals, lunatics, and mental incompetents. It's a nasty, bitter side I see of life, but I know that side—and I tell you this fellow is dangerous!"

"Do you understand this, Dr. Carl?"

He reached over, taking her hand in his great palm with its long, curious delicate fingers. "I have my theory, Pat. The man's a sadist, a lover of cruelty, and there's enough masochism in any woman to make him terribly dangerous. I want your promise."

"About what?"

"I want you to promise never to see him again."

The girl turned serious eyes on his face; he noted with a shock of sympathy that they were filled with tears.

"You warned me I'd get burned playing with fire," she said. "You did, didn't you?"

"I'm an old fool, Honey. If I'd believed my own advice, I'd have seen that this never happened to you." He patted her hand. "Have I your promise?"

She averted her eyes. "Yes," she murmured. He winced as he perceived that the tears were on her cheeks.

"So!" he said, rising. "The patient can get out of bed when she feels like it—and don't forget that little fib we've arranged for your mother's peace of mind."

She stared up at him, still clinging to his hand.

"Dr. Carl," she said, "are you sure—quite sure—you're right about him? Couldn't there be a chance that you're mistaken—that it's something your psychiatry has overlooked or never heard of?"

"Small chance, Pat dear."

"But a chance?"

"Well, neither I nor any reputable medic claims to know everything, and the human mind's a subtle sort of thing."

"I'm glad!" Pat told herself. "I'm glad it's over, and I'm glad I promised Dr. Carl—I guess I was mighty close to the brink of disaster that time."

She examined the injuries on her face, carefully powdered to conceal the worst effects from her mother. The trick had worked, too; Mrs. Lane had delivered herself of an excited lecture on the dangers of the gasoline age, and then thanked Heaven it was no worse. Well, Pat reflected, she had good old Dr. Carl to thank for the success of the subterfuge; he had broken the news very skillfully, set the stage for her appearance, and calmed her mother's apprehensions of scars. And Pat, surveying her image in the glass above her dressing-table, could see for herself the minor nature of the hurts.

"Scars—pooh!" she observed. "A bruised cheek, a split lip, a skinned chin. All I need is a black eye, and I guess I'd have had that in five minutes more, and perhaps a cauliflower ear into the bargain."

But her mood was anything but flippant; she was fighting off the time when her thoughts had of necessity to face the unpleasant, disturbing facts of the affair. She didn't want to think of the thing at all; she wanted to laugh it off and forget it, yet she knew that for an impossibility. The very desire to forget she recognized as a coward's wish, and she resented the idea that she was cowardly.

"Forget the wise-cracks," she advised her image. "Face the thing and argue it out; that's the only way to be satisfied."

She rose with a little grimace of pain at the twinge from her bruised knees, and crossed to the chaise lounge beside the far window. She settled herself in it and resumed her cogitations. She was feeling more or less herself again; the headache of the morning had nearly vanished, and aside from the various aches and a listless fagged-out sensation, she approximated her normal self. Physically, that is; the shadow of that other catastrophe, the one she hesitated to face, was another matter.

"I'm lucky to get off this easily," she assured herself, "after going on a bust like that one, like a lumberjack with his pay in his pocket." She shook her head in mournful amazement. "And I'm Patricia Lane, the girl whom Billy dubbed 'Pat the Impeccable'! Impeccable! Wandering through alleys in step-ins and a table cloth—getting beaten up in a drunken brawl—passing out on rot-gut liquor—being carried home and put to bed! Not impeccable; incapable's the word! I belong to Dr. Carl's parade of incompetents."

She continued her rueful reflections. "Well, item one is, I don't love Nick any more. I couldn't now!" she flung at the smiling green buddha on the mantel. "That's over; I've promised."

Somehow there was not satisfaction in the memory of that promise. It was logical, of course; there wasn't anything else to do now, but still—

"That *wasn't* Nick!" she told herself. "That wasn't *my* Nick. I guess Dr. Carl is right, and he's a depressed what-ever-it-was; but if he's crazy, so am I! He had me convinced last night; I understood what he meant, and I felt what he wanted me to feel. If he's crazy, I am too; a fine couple we are!"

She continued. "But it wasn't Nick! I saw his face when we drove off, and it had changed again, and that was Nick's face, not the other. And he was sorry; I could see he was sorry, and the other could never have regretted it—not ever! The other isn't—quite human, but Nick is."

She paused, considering the idea. "Of course," she resumed, "I might have imagined that change at the end. I was hazy and quavery, and it's the last thing I *do* remember; that must have been just before I passed out."

And then, replying to her own objection, "But I *didn't* imagine it! I saw it happen once before, that other night when—Well, what difference does it make, anyway? It's over, and I've given my promise."

But she was unable to dismiss the matter as easily as that. There was some uncanny, elusive element in it that fascinated her. Cruel, terrible, demoniac, he might have been; he had also been kind, lovable, and gentle. Yet Dr. Carl had told her that split personalities could contain no characteristics that were not present in the original, normal character. Was cruelty, then, a part of kindness? Was cruelty merely the lack of kindness, or, cynical thought, was kindness but the lack of cruelty? Which qualities were positive in the antagonistic phases of Nicholas Devine's individuality, and which negative? Was the gentle, lovable, but indubitably weaker character the split, and the demon of last evening his normal self? Or vice-versa? Or were both of these fragmentary entities, portions of some greater personality as yet unapparent to her?

The whole matter was a mystery; she shrugged in helpless perplexity.

"I don't think Dr. Carl knows as much about it as he says," she mused. "I don't think psychiatry or any other science knows that much about the human soul. Dr. Carl doesn't even believe in a soul; how could he know anything about it, then?" She frowned in puzzlement and gave up the attempt to solve the mystery.

The hours she had spent in her room, at her mother's insistence, began to pall; she didn't feel particularly ill—it was more of a languor, a depressed, worn-out feeling. Her mother, of course, was out somewhere; she felt a desire for human companionship, and wondered if the Doctor might by some chance drop in. It seemed improbable; he had his regular Sunday afternoon routine of golf at the Club, and it took a real catastrophe to keep him away from that. She sighed, stretched her legs, rose from her position on the chaise lounge, and wandered toward the kitchen where Magda was doubtless to be found.

It was in the dusk of the rear hall that the first sense of her loss came over her. Heretofore her renunciation of Nicholas Devine was a rational thing, a promise given but not felt; but now it was suddenly a poignant reality. Nick was gone, she realized; he was out of her world, irrevocably sundered from her. She paused at the top of the rear flight of stairs, considering the matter.

"He's gone! I won't see him ever again." The thought was appalling; she felt already a premonition of loneliness to come, of an emptiness in her world, a lack that nothing could replace.

"I shouldn't have promised Dr. Carl," she mused, knowing that even without that promise her course must still have been the same. "I shouldn't have, not until I'd talked to Nick—my own Nick."

And still, she reflected forlornly, what difference did it make? She had to give him up; she couldn't continue to see him not knowing at what instant that terrible caricature of him might appear to torment her. But he might have explained, she argued miserably, answering her own objection at once—he's said he couldn't explain, didn't understand. The thing was at an impasse.

She shook her shining black head despondently, and descended the dusky well of the stairs to the kitchen. Magda was there clattering among her pots and pans; Pat entered quietly and perched on the high stool by the long table. Old Magda, who had warmed her babyhood milk and measured out her formula, gave her a single glance and continued her work.

"Sorry about the accident, I was," she said without looking up.

"Thanks," responded the girl. "I'm all right again."

"You don't look it."

"I feel all right."

She watched the mysterious, alchemistic mixing of a pastry, and thought of the vast array of them that had come from Magda's hands. As far back as she could remember she had perched on this stool observing the same mystic culinary rites.

Suddenly another memory rose out of the grave of forgetfulness and went gibbering across her world. She remembered the stories Magda used to tell her, frightening stories of witchcraft and the evil eye, tales out of an older region and a more credulous age.

"Magda," she asked, "did you ever see a devil?"

"Not I, but I've talked with them that had."

"Didn't you ever see one?"

"No." The woman slid a pan into the oven. "I saw a man once, when I was a tot, possessed by a devil."

"You did? How did he look?"

"He screamed terrible, then he said queer things. Then he fell down and foam came out of his mouth."

"Like a fit?"

"The Priest, he said it was a devil. He came and prayed over him, and after a while he was real quiet, and then he was all right."

"Possessed by a devil," said Pat thoughtfully. "What happened to him?"

"Dunno."

"What queer things did he say?"

"Wicked things, the Priest said. I couldn't tell! I was a tot."

"Possessed by a devil!" Pat repeated musingly. She sat immersed in thoughts on the high stool while Magda clattered busily about. The woman paused finally, turning her face to the girl.

"What you so quiet about, Miss Pat?"

"I was just thinking."

"You get your letter?"

"Letter? What letter? Today's Sunday."

"Special delivery. The girl, she put it in the hall."

"I didn't know anything about it. Who'd write me a special?"

She slipped off the high stool and proceeded to the front hall. The letter was there, solitary on the salver that always held the mail. She picked it up, examining the envelope in sudden startled amazement and more than a trace of illogical exultation.

For the letter, post-marked that same morning, was addressed in the irregular script of Nicholas Devine!

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## 13 Indecision

Pat turned the envelope dubiously in her hands, while a maze of chaotic thoughts assailed her. She felt almost a sensation of guilt as if she were in some manner violating the promise given to Dr. Horker; she felt a tinge of indignation that Nicholas Devine should dare communicate with her at all, and she felt too that queer exultation, an inexplicable pleasure, a feeling of secret triumph. She slipped the letter in the pocket of her robe and padded quietly up the stairs to her own room.

Strangely, her loneliness had vanished. The great house, empty now save for herself and Magda in the distant kitchen, was no longer a place of solitude; the discovery of the letter, whatever its contents, had changed the deserted rooms into chambers teeming with her own excitements, trepidations, doubts, and hopes. Even hopes, she admitted to herself, though hopes of what nature she was quite unable to say. What *could* Nick write that had the power to change things? Apologies? Pleas? Promises? None of these could alter the naked, horrible facts of the predicament.

Nevertheless, she was almost a-tremble with expectation as she skipped hastily into her own room, carefully closed the door, and settled herself by the west windows. She drew the letter from her pocket, and then, with a tightening of her throat, tore open the envelope, slipping out the several pages of scrawled paper. Avidly she began to read.

"I don't know whether you'll ever see this"—the missive began without salutation—"and I'll not blame you, Pat dear, if you do return it unopened. There's nothing you can do that wouldn't be justified, nor can you think worse of me than I do of myself. And that's a statement so meaningless that even as I wrote it, I could anticipate its effect on you.

"Pat—How am I going to convince you that I'm sincere? Will you believe me when I write that I love you? Can you believe that I love you tenderly, worshipfully—reverently?

"You can't; I know you can't after that catastrophe of last night. But it's true, Pat, though the logic of a

Spinoza might fail to convince you of it.

"I don't know how to write you this. I don't know whether you want to hear what I could say, but I know that I must try to say it. Not apologies, Pat—I shouldn't dare approach you for so poor a reason as that—but a sort of explanation. You more than any one in the world are entitled to that explanation, if you want to hear it.

"I can't write it to you, Pat; it's something I can only make you believe by telling you—something dark and rather terrible. But please, Dear, believe that I mean you no harm, and that I plan no subterfuge, when I suggest that you see me. It will be, I think, for the last time.

"Tonight, and tomorrow night, and as many nights to follow as I can, I'll sit on a bench in the park near the place where I kissed you that first time. There will be people passing there, and cars driving by; you need fear nothing from me. I choose the place to bridle my own actions, Pat; nothing can happen while we sit there in the view of the world.

"To write you more than this is futile. If you come, I'll be there; if you don't, I'll understand.

"I love you."

The letter was signed merely "Nick." She stared at the signature with feelings so confused that she forebore any attempt to analyze them.

"But I can't go," she mused soberly. "I've promised Dr. Carl. Or at least, I can't go without telling him."

That last thought, she realized, was a concession. Heretofore she hadn't let herself consider the possibility of seeing Nicholas Devine again, and now suddenly she was weakening, arguing with herself about the ethics of seeing him. She shook her head decisively.

"Won't do, Patricia Lane!" she told herself. "Next thing, you'll be slipping away without a word to anybody, and coming home with two black eyes and a broken nose. Won't do at all!"

She dropped her eyes to the letter. "Explanations," she reflected. "I guess Dr. Carl would give up a hole-in-one to hear that explanation. And I'd give more than that." She shook her head regretfully. "Nothing to do about it, though. I promised."

The sun was slanting through the west windows; she sat watching the shadows lengthen in the room, and tried to turn her thoughts into more profitable channels. This was the first Sunday in many months that she had spent alone in the house; it was a custom for herself and her mother to spend the afternoon at the club. The evening too, as a rule; there was invariably bridge for Mrs. Lane, and Pat was always the center of a circle of the younger members. She wondered dreamily what the crowd thought of her non-appearance, reflecting that her mother had doubtless enlarged on Dr. Carl's story of an accident. Dr. Carl wouldn't say much, simply that he'd ordered her to stay at home. But sooner or later, Nick would hear the accident story; she wondered what he'd think of it.

She caught herself up sharply. "My ideas wander in circles," she thought petulantly. "No matter where I start, they curve around back to Nick. It won't do; I've got to stop it."

Nearly time for the evening meal, she mused, watching the sun as it dropped behind Dr. Horker's house. She didn't feel much like eating; there was still a remnant of the exhausted, dragged-out sensation, though the headache that had accompanied her awakening this morning had disappeared.

"I know what the morning after feels like, anyway," she reflected with a wry little smile. "Everybody ought to experience it once, I suppose. I wonder how Nick—"

She broke off abruptly, with a shrug of disgust. She slipped the letter back into its envelope, rose and deposited it in the drawer of the night-table. She glanced at the clock ticking on its shiny top.

"Six o'clock," she murmured. Nick would be sitting in the park in another two hours or so. She had a twinge of sympathy at the thought of his lone vigil; she could visualize the harried expression on his face when the hours passed without her arrival.

"Can't be helped," she told herself. "He's no right to ask for anything of me after last night. He knows that; he said so in his letter."

She suppressed an impulse to re-read that letter, and trotted deliberately out of the room and down the stairs. Magda had set the table in the breakfast room; it was far cozier than the great dining room, especially without her mother's company. And the maid was away; the breakfast room simplified serving, as well.

She tried valorously to eat what Magda supplied, but the food failed to tempt her. It wasn't so much her physical condition, either; it was—She clenched her jaws firmly; was the memory of Nicholas Devine to haunt her forever?

"Pat Lane," she said in admonition, "you're a crack-brained fool! Just because a man kicks you all over the place is no reason to let him become an obsession."

She drank her coffee, feeling the sting of its heat on her injured lips. She left the table, tramped firmly to her room, and began defiantly to read. The effort was useless; half a dozen times she forced her attention to the page only to find herself staring vaguely into space a moment or two later. She closed the book finally with an irritable bang, and vented her restlessness in pacing back and forth.

"This house is unbearable!" she snapped. "I'm not going to stay shut up here like a jail-bird in solitary confinement. A walk in the open is what I need, and that's what I'll have."

She glanced at the clock; seven-thirty. She tore off her robe pettishly, flung out of her pajamas, and began to dress with angry determination. She refused to think of a lonely figure that might even now be sitting disconsolately on a bench in the near-by park.

She disguised her bruised cheek as best she could, dabbed a little powder on the abrasion on her chin, and tramped militantly down the stairs. She caught up her wrap, still lying where the Doctor had tossed it last night, and moved toward the door, opening it and nearly colliding with the massive figure of Dr. Horker!

"Well!" boomed the Doctor as she started back in surprise. "You're pretty spry for a patient. Think you were going out?"

"Yes," said Pat defiantly.

"Not tonight, child! I left the Club early to take a look at you."

"I am perfectly all right. I want to go for a walk."

"No walk. Doctor's orders."

"I'm of legal age!" she snapped. "I want to go for a walk. Do I go?"

"You do not." The Doctor placed his great form squarely in the doorway. "Not unless you can lick me, my girl, and I'm pretty tough. I put you to bed last night, and I can do as much tonight. Shall I?"

Pat backed into the hall. "You don't have to," she said sullenly. "I'm going there myself." She flung her wrap angrily to a chair and stalked up the stairs.

"Good night, spit-fire," he called after her. "I'll read down here until your mother comes home."

The girl stormed into her room in anger that she knew to be illogical.

"I won't be watched like a problem child!" she told herself viciously. "I know damn well what he thought—and I wasn't going to meet Nick! I wasn't at all!"

She calmed suddenly, sat on the edge of her bed and kicked off her pumps. It had occurred to her that Nick had written his intention to wait for her in the park tomorrow night as well, and Dr. Horker's interference had confirmed her in a determination to meet him.



"I won't be bullied!" Pat told herself, examining her features in the mirror. The two day interval had faded the discoloration of her cheek to negligible proportions, and all that remained as evidence of the violence of Saturday night was the diminishing mark on her chin. Of course, her knees—but they were covered; most of the time, at least. She gave herself a final inspection, and somewhere below a clock boomed.

"Eight o'clock," she remarked to her image; "Time to be leaving, and it serves Dr. Carl right for his high-handed actions last night. I won't be bullied by anybody." She checked herself as her mind had almost added, "Except Nick." True or not, she didn't relish the thought; the recent recollections it roused were too disturbing.

She tossed a stray wisp of black hair from her forehead and turned to the door. She heard her mother's voice as she descended the stairs.

"Are you going out, Patricia? Do you think it wise?"

"I am perfectly all right. I want to go for a walk."

"I know, Dear; it was largely your appearance I meant." She surveyed the girl with a critical eye. "Nice enough, except for that little spot on your chin, and will you never learn to keep your hair away from that side of your forehead? One can never do a bob right; why don't you let it grow out like the other girls?"

"Makes me individual," replied Pat, moving toward the outer door. "I won't be late at all," she added.

On the porch she cast a cautious glance at Dr. Horker's windows, but his great figure was nowhere evident. Only a light burning in the library evinced his presence. She gave a sigh of relief, and tiptoed down the steps to the sidewalk, and moved hastily away from the range of his watchful eyes.

No sooner had she sighted the park than doubts began to torment her. Suppose this were some trick of Nicholas Devine's, to trap her into some such situation as that of Saturday night. Even suppose that she found him the sweet personality that she had loved, might that also be a trick? Mightn't he be trusting to his ability to win her over, to the charm she had confessed to him that he held for her? Couldn't he be putting his faith in his own amorous skill, planning some specious explanation to win her forgiveness only to use her once more as the material for some horrible experiment? And if he were, would she be able to prevent herself from yielding?

"Forewarned is fore-armed," she told herself. "I'll not put up such a feeble resistance this time, knowing what I now know. And it's only fair of me to listen to his explanation, if he really has one."

She was reassured by the sight of the crowded park; groups strolled along the walks, and an endless procession of car-headlights marked the course of the roadway. Nothing could happen in such an environment; they'd be fortunate even to have an opportunity for confidential talk. She waited for the traffic lights, straining her eyes to locate Nicholas Devine; at the click of the signal she darted across the street.

She moved toward the lake; here was the spot, she was sure. She glanced about with eagerness unexpected even to herself, peering through the shadow-shot dusk. He wasn't there, she concluded, with a curious sense of disappointment; her failure to appear last night had disheartened him; he had abandoned his attempt.

Then she saw him. He sat on a bench isolated from the rest in a treeless area overlooking the lake. She saw his disconsolate figure, his chin on his hand, staring moodily over the waters. A tremor ran through her, she halted deliberately, waiting until every trace of emotion had vanished, then she advanced, standing coolly beside him.

For a moment he was unaware of her presence; he sat maintaining his dejected attitude without glancing at her. Suddenly some slight movement, the flutter of her skirt, drew his attention; he turned sharply, gazing directly into her face.

"Pat!" He sprang to his feet. "Pat! is it you—truly you? Or are you one of these visions that have been plaguing me for hours?"

"I'm real," she said, returning his gaze with a studied coolness in her face. She made no other move; her cold composure disconcerted him, and he winced, flushed, and moved nervously aside as she seated herself. He dropped beside her; he made no attempt to touch her, but sat watching her in silence for so long a time that she felt her composure ebbing. There was a hungry, defeated look about him; there was a wistfulness, a frustration, in his eyes that seemed about to tug tears from her own eyes. Abruptly she dropped her gaze from his face.

"Well?" she said finally in a small voice, and as he made no reply, "I'm here."

"Are you really, Pat? Are you truly here?" he murmured, still watching her avidly. "I—I still don't believe it. I waited here for hours and hours last night, and I'd given up hope for tonight, or any night. But I would have come again and again."

She started as he bent suddenly toward her, but he was merely examining her face. She saw the gleam of horror in his expression as his eyes surveyed the faintly visible bruise on her cheek, the red mark on her chin.

"Oh my God, Pat!" His words were barely audible. "Oh my God!" he repeated, drawing away from her and resuming the attitude of desolation in which her arrival had found him. "I've hoped it wasn't true!"

"What wasn't?" She was keeping her voice carefully casual; this miserable contrition of Nick's was tugging at her rather too powerfully for complete safety.

"What I remembered. What I saw just now."

"You hoped it wasn't true?" she queried in surprise. "But you did it."

"I did it, Pat? Do you think *I* could have done it?"

"But you did!" Her voice had taken on a chill inflection; the memory of those indignities came to steel her against him.

"Pat, do you think I could assault your daintiness, or maltreat the beauty I worship? Didn't anything occur to you? Didn't anything seem queer about—about that ghastly evening?"

"Queer!" she echoed. "That's certainly a mild word to use, isn't it?"

"But I mean—hadn't you any idea of what had happened? Didn't you think anything of it except that I had suddenly gone mad? Or that I'd grown to hate you?"

"What was I to think?" she countered, trying to control the tremor that had crept into her voice.

"But did you think that?"

"No," the girl confessed after a pause. "At first, when you started with that drink, I thought you were looking for material for your work. That's what you said—an experiment. Didn't you?"

"I guess so," he groaned.

"But after that, after I'd swallowed that horrible stuff, but before everything went hazy, I—thought differently."

"But what, Pat? What did you think?"

"Why, then I realized that it wasn't you—not the real you. I could feel the—well, the presence of the person I knew; this presence that was tormenting me was another person, a terrible, cold, inhuman stranger."

"Pat!" There was a note almost of relief in his voice. "Did you really feel that?"

"Yes. Does it help matters, my sensing that? I can't see how."

His eyes, which had been fixed on hers, dropped suddenly. "No," he muttered, all the relief gone out of his tones, "no, it doesn't help, does it? Except that it's a meager consolation to me to know that you felt it."

Pat struggled to suppress an impulse to reach out her hand, to stroke his hair. She caught herself sharply; this was the very danger against which she had warned herself—this was the very attitude she had anticipated in Nicholas Devine, the lure which might bait a trap. Yet he looked so forlorn, so wistful! It was an effort to forbear from touching him; her fingers fairly ached to brush his cheek.

"Only a fool walks twice into the same trap," she told herself. Aloud she said, "You promised me an explanation. If you've any excuse, I'd like to hear it." Her voice had resumed its coolness.

"I haven't any excuse," he responded gloomily, "and the explanation is perhaps too bizarre, too fantastic for belief. *I* don't believe it entirely; I suppose *you* couldn't believe it at all."

"You promised," she repeated. The carefully assumed composure of her voice threatened to crack; this wistfulness of his was a powerful weapon against her defense.

"Oh, I'll give you the explanation," he said miserably. "I just wanted to warn you you'd not believe me." He gave her a despondent glance. "Pat, as I love you I swear that what I tell you is the truth. Do you think you can believe me?"

"Yes," she murmured. The tremor had reappeared in her voice despite her efforts.

Nicholas Devine turned his eyes toward the lake and began to speak.

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## 15

### A Modern Mr. Hyde

"I don't remember when I first noticed it," began Nick in a low voice, "but I'm two people. I'm me, the person who's talking to you now, and I'm—another."

Pat, looking very pale and serious in the dusky light, said nothing at all. She simply gazed at him silently, without the slightest trace of surprise in her wide dark eyes.

"This is the real me," proceeded Nick miserably. "The other is an outsider, that has somehow contrived to grow into me. He is different; cold, cruel, utterly selfish, and not exactly—human. Do you understand?"

"Y—Yes," said the girl, fighting to control her voice. "Sort of."

"This is a struggle that has continued for a long time," he pursued. "There were times in childhood when I remember punishments for offenses I never committed, for nasty little meannesses *he* perpetrated. My mother, and after her death, my tutoress, thought I was lying when I tried to explain; they thought I was trying to evade responsibility. After a while I learned not to explain; I learned to accept my punishments doggedly, and to fight this other when he sought dominance."

"And could you?" asked Pat, her voice frankly quavery. "Could you fight him?"

"I was the stronger; I could win—usually. He slipped into consciousness as wilful, mean little impulses, nasty moods, unreasoning hates and such unpleasant things. But I was always the stronger: I learned to drive him into the background."

"You said you *were* the stronger," she mused. "What does that mean, Nick?"

"I've always been the stronger; I am now. But recently, Pat—I think it's since I fell in love with you—the struggle has been on evener terms. I've weakened or he's gained. I have to guard against him constantly; in any moment of weakness he may slip in, as on our ride last week, when we had that near accident. And again Saturday." He turned appealing eyes on the girl. "Pat, do you believe me?"

"I guess I'll have to," she said unhappily. "It—makes things rather hopeless, doesn't it?"

He nodded dejectedly. "Yes. I've always felt that sooner or later I'd win, and drive him away permanently. I've felt on the verge of complete victory more than once, but now—" He shook his head doubtfully. "He had never dominated me so entirely until Saturday night—Pat, you don't know what Hell is like until you're forced as I was to watch the violation of the being you worship, to stand helpless while a desecration is committed. I'd rather die than suffer it again!"

"Oh!" said the girl faintly. She was thinking of the sorry picture she must have presented as she reeled half-clothed through the alley. "Can you see what—*he* sees?"

"Of course, and think his thoughts. But only when he's dominant. I don't know what evil he's planning now, else I could forestall him, I would have warned you if I could have known."

"Where is he now?"

"Here," said Nick somberly. "Here listening to us, knowing what I'm thinking and feeling, laughing at my unhappiness."

"Oh!" gasped Pat again. She watched her companion doubtfully. Then the memory of Dr. Horker's diagnosis came to her, and set her wondering. Was this story the figment of an unsettled mind? Was this irrational tale of a fiendish intruder merely evidence that the Doctor was right in his opinion? She was in a maze of uncertainty.

"Nick," she said, "did you ever try medical help? Did you ever go to a doctor about it?"

"Of course, Pat! Two years ago I went to a famous psychiatrist in New York—you'd know the name if I mentioned it—and told him about the—the case. And he studied me, and he treated me, and psychoanalyzed me, and the net result was just nothing. And finally he dismissed me with the opinion that 'the whole thing is just a fixed delusion, fortunately harmless!' Harmless! Bah! But it wasn't I that did those things, Pat; I had to stand by in horror and watch. It was enough to *drive* me crazy, but it didn't—quite."

"But—Oh, Nick, what is it? What is this—this outsider? Can't we fight it somehow?"

"How can anyone except me fight it?"

"Oh, I don't know!" she wailed miserably. "There must be a way. Doctors claim to know pretty nearly everything; there must be *something* to do."

"But there isn't," he retorted gloomily. "I don't know any more than you what that thing is, but it's beyond your doctors. I've got to fight it out alone."

"Nick—" Her voice was suddenly tense. "Are you sure it isn't some kind of madness? Something tangible like that could perhaps be treated."

"It's no kind your doctors can treat, Pat. Did you ever hear of a madman who stood aside and rationally watched the working of his own insanity? And that's what I'm forced to do. And yet—this other isn't insane either. Were its actions insane?"

Pat shuddered. "I—don't know," she said in low tones. "I guess not."

"No. Horrible, cruel, bestial, devilishly cunning, evil—but not insane. I don't know what it is, Pat. I know that the fight has to be made by me alone. There's nothing, nobody in the world, that can help."

"Nick!" she wailed.

"I'm sorry, Pat dear. You understand now why I was so reluctant to fall in love with you. I was afraid to love you; now I know I was right."

"Nick!" she cried, then paused hopelessly. After a moment she continued, "Yesterday I was determined to forget you, and now—now I don't care if this whole tale of yours is a mesh of fantastic lies, I love you! I'd love you even if your real self were that—that other creature, and even if I knew that this was just a trap. I'd love you anyway."

"Pat," he said seriously, "don't you believe me? Why should I offer to give you up if this were—what you said? Wouldn't I be pleading for another chance, making promises, finding excuses?"

"Oh, I believe you, Nick! It isn't that; I was just thinking how strange it is that I could hate you so two nights past and love you so tonight."

"Oh God, Pat! Even you can't know how much I love you; and to win you and then be forced to give you up—" He groaned.

The girl reached out her hand and covered his; it was the first time during the evening that she had touched him, and the feel of his flesh sent a tingle through her. She was miserably distraught.

"Honey," she murmured brokenly. "Nick, Honey."

He looked at her. "Do you suppose there's a chance to beat the thing?" he asked. "I'd not ask you to wait, Pat, but if I

only glimpsed a chance—"

"I'll wait. I don't think I could do anything else but wait for you."

"If I only knew what I had to fight!" he whispered. "If I only knew that!"

A sudden memory leaped into Pat's mind. "Nick," she said huskily, "I think I know."

"What do you mean, Pat?"

"It's something Magda—the cook—said to me. It's foolish, superstitious, but Nick, what else can it be?"

"Tell me!"

"Well, she was talking to me yesterday, and she said that when she was a child in the old country, she had seen a man once—" she hesitated—"a man who was possessed by a devil. Nick, I think you're possessed by a devil!"

He stared at her. "Pat," he said hoarsely, "that's—an impossibility!"

"I know, but what else can it be?"

"Out of the Dark Ages," he muttered. "An echo of the Black Mass and witchcraft, but—"

"What did they do," asked the girl, "to people they thought were possessed?"

"Exorcism!" he whispered.

"And how did they—exorcise?"

"I don't know," he said in a low voice. "Pat, that's an impossible idea, but—I don't know!" he ended.

"We'll try," she murmured, still covering his hand with her own. "What else can we do, Nick?"

"What's done I'll do alone, Pat."

"But I want to help!"

"I'll not let you, Dear. I won't have you exposed to a repetition of those indignities, or perhaps worse!"

"I'm not afraid."

"Then I am, Pat! I won't have it!"

"But what'll you do?"

"I'll go away. I'll battle the thing through once for all, and I'll either come back free of it or—" He paused and the girl did not question him further, but sat staring at him with troubled eyes.

"I won't write you, Pat," he continued. "If you should receive a letter from me, burn it—don't read it. It might be from—the other, a trap or a lure of some sort. Promise me! You'll promise that, won't you?"

She nodded; there was a glint of tears in her eyes.

"And I don't want you to wait, Pat," he proceeded. "I don't want you to feel that you have any obligations to me—God knows you've nothing to thank me for! When—If I come back and you haven't changed, then we'll try again."

"Nick," she said in a small voice, "how do you know the—the other won't come back here? How can you promise for—it?"

"I'm still master!" he said grimly. "I won't be dominated long enough at any time for that to happen. I'll fight it down."

"Then—it's good-bye?"

He nodded. "But not for always—I hope."

"Nick," she murmured, "will you kiss me?" She felt a tear on her cheek. "I'll stand losing you a little better if I can have a—last kiss—to remember." Her voice was faltering.

His arms were about her. She yielded herself completely to his caress; the park, the crowd passing a few yards away, the people on near-by benches, were all forgotten, and once more she felt herself alone with Nicholas Devine in a vast empty cosmos.

An insistent voice penetrated her consciousness; she realized that it had been calling her name for some seconds.

"Miss Lane," she heard, and again, "Miss Lane." A hand tapped her shoulder; with a sudden start, she tore her lips away, and looked up into a face unrecognized for a moment. Then she placed it. It was the visage of Mueller, Dr. Horker's companion on that disastrous Saturday night.

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## 16

### Possessed

Pat stared at the intruder in a mingling of embarrassment, perplexity, and indignation. She felt her cheeks reddening as the latter emotion gained the dominance of her mood.

"Well!" she snapped. "What do you want?"

"I thought I'd walk home with you," Mueller said amiably.

"Walk home with me! Please explain that!" She grasped the arm of Nicholas Devine, who had risen angrily at the interruption. "Sit down, Nick, I know the fellow."

"So should he," said Mueller. "Sure; I'll explain. I'm on a job for Dr. Horker."

"Spying on me for him, I suppose!" taunted the girl.

"No. Not on you."

"He means on me," said Nick soberly. "You can't blame him, Pat. And perhaps you had better go home; we've finished here. There's nothing more we can do or say."

"Very well," she said, her voice suddenly softer. "In a moment, Nick." She turned to Mueller. "Would you mind telling me why you waited until now to interfere? We've been here two hours, you know."

"Sure I'll tell you. I got no orders to interfere, that's why."

"Then why did you?" queried Pat tartly.

"I didn't until I saw him there"—he nodded at Nick—"put his arms around you. Then I figured, having no orders, it was time to use my own judgment."

"If any!" sniffed the girl. She turned again to Nick; her face softened, became very tender. "Honey," she murmured huskily, "I guess it's good-bye now. I'll be fighting with you; you know that."

"I know that," he echoed, looking down into her eyes. "I'm almost happy, Pat."

"When'll you go?" she whispered in tones inaudible to Mueller.

"I don't know," he answered, his voice unchanged. "I'll have to make some sort of preparations—and I don't want you to know."

She nodded. She gazed at him a moment longer with tear-bright eyes. "Good-bye, Nick," she whispered. She rose on tiptoe, and kissed him very lightly on his lips, then turned and walked quickly away, with Mueller following behind.

She walked on, ignoring him until he halted beside her at the crossing of the Drive. Then she gave him a cold glance.

"Why is Dr. Carl having him watched?" she asked.

Mueller shrugged. "The ins and outs of this case are too much for me," he said. "I do what I'm paid to do."

"You're not watching him now."

"Nope. Seemed like the Doctor would think it was more important to get you home."

"You're wasting your time," she said irritably as the lights changed and they stepped into the street. "I was going home anyway."

"Well, now you got company all the way." Mueller's voice was placid.

The girl sniffed contemptuously, and strode silently along. The other's presence irritated her; she wanted time and solitude to consider the amazing story Nicholas Devine had given her. She wanted to analyze her own feelings, and most of all she wanted just a place of privacy to cry out her misery. For now the loss of Nicholas Devine had changed from a fortunate escape to a tragedy, and liar, madman, or devil, she wanted him terribly, with all the power of her tense little heart. So she moved as swiftly as she could, ignoring the silent companionship of Mueller.

They reached her home; the light in the living room window was evidence that the bridge game was still in progress. She mounted the steps, Mueller watching her silently from the walk; she fumbled for her key.

Suddenly she snapped her hand-bag shut; she couldn't face her mother and the two spinster Brocks and elderly, inquisitive Carter Henderson. They'd suggest that she cut into the game, and they'd argue if she refused, and she couldn't play bridge now! She glanced at the impassive Mueller, turned and crossed the strip of lawn to Dr. Horker's residence, where the light still glowed in the library, and rang the bell. She saw the figure on the sidewalk move away as the shadow of the Doctor appeared on the lighted square of the door.

"Hello," boomed the Doctor amiably. "Come in."

Pat stalked into the library and threw herself angrily into Dr. Horker's particular chair. The other grinned, and chose another place.

"Well," he said, "What touched off the fuse this time?"

"Why are you spying on my friends?" snapped the girl. "By what right?"

"So he's spotted Mueller, eh? That lad's diabolically clever, Pat—and I mean diabolic."

"That's no answer!"

"So it isn't," agreed the Doctor. "Say it's because I'm acting *in loco parentis*."

"And *in loco* is as far as you'll get, Dr. Carl, if you're going to spy on me!"

"On you?" he said mildly. "Who's spying on you?"

"On us, then!"

"Or on us?" queried the Doctor. "I set Mueller to watch the Devine lad. Have you by some mischance broken your promise to me?"

Pat flushed. She had forgotten that broken promise; the recollection of it suddenly took the wind from her sails, placed her on the defensive.

"All right," she said defiantly. "I did; I admit it. Does that excuse you?"

"Perhaps it helps to explain my actions, Pat. Don't you understand that I'm trying to protect you? Do you think I hired Mueller out of morbid curiosity, or professional interest in the case? Times aren't so good that I can throw money away on such whims."

"I don't need any protection. I can take care of myself!"

"So I noticed," said the Doctor dryly. "You gave convincing evidence of it night before last."

"Oh!" said the girl in exasperation. "You would say that!"

"It's true, isn't it?"

"Suppose it is! I don't have to learn the same lesson twice."

"Well, apparently once wasn't enough," observed the other amiably. "You walked into the same danger tonight."

"I wasn't in any danger tonight!" Suddenly her mood changed as she recalled the circumstances of her parting with Nicholas Devine. "Dr. Carl," she said, her voice dropping, "I'm terribly unhappy."

"Lord!" he exclaimed staring at her. "Pat, your moods are as changeable as my golf game! You're as mercurial as your Devine lad! A moment ago you were snapping at me, and now I'm suddenly acceptable again." He perceived the misery in her face. "All right, child; I'm listening."

"He's going away," she said mournfully.

"Don't you think that's best for everybody concerned? I commend his judgment."

"But I don't want him to!"

"You do, Pat. You can't continue seeing him, and his absence will make it easier for you."

"It'll never be easier for me, Dr. Carl." She felt her eyes fill. "I guess I'm—just a fool about him."

"You still feel that way, after the experience you went through?"

"Yes. Yes, I do."

"Then you *are* a fool about him, Pat. He's not worth such devotion."

"How do you know what he's worth? I'm the only one to judge that."

"I have eyes," said the Doctor. "What happened tonight to change your attitude so suddenly? You were amenable to reason yesterday."

"I didn't know yesterday what I know now."

"So he told a story, eh?" The Doctor watched her serious, troubled features. "Would you mind telling me, Honey? I'm interested in the defense mechanisms these psychopathic cases erect to explain their own impulses to themselves."

"No, I won't tell you!" snapped Pat indignantly. "Psychopathic cases! We're all just cases to you. I'm a case and he's another, and all you want is our symptoms!"

Doctor Horker smiled placatingly into her face. "Pat dear," he said earnestly, "don't you see I'd give my eyes to help you? Don't take my flippancies too seriously, Honey; look once in a while at the intentions behind them." He continued his earnest gaze.

The girl returned his look; her face softened. "I'm sorry," she said contritely. "I never doubted it, Dr. Carl—it's only that I'm so—so torn to pieces by all this that I get snappy and irritable." She paused. "Of course I'll tell you."

"I'd like to hear it."

"Well," she began hesitantly, "he said he was two personalities—one the character I knew, and one the character that we saw Saturday night. And the first one is—well, dominant, and fights the other one. He says the other has been growing stronger; until lately he could suppress it. And he says—Oh, it sounds ridiculous, the way I tell it, but it's true! I'm sure it's true!" She leaned toward the Doctor. "Did you ever hear of anything like it? Did you, Dr. Carl?"

"No." He shook his head, still watching her seriously. "Not exactly like that, Honey. Don't you think he might possibly



have lied to you, Pat? To excuse himself for the responsibility of Saturday night, for instance?"

"No, I don't," she said defiantly.

"Then you have an idea yourself what the trouble is? I judge you have."

"Yes," she said in low tones. "I have an idea."

"What is it?"

"I think he's possessed by a devil!" said the girl flatly.

A quizzical expression came into the Doctor's face. "Well, of all the queer ideas that harum-scarum mind of yours has ever produced, that's the queerest!" He broke into a chuckle.

"Queer, is it?" flared Pat. "I don't think you and your mind-doctors know as much as a Swahili medicine-man with a mask!"

She leaped angrily to her feet, stamped viciously into the hall.

"Devil and all," she repeated, "I love him!"

"Pat!" called the Doctor anxiously. "Pat! Where are you going, child?"

"Where do devils live?" Her voice floated tauntingly back from the front door. "Hell, of course!"

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## 17

### Witch-Doctor

Pat had no intentions, however, of following the famous highway that evening. She stamped angrily down the Doctor's steps, swished her way through the break in the hedge with small regard to the safety of her sheer hose, and mounted to her own porch. She found her key, opened the door and entered.

As she ascended the stairs, her fit of temper at the Doctor passed, and she felt lonely, weary, and unutterably miserable. She sank to a seat on the topmost step and gave herself over to bitter reflections.

Nick was gone! The realization came poignantly at last; there would be no more evening rides, no more conversations whose range was limited only by the scope of the universe, no more breath-taking kisses, the sweeter for his reluctance. She sat mournfully silent, and considered the miserable situation in which she found herself.

In love with a madman! Or worse—in love with a demon! With a being half of whose nature worshiped her while the other half was bent on her destruction! Was any one, she asked herself—was any one, anywhere, ever in a more hopeless predicament?

What could she do? Nothing, she realized, save sit helplessly aside while Nick battled the thing to a finish. Or possibly—the only alternative—take him as he was, chance the vicissitudes of his unstable nature, lay herself open to the horrors she had glimpsed so recently, and pray for her fortunes to point the way of salvation. And in the mood in which she now found herself, that seemed infinitely the preferable solution. Yet rationally she knew it was impossible; she shook her head despondently, and leaned against the wall in abject misery.

Then, thin and sharp sounded the shrill summons of the door bell, and a moment later, the patter of the maid's footsteps in the hall below. She listened idly to distract herself from the chain of despondency that was her thoughts, and was mildly startled to recognize the booming drums of Dr. Horker's voice. She heard his greeting and the muffled reply from the group, and then a phrase understandable because of his sonorous tones.

"Where's Pat?" The words drifted up the well of the stairs, followed by a scarcely audible reply from her mother. Heavy footfalls on the carpeted steps, and then his figure bulked on the landing below her. She cupped her chin on her hands, and stared down at him while he ascended to her side, sprawling his great figure beside her.

"Pat, Honey," he rumbled, "you're beginning to get me worried!"

"Am I?" Her voice was weary, dull. "I've had myself like that for a long time."

"Poor kid! Are you really so miserable over this Nick problem of yours?"

"I love him."

"Yes." He looked at her with sympathy and calculation mingling in his expression. "I believe you do. I'm sorry, Honey; I didn't realize until now what he means to you."

"You don't realize now," she murmured, still with the weary intonation.

"Perhaps not, Pat, but I'm learning. If you're in this thing as deeply at all that, I'm in too—to the finish. Want me?"

She reached out her hand, plucking at his coatsleeve. Abruptly she leaned toward him, burying her face against the rough tweed of his suit; she sobbed a little, while he patted her gently with his great, delicately fingered hand. "I'm sorry, Honey," he rumbled. "I'm sorry."

The girl drew herself erect and leaned back against the wall, shaking her head to drive the tears from her eyes. She gave the Doctor a wan little smile.

"Well?" she asked.

"I'll return your compliment of the other night," said Horker briskly. "I'll ask a few questions—purely professional, of course."

"Fire away, Dr. Carl."

"Good. Now, when our friend has one of these—uh—attacks, is he rational? Do his utterances seem to follow a logical thought sequence?"

"I—think so."

"In what way does he differ from his normal self?"

"Oh, every way," she said with a tremor. "Nick's kind and gentle and sensitive and—and naive, and this—other—is cruel, harsh, gross, crafty, and horrible. You can't imagine a greater difference."

"Um. Is the difference recognizable instantly? Could you ever be in doubt as to which phase you were encountering?"

"Oh, no! I can—well, sort of dominate Nick, but the other—Lord!" She shuddered again. "I felt like a terrified child in the presence of some powerful, evil god."

"Humph! Perhaps the god's name was Priapus. Well, we'll discount your feelings, Pat, because you weren't exactly in the best condition for—let's say *sober* judgment. Now about this story of his. What happens to his own personality when this other phase is dominant? Did he say?"

"Yes. He said his own self was compelled to sort of stand by while the—the intruder used his voice and body. He knew the thoughts of the other, but only when it was dominant. The rest of the time he couldn't tell its thoughts."

"And how long has he suffered from these—intrusions?"

"As long as he can remember. As a child he was blamed for the other's mischief, and when he tried to explain, people thought he was lying to escape punishment."

"Well," observed the Doctor, "I can see how they might think that."

"Don't you believe it?"

"I don't exactly disbelieve it, Honey. The human mind plays queer tricks sometimes, and this may be one of its little jokes. It's a psychiatrist's business to investigate such things, and to painlessly remove the point of the joke."

"Oh, if you only can, Dr. Carl! If you only can!"

"We'll see." He patted her hand comfortingly.

"Now, you say the kind, gentle, and all that, phase is the normal one. Is that usually dominant?"

"Yes. Nick can master the other, or could until recently. He says this last—attack—is the worst he's ever had; the other has been gaining strength."

"Strange!" mused the Doctor. "Well," he said with a smile of encouragement, "I'll have a look at him."

"Do you think you can help?" Pat asked anxiously. "Have you any idea what it is?"

"It isn't a devil, at any rate," he smiled.

"But have you any idea?"

"Naturally I have, but I can't diagnose at second hand. I'll have to talk to him."

"But what do you think it is?" she persisted.

"I think it's a fixation of an idea gained in childhood, Honey. I had a patient once—" He smiled at the reminiscence—"who had a fixed delusion of that sort. He was perfectly rational on every point save one—he believed that a pig with a pink ribbon was following him everywhere! Down town, into elevators and offices, home to bed—everywhere he went this pink-ribboned prize porker pursued him!"

"And did you cure him?"

"Well, he recovered," said the Doctor non-committally. "We got rid of the pig. And it might be something of that nature that's troubling your boy friend. Your description doesn't sound like a praecox or a manic depressive, as I thought originally."

"Oh," said Pat abruptly. "I forgot. He went to a doctor in New York, a very great doctor."

"Muenster?"

"He didn't say whom. But this doctor studied him a long time, and finally came out with this fixed idea theory of yours. Only he couldn't cure him."

"Um." Horker grunted thoughtfully.

"Do fixed ideas do things like that to people?" queried the girl. "Things like the pig and what happened to Nick?"

"They might."

"Then they're devils!" she announced with an air of finality. "They're just your scientific jargon for exactly what Magda means when she says a person's possessed by a devil. So I'm right anyway!"

"That's good orthodox theology, Pat," chuckled the Doctor. "We'll try a little exorcism on your devil, then." He rose to his feet. "Bring your boy friend around, will you?"

"Oh, Dr. Carl!" she cried. "He's leaving! I'll have to call him tonight!"

"Not tonight, Honey. Mueller would let me know if anything of that sort were happening. Tomorrow's time enough."

The girl stood erect, mounting to the top step to bring her head level with the Doctor's. She threw her arms about him, burying her face in his massive shoulder.

"Dr. Carl," she murmured, "I'm a nasty, ill-tempered, vicious little shrew, and I'm sorry, and I apologize. You know I'm crazy about you, and," she whispered in his ear, "so's Mother!"

"He doesn't answer! I'm too late," thought Pat disconsolately as she replaced the telephone. The cheerfulness with which she had awakened vanished like a patch of April sunshine. Now, with the failure of her third attempt in as many hours to communicate with Nicholas Devine, she was ready to confess defeat. She had waited too long. Despite Dr. Horker's confidence in Mueller, she should have called last night—at once.

"He's gone!" she murmured distractedly. She realized now the impossibility of finding him. His solitary habits, his dearth of friends, his lonely existence, left her without the least idea of how to commence a search. She knew, actually, so little about him—not even the source of the apparently sufficient income on which he subsisted. She felt herself completely at a loss, puzzled, lonesome, and disheartened. The futile buzzing of the telephone signal symbolized her frustration.

Perhaps, she thought, Dr. Horker might suggest something to do; perhaps, even, Mueller had reported Nick's whereabouts. She seized the hope eagerly. A glance at her wrist-watch revealed the time as ten-thirty; squarely in the midst of the Doctor's morning office hours, but no matter. If he were busy she could wait. She rose, bounding hastily down the stairs.

She glimpsed her mother opening mail in the library, and paused momentarily at the door. Mrs. Lane glanced up as she appeared.

"Hello," said the mother. "You've been on the telephone all morning, and what did Carl want of you last night?"

"Argument," responded Pat briefly.

"Carl's a gem! He's been of inestimable assistance in developing you into a very charming and clever daughter, and Heaven knows what I'd have raised without him!"

"Cain, probably," suggested Pat. She passed into the hall and out the door, blinking in the brilliant August sunshine. She crossed the strip of turf, picked her way through the break in the hedge, and approached the Doctor's door. It was open; it often was in summer time, especially during his brief office hours. She entered and went into the chamber used as waiting room.

His office door was closed; the faint hum of his voice sounded. She sat impatiently in a chair and forced herself to wait.

Fortunately, the delay was nominal; it was but a few minutes when the door opened and an opulent, middle-aged lady swept past her and away. Pat recognized her as Mrs. Lowry, some sort of cousin of the Brock pair.

"Good morning!" boomed the Doctor. "Professional call, I take it, since you're here during office hours." He settled his great form in a chair beside her.

"He's gone!" said Pat plaintively. "I can't reach him."

"Humph!" grunted Horker helpfully.

"I've tried all morning—he's always home in the morning."

"Listen, you little scatter-brain!" rumbled the Doctor. "Why didn't you tell me Mueller brought you home last night? I thought he was on the job."

"I didn't think of it," she wailed. "Nick said he'd have to make some preparations, and I never dreamed he'd skip away like this."

"He must have gone home directly after you left him, and skipped out immediately," said the Doctor ruminatively. "Mueller never caught up with him."

"But what'll we do?" she cried desperately.

"He can't have gone far with no more preparation than this," soothed Horker. "He'll write you in a day or two."

"He won't! He said he wouldn't. He doesn't want me to know where he is!" She was on the verge of tears.

"Now, now," said the Doctor still in his soothing tones. "It isn't as bad as all that."

"Take off your bed-side manner!" she snapped, blinking to keep back the tears. "It's worse! What ever can we do? Dr. Carl," she changed to a pleading tone, "can't you think of something?"

"Of course, Pat! I can think of several things to do if you'll quiet down for a moment or so."

"I'm sorry, Dr. Carl—but what *can* we do?"

"First, perhaps Mueller can trace him. That's his business, you know."

"But suppose he can't—what then?"

"Well, I'd suggest you write him a letter."

"But I don't know where to write!" she wailed. "I don't know his address!"

"Be still a moment, scatter-brain! Address it to his last residence; you know that, don't you? Of course you do. Now, don't you suppose he'll leave a forwarding address? He must receive some sort of mail about his income, or estate, or whatever he lives on. Your letter'll find him, Honey; don't you doubt it."

"Oh, do you think so?" she asked, suddenly hopeful. "Do you really think so?"

"I really think so. You would too if you didn't fly into a panic every time some little difficulty confronts you. Sometimes even my psychiatry is puzzled to explain how you can be so clever and so stupid, so self-reliant and so dependent, so capable and so helpless—all at one and the same time. Your Nick can't be as much of a paradox as you are!"

"I wonder if a letter *will* reach him," she said eagerly, ignoring the Doctor's remarks. "I'll try. I'll try immediately."

"I sort of had a feeling you would," said Horker amiably. "I hope you succeed; and not only for your sake, Pat, because God knows how this thing will work out. But I'm anxious to examine this youngster of yours on my own account; he must be a remarkable specimen to account for all the perturbation he's managed to cause you. And this Jekyll-and-Hyde angle sounds interesting, too."

"Jekyll and Hyde!" echoed Pat. "Dr. Carl, is that possible?"

"Not literally," chuckled the other, "though in a sense, Stevenson anticipated Freud in his thesis that liberating the evil serves also to release the good."

"But—It was a drug that caused that change in the story, wasn't it?"

"Well? Do you suspect your friend of being addicted to some mysterious drug? Is that the latest hypothesis?"

"Is there such a drug? One that could change a person's character?"

"*All* alkaloids do that, Honey. Some of them stimulate, some depress, some breed frenzies, and some give visions of delight—but all of them influence one's mental and emotional organization, which you call character. So for that matter, does a square meal, or a cup of coffee, or even a rainy day."

"But isn't there a drug that can separate good qualities from evil, like the story?"

"Emphatically not, Pat! That's not the trouble with this pesky boy friend of yours."

"Well," said the girl doubtfully, "I only wish I had as much faith in your psychologies as you have. If you brain-doctors know it all, why do you switch theories every year?"

"We *don't* know it all. On the other hand, there are a few things to be said in our favor."

"What are they?"

"For one," replied the Doctor, "we do cure people occasionally. You'll admit that."

"Sure," said Pat. "So did the Salem witches—occasionally." She gave him a suddenly worried look. "Oh, Dr. Carl, don't think I'm not grateful! You know how much I'm hoping from your help, but I'm miserably anxious over all this."

"Never mind, Honey. You're not the first one to point out the shortcomings of the medical profession. That's a game played by plenty of physicians too." He paused at the sound of footsteps on the porch, followed by the buzz of the doorbell. "Run along and write your letter, dear—here comes that Tuesday hypochondriac of mine, and he's rich enough for my careful attention."

Pat flashed him a quick smile of farewell and slipped quietly into the hall. At the door she passed the Doctor's patient—a lean, elderly gentleman of woe-begone visage—and returned to her own home.

Her spirits, mercurial to a degree, had risen again. She was suddenly positive that the Doctor's scheme would bring results, and she darted into the house almost buoyantly. Her mother had abandoned the desk, and she ensconced herself before it, finding paper and pen, and staring thoughtfully at the blank sheet.

Finally she wrote.

"Dear Nick—

"Something has happened, favorable, I think, to us. I believe I have found the help we need.

"Will you come if you can, or if that's not possible, break that self-given promise of yours, and communicate with me?

"I love you."

She signed it simply "Pat", placed it in an envelope, addressed it hastily, and hurried out to post it. On her return she spied the Doctor's hypochondriac in the act of leaving. He walked past her with his lean, worry-smitten face like a study of Hogarth, and she heard him mumbling to himself. The elation went out of her; she mounted the steps very soberly, and went miserably inside.

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## 19

### Man or Monster?

Pat suffered Wednesday through somehow, knowing that any such early response to her letter was impossible. Still, that impossibility did not deter her from starting at the sound of the telephone, and sorting through the mail with an eagerness that drew a casual attention from her mother.

"Good Heavens, Patricia! You're like a child watching for an answer to his note to Santa Claus!"

"That's what I am, I guess," responded the girl ruefully. "Maybe I expect too much from Santa Claus."

Late in the afternoon she drifted over to Dr. Horker's residence, to be informed that he was out. For distraction, she went in anyway, and spent a while browsing among the books in the library. She blundered into Kraft-Ebing, and read a few pages in growing indignation.

"I'm ashamed to be human!" she muttered disgustedly to herself, slamming shut the *Psychopathia Sexualis*. "I wouldn't be a doctor, or have a child of mine become one, if I were positively certain he'd turn into Lord Lister himself! Nick was right when he said doctors live on people's troubles."

She wondered how Dr. Horker could remain so human, so kindly and understanding, when as he said himself his world was a parade of misfits, incompetents, and all the nastiness of mortals. *He* was nice; she felt no embarrassment in confiding in him even when she might hesitate to bare her feelings to her own mother. Or was it simply the natural thing to do to tell one's troubles to a doctor?

Not, of course, that the situation reflected any discredit on her mother. Mrs. Lane was a very precious sort of parent, she mused, young as Pat in spirit, appreciative and enthusiastically fond of her daughter. That she trusted Pat, that she permitted her to do entirely as she pleased, was exactly as the girl would have it; it argued no lack of affection that each of them had their separate interests, and if the girl occasionally found herself in unpleasantness such as this, that too was her own fault.

And yet, she reflected, it was a bitter thing to have no one to whom to turn. If it weren't for Dr. Carl and his jovial

willingness to commit any sin up to malpractice to help her, she might have felt differently. But there always was Dr. Carl, and that, she concluded, was that.

She wandered back to her own side of the hedge, missing for the first time in many weeks the companionship of the old crowd. There hadn't been many idle afternoons heretofore during the summer; there'd always been some of the collegiate vacationing in town, and Pat had never needed other lure than her own piquant vivacity to assure herself of ample attention. Now, of course, it was different; she had so definitely tagged herself with the same Nicholas Devine that even the most ardent of the group had taken the warning.

"And I don't regret it either!" she told herself as she entered the house. "Trouble, mystery, suffering and all—I don't regret it! I've had my compensations too."

She sighed and trudged upstairs to prepare for dinner.

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Morning found Pat in a fair frenzy of trepidation. She kept repeating to herself that two days wasn't enough, that more time might be required, that even had Nicholas Devine received her letter, he might not have answered at once. Yet she was quivering as she darted into the hall to examine the mail.

It was there! She spied a fragment of the irregular handwriting and seized the envelope from beneath a clutter of notes, bills, and advertisements. She glanced at the post-mark. Chicago! He hadn't left the city, trusting perhaps to the anonymity conferred by its colossal swarm of humanity. Indeed, she thought as she stared at the missive, he might have moved around the corner, and save for the chance of a fortuitous meeting she'd never know it.

She tore open the envelope and scanned the several scrawled lines.

No heading, no salutation, not even a signature. Just, "Thursday evening at our place in the park." No more; she studied the few words intently, as if she could read into their bald phrasing the moods and hidden emotions of the writer.

A single phrase, but sufficient. The day was suddenly brighter, and the hope which had glowed so dimly yesterday was abruptly almost more than a hope—a certainty. All her doubts of Dr. Horker's abilities were forgotten; already the solution of this uncanny mystery seemed assured, and the restoration of romance imminent. She carried the letter to her own room and tucked it carefully by the other in the drawer of the night-table.

Thursday evening—this evening! Many hours intervened between now and a reasonable time for the meeting, but they loomed no longer drab, dull, and hopeless. She lay on her bed and dreamed.

She could meet Nick as early as possible; perhaps at eight-thirty, and bring him directly to the Doctor's residence. No use wasting a moment, she mused; the sooner some light could be thrown on the affliction, the sooner they could lay the devil—exorcise it. Demon, fixed idea, mental aberration, or whatever Dr. Carl chose to call it, it had to be met and vanquished once and forever. And it *could* be vanquished; in her present mood she didn't doubt it. Then—after that—there was the prospect of her own Nick regained, and the sweet vistas opened by that reflection.

She lunched in an abstracted manner. In the afternoon, when the phone rang, she jumped in a startled manner, then relaxed with a shrug.

But this time it *was* for her. She darted into the hall to take the call on the lower phone; she was hardly surprised but thoroughly excited to recognize the voice of Nicholas Devine.

"Pat?"

"Nick! Oh, Nick, Honey! What is it?"

"My note to you." Even across the wire she sensed the strain in his tense tones. "You've read it?"

"Of course, Nick! I'll be there."

"No." His voice was trembling. "You won't come, Pat. Promise you won't!"

"But why? Why not, Nick? Oh, it's terribly important that I see you!"

"You're not to come, Pat!"

"But—" An idea was struggling to her consciousness. "Nick, was it—?"

"Yes. You know now."

"But, Honey, what difference does it make? *You* come. You must, Nick!"

"I won't meet you, I tell you!" She could hear his voice rising excitedly in pitch, she could feel the intensity of the struggle across unknown miles of lifeless copper wire.

"Nick," she said, "I'm going to be there, and you're going to meet me."

There was silence at the other end.

"Nick!" she cried anxiously. "Do you hear me? I'll be there. Will you?"

His voice sounded again, now flat and toneless.

"Yes," he said. "I'll be there."

The receiver clicked at the far end of the wire; there was only a futile buzzing in Pat's ears. She replaced the instrument and sat staring dubiously at it.

Had that been Nick, really her Nick, or—? Suppose she went to that meeting and found—the other? Was she willing to face another evening of indignities and terrors like those still fresh in her memory?

Still, she argued, what harm could come to her on that bench, exposed as it was to the gaze of thousands who wandered through the park on summer evenings? Suppose it *were* the other who met her; there was no way to force her into a situation such as that of Saturday night. Nick himself had chosen that very spot for their other meeting, and for that very reason.

"There's no risk in it," she told herself, "Nothing can possibly happen. I'll simply go there and bring Nick back to Dr. Carl's, along a lighted, busy street, the whole two blocks. What's there to be afraid of?"

Nothing at all, she answered herself. But suppose—She shuddered and deliberately abandoned her chain of thought as she rose and rejoined her mother.

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## 20

### The Assination

Pat was by no means as buoyant as she had been in the morning. She approached the appointed meeting place with a feeling of trepidation that all her arguments could not subdue.

She surveyed the crowded walks of the park with relief; she felt confirmed in her assumption that nothing unpleasant could occur with so many on-lookers. So she approached the bench with somewhat greater self-assurance than when she had left the house.

She saw the seat with its lone occupant, and hastened her steps. Nicholas Devine was sitting exactly as he had on that other occasion, chin cupped on his hands, eyes turned moodily toward the vast lake that coruscated now with the reflection of stars and many lights. As before, she moved close to his side before he looked up, but here the similarity of the two occasions vanished. Her fears were realized; she was looking into the red-gleaming eyes and expressionless features of his other self—the demon of Saturday evening!

"Sit down!" he said as a sardonic half-smile twisted his lips. "Aren't you pleased? Aren't you thrilled to the very core of your being?"

Pat stood irresolute; she controlled an impulse to break into sudden, abandoned flight. The imminence of the crowded walks again reassured her, and she seated herself gingerly on the extreme edge of the bench, staring at her companion with coolly inimical eyes. He returned her gaze with features as immobile as carven stone; only his red eyes gave evidence of the obscene, uncanny life behind the mask.



"Well?" said Pat in as frigid a voice as she could muster.

"Yes," said the other surveying her. "You are quite as I recalled you. Very pretty, almost beautiful, save for a certain irregularity in your features. Not unpleasant, however." His eyes traveled over her body; automatically she drew back, shrinking away from him. "You have a seductive body," he continued. "A most seductive body; I regret that circumstances prevented our full enjoyment of it. But that will come. Yes, that will come!"

"Oh!" said Pat faintly. It took all her determination to remain seated by the side of the horror.

"You were extremely attractive as I attired you Saturday," the other proceeded. His lips took on a curious sensual leer. "I could have done better with more time; I would have stripped you somewhat more completely. Everything, I think, except your legs; I am pleased by the sight of long, straight, silk-clad legs, and should perhaps have received some pleasure by running these hands along them—scratching at proper intervals for the aesthetic effect of blood. But that too will come."

The girl sprang erect, gasping and speechless in outraged anger. She turned abruptly; nothing remained of her determination now. She felt only an urge to escape from the sneering tormentor who had lost in her mind all connection with her own Nicholas Devine. She took a sudden step.

"Sit down!" She heard the tones of the entity behind her, flat, unchanged. "Sit down, else I'll drag you here!"

She paused in sheer surprise, turning a startled face on the other.

"You wouldn't dare!" she said, amazed at the bald effrontery of the threat. "You don't dare touch me here!"

The other laughed. "Don't I? What have I to risk? *He*'ll suffer for any deed of mine! You'll call for aid against me and only loose the hounds on *him*."

Pat stared blankly at the evil face. She had no answer; for once her ready tongue found no retort.

"Sit down!" reiterated the other, and she dropped dazedly to her position on the bench. She turned dark questioning eyes on him.

"Do you see," he sneered, "how weakening an influence is this love of yours? To protect him you are obeying me; this is my authority over you—this body I share with him!"

She made no reply; she was making a desperate effort to lash her mind into activity, to formulate some means of combating the being who tortured her.

"It has weakened him, too," the other proceeded. "This disturbed love of his has taken away the mastery which birth gave him, and his enfeeblement has given that mastery to me. He knows now the reason for his weakness; I tell it to him too late to harm me."

Pat struggled for composure. The very presence of the cold demon tore at the roots of her self-control, and she suppressed a fierce desire to break into hysterical laughter. Ridiculous, hopeless, incomprehensible situation! She forced her quivering throat to husky speech.

"What—what are you?" she stammered.

"Synapse! I'm a question of synapses," jeered the other. "Simple! Very simple! Ask your friend the Doctor!"

"I think," said the girl, a measure of control returning to her voice, "that you're a devil. You're some sort of a fiend that has managed to attach itself to Nick, and you're not human. That's what I think!"

"Think what you please," said the other. "We're wasting time here," he said abruptly. "Come."

"Where?" Pat was startled; she felt a recurrence of fright.

"No matter where. Come."

"I won't! Why do you want me?"

"To complete the business of Saturday night," he said. "Your lips have healed; they bleed no longer, but that is easy to remedy. Come."

"I won't!" exclaimed the girl in sudden panic. "I won't!" She moved as if to rise.

"You forget," intoned the being beside her. "You forget the authority vested in me by virtue of this love of yours. Let me convince you." He stretched forth a thin hand. "Move and you condemn your sweetheart to the punishment you threaten me."

He seized her arm, pinching the flesh brutally, his nails breaking the smooth skin. Pat felt her face turn ashy pale; she closed her eyes and bit her nearly-healed lips at the excruciating pain, but she made not the slightest sound nor the faintest movement. She simply sat and suffered.

"You see!" sneered the other, releasing her. "Thank my kindly nature that I marked your arm instead of your face. Shall we go?"

A scarcely audible whimper of pain came from the girl's lips. She sat palled and unmoving, with her eyes still closed.

"No," she murmured faintly at last. "No. I won't go with you."

"Shall I drag you?"

"Yes. Drag me if you dare."

His hand closed on her wrist; she felt herself jerked violently to her feet, so roughly that it wrenched her shoulder. A startled, frightened little cry broke from her lips, and then she closed them firmly at the sight of several by-passers turning curious eyes on them.

"I'll come," she murmured. The glimmering of an idea had risen in her chaotic mind.

She followed him in grim, bitter silence across the clipped turf to the limit of the park. She recognized Nick's modest automobile standing in the line of cars along the street; her companion, or captor, moved directly towards it, opened the door and clambered in without a single backward glance. He turned about and watched her as she paused with one diminutive foot on the running board, and rubbed her hand over her aching arm.

"Get in!" he ordered coldly.

She made no move. "I want to know where you intend to take me."

"It doesn't matter. To a place where we can complete that unfinished experiment of ours. Aren't you happy at the prospect?"

"Do you think," she said unsteadily, "that I'd consent to that even to save Nick from disgrace and punishment? Do you think I'm fool enough for that?"

"We'll soon see." He extended his hand. "Scream—fight—struggle!" he jeered. "Call them down on your sweetheart!"

He had closed his hand on her wrist; she jerked it convulsively from his grasp.

"I'll bargain with you!" she gasped. She needed a moment's respite to clarify a thought that had been growing in her mind.

"Bargain? What have you to offer?"

"As much as you!"

"Ah, but I have a threat—the threat to your sweetheart! And I'm offering too the lure of that evil whose face so charmed you recently. Have you forgotten how nearly I won you to the worship of that principle? Have you forgotten the ecstasy of that pain?"

His terrible, blood-shot eyes were approaching her face; and strangely, the girl felt a curious recurrence of that illogical desire to yield that had swept over her on that disastrous night of Saturday. There *had* been an ecstasy; there *had* been a

wild, ungodly, unhallowed pleasure in his blows, in the searing pain of his kisses on her lacerated lips. She realized vaguely that she was staring blankly, dazedly, into the red eyes, and that somewhere within her, some insane brain-cells were urging her to clamber to the seat beside him.

She tore her eyes away. She rubbed her bruised shoulder, and the pain of her own touch restored her vanishing logical faculties. She returned her gaze to the face of the other, meeting his gaze now coolly.

"Nick!" she said earnestly, as if calling him from a distance. "Nick!"

There was, she fancied, the faintest gleam of concern apparent in the features opposite her. She continued.

"Nick!" she repeated. "You can hear me, Honey. Come to the house as soon as you are able. Come tonight, or any time; I'll wait until you do. You'll come, Honey; you must!"

She backed away from the car; the other made no move to halt her. She circled the vehicle and dashed recklessly across the street. From the safety of the opposite walk she glanced back; the red-eyed visage was regarding her steadily through the glass of the window.

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## 21

### A Question of Synapses

Pat almost ran the few blocks to her home. She hastened along in a near panic, regardless of the glances of pedestrians she chanced to pass. With the disappearance of the immediate urge, the composure for which she had struggled had deserted her, and she felt shaken, terrified, and weak. Her arm ached miserably, and her wrenched shoulder pained at each movement. It was not until she attained her own door-step that she paused, panting and quivering, to consider the events of the evening.

"I can't stand any more of this!" she muttered wretchedly to herself. "I'll just have to give up, I guess; I can't pit myself another time against—that thing."

She leaned wearily against the railing of the porch, rubbing her injured arm.

"Dr. Carl was right," she thought. "Nick was right; it's dangerous. There was a moment there at the end when he—or it—almost had me. I'm frightened," she admitted. "Lord only knows what might have happened had I been a little weaker. If the Lord *does* know," she added.

She found her latch-key and entered the house. Only a dim light burned in the hall; her mother, of course, was at the Club, and the maid and Magda were far away in their chambers on the third floor. She tossed her wrap on a chair, switched on a brighter light, and examined the painful spot on her arm, a red mark already beginning to turn a nasty blue, with two tiny specks of drying blood. She shuddered, and trudged wearily up the stairs to her room.

The empty silence of the house oppressed her. She wanted human companionship—safe, trustworthy, friendly company, anyone to distract her thoughts from the eerie, disturbing direction they were taking. She was still in somewhat of a panic, and suppressed with difficulty a desire to peep fearfully under the bed.

"Coward!" she chided herself. "You knew what to expect."

Suddenly the recollection of her parting words recurred to her. She had told Nick—if Nick had indeed heard—to come to the house, to come at once, tonight, if he could. A tremor of apprehension ran through her. Suppose he came; suppose he came as her own Nick, and she admitted him, and then—or suppose that other came, and managed by some trick to enter, or suppose that unholy fascination of his prevailed on her—she shivered, and brushed her hand distractedly across her eyes.

"I can't stand it!" she moaned. "I'll have to give up, even if it means never seeing Nick again. I'll have to!" She shook her head miserably as if to deny the picture that had risen in her mind of herself and that horror alone in the house.

"I won't stay here!" she decided. She peeped out of the west windows at the Doctor's residence, and felt a surge of relief at the sight of his iron-gray hair framed in the library window below. He was reading; she could see the book on his knees. There was her refuge; she ran hastily down the stairs and out of the door.

With an apprehensive glance along the street she crossed to his door and rang the bell. She waited nervously for his coming, and, with a sudden impulse, pulled her vanity-case from her bag and dabbed a film of powder over the mark on her arm. Then his ponderous footsteps sounded and the door opened.

"Hello," he said genially. "These late evening visits of yours are becoming quite customary—and see if I care!"

"May I come in a while?" asked Pat meekly.

"Have I ever turned you away?" He followed her into the library, pushed a chair forward for her, and dropped quickly into his own with an air of having snatched it from her just in time.

"I didn't want your old arm-chair," she remarked, occupying the other.

"And what's the trouble tonight?" he queried.

"I—well, I was just nervous. I didn't want to stay in the house alone."

"You?" His tone was skeptical. "You were nervous? That hardly sounds reasonable, coming from an independent little spit-fire like you."

"I was, though. I was scared."

"And of what—or whom?"

"Of haunts and devils."

"Oh." He nodded. "I see you've had results from your letter-writing."

"Well, sort of."

"I'm used to your circumlocutions, Pat. Suppose you come directly to the point for once. What happened?"

"Why, I wrote Nick to get in touch with me, and I got a reply. He said to meet him in the park at a place we knew. This evening."

"And you did, of course."

"Yes, but before that, this afternoon, he called up and told me not to, but I insisted and we did."

"Told you not to, eh? And was his warning justified?"

"Yes. Oh, yes! When I came to the place, it was—the other."

"So! Well, he could hardly manhandle you in a public park."

Pat thought of her wrenched shoulder and bruised arm. She shuddered.

"He's horrible!" she said. "Inhuman! He kept referring to Saturday night, and he threatened that if I moved or made a disturbance he'd let Nick suffer the consequences. So I kept still while he insulted me."

"You nit-wit!" There was more than a trace of anger in the Doctor's voice. "I want to see that pup of yours! We'll soon find out what this thing is—a mania or simply lack of a good licking!"

"What it is?" echoed Pat. "Oh—it told me! Dr. Carl, what's a synopsis?"

"A synopsis! You know perfectly well."

"I mean applied to physiology or psychology or something. It—he told me he was a question of synopsis."

"This devil of yours said that?"

"Yes."

"Hum!" The Doctor's voice was musing. He frowned perplexedly, then looked up abruptly. "Was it—did he by any chance say synapses? Not synopsis—synapses?"

"That's it!" exclaimed the girl. "He said he was a question of synapses. Does that explain him? Do you know what he is?"

"Doesn't explain a damn thing!" snapped Horker. "A synapse is a juncture, or the meeting of two nerves. It's why you can develop automatic motions and habits, like playing piano, or dancing. When you form a habit, the synapses of the nerves involved are sort of worn thin, so the nerves themselves are, in a sense, short-circuited. You go through motions without the need of your brain intervening, which is all a habit amounts to. Understand?"

"Not very well," confessed Pat.

"Humph! It doesn't matter anyway. I can't see that it helps to analyze your devil."

"I don't care if it's never analyzed," said Pat with a return of despondency. "Dr. Carl, I can't face that evil thing again. I can't do it, not even if it means never seeing Nick!"

"Sensible," said the Doctor approvingly. "I'd like to have a chance at him, but not enough to keep you in this state of jitters. Although," he added, "a lot of this mystery is the product of your own harum-scarum mind. You can be sure of that, Honey."

"You *would* say so," responded the girl wearily. "You've never seen that—change. If it's my imagination, then I'm the one that needs your treatments, not Nick."

"It isn't *all* imagination, most likely," said Horker defensively. "I know these introverted types with their hysterias, megalomaniacs, and defense mechanisms! They've paraded through my office there for a good many years, Pat; they've provided the lion's share of my practice. But this young psychopathic of yours seems to have it bad—abnormally so, and that's why I'm so interested, apart from helping you, of course."

"I don't care," said Pat apathetically, repressing a desire to rub her injured arm. "I'm through. I'm scared out of the affair. Another week like this last one and I *would* be one of your patients."

"Best drop it, then," said Horker, eyeing her seriously. "Nothing's worth upsetting yourself like this, Pat."

"Nick's worth it," she murmured. "He's worth it—only I just haven't the strength. I haven't the courage. I can't do it!"

"Never mind, Honey," the Doctor muttered, regarding her with an expression of concern. "You're probably well out of the mess. I know damn well you haven't told me everything about this affair—notably, how you acquired that ugly mark on your arm that's so carefully powdered over. So, all in all, I guess you're well out of it."

"I suppose I am." Her voice was still weary. Suddenly the glare of headlights drew her attention to the window; a car was stopping before her home. "There's Mother," she said. "I'll go on back now, Dr. Carl, and thanks for entertaining a lonesome and depressed lady."

She rose with a casual glance through the window, then halted in frozen astonishment and a trace of terror.

"Oh!" she gasped. The car was the modest coupe of Nicholas Devine.

She peered through the window; the Doctor rose and stared over her shoulder. "I told him to come," she whispered. "I told him to come when he was able. He heard me, he or—the other."

A figure alighted from the vehicle. Even in the dusk she could perceive the exhaustion, the weariness in its movements. She pressed her face to the pane, surveying the form with fascinated intentness. It turned, supporting itself against the car and gazing steadily at her own door. With the movement the radiance of a street-light illuminated its features.

"It's Nick!" she cried with such eagerness that the Doctor was startled. "It's *my* Nick!"

Pat rushed to the door, out upon the porch, and down to the street. Dr. Horker followed her to the entrance and stood watching her as she darted toward the dejected figure beside the car.

"Nick!" she cried. "I'm here, Honey. You heard me, didn't you?"

She flung herself into his arms; he held her eagerly, pressing a hasty, tender kiss on her lips.

"You heard me!" she murmured.

"Yes." His voice was husky, strained. "What is it, Pat? Tell me quickly—God knows how much time we have!"

"It's Dr. Carl. He'll help us, Nick."

"Help us! No one can help us, dear. No one!"

"He'll try. It can't do any harm, Honey. Come in with me. Now!"

"It's useless, I tell you!"

"But come," she pleaded. "Come anyway!"

"Pat, I tell you this battle has to be fought out by me alone. I'm the only one who can do anything at all and," he lowered his voice, "Pat, I'm losing!"

"Nick!"

"That's why I came tonight. I was too cowardly to make our last meeting—Monday evening in the park—a definite farewell. I wanted to, but I weakened. So tonight, Pat, it's a final good-bye, and you thank Heaven for it!"

"Oh, Nick dear!"

"It was touch and go whether I came at all tonight. It was a struggle, Pat; *he* is as strong as I am now. Or stronger."

The girl gazed searchingly into his worn, weary face. He looked miserably ill, she thought; he seemed as exhausted as one who had been engaged in a physical battle.

"Nick," she said insistently, "I don't care what you say, you're coming in with me. Only for a little while."

She tugged at his hand, dragging him reluctantly after her. He followed her to the porch where the open door still framed the great figure of the Doctor.

"You know Dr. Carl," she said.

"Come inside," growled Horker. Pat noticed the gruffness of his voice, his lack of any cordiality, but she said nothing as she pulled her reluctant companion through the door and into the library.

The Doctor drew up another chair, and Pat, more accustomed to his devices, observed that he placed it in such position that the lamp cast a stream of radiance on Nick's face. She sank into her own chair and waited silently for developments.

"Well," said Horker, turning his shrewd old eyes on Nick's countenance, "let's get down to cases. Pat's told me what she knows; we can take that much for granted. Is there anything more you might want to tell?"

"No, sir," responded the youth wearily. "I've told Pat all I know."

"Humph! Maybe I can ask some leading questions, then. Will you answer them?"

"Of course, any that I can."

"All right. Now," the Doctor's voice took on a cool professional edge, "you've had these—uh—attacks as long as you can remember. Is that right?"

"Yes."

"But they've been more severe of late?"

"Much worse, sir!"

"Since when?"

"Since—about as long as I've known Pat. Four or five weeks."

"M—m," droned the Doctor. "You've no idea of the cause for this increase in the malignancy of the attacks?"

"No sir," said Nick, after a barely perceptible hesitation.

"You don't think the cause could be in any way connected with, let us say, the emotional disturbances attending your acquaintance with Pat here?"

"No, sir," said the youth flatly.

"All right," said Horker. "Let that angle go for the present. Are there any after effects from these spells?"

"Yes. There's always a splitting headache." He closed his eyes. "I have one of them now."

"Localized?"

"Sir?"

"Is the pain in any particular region? Forehead, temples, eyes, or so forth?"

"No. Just a nasty headache."

"But no other after-effects?"

"I can't think of any others. Except, perhaps, a feeling of exhaustion after I've gone through what I've just finished." He closed his eyes as if to shut out the recollection.

"Well," mused the Doctor, "we'll forget the physical symptoms. What happens to your individuality, your own consciousness, while you're suffering an attack?"

"Nothing happens to it," said Nick with a suppressed shudder. "I watch and hear, but what *he* does is beyond my control. It's terrifying—horrible!" he burst out suddenly.

"Doubtless," responded Horker smoothly. "What about the other? Does that one stand by while you're in the saddle?"

"I don't know," muttered Nick dully. "Of course he does!" he added abruptly. "I can feel his presence at all times—even now. He's always lurking, waiting to spring forth, as soon as I relax!"

"Humph!" ejaculated the Doctor. "How do you manage to sleep?"

"By waiting for exhaustion," said Nick wearily. "By waiting until I can stay awake no longer."

"And can you bring this other personality into dominance? Can you change controls, so to speak, at will?"

"Why—yes," the youth answered, hesitating as if puzzled. "Yes, I suppose I could."

"Let's see you, then."

"But—" Horror was in his voice.

"No, Dr. Carl!" Pat interjected in fright. "I won't let him!"

"I thought you declared yourself out of this," said Horker with a shrewd glance at the girl.

"Then I'm back in it! I won't let him do what you want—anyway, not that!"

Pat," said the Doctor with an air of patience, "you want me to treat this affliction, don't you? Isn't that what both of you want?"

The girl murmured a scarcely audible assent.

"Very well, then," he proceeded. "Do you expect me to treat the thing blindly—in the dark? Do you think I can guess at the cause without observing the effect?"

"No," said Pat faintly.

"So! Now then," he turned to Nick, "Let's see this transformation."

"Must I?" asked the youth reluctantly.

"If you want my help."

"All right," he agreed with another tremor. He sat passively staring at the Doctor; a moment passed. Horker heard Pat's nervous breathing; other than that, the room was in silence. Nicholas Devine closed his eyes, brushed his hand across his forehead. A moment more and he opened them to gaze perplexedly at the Doctor.

"He won't!" he muttered in astonishment. "He won't do it!"

"Humph!" snapped Horker, ignoring Pat's murmur of relief. "Finicky devil, isn't he? Likes to pick company he can bully!"

"I don't understand it!" Nick's face was blank. "He's been tormenting me until just now!" He looked at the Doctor. "You don't think I'm lying about it, do you, Dr. Horker?"

"Not consciously," replied the other coolly. "If I thought you were responsible for a few of the indignities perpetrated on Pat here, I'd waste no time in questions, young man. I'd be relieving myself of certain violent impulses instead."

"I *couldn't* harm Pat!"

"You gave a passable imitation of it, then! However, that's beside the point; as I say, I don't hold you responsible for aberrations which I believe are beyond your control. The main thing is a diagnosis."

"Do you know what it is?" cut in Pat eagerly.

"Not yet—at least, not for certain. There's only one real method available; these questions will get us nowhere. We'll have to psychoanalyze you, young man."

"I don't care what you do, if you can offer any hope!" he declared vehemently. "Let's get it over!"

"Not as easy as all that!" rumbled Horker. "It takes time; and besides, it can't be successful with the subject in a hectic mood such as yours." He glanced at his watch. "Moreover, it's after midnight."

He turned to Nicholas Devine. "We'll make it Saturday evening," he said. "Meanwhile, young man, you're not to see Pat. Not at all—understand? You can see her here when you come."

"That's infinitely more than I'd planned for myself," said the youth in a low voice. "I'd abandoned the hope of seeing her."

He rose and moved toward the door, and the others followed. At the entrance he paused; he leaned down to plant a brief, tender kiss on the girl's lips, and moved wordlessly out of the door. Pat watched him enter his car, and followed the vehicle with her eyes until it disappeared. Then she turned to Horker.

"Do you really know anything about it?" she queried. "Have you any theory at all?"

"He's not lying," said the Doctor thoughtfully. "I watched him closely; he believes he's telling the truth."

"He is. I know what I saw!"



"He hasn't the signs of praecox or depressive," mused the Doctor. "It's puzzling; it's one of those functional aberrations, or a fixed delusion of some kind. We'll find out just what it is."

"It's the devil," declared Pat positively. "I don't care what sort of scientific tag you give it—that's what it is. You doctors can hide a lot of ignorance under a long name."

Horker paid no attention to her remarks. "We'll see what the psychoanalysis brings out," he said. "I shouldn't be surprised if the whole thing were the result of a defense mechanism erected by a timid child in an effort to evade responsibility. That's what it sounds like."

"It's a devil!" reiterated Pat.

"Well," said the Doctor, "if it is, it has one thing in common with every spook or devil I ever heard of."

"What's that?"

"It refuses to appear under any conditions where one has a chance to examine it. It's like one of these temperamental mediums trying to perform under a spot-light."

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## 23

### Werewolf

Pat awoke in rather better spirits. Somehow, the actual entrance of Dr. Horker into the case gave her a feeling of security, and her natural optimistic nature rode the pendulum back from despair to hope. Even the painful black-and-blue mark on her arm, as she examined it ruefully, failed to shake her buoyant mood.

Her mood held most of the day; it was only at evening that a recurrence of doubt assailed her. She sat in the dim living room waiting the arrival of her mother's guests, and wondered whether, after all, the predicament was as easily solvable as she had assumed. She watched the play of lights and shadows across the ceiling, patterns cast through the windows by moving headlights in the street, and wondered anew whether her faith in Dr. Carl's abilities was justified. Science! She had the faith of her generation in its omnipotence, but here in the dusk, the outworn superstitions of childhood became appalling realities, and some of Magda's stories, forgotten now for years, rose out of their graves and went squeaking and maundering like sheeted ghosts in a ghastly parade across the universe of her mind. The meaningless taunts she habitually flung at Dr. Carl's science became suddenly pregnant with truth; his patient, hard-learned science seemed in fact no more than the frenzies of a witch-doctor dancing in the heart of a Rhodesian swamp.

What was it worth—this array of medical facts—if it failed to cure? Was medicine falling into the state of Chinese science—a vast collection of good rules for which the reasons were either unknown or long forgotten? She sighed; it was with a feeling of profound relief that she heard the voices of the Brocks outside; she played miserable bridge the whole evening, but it was less of an affliction than the solitude of her own thoughts.

Saturday morning, cloudy and threatening though it was, found the pendulum once more at the other end of the arc. She found herself, if not buoyantly cheerful, at least no longer prey to the inchoate doubts and fears of the preceding evening. She couldn't even recall their nature; they had been apart from the cool, day-time logic that preached a common-sense reliance on accepted practices. They had been, she concluded, no more than childish nightmares induced by darkness and the play of shadows.

She dressed and ate a late breakfast; her mother was already en route to the Club for her bridge-luncheon. Thereafter, she wandered into the kitchen for the company of Magda, whom she found with massive arms immersed in dish water. Pat perched on her particular stool beside the kitchen table and watched her at her work.

"Magda," she said finally.

"I'm listening, Miss Pat."

"Do you remember a story you told me a long time ago? Oh, years and years ago, about a man in your town who could change into something—some fierce animal. A wolf, or something like that."

"Oh, him!" said Magda, knitting her heavy brows. "You mean the werewolf."

"That's it! The werewolf. I remember it now—how frightened I was after I went to bed. I wasn't more than eight years old, was I?"

"I couldn't remember. It was years ago, though, for sure."

"What was the story?" queried Pat. "Do you remember that?"

"Why, it was the time the sheep were being missed," said the woman, punctuating her words with the clatter of dishes on the drainboard. "Then there was a child gone, and another, and then tales of this great wolf about the country. I didn't see him; us little ones stayed under roof by darkness after that."

"That wasn't all of it," said Pat. "You told me more than that."

"Well," continued Magda, "there was my uncle, who was best hand with a rifle in the village. He and others went after the creature, and my uncle, he came back telling how he'd seen it plain against the sky, and how he'd fired at it. He couldn't miss, he was that close, but the wolf gave him a look and ran away."

"And then what?"

"Then the Priest came, and he said it wasn't a natural wolf. He melted up a silver coin and cast a bullet, and he gave it to my uncle, he being the best shot in the village. And the next night he went out once more."

"Did he get it?" asked Pat. "I don't remember."

"He did. He came upon it by the pasture, and he aimed his gun. The creature looked straight at him with its evil red eyes, and he shot it. When he came to it, there wasn't a wolf at all, but this man—his name I forget—with a hole in his head. And then the Priest, he said he was a werewolf, and only a silver bullet could kill him. But my uncle, *he* said those evil red eyes kept staring at him for many nights."

"Evil red eyes!" said Pat suddenly. "Magda," she asked in a faint voice, "could he change any time he wanted to?"

"Only by night, the Priest said. By sunrise he had to be back."

"Only by night!" mused the girl. Another idea was forming in her active little mind, another conception, disturbing, impossible to phrase. "Is that worse than being possessed by a devil, Magda?"

"Sure it's worse! The Priest, he could cast out the devil, but I never heard no cure for being a werewolf."

Pat said nothing further, but slid from her high perch to the floor and went soberly out of the kitchen. The fears of last night had come to life again, and now the over-cast skies outside seemed a fitting symbol to her mood. She stared thoughtfully out of the living room windows, and the sudden splash of raindrops against the pane lent a final touch to the whole desolate ensemble.

"I'm just a superstitious little idiot!" she told herself. "I laugh at Mother because she always likes to play North and South, and here I'm letting myself worry over superstitions that were discarded before there was any such thing as a game called contract bridge."

But her arguments failed to carry conviction. The memory of the terrible eyes of that *other* had clicked too aptly to Magda's phrase. She couldn't subdue the picture that haunted her, and she couldn't cast off the apprehensiveness of her mood. She recalled gloomily that Dr. Horker was at the Club—wouldn't be home before evening, else she'd have gladly availed herself of his solid, matter-of-fact company.

She thought of Nick's appointment with the Doctor for that evening. Suppose his psychoanalysis brought to light some such horror as these fears of hers—that would forever destroy any possibility of happiness for her and Nick. Even though the Doctor refused to recognize it, called it by some polysyllabic scientific name, the thing would be there to sever them.

She wandered restlessly into the hall. The morning mail, unexamined, lay in its brazen receptacle, she moved over, fingering it idly. Abruptly she paused in astonishment—a letter in familiar script had flashed at her. She pulled it out; it was! It was a letter from Nicholas Devine!

She tore it open nervously, wondering whether he had reverted to his original refusal of Dr. Horker's aid, whether he

was unable to come, whether *that* had happened. But only a single unfolded sheet slipped from the envelope, inscribed with a few brief lines of poetry.

"The grief that is too faint for tears,  
And scarcely breathes of pain,  
May linger on a hundred years  
Ere it creep forth again.  
But I, who love you now too well  
To suffer your disdain,  
Must try tonight that love to quell—  
And try in vain!"

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## 24

### The Dark Other

It was early in the evening, not yet eight o'clock, when Pat saw the car of Nicholas Devine draw up before the house. She had already been watching half an hour, sitting cross-legged in the deep window seat, like her jade Buddha. That equivocal poem of his had disturbed her, lent an added strength to the moods and doubts already implanted by Magda's mystical tale, and it was with a feeling of trepidation that she watched him emerge wearily from his vehicle and stare in indecision first at her window and then at the Horker residence. The waning daylight was still sufficient to delineate his worn features; she could see them, pale, harried, but indubitably the mild features of her own Nick.

While he hesitated, she darted to the door and out upon the porch. He gave her a wan smile of greeting, advanced to the foot of the steps, and halted there.

"The Doctor's not home yet," she called to him. He stood motionless below her.

"Come up on the porch," she invited, as he made no move. She uttered the words with a curious feeling of apprehension; for even as she ached for his presence, the uncertain state of affairs was frightening. She thought fearfully that what had happened before might happen again. Still, there on the open porch, in practically full daylight, and for so brief a time—Dr. Carl would be coming very shortly, she reasoned.

"I can't," said Nick, staring wistfully at her. "You know I can't."

"Why not?"

"I promised. You remember—I promised Dr. Horker I'd not see you except in his presence."

"So you did," said Pat doubtfully. The promise offered escape from a distressing situation, she thought, and yet—somehow, seeing Nick standing pathetically there, she couldn't imagine anything harmful emanating from him. There had been many and many evenings in his company that had passed delightfully, enjoyably, safely. She felt a wave of pity for him; after all, the affliction was his, most of the suffering was his.

"We needn't take it so literally," she said almost reluctantly. "He'll be home very soon now."

"I know," said Nick soberly, "but it was a promise, and besides, I'm afraid."

"Never mind, Honey," she said, after a momentary hesitation. "Come up and sit here on the steps, then—here beside me. We can talk just as well as there on the settee."

He climbed the steps and seated himself, watching Pat with longing eyes. He made no move to touch her, nor did she suggest a kiss.

"I read your poem, Honey," she said finally. "It worried me."

"I'm sorry, Pat. I couldn't sleep. I kept wandering around the house, and at last I wrote it and took it out and mailed it. It was a vent, a relief from the things I'd been thinking."

"What things, Honey?"

"A way, mostly," he answered gloomily, "of removing myself from your life. A permanent way."

"Nick!"

"I didn't, as you see, Pat. I was too cowardly, I suppose. Or perhaps it was because of this forlorn hope of ours. There's always hope, Pat; even the condemned man with his foot on the step to the gallows feels it."

"Nick dear!" she cried, her voice quavering in pity. "Nick, you mustn't think of those things! It might weaken you—make it easier for *him*!"

"It can't. If it frightens *him*, I'm glad."

"Honey," she said soothingly, "we'll give Dr. Carl a chance. Promise me you'll let him try, won't you?"

"Of course I will. Is there anything I'd refuse to promise you, Pat? Even," he added bitterly, "when reason tells me it's a futile promise."

"Don't say it!" she urged fiercely. "We've got to help him. We've got to believe—There he comes!" she finished with sudden relief.

The Doctor's car turned up the driveway beyond his residence. Pat saw his face regarding them as he disappeared behind the building.

"Come on, Honey," she said. "Let's get at the business."

They moved slowly over to the Doctor's door, waiting there until his ponderous footsteps sounded. A light flashed in the hall, and his broad shadow filled the door for a moment before it opened.

"Come in," he rumbled jovially. "Fine evening we're spoiling, isn't it?"

"It could be," said Pat as they followed him into the library, "only it'll probably rain some more."

"Hah!" snorted the Doctor, frowning at the mention of rain. "The course was soft. Couldn't get any distance, and it added six strokes to my score. At least six!"

Pat chuckled commiseratingly. "You ought to lay out a course in Greenland," she suggested. "They say anyone can drive a ball a quarter of a mile on smooth ice."

"Humph!" The Doctor waved toward a great, low chair. "Suppose you sit over there, young man, and we'll get about our business. And don't look so woe-begone about it."

Nick settled himself nervously in the designated chair; the Doctor seated himself at a little distance to the side, and Pat sat tensely in her usual place beside the hearth. She waited in strained impatience for the black magic of psychoanalysis to commence.

"Now," said Horker, "I want you to keep quiet, Pat—if possible. And you, young man, are to relax, compose yourself, get yourself into as passive a state as possible. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir," The youth leaned back in the great chair, closing his eyes.

"So! Now, think back to your childhood, your earliest memories. Let your thoughts wander at random, and speak whatever comes to your mind."

Nick sat a moment in silence. "That's hard to do, sir," he said finally.

"Yes. It will take practice, weeks of it, perhaps. You'll have to acquire the knack of it, but to do that, we'll have to start."

"Yes, sir." He sat with closed eyes. "My mother," he murmured, "was kind. I remember her a little, just a little. She was very gentle, not apt to blame me. She could understand. Made excuses to my father. He was hard, not cruel—strict. Couldn't understand. Blamed me when I wasn't to blame. Other did it. I wasn't mischievous, but got the blame. Couldn't explain, he wouldn't believe me." He paused uncertainly.

"Go on," said Horker quietly, while Pat strained her ears to listen.

"Mrs. Stevens," he continued. "Governess after Mother died. Strict like Father, got punished when I wasn't to blame. Just as bad after Father died. Always blamed. Couldn't explain, nobody believed me. Other threw cat in window, I had to go to bed. Put salt in bird seed, broke leg of chair to make it fall. Punished—I couldn't explain." His voice droned into silence; he opened his eyes. "That all," he said nervously.

"Good enough for the first time," said the Doctor briskly. "Wait a few weeks; we'll have your life's history out of you. It takes practice."

"Is that all?" queried Pat in astonishment.

"All for the first time. Later we'll let him talk half an hour at a stretch, but it takes practice, as I've mentioned. You run along home now," he said to Nick.

"But it's early!" objected Pat.

"Early or not," said the Doctor, "I'm tired, and you two aren't to see each other except here. You remember that."

Nick rose from his seat in the depths of the great chair. "Thank you, sir," he said. "I don't know why, but I feel easier in your presence. The—the struggle disappears while I'm here."

"Well," said Horker with a smile, "I like patients with confidence in me. Good night."

At the door Nick paused, turning wistful eyes on Pat. "Good night," he said, leaning to give her a light kiss. A rush of some emotion twisted his features; he stared strangely at the girl. "I'd better go," he said abruptly, and vanished through the door.

"Well?" said Pat questioningly, turning to the Doctor. "Did you learn anything from that?"

"Not much," the other admitted, yawning. "However, the results bear out my theory."

"How?"

"Did you notice how he harped on the undeserved punishment theme? He was punished for another's mischief?"

"Yes. What of that?"

"Well, picture him as a timid, sensitive child, rather afraid of being punished. Afraid, say, of being locked up in a dark closet. Now, when he inadvertently commits a mischief, as all children do, he tries desperately to divert the blame from himself. But there's no one else to blame! So what does he do?"

"What?"

"He invents this *other*, the mischievous one, and blames him. And now the other has grown to the proportions of a delusion, haunting him, driving him to commit acts apart from his normal inclinations. Understand? Because I'm off to bed whether you do or not."

"I understand all right," murmured Pat uncertainly as she moved to the door. "But somehow, it doesn't sound reasonable."

"It will," said the Doctor. "Good night."

Pat wandered slowly down the steps and through the break in the hedge, musing over Doctor Horker's expression of opinion. Then, according to him, the devil was nothing more than an invention of Nick's mind, the trick of a cowardly

child to evade just punishment. She shook her head; it didn't sound like Nick at all. For all his gentleness and sensitivity, he wasn't the one to hide behind a fabrication. He wasn't a coward; she was certain of that. And she was as sure as she could ever be that he hated, feared, loathed this personality that afflicted him; he *couldn't* have created it.

She sighed, mounted the steps, and fumbled for her key. The sound of a movement behind her brought a faint gasp of astonishment. She turned to see a figure materializing from the shadows of the porch. The light from the hall fell across its features, and she drew back as she recognized Nicholas Devine—not the being she had just kissed good night, but in the guise of her tormentor, the red-eyed demon!

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## 25

### The Demon Lover

Pat drew back, leaning against the door, and her key tinkled on the concrete of the porch. She was startled, shocked, but not as completely terrified as she might have expected. After all, she thought rapidly, they were standing in full view of a public street, and Dr. Carl's residence was but a few feet distant. She could summon his help by screaming.

"Well!" she exclaimed, eyeing the figure inimically. "Your appearances and disappearances are beginning to remind me of the Cheshire Cat."

"Except for the grin," said the other in his cold tones.

"What do you want?" snapped Pat.

"You know what I want."

"You'll not get it," said the girl angrily. "You—you're doomed to extinction, anyway! Go away!"

"Suppose," said the other with a strange, cold, twisted smile, "it were *he* that's doomed to extinction—what then?"

"It isn't!" cried Pat. "It isn't!" she repeated, while a quiver of uncertainty shook her. "He's the stronger," she said defiantly.

"Then where is he now?"

"Dr. Carl will help us!"

"Doctor!" sneered the other. "He and his clever theory! Am I an illusion?" he queried sardonically, thrusting his red-glinting eyes toward her. "Am I the product of his puerile, vacillating nature? Bah! I gave you the clue, and your Doctor hasn't the intelligence to follow it!"

"Go away!" murmured Pat faintly. The approach of his face had unnerved her, and she felt terror beginning to stir within her. "Go away!" she said again. "Why do you have to torment me? Any one would serve your purpose—any woman!"

"You have an aesthetic appeal, as I've told you before," replied the other in that toneless voice of his. "There is a pleasure in the defacement of black hair and pale skin, and your body is seductive, most seductive. Another might afford me less enjoyment, and besides, you hate me. Don't you hate me?" He peered evilly at her.

"Oh, God—yes!" The girl was shuddering.

"Say it, then! Say you hate me!"

"I hate you!" the girl cried vehemently. "Will you go away now?"

"With you!"

"I'll scream if you come any closer. You don't dare touch me; I'll call Dr. Horker."

"You'll only damage *him*—your lover."

"Then I'll do it! He'll understand."

"Yes," said the other reflectively. "He's fool enough to forgive you. He'll forgive you anything—the weakling!"

"Go away! Get away from here!"

The other stared at her out of blood-shot eyes. "Very well," he said in his flat tones. "This time the victory is yours."

He backed slowly toward the steps. Pat watched him as he moved, feeling a surge of profound relief. As his shadow shifted, her key gleamed silver at her feet, and she stooped to retrieve it.

There was a rush of motion as her eyes left the form of her antagonist. A hand was clamped violently over her mouth, an arm passed with steel-like rigidity about her body. Nicholas Devine was dragging her toward the steps; she was half-way down before she recovered her wits enough to struggle.

She writhed and twisted in his grasp. She drove her elbow into his body with all her power, and kicked with the strength of desperation at his legs. She bit into the palm across her mouth—and suddenly, with a subdued grunt of pain, he released her so abruptly that her own struggles sent her spinning blindly into the bushes of the hedge.

She turned gasping, unable for the moment to summon sufficient breath to scream. The other stood facing her with his eyes gleaming terribly into her own; then they ranged slowly from her diminutive feet to the rumpled ebony of her hair that she was brushing back with her hands from her pallid, frightened face.

"Obstinate," he observed, rubbing his injured palm.

"Obstinate and unbroken—but worth the trouble. Well worth it!" He reached out a swift hand, seizing her wrist as she backed against the bushes.

Pat twisted around, gazing frantically at Doctor Horker's house, where a light had only now flashed on in the upper windows. Her breath flowed back into her lungs with a strengthening rush.

"Dr. Carl!" she screamed. "Dr. Carl! Help me!"

The other spun her violently about. She had a momentary glimpse of a horribly evil countenance, then he drew back his arm and shot a clenched fist to her chin.

The world reeled into a blaze of spinning lights that faded quickly to darkness. She felt her knees buckling beneath her, and realized that she was crumpling forward toward the figure before her. Then for a moment she was aware of nothing.

She didn't quite lose consciousness, or at least for no more than a moment. She was suddenly aware that she was gazing down at a moving pavement, at her own arms dangling helplessly toward it. She perceived that she was lying limply across Nicholas Devine's shoulder with his arms clenched about her knees. And then, still unable to make the slightest resistance, she was bundled roughly into the seat of his coupe; he was beside her, and the car was purring into motion.

She summoned what remained of her strength. She drew herself erect, fumbling at the handle of the door with a frantic idea of casting herself out of the car to the street. The creature beside her jerked her violently back; as she reeled into the seat, he struck her again with the side of his fist. It was a random blow, delivered with scarcely a glance at her; it caught her on the forehead, snapping her head with an audible thump against the wall of the vehicle. She swayed for a moment with closing eyes, then collapsed limply against him, this time in complete unconsciousness.

That lapse too must have been brief. She opened dazed eyes on a vista of moving street lights; they were still in the car, passing now along some unrecognized thoroughfare lined with dark old homes. She lay for some moments uncomprehending; she was completely unaware of her situation.

It dawned on her slowly. She moaned, struggled away from the shoulder against which she had been leaning, and huddled miserably in the far corner of the seat. Nicholas Devine gave her a single glance with his unpleasant eyes, and turned them again on the street.

The girl was helpless, unable to put forth the strength even for another attempt to open the door. She was still only half aware of her position, and realized only that something appalling was occurring to her. She lay in passive misery against the cushions of the seat as the other turned suddenly up a dark driveway and into the open door of a small garage. He snapped off the engine, extinguished the headlights, and left them in a horrible, smothering, silent darkness.

She heard him open the door on his side; after an apparently interminable interval, she heard the creak of the hinges on her own side. She huddled terrified, voiceless, and immobile.

He reached in, fumbling against her in the darkness. He found her arm, and dragged her from the car. Again, as on that other occasion, she found herself reeling helplessly behind him through the dark as he tugged at her wrist. He paused at a door in the building adjacent to the garage, searching in his pocket with his free hand.

"I won't go in there!" she muttered dazedly. The other made no reply, but inserted a key in the lock, turned it, and swung open the door.

He stepped through it, dragging her after him. With a sudden access of desperate strength, she caught the frame of the door, jerked violently on her prisoned wrist, and was unexpectedly free. She reeled away, turned toward the street, and took a few faltering steps down the driveway.

Almost instantly her tormentor was upon her, and his hand closed again on her arm. Pat had no further strength; she sank to the pavement and crouched there, disregarding the insistent tugging on her arm.

"Come on," he growled. "You only delay the inevitable. Must I drag you?"

She made no reply. He tugged violently at her wrist, dragging her a few inches along the pavement. Then he stooped over her, raised her in his arms, and bore her toward the dark opening of the door. He crowded her roughly through it, disregarding the painful bumping of her shoulders and knees. She heard the slam of the door as he kicked it closed, and she realized that they were mounting a flight of stairs, moving somewhere into the oppressive threatening darkness.

Then they were moving along a level floor, and her arm was bruised against another door. There was a moment of stillness, and then she was released, dropped indifferently to the surface of a bed or couch. A moment later a light flashed on.

The girl was conscious at first only of the gaze of the red eyes. They held her own in a fascinating, unbreakable, trance-like spell. Then, in a wave of dizziness, she closed her own eyes.

"Where are we?" she murmured. "In Hell?"

"You should call it Heaven," came the sardonic voice. "It's the home of your sweetheart. His home—and mine!"

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## 26

### The Depths

"Heaven and Hell always were the same place," said Nicholas Devine, his red eyes glaring down at the girl. "We'll demonstrate the fact."

Pat shifted wearily, and sat erect, passing her hand dazedly across her face. She brushed the tangled strands of black hair from before her eyes, and stared dully at the room in which she found herself.

It had some of the aspects of a study, and some of a laboratory, or perhaps a doctor's office. There was a case of dusty books on the wall opposite, and another crystal-fronted cabinet containing glassware, bottles, little round boxes suggestive of drugs or pharmaceuticals. There was a paper-littered table too; she gave a convulsive shudder at the sight of a bald, varnished death's head, its lower jar articulated, that reposed on a pile of papers and grinned at her.

"Where—" she began faintly.

"This was the room of your sweetheart's father," said the other. "His and my mutual father. He was an experimenter, a researcher, and so, in another sense, am I!" He leered evilly at her. "He used this chamber to further his experiments, and I for mine—the carrying on of a noble family tradition!"

The girl scarcely heard his words; the expressionless tone carried no meaning to the chaos which was her mind. She felt only an inchoate horror and a vague but all-encompassing fear, and her head was aching from the blows he had dealt her.

"What do you want?" she asked dully.



"Why, there is an unfinished experiment. You must remember our interrupted proceedings of a week ago! Have you already forgotten the early steps of our experiment in evil?"

Pat cringed at the cold, sardonic tones of the other. "Let me go," she whimpered. "Please!" she appealed. "Let me go!"

"In due time," he responded. "You lack gratitude," he continued. "Last time, out of the kindness that is my soul, I permitted you to dull your senses with alcohol, but you failed, apparently, to appreciate my indulgence. But this time"—His eyes lit up queerly—"this time you approach the consummation of our experiment with undimmed mind!"

He approached her. She drew her knees up, huddling back on the couch, and summoned the final vestiges of her strength.

"I'll kick you!" she muttered desperately. "Keep back from me!"

He paused just beyond her reach. "I had hoped," he said ironically, "if not for your cooperation, at least for no further active resistance. It's quite useless; I told you days ago that this time would come."

He advanced cautiously; Pat thrust out her foot, driving it with all her power. Instantly he drew back, catching her ankle in his hand. He jerked her leg sharply upwards, and she was precipitated violently to the couch. Again he advanced.

The girl writhed away from him. She slipped from the foot of the couch and darted in a circle around him, turning in an attempt to gain the room's single exit—the door by which they had entered. He moved quickly to intercept her; he closed the door as she backed despairingly away, retreating to the far end of the room. Once more he faced her, his malicious eyes gleaming, and moved deliberately toward her.

She drew back until the table halted her; she pressed herself against it as if to force her way still further. The other moved at unaltered pace. Suddenly her hand pressed over some smooth, round, hard object; she grasped it and flung the grinning skull at the more terrible face that approached her. He dodged; there was a crash of glass as the gruesome missile shattered the pane of the cabinet of drugs. And inexorably, Nicholas Devine approached once more.

She moved along the edge of the table, squeezed herself between it and the wall. Behind her was one of the room's two windows, curtainless, with drawn shades. She found the cord, jerked it, and let the blind coil upward with an abrupt snap.

"I'll throw myself through the window!" she announced with a sort of desperate calm. "Don't dare move a step closer!"

The demon paused once more in his deliberate advance. "You will, of course," he said as if considering. "Given the opportunity. Your body torn and broken, spotted with blood—that might be a pleasure second only to that I plan."

"You'll suffer for it!" said the girl hysterically. "I'll be glad to do it, knowing you'll suffer!"

"Not I—your sweetheart."

"I don't care! I can't stand it!"

The other smiled his demoniac smile, and resumed his advance. She watched him in terror that had now reached the ultimate degree; her mind could bear no more. She turned suddenly, raised her arm, and beat her fist against the pane of the window.

With the surprising resistance glass sometimes displays, it shook at her blow but did not shatter. She drew back for a second attempt, and her upraised arm was caught in a rigid grip, and she was dragged backward to the center of the room, thrown heavily to the floor. She sat dazedly looking up at the form standing over her.

"Must I render you helpless again?" queried the flat voice of the other. "Are you not yet broken, convinced of the uselessness of this struggle?"

She made no answer, staring dully at his immobile features.

"Are you going to fight me further?" As she was still silent, he repeated, "Are you?"

She shook her head vaguely. "No," she muttered. She had reached the point of utter indifference; nothing at all was important enough now to struggle for.

"Stand up!" ordered the being above her.

She pulled herself wearily to her feet, leaning against the wall. She closed her eyes for a moment, then opened them dully as the other moved.

"What—are you—are you going to do?" she murmured.

"First," said the demon coldly, "I shall disrobe you somewhat more completely than on our other occasion. Thereafter we will proceed to the consummation of our experiment."

She watched him indifferently, uncomprehendingly, as he crooked a thin finger in the neck of her frock. She felt the pressure as he pulled, heard the rip of the fabric, and the pop of buttons, but she was conscious of no particular sensation as the garment cascaded into a black and red pool at her feet. She stood passive as he hooked his finger in the strap of her vest, and that too joined the little mound of cloth. She shivered slightly as she stood bared to the waist, but gave no other sign.

Again the thin hand moved toward her; from somewhere in her tormented spirit a final shred of resistance arose, and she pushed the questing member feebly to one side. She heard a low, sardonic laugh from her oppressor.

"Look at me!" he commanded.

She raised her eyes wearily; she drew her arm about her in a forlorn gesture of concealment. Her eyes met the strange orbs of the other, and a faint thrill of horror stirred; other than this, she felt nothing. Then his eyes were approaching her; she was conscious of the illusion that they were expanding, filling all the space in front of her. Their weird glow filled the world, dominated everything.

"Will you yield?" he queried.

The eyes commanded. "Yes," she said dully.

She felt his hands icy cold on her bare shoulders. They traveled like a shudder about her body, and suddenly she was pressed close to him.

"Are you mine?" he demanded. For the first time there was a tinge of expression in the toneless voice, a trace of eagerness. She made no answer; her eyes, held by his, stared like the eyes of a person in a trance, unwinking, fascinated.

"Are you mine?" he repeated, his breath hissing on her cheek.

"Yes." She heard her own voice in automatic reply to his question.

"Mine—for the delights of evil?"

"Yours!" she murmured. The eyes had blotted out everything.

"And do you hate me?"

"No."

The arms about her tightened into crushing bands. The pressure stopped her breath; her very bones seemed to give under their fierce compression.

"Do you hate me?" he muttered.

"Yes!" she gasped. "Yes! I hate you!"

"Ah!" He twisted his hand in her black hair, wrenching it roughly back. "Are you ready now for the consummation? To look upon the face of evil?"

She made no reply. Her eyes, as glassy as those of a sleep-walker, stared into his.

"Are you ready?"

"Yes," she said.

He pressed his mouth to hers. The fierceness of the kiss bruised her lips, the pull of his hand in her hair was a searing pain, the pressure of his arm about her body was a suffocation. Yet—somehow—there was again the dawning of that unholy pleasure—the same degraded delight that had risen in her on that other occasion, in the room of the red-checked table cloth. Through some hellish alchemy, the leaden pain was transmuting itself into the garish gold of a horrible, abnormal pleasure. She found her crushed lips attempting a feeble, painful response.

At her movement, she felt herself swung abruptly from her feet. With his lips still crushing hers, he raised her in his arms; she felt herself borne across the room. He paused; there was a sudden release, and she crashed to the hard surface of the couch, whose rough covering scratched the bare flesh of her back. Nicholas Devine bent over her; she saw his hand stretch toward her single remaining garment. And again, from somewhere in her harassed soul, a spark of resistance flashed.

"Nick!" she moaned. "Oh, Nick! Help me!"

"Call him!" said the other, a sneer on his face. "Call him! He hears; it adds to his torment!"

She covered her eyes with her hands. She felt his hand slip coldly between her skin and the elastic about her waist.

"Nick!" she moaned again. "Nick! Oh, my God! Nick!"

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## 27

### Two in Hell

The cold hand against Pat was still; she felt it rigid and stiff on her flesh. She lay passive with closed eyes; having voiced her final appeal, she was through. The words torn from her misery represented the final iota of spirit remaining to her; and her bruised body and battered mind had nothing further to give.

The hand quivered and withdrew. For a moment more she lay motionless with her arms clutched about her, then she opened her eyes, gazing dully, hopelessly at the demon standing over her. He was watching her with a curious abstracted frown; as she stirred, the scowl intensified, and he drew back a step.

His face contorted suddenly in a spasm of some unguessable emotion. His fists clenched; a low unintelligible mutter broke from his lips. "Strange!" she heard him say, and after a moment, "I'm still master here!"

He was master; in a moment the emotion vanished, and he was again standing over her, his face the same impassive demoniac mask. She watched him in a dull stupor of despair that was too deep for even a whimper of pain as he wrenched at the elastic about her waist, and it cut into her flesh and parted. He tore the garment away, and the red eyes bored down with a wild elation in their depths.

"Mine!" the being muttered, a new hoarseness in his voice. "Are you mine?"

Pat made no answer; his voice croaked in more insistent tones. "Are you mine?"

She could not reply. She felt his fingers bite into the flesh of her shoulder. She was shaken roughly, violently, and the question came again, fiercely. The eyes flamed in command, and she felt through her languor and weakness, the stirring of that strange and unholy fascination that he held over her.

"Answer!" he croaked. "Are you mine?"

The torture of his searing grip on her shoulder wrung an answer from her.

"Yes," she murmured faintly. "Yours."

She closed her eyes again in helpless resignation. She felt the hand withdrawn, and she lay passive, waiting, on the verge of unconsciousness, numb, spirit-broken, and beaten.

Nothing happened. After a long interval she opened her eyes, and saw the other standing again with clenched fists and contorted countenance. His features were writhing in the intensity of his struggle; a strange low snarl came from his

lips. He backed away from her, step by step; he leaned against the book-shelves, and beads of perspiration formed on his scowling face.

He was no longer master! She saw the change; imperceptibly the evil vanished from his features, and suddenly they were no longer his, but the weary, horror-stricken visage of her Nick! The red eyes were no longer Satanic, but only the blood-shot, troubled, gentle eyes of her sweetheart, and the lips had lost their grimness, and gasped and quivered and trembled. He reeled against the wall, staggered to the chair at the table, and sank weakly into it.

Pat was far too exhausted, far too dazed, to feel anything but the faintest sensation of relief. She realized only dimly that tears were welling from her eyes, and that sharp sobs were shaking her. She was for the moment unable to stir, and it was not long until the being at the table turned stricken eyes on her that she moved. Then she drew her knees up before her, as if to hide her body behind their slim, chiffon-clad grace.

Nick rose from the table, approaching her with weary, hesitant tread. He seized a cover of some sort that was folded over the foot of the couch, shook it out and cast it over her. She clutched it about her body, sat erect and leaned back against the wall in utter exhaustion. Many minutes passed with no word from either of the occupants of the unholy chamber. It was Nick who broke the long silence.

"Pat," he murmured in low tones. "Pat—Dear. Are you—all right?"

She stared at him dazedly without answer.

"Honey!" he said. "Honey! Tell me you're all right!"

"All right?" she repeated uncomprehendingly. "Yes. I guess I'm all right."

"Then go, Pat! Get away from here before he—before anything happens! Put your clothes on and hurry away!"

"I can't!" she said, faintly. "I—can't!"

"You must, Honey!"

"I'm just—not able to. I will soon, Nick—honest. When I—when I get my breath back."

"Pat!" There was anguish in the cry. "Oh, God—Pat! We mustn't ever be together again—not ever!"

"No," she said. A bit of sanity was returning to her; comprehension of her position sent a shudder through her. "No, we mustn't."

"I couldn't bear another night like this—watching! I'd go mad!"

"Oh!" she choked, tears starting. "If you hadn't come back, Nick!"

"I conquered him," he said. "I don't think I could do it again. It was your call that gave me the strength, Pat." He shook his head as if bewildered. "He thought it was being in love with you that weakened me, but in the end it was that which gave me the strength to subdue him."

"I'm scared!" said the girl suddenly. "Oh, Nick! I'm frightened!"

"You'd better go. You'd better dress and leave at once, Honey. Here." He gathered her clothes from the floor, depositing them beside her on the couch. "There are pins in the tray on the table, Pat. Fix yourself up as well as you can, dear—and hurry out of here!"

He turned toward the door as if to leave, and a shock of terror shook her.

"Nick!" she cried. "Don't go away! I'm more afraid when I can't see you—afraid that *he*—" She broke off sobbing.

"All right, Honey. I'll turn my back."

She slipped out from under the blanket, found the pins, and repaired her ruined costume. The frock was torn, crushed and bedraggled; she pinned it together at the throat, though her trembling fingers made the task difficult. She pulled it on and took a tentative step toward the door.

Nick!" she called as a wave of dizziness sent her swaying against the wall.

"What's the matter, Honey?" He turned anxiously at her cry.

"I'm dizzy," she moaned. "My head aches, and—I'm scared!"

"Pat, darling! You can't go out alone like this—and," he added miserably, "I can't take you!" He slipped his arm around her tenderly, supporting her to the couch. "Honey, what'll we do?"

"I'll be—all right," she murmured. "I'll go in a moment." The dizziness was leaving her; strength was returning.

"You must!" he said dolefully. "What a parting, Pat! Never to see you again, and then having this to remember as farewell!"

"I know, Nick. You see, I love you too." She turned her dark, troubled eyes on him. "Honey, kiss me good-bye! We'll have that to remember, anyway!" Tears were again on her cheeks.

"Do I dare?" he asked despondently. "After the things these lips of mine have said, and what these arms have done to you?"

"But you didn't, Nick! Could I blame you for—that *other*?"

"God! You're kind, Pat! Honey, if ever I win out in this battle, if ever I know I'm the final victor, I'll—No," he said his tones dropping abruptly. "I'll never come back to you, Pat. It's far too dangerous, and—can I ever be certain? Can I?"

"I don't know, Nick. Can you?"

"I can't be, Pat! I'll never be sure that *he* isn't just dormant, as he was before, waiting for my weakness to betray me! I'll never be certain, Honey! It *has* to be good-bye!"

"Then kiss me!"

She clung to him; the room that had been so recently a chamber of horrors was transformed. As she held him, as her lips were pressed to his, she thought suddenly of the words of the demon, that Heaven and Hell were always the same place. They had taken on a new meaning, those words; she drew away from Nick and turned her tear-bright eyes tenderly on his.

"Honey," she murmured, "I don't want you to leave me. I don't want you to go!"

"Nor do I want to, Pat! But I must."

"You mustn't! You're to stay, and we'll fight it out together—be married, or any way that permits us to fight it through together."

"Pat! Do you think I'd consent to that?"

"Nick," she said. "Nick darling—It's worth it to me! I'm realizing it now; I thought it wasn't—but it is! I can't lose you, Nick—anything, even that *other*, is better than losing you."

"You're sweet, Pat! You know I'd trade my very soul for that, but—No. I can't do it! And don't Honey, torture me by suggesting it again."

"But I will, Nick!" She was speaking softly, earnestly. "You're worth anything to me! If *he* should kill me, you'd still be worth it!" She gazed tenderly at him. "I'd want to die anyway without you!"

"No more than I without you," he muttered brokenly. "But I won't do it, Pat! I won't do that to you!"

"I love you, Nick!" she said in a low voice. "I don't want to live without you. Do you understand me, dear? I don't want to live without you!"

He stared at her somberly. "I've thought of that too," he said. "Pat—if I only believed that we'd be together after, together *anywhere*, I'd say yes. If only I believed there *were* an afterwards!"

"Doesn't he prove that by his very existence?"

"Your Doctor would deny that."

"Doctor Carl never saw *him*, Nick. And anyway, even oblivion together would be better than being separated, and far better than this!"

He gazed at her silently. She spoke again. "That doesn't frighten me, Nick. It's only losing you that frightens me, especially the fear of losing you to *him*."

He continued his silent gaze. Suddenly he drew her close to him, held her in a tight, tender embrace.

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## 28

### Lunar Omen

After a considerable interval, during which Nick held the girl tightly and silently in his arms, he released her, sat with his head resting on his cupped palms in an attitude of deep study. Pat, beside him, fell mechanically to repinning the throat of her frock, which had opened during the moments of the embrace. He rose to his feet, pacing nervously before her.

"It isn't a thing to do on the impulse of a moment, Pat," he muttered, pausing at her side. "You must see that."

"It isn't the impulse of a moment."

"But one doesn't abandon everything, the whole world, so easily, Honey. One doesn't cast away a last hope, however forlorn a hope it may be!"

"Is there a hope, Nick?" she asked gently. "Is there a chance left to us?"

"I don't know!" His voice held an increasing tenseness. "Before God—I—don't know!"

"If there's a chance, the very slightest shadow of the specter of a chance, we'll take it, won't we? Because the other way is always open to us, Nick."

"Yes. It's always open."

"But we won't take that chance," she continued defiantly, "if it involves my losing you, Honey. I meant what I said, Nick: I don't want to live without you!"

"What chance have we?" he queried somberly. "Those are our alternatives—life apart, death together."

"Then you know my choice!" she cried desperately. "Nick, Honey—don't let's draw it out in futile talking! I can't stand it!"

He moved his hand in a gesture of bewilderment and frustration, and turned away, striding nervously toward the window whose blind she had raised. He leaned his hands on the table, peering dejectedly out upon the street below.

"What time," he asked irrelevantly in a queer voice, "did the Doctor say the moon rose? Do you remember?"

"No," she said tensely. "Oh, Honey! Please—don't stand there with your back to me now, when I'm half crazy!"

"I'm thinking," he responded. "It rises a little earlier each night—or is it later? No matter; come here, Pat."

She rose wearily and joined him; he slipped his arm about her, and drew her against him.

"Look there," he said, indicating the night-dark vista beyond the window.

She looked out upon a dim-lit street or court, at the blind end of which the house was apparently situated. Far off at the open end, across a distant highway where even at this hour passed a constant stream of traffic, flashed a narrow strip of lake; and above it, rising gigantic from the coruscating moon-path, lifted the satellite. She watched the remote flickering

of the waves as they tossed back the broken bits of the light strewn along the path. Then she turned puzzled eyes on her companion.

"That's Heaven," he said pointing a finger at the great flowing lunar disk. "There's a world that never caught the planet-cancer called Life, or if it ever suffered, it's cured. It's clean—burned clean by the sun and scoured clean by the airless zero of space. A dead world, and therefore not an unhappy one."

The girl stared at him without comprehension. She murmured, "I don't understand, Nick."

"Don't you, Pat?" He pointed again at the moon. "That's Heaven, the dead world, and this is Hell, the living one. Heaven and Hell swinging forever about their common center!" He gestured toward the sparkling moon-path on the water. "Look, Pat! The dead world strews flowers on the grave of the living one!"

Some of his bitter ecstasy caught the girl; she felt his somber mood of exaltation.

"I love you, Nick!" she whispered, pressing closely to him.

"What difference does it make—our actions?" he queried. "There's the omen, that lifeless globe in the sky. Where we go, all humanity now living will follow before a century, and in a million years, the human race as well! What if we go a year or a million years before the rest? Will it make any difference in the end?" He looked down at her. "All we've been valuing here is hope. To the devil with hope! Let's have peace instead!"

"I'm not afraid, Nick."

"Nor I. And if we go, *he* goes, and he's mortally afraid of death!"

"Can he—prevent you?"

"Not now! I'm the stronger now. For this time, I'm master."

He turned again to stare at the glowing satellite as it rose imperceptibly from the horizon. "There's nothing to regret," he murmured, "except one thing—the loss of beauty. Beauty like that—and like you, Pat. That's bitterly hard to foreswear!" He leaned forward toward the remote disk of the moon; he spoke as if addressing it, in tones so low that the girl, pressed close to him, had to quiet the sound of her own breath to listen. He said:

"Long miles above cloud-bank and blast,

And many miles above the sea,

I watch you rise majestically

Feeling your chilly light at last—

Cold beauty in the way you cast

Split silver fragments on the waves,

As if this planet's life were past,

And all men peaceful in their graves."

Pat was silent for a moment as he paused, then she murmured a low phrase. "Oh, I love you, Nick!" she said.

"And I you, dear," he responded. "Have we decided anything? Are we—going through with it?"

"I've not faltered," she said soberly. "I meant it, Nick. Without you, life would be as empty as that airless void you speak of. I'm not afraid. What's there to be afraid of?"

"Only the transition, Pat. That and the unknown—but no situation could possibly be more terrible than our present one. It *couldn't* be! Oblivion, annihilation—they're preferable, aren't they?"

"Oh, yes! Nothing I can imagine could be other than a change for the better."

"Then let's face it!" His voice took on a note of determination. "I've thought to face it a dozen times before this, and each time I've hesitated. The hesitation of a coward, Pat."

"You're no coward, dear. It was that illusion of hope; that always weakens one. No one's strong who hasn't given up hope."

"Then," he repeated, "let's face it!"

"How, Nick?"

"My father has left us the means. There in the cabinet are a hundred deaths—swift ones, lingering ones, painful, and easy! I don't know one from the other; our choice must be blind." He strode over to the case, sending slivers of glass from the shattered front glistening along the floor. "I'd choose an easy one, Dear, if I knew, for your sake. Euthanasia!"

He stared hesitantly at the files of mysterious drugs with their incomprehensible labels.

Suddenly the scene appeared humorous to the girl, queerly funny, in some unnatural horrible fashion. Her nerves, overstrained for hours, were on the verge of breaking; without realization of it, she had come to the border of hysteria.

"Shopping for death!" she choked, trying to suppress the wild laughter that beat in her throat. "Which one's most suitable? Which one's most becoming? Which one"—an hysterical laughing sob shook her—"will wear the longest?"

He turned, gazing at her with an illogical concern in his face.

"What's the difference?" she cried wildly. "I don't care—painful or pleasant, it all ends in the same grave! Close your eyes and choose!"

Suddenly he was holding her in his arms again, and she was sobbing, clinging to him frantically. She was miserably unstrung; her body shook under the impact of her gasping breath. Then gradually, she quieted, and was silent against him.

"We've been mad!" he murmured. "It's been an insane idea—for me to inflict this on you, Pat. Do you think I could consider the destruction of your beauty, Dear? I've been lying to myself, stifling my judgment with poetic imagery, when all the while it was just that I'm afraid to face the thing alone!"

"No," she murmured, burying her face against his shoulder. "I'm the coward, Nick. I'm the one that's frightened, and I'm the one that broke down! It's just been—too much, this evening; I'm all right now."

"But we'll not go through with *this*, Pat!"

"But we will! It's better than life without you, Dear. We've argued and argued, and at last forgotten the one truth, the one thing I'll never retract: I can't face living without you, Nick! I can't!"

He brushed his hand wearily before his eyes. "Back at the starting point," he muttered. "All right, Honey. So be it!"

He strode again to the cabinet. "Corrosive sublimate," he murmured. "Cyanide of Potassium. They're both deadly, but I think the second is rapid, and therefore less painful. Cyanide let it be!"

He extracted two small beakers from the glassware on the shelf. He filled them with water from a carafe on the table, and, while the girl watched him with fascinated eyes, he deliberately tilted a spoonful or so of white crystals into each of them. The mixture swirled a moment, then settled clear and colorless, and the crystals began to shrink as they passed swiftly into solution.

"There it is," he announced grimly. "There's peace, oblivion, forgetfulness, and annihilation for you, for me, and—for *him*! Beyond all doubt, the logical course for us, isn't it? Do we take it?"

"Please," she said faintly. "Kiss me first, Honey. Isn't that the proper course for lovers in this situation?" She felt a faint touch of astonishment at her own irony; the circumstances had ceased to have any reality to her, and had become merely a dramatic sequence like the happenings in a play.

He gathered her again into his arms and pressed his lips to hers. It was a long, tender, wistful kiss; when at last it ended, Pat found her eyes again filled with tears, but not this time the tears of hysteria.



"Nick!" she murmured. "Nick, darling!"

He gave her a deep, somber, but very tender smile, and reached for one of the deadly beakers, "To another meeting!" he said as his fingers closed on it.

Suddenly, amazingly, the strident ring of a doorbell sounded, the more surprising since they had all but forgotten the existence of a world about them. Interruption! It meant only the going through once more of all that they had just passed.

"Drink it!" exclaimed Pat impulsively, seizing the remaining beaker.

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## 29

### Scopolamine for Satan

The glass was struck from Pat's hand, and the water-clear contents streamed into pools and darkening blots over the table and its litter of papers. She stared unseeingly at the mess, without realizing that it was Nick who had dashed the draught from her very lips. She felt neither anger nor relief, but only a numbness, and a sense of anti-climax. Somewhere below the bell was ringing again, and a door was resounding to violent blows, but she only continued her bewildered, questioning gaze.

"I can't let you, Pat!" he muttered, answering her unspoken query.

"But Nick—why?"

"There's somebody at the door, isn't there? Mustn't we find out who?"

"What difference can it make?" she asked wearily.

"I don't know. I want to find out."

"It's that illusion of hope again," she murmured. "That's all it is, Nick—and it means now that it's all to do over again! The whole thing, from the beginning—and we were so near—the end!"

"I know," he said miserably. "I know all that, but—" He paused as the insistent racket below was redoubled. "I'm going to answer that bell," he ended.

He moved away from her, vanishing through the room's single door. She watched his disappearance without moving, but no sooner had he passed from sight than a curious feeling of fear oppressed her. She cast off the numbness and languor, and darted after him into the darkness of the hall.

"Nick!" she called. Somewhere ahead a light flashed on; she saw the well of a stair-case, and heard his footsteps descending. She followed in frantic haste, gaining the top step just as the pounding below ceased. She heard the click of the door, and paused suddenly at the sound of a familiar voice.

"Where's Pat?" The words drifted up in low, rumbling, ominous tones.

"Dr. Carl!" she shrieked. She ran swiftly down the stairs to Nick's side, where he stood facing the great figure of the Doctor. "Dr. Carl! How'd you find me?"

The newcomer gave her a long, narrow-eyed, speculative survey. "I spent nearly the whole night doing it," he growled at last. "It took me hours to locate Mueller and get this address from him." He stepped forward, taking the girl's arm. "Come on!" he said gruffly, without a glance at Nick standing silently beside her. "I'm taking you home!"

She held back. "But why?"

"Why? Because I don't like the company you keep. Is that reason enough?"

She still resisted his insistent tug. "Nick hasn't done anything," she said defiantly, with a side glance at the youth's flushed, unhappy features.

He hasn't? Look at yourself, girl! Look at your clothes, and your forehead! What's more, I saw enough from my window; I saw him bundle you into that car!" His eyes were flashing angrily, and his grip on her arm tightened, while his free hand clenched into an enormous fist.

"That wasn't Nick!"

"No. It was your devil, I suppose!" said Horker sarcastically. "Anyway, Pat, you're coming with me before I do violence to what remains of your devil!"

Nick spoke for the first time since the Doctor's entrance. "Please do, Pat," he said softly. "Please go with him."

"I won't!" she snapped. The sudden shifts of situation during the long hours of that terrible evening were irritating her. She had alternated so rapidly between horror and hope and despair that her frayed nerves had seized now at the same reality of anger.

Her mind, so long overstrained, was now deliberately forgetting her swing from the pit of terror to the verge of death. "You come up like a hero to the rescue!" she taunted the doctor. "Hairbreadth Horker!"

"You little fool!" growled the Doctor. "A fine reception, after losing a night's sleep! I'll drag you home, if I have to!" He moved ponderously toward the door; she gave a violent wrench and freed her arm from his grasp.

"If you can, you mean!" she jeered. She looked at his exasperated face, and suddenly, with one of her abrupt changes of mood, she softened. "Dr. Carl, Honey," she said in apologetic tones, "I'm sorry. You're very sweet, and I'm really grateful, but I can't leave Nick now." Her eyes turned troubled. "Not now."

"Why, Pat?" Mollified by the change in her mien, his voice rumbled in sympathetic notes.

"I can't," she repeated. "It's—it's getting worse."

"Bah!"

"So it's 'Bah!'" she flared. "Well, if you're so contemptuous of the thing, why don't you cure it? What good did your psychoanalysis do? You don't even know what it is!"

"What do you expect?" roared the Doctor. "Can I diagnose it by absent treatment? I haven't had a chance to see the condition active yet!"

"All right!" said Pat, her strained nerves driving her to impatience. "You're here and Nick's here! Go on with your diagnosis; get it over with, and let's see what you can do. *You* ought at least to be able to name the condition—the outstanding authority in the Middle West on neural and mental pathology!" Her tone was sardonic.

"Listen, Pat," said Horker with exaggerated patience, in the manner of one addressing a stupid child, "I've explained before that I can't get at the root of a mental aberration when the subject's as unstrung as your young man here seems to be. Psychoanalysis just won't work unless the subject is calm, composed, and not in a nervous state. Can you comprehend that?"

"Just dimly!" she snapped. "You ought to know another way—you, the outstanding authority—"

"Be still!" he interrupted gruffly. "Of course I know another way, if I wanted to drag all of us back to my office, where I have the equipment!—which I won't do tonight," he finished grimly.

"Then do it here."

"I haven't what I need."

"There's everything upstairs," said Pat. "It's all there, all Nick's father's equipment."

"Not tonight! That's final."

The girl's manner changed again. She turned troubled, imploring eyes on Horker. "Dr. Carl," she said plaintively, "I can't leave Nick now." She seized the arm of the silent, dejected youth, who had been standing passively by. "I can't leave him, really. I'd not be sure of seeing him again, ever. Please, Dr. Carl!"

If these frenzies of yours," rumbled Horker, "are so violent and malicious, you ought to be confined. Do you know that, young man?"

"Yes, sir," mumbled Nick wretchedly.

"And I've thought of it," continued the Doctor. "I've thought of it!"

"Please!" cried Pat imploringly. "Won't you try, Dr. Carl?"

"The devil!" he growled. "All right, then."

He followed the girl up the stairs, while Nick trailed disconsolately behind. She led him back into the chamber they had quitted, where a curious odor of peach pits seemed to scent the air. Horker sniffed suspiciously, then seized the remaining beaker, raising it cautiously to his nostrils.

"Damnation!" he exploded. "Prussic acid—or cyanide! What in—" He caught sight of Pat's tragic eyes, and suddenly replaced the container. "Pat!" he groaned. "Pat, Honey!" He drew her into the circle of his great arm. "I'll help you, dear! All I can, with all my heart, since it means that much to you!" He groaned again under his breath. "Oh, my God!"

He held her a moment, patting her tousled black head with his massive, delicate fingered hand. Then he released her, turning to Nick.

"This the stuff?" he asked, brusquely, indicating the cabinet of bottles, with its splintered front.

Nick nodded. Pat sank to the chair beside the table and watched Horker as he scanned the array of containers. He pulled out a tiny wooden case and snapped it open to reveal a number of steel needles that glinted brightly in the yellow light. He grunted in satisfaction and continued his inspection.

"Atropine," he muttered, reading the labeled boxes. "Cocaine, daturine, hyoscine, hyoscyamine—won't do!"

"What do you need?" the girl queried faintly.

"A mild hypnotic," said the Doctor abstractedly, still searching. "Pretty good substitutes for psychoanalysis—certain drugs. Dulls the conscious mind, but not to complete unconsciousness. Good means of getting at the subconscious. See?"

"Sort of," said Pat. "If it only works!"

"Oh, it'll work if we can find—ah!" He seized a tiny cardboard box. "Scopolamine! This'll do the work."

He extracted a tiny glassy something from one or other of the boxes he held, and frowned down at it. He seized the carafe of water, plunged something pointed and shiny into it.

"Antiseptic," he muttered thoughtfully. He seized a brown bottle from the case, held it toward the light, and shook it. "Peroxide's gone flat," he growled. "Nothing but water."

He pulled a silver cigar-lighter from his pocket and snapped a yellow flame to it. He passed the point of the hypodermic rapidly back and forth through the little spear of fire. Finally he turned to Nick.

"Take off your coat," he ordered. "Roll up your shirt sleeve—the left one. And sit over there." He indicated the couch along the wall.

The youth obeyed without a word. The only indication of emotion was a long, miserable, wistful look at Pat as he seated himself impassively on the spot that the girl had so recently occupied.

"Now!" said the Doctor briskly, approaching the youth. "This will make you drowsy, sleepy. That's all it'll do. Don't fight the effect. Just relax, let the thing take its course, and I'll see what I can get out of you."

Pat gasped and Nick winced as he drove the needle into the bared arm.

"So!" he said. "Now relax. Lean back and close your eyes."

He stepped to the door, dragged in a battered chair from the hall, and occupied it. He sat beside Pat, watching the pale features of the youth, who sat quietly with closed eyes, breathing slowly, heavily.

"Long enough," muttered Horker. He raised his voice. "Can you hear me?" he called to the motionless figure on the couch. There was no response, but Pat fancied she saw a slight change in Nick's expression.

"Can you hear me?" repeated Horker in louder tones.

"Yes, I can hear you," came in icy tones from the figure on the couch. Pat started violently as the voice sounded. The eyes opened, and she saw in sudden terror the ruddy orbs of the demon!

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## 30

### The Demon Free

Pat emitted a small, startled shriek, and heard it echoed by a surprised grunt from Dr. Horker.

"Queer!" he muttered. "The stuff must be mislabeled. Scopolamine doesn't act like this; it's a narcotic."

"He's—the other!" gasped Pat, while the being on the couch grinned sardonically.

"Eh? An attack? Can't be!" The Doctor shook his head emphatically.

"It's not Nick!" cried the girl in panic. "You're not, are you?" she appealed to the grim entity.

"Not your sweetheart?" queried the creature, still with his mocking leer. "A few hours ago you were lying here all but naked, confessing you were mine. Have you forgotten?"

She shuddered at the reference, and shrank back in her chair. She heard the Doctor's ominous, angry rumble, and the evil tittering chuckle of the other.

"Pathological or not," snapped Horker, "I can resent your remarks! I've considered several times varying my treatment with another solid cut to the jaw!" He rose from his chair, stamping viciously toward the other.

"A moment," said Nicholas Devine. "Do you know what you've done? Have you any idea what you've done?" He turned cool, mocking, red-glinting eyes on the Doctor.

"Huh?" Horker paused as if puzzled. "What *I've* done? What do you mean?"

"You don't know, then." The other gave a satyric smile. "You're stupid; I gave you the clue, yet you hadn't the intelligence to follow it. Do you know what I am?" He leaned forward, his eyes leering evilly into the Doctor's. "I'll tell you. I'm a question of synapses. That's all—merely a question of synapses!" He tittered again, horribly. "It still means nothing to you, doesn't it, Doctor?"

"I'll show you what it means!" Horker clenched a massive fist and strode toward the figure, whose eyes stared, steadily, unwinkingly into his own.

"Back!" the being snapped as the great form bent over him. The Doctor paused as if struck rigid, his arm and heavy fist drawn back like the conventional fighting pose of a boxer. "Go back!" repeated the other, rising. Pat whimpered in abject terror as she heard Horker's surprised grunt, and saw him recede slowly, and finally sink into his chair. His bewildered eyes were still fixed on those of Nicholas Devine.

"I'll tell you what you've done!" said the strange being. "You've freed me! There was nothing wrong with your scopolamine. It worked!" He chuckled. "You drugged *him* and freed me!"

Horker managed a questioning grunt.

"I'm free!" exulted the other. "For the first time I haven't *him* to fight! He's here, but helpless to oppose me—he's feeble—feeble!" He gave again the horrible tittering chuckle. "See how weak the two of you are against my unopposed powers!" he jeered. "Weaklings—food for my pleasures!"

He turned his eyes, luminous and avid, on Pat. "This time," he said, "there'll be no interruptions. A witness to our experiment will add a delicate touch of pleasure—"

He broke off at the Doctor's sudden movement. Horker had snatched a glistening blue revolver from his pocket, held it leveled at the lust-filled eyes.

"Huh!" growled the Doctor triumphantly. "Do you think I come trailing a maniac without some protection? Especially a vicious one like you?"

Nicholas Devine turned his eyes on his opponent. He stared long and intently.

"Drop it!" he commanded at length. Pat felt a surge of chaotic terror as the weapon clattered to the floor. She turned a frightened glance on Horker's face, and her fright redoubled at the sight of his straining jaw, the perspiration-beaded forehead, and his bewildered eyes. The demon kicked the gun carelessly aside.

"Puerile!" he said contemptuously. He backed away from them, re-seating himself on the couch whence he had risen. He surveyed the pair in sardonic mirth.

"Pat!" muttered the Doctor huskily. "Get out of here, Honey! He's got some hellish trick of fascination that's paralyzed me. Get out and get help!"

The girl moved as if to rise. Nicholas Devine shifted his eyes for the barest instant to her face; she felt the strength drain out of her body, and she sank weakly to her chair.

"It's useless," she murmured hopelessly to the Doctor. "He's—he's just what I told you—a devil!"

"I guess you were right," mumbled Horker dazedly.

There was a burst of demonic mirth from the being on the couch. "Merely a matter of synapses," he rasped, chuckling. His face changed, took on the familiar coldness, the stony expression Pat had observed there before. "This palls!" he snapped. "I've better amusement—after we've rendered your friend merely an interested on-looker." He narrowed his red eyes as if in thought. "Take off a stocking," he ordered. "Tie his hands to the back of the chair."

"I won't!" said the girl. The eyes shifted to her face. "I won't!" she repeated tremulously as she kicked off a diminutive pump. She shuddered at the gleam in the evil eyes as she stripped the long silken sheath from a white, rounded limb. She slipped a bare foot into the pump and moved reluctantly behind the chair that held the groaning Horker. She took one of the clenched, straining hands, and drew it back, fumbling with shaking fingers as she twisted the strip of thin chiffon. The demon moved closer, standing over her.

"Loose knots!" he snarled abruptly. He knocked her violently away with a stinging slap across her cheek, and seized the strip in his own hands. He drew the binding tight, twisting it about the lowest rung of the chair's ladder back. Horker was forced to lean awkwardly to the rear; in this unbalanced position it was quite impossible to rise.

Nicholas Devine turned away from the straining, perspiring Doctor, and advanced toward Pat, who cowered against the shattered cabinet.

"Now!" he muttered. "The experiment!" He chuckled raspingly. "What delicacy of degradation! Your lover and your guardian angel—both helpless watchers! Excellent! Oh, very excellent!"

He grasped her wrist, drawing her after him to the center of the room, into the full view of the horrified, staring eyes of Horker.

"Always before," continued her tormentor, "these hands have prepared you for the rites—the ceremony that failed on two other occasions to transpire. Would it add a poignancy to the torture if I made you strip this body of yours with your own hands? Or will they suffer more watching me? Which do you think?"

Pat closed her eyes in helpless resignation to her fate. "Nick!" she moaned. "Oh, Nick dearest!"

"Not this time!" sneered the other. "Your friend and protector, the Doctor, has thoughtfully eliminated your sweetheart as a factor. He struggles too feebly for me to feel."

"Nick!" she murmured again. "Dr. Carl!"

But the Doctor, now pulling painfully at his bonds, could only groan in distraction, and curse the unsuspected strength of sheer chiffon. He writhed miserably at the chafing of his wrists; his strange paralysis had departed, but he was quite helpless to assist Pat.

"I think," said the cold tones of Nicholas Devine, "that the more delicate torture lies in your willingness. Let us see."

He drew her into his arms. He twisted a hand in her hair, jerked her head violently backward, and pressed avid lips to hers. She struggled a little, but hopelessly, automatically. At last she lay quite passive, quite motionless, supported by his arms, and making not the slightest response to his kiss.

"Are you mine?" he queried fiercely, releasing her lips. "Are you mine now?"

She shook her head without opening her eyes. "No," she said dully. "Not now, or ever."

Again he crushed her, while the Doctor looked on in helpless, bewildered, voiceless anger. This time his kiss was painful, burning, searing. Again that unholy fascination and unnatural delight in her own pain stirred her, and it took what little effort she was able to make to keep from responding. After a long interval, his lips again withdrew.

"Are you mine?" he repeated. She made no answer; she was gasping, and tears glistened under her closed eye-lids, from the pain of her crushed lips. Again he kissed her, and again the wild abandonment to evil suffused her. She was suddenly responding to his agonizing caress; she was clinging fiercely to his torturing lips, feeling an unholy exaltation in the pain of his tearing fingers in the flesh of her back.

"Yours!" she murmured in response to his query. She heard her voice repeat madly, "Yours! Yours! Yours!"

"Do you yield willingly?" came the icy tones of the demon.

"Yes—yes—yes! Willingly!"

"Take off your clothes!" sounded the terrible, overpowering voice. He thrust her from him, so that she staggered dizzily backward. She stood swaying; the voice repeated its command.

The girl's eyes widened wildly; she had the appearance of one in an ecstasy, a religious fervor. She raised her hand with a jerky impulsive gesture to the neck of her frock, still pinned together in the makeshift repairs of the evening.

There came a strange interruption. The Doctor, helpless on-looker, had at length evolved an idea out of the bewilderment in his mind. He opened his mouth and emitted a tremendous, deep, ear-shattering bellow!

Nicholas Devine sent the girl spinning to the floor with a vicious shove, and turned his blazing eyes on Horker, who was drawing in his breath for a repetition of his roar. "Quiet!" he rasped, his red orbs boring down at the other. "Quiet, or I'll muffle you!" Closing his eyes, the Doctor repeated his mighty shout.

The demon snatched the blanket from the couch, tossing it over the figure of the Doctor, where it became a billowing, writhing heap of brown wool. He turned his gaze on Pat, who was just struggling to her feet, and moved as if to advance toward her.

He paused. She had retrieved the Doctor's revolver from the floor, and now faced him with the madness gone out of her eyes, supporting the weapon with both hands, the muzzle wavering toward his face.

"Drop it!" he commanded. She felt a recurrence of fascination, and an impulse to obey. Out of the corner of her eye, she saw the Doctor's head emerging from the blanket as he shook it off.

"Drop it!" repeated Nicholas Devine.

She closed her eyes, shutting out the vision of his dominant visage. With a surge of terror, she squeezed the trigger, staggering back to the couch at the roar and the recoil.

She opened her eyes. Nicholas Devine lay in the center of the room on his face; a crimson spot was matting the hair on the back of his head. She saw the Doctor raise a free hand; he was working clear of his bonds.

"Pat!" he said softly. He looked at her pale, sickened features. "Honey," he said, "sit down till I get free. Sit down, Pat; you look faint."

Never faint!" murmured the girl, and pitched backward to the couch, with one clad and one bare leg hanging in curious limpness over the edge.

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# 31

## "Not Humanly Possible"

Pat opened weary eyes and gazed at a blank, uninformative ceiling. It was some moments before she realized that she was lying on the couch in the room of Nicholas Devine. Somebody had placed her there, presumably, since she was quite unaware of the circumstances of her awakening. Then recollection began to form—Dr. Carl, the *other*, the roar of a shot. After that, nothing save a turmoil ending in blankness.

A sound of movement beside her drew her attention. She turned her head and perceived Dr. Horker kneeling over a form on the floor, fingering a white bandage about the head of the figure. Her recollections took instant form; she remembered the catastrophes of the evening—last night, rather, since dawn glowed dully in the window. She had shot Nick! She gave a little moan and pushed herself to a sitting position.

The Doctor glanced at her with a sick, shaky smile. "Hello," he said. "Come to, have you? Sorry I couldn't give you any attention." He gave the bandage a final touch. "Here's a job I had no heart for," he muttered. "Better for everyone to let things happen without interference."

The girl, returning to full awareness, noticed now that the bandage consisted of strips of the Doctor's shirt. She glanced fearfully at the still features of Nicholas Devine; she saw pale cheeks and closed eyes, but indubitably not the grim mien of the demon.

"Dr. Carl!" she whispered. "He isn't—he isn't—"

"Not yet."

"But will he—?"

"I don't know. That's a bad spot, a wound in the base of the brain. You'd best know it now, Pat, but also realize that nothing can happen to you. I'll see to that!"

"To me!" she said dully. "What difference does that make? It's Nick I want saved."

"I'll do my best for you, Honey," said Horker with almost a hint of reluctance. "I've phoned Briggs General for an ambulance. Your faint lasted a full quarter hour," he added.

"What can we tell them?" asked the girl. "What can we say?"

"Don't you say anything, Pat. I'm not on the board for nothing." He rose from his knees, glancing out of the window into the cool dawn. "Queer neighborhood!" he said. "All that yelling and a shot, and still no sign of interest from the neighbors. That's Chicago, though," he mused. "Lucky for us, Pat; we can handle the thing quietly now."

But the girl was staring dully at the still figure on the floor. "Oh God!" she said huskily. "Help him, Dr. Carl!"

"I'll do my best," responded Horker gloomily. "I was a good surgeon before I specialized in psychiatry. Brain surgery, too; it led right into my present field."

Pat said nothing, but dropped her head on her hands and stared vacantly before her.

"Better for you, and for him too, if I fail," muttered the Doctor.

His words brought a reply. "You won't fail," she said tensely. "You won't!"

"Not voluntarily, I'm afraid," he growled morosely. "I've still a little respect for medical ethics, but if ever a case—" His voice trailed into silence as from somewhere in the dawn sounded the wail of a siren. "There's the ambulance," he finished.

Pat sat unmoving as the sounds from outdoors detailed the stopping of the vehicle before the house. She heard the

Doctor descending the steps, and the creak of the door. Though it took place before her eyes, she scarcely saw the white-coated youths as they lifted the form of Nicholas Devine and bore it from the room on a stretcher, treading with carefully broken steps to prevent the swaying of the support. Dr. Horker's order to follow made no impression on her; she sat dully on the couch as the chamber emptied.

Why, she wondered, had the thought of Nick's death disturbed her so? Wasn't it but a short time since they had both contemplated it? What had occurred to alter that determination? Nick was dying, she thought mournfully; all that remained was for her to follow. There on the floor lay the revolver, and on the table, glistening in the wan light, reposed the untouched lethal draft. That was the preferable way, she mused, staring fixedly at its glowing contour.

But suppose Nick weren't to die—she'd have abandoned him to his terrible doom, left him to face a situation far more ominous than any unknown terrors beyond death. She shook her head distractedly, and looked up to meet the eyes of Dr. Horker, who was watching her gravely in the doorway.

"Come on, Pat," he said gently.

She rose, followed him down the stairs and out into the morning light. The driver of the ambulance stared curiously at her dishevelled, bedraggled figure, but she was so weary and forlorn that even the effort of brushing away the black strands of hair that clouded her smoke-dark eyes was beyond her. She slumped into the seat of the Doctor's car and sighed in utter exhaustion.

"Rush it!" Horker called to the driver ahead. "I'll follow you."

The car swept into motion, and the swift cool morning air beating against her face from the open window restored some clarity to her mind. She fixed her eyes on the rear of the speeding vehicle they followed.

"Is there any hope at all?" she queried despondently.

"I don't know, Pat. I can't tell yet. When you closed your eyes, he half turned, dodged; the bullet entered his skull near the base, near the cerebellum. If it had pierced the cerebellum, his heart and breathing must have stopped instantly. They didn't, however, and that's a mildly hopeful sign. Very mildly hopeful, though."

"Do you know now what that devil—what the attack was?"

"No, Pat," Horker admitted. "I don't. Call it a devil if you like; I can't name it any better." His voice changed to a tone of wonder. "Pat, I can't understand that paralyzing fascination the thing exerted. I—any medical man—would say that mental dominance of that sort doesn't exist."

"Hypnotism," the girl suggested.

"Bah! Every psychiatrist uses hypnotism in his business; it's part of some treatments. There's nothing of fascination about it; no dominance of one will over another, despite the popular view. That's natural and understandable; this was like—well, like the exploded claims of Mesmerism. I tell you, it's not humanly possible—and yet I felt it!"

"Not *humanly* possible," murmured Pat. "That's the answer, then, Dr. Carl. Maybe now you'll believe in my devil."

"I'm tempted to."

"You'll have to! Can't you see it, Dr. Carl? Even his name, Nick—that's a colloquialism for the devil, isn't it?"

"And Devine, I suppose," said Horker, "refers to his angelic ancestry. Devils are only fallen angels, aren't they?"

"All right," said Pat wearily. "Make fun of it. You'll see!"

"I'm not making fun of your theory, Honey. I can't offer a better one myself. I never saw nor heard of anything similar, and I'm not in position to ridicule any theory."

"But you don't believe me."

"Of course I don't, Pat. You're weaving an intricate fairy tale about a pathological condition and a fortuitous suggestiveness in names. Whatever the condition is—and I confess I don't understand it—it's something rational, and those things can be treated."



"Treated by exorcism," said the girl. "That's the only way anyone ever succeeded in casting out a devil."

The Doctor made no answer. The wailing vehicle ahead of them swung rapidly out of sight into an alley, and Horker halted his car before the gray facade of Briggs General.

"Come in here," he said, helping Pat to alight. "You'll want to wait, won't you?"

"How long," she queried listlessly, "before—before you'll know?"

"Perhaps immediately. The only chance is to get that bullet out at once—if there's still time for it."

She followed him into the building, past a desk where a white-clad girl regarded her curiously, and up an elevator. He led her into a small office.

"Sit here," he said gently, and disappeared.

She sat dully in the chair he had indicated, and minutes passed. She made no attempt to think; the long, cataclysmic night had exhausted her powers. She simply sat and suffered; the deep scratches of fingernails burned in the flesh of her back, her cheek pained from the violent slap, and her head and jaw ached from that first blow, the one that had knocked her unconscious last evening. But these twinges were minor; they were merely physical, and the hurts of the demon had struck far deeper than any physical injury. The damage to her spirit was by all odds the more painful; it numbed her mind and dulled her thoughts, and she simply sat idle and stared at the blank wall.

She had no conception of the interval before Dr. Horker returned. He entered quietly, and began rinsing his hands at a basin in the corner.

"Is it over?" she asked listlessly.

"Not even begun," he responded. "However, it isn't too late. He'll be ready in a moment or so."

"I wish it were over," she murmured. "One way or the other."

"I too!" said the Doctor. "With all my heart, I wish it were over! If there were anyone within call who could handle it, I'd turn it to him gladly. But there isn't!"

He moved again toward the door, leaning out and glancing down the hall.

"You stay here," he admonished her. "Don't try to find us; I want no interruptions, no matter what enters that mind of yours!"

"You needn't worry," she said soberly. "I'm not fool enough for that." She leaned wearily back in the chair, closing her eyes. A long interval passed; she was vaguely surprised to see the Doctor still standing in the doorway when she opened her eyes. She had fancied him already in the midst of his labor.

"What will you do?" she asked.

"About what?"

"I mean what sort of operation will it need? Probing or what?"

"Oh," he said. "I'll have to trephine him. Must get that bullet."

"What's that—trephine?"

He glanced down the hall. "They're ready," he said, and turned to go. At the door he paused. "Trephining is to open a little door in the skull. If your devil is in his head, we'll have it out along with the bullet."

His footsteps receded down the hall.

"Is it over now?" queried Pat tremulously as the Doctor finally reappeared. The interminable waiting had left her even more worn, and her pallid features bore the marks of strain.

"Twenty minutes ago," said Horker. His face too bore evidence of tension; moreover, there was a puzzled, dubious expression in his eyes that frightened Pat. She was too apprehensive to risk a question as to the outcome, and simply stared at him with wide, fearful, questioning eyes.

"I called up your home," he said irrelevantly. "I told them you left with me early this morning. Your mother's still in bed, although it's after ten." He paused. "Slip in without anyone seeing you, will you, Honey? And rumple up your bed."

"If I haven't lost my key," she said, still with the question in her eyes.

"It's in the mail-box. Magda found it on the porch this morning. I talked to her."

She could bear the uncertainty no longer. "Tell me!" she demanded.

"It's all right, I think."

"You mean—he'll live?"

The Doctor nodded. "I think so." He turned his puzzled eyes on her.

"Oh!" breathed Pat. "Thank God!"

"You wanted him back, Honey, didn't you?" Horker's tone was gentle.

"Oh, yes!"

"Devil and all?"

"Yes—devil and all!" she echoed. Suddenly she sensed something strange in the other's manner. She perceived the uncertainty in his visage, and felt a rising trepidation. "What's the matter?" she queried anxiously. "You're not telling me everything! Tell me, Dr. Carl!"

"There's something else," he said. "I'm not sure, Pat, but I think—I hope—you've got him back without the devil!"

"He's cured?" Her voice was incredulous; she did not dare accept the Doctor's meaning.

"I hope so. At least I located the cause."

"What was it?" she demanded, an unexpected vigor quickening her tired body. "What was that devil? Tell me! I want to know, Dr. Carl!"

"I think the best name for it is a tumor," he said slowly. "I told them in there it was a tumor. I wish I knew myself."

"A tumor! I don't understand!"

"I don't either, Pat—not fully. It's something on or beyond the border of medical knowledge. I don't think any living authority could classify it definitely."

"But tell me!" she cried fiercely. "Tell me!"

"Well, Honey—I'll try." He paused thoughtfully. "Cancers and tumors—sarcomas—are curious things, Dear. Doctors aren't at all sure just what they are. And one of their peculiarities is that they sometimes seem to be trying to develop into separate entities, trying to become human by feeding like parasites on their hosts. Do you understand?"

"No," said the girl. "I'm sorry, Dr. Carl, but I don't."

"I mean," he continued, "that sometimes these growths seem to be trying to develop into—into organisms. I've seen them, for instance—every surgeon has—with bones developing. I've seen one with a rather perfect jaw-bone, and little teeth, and hair. As if," he added, "it were making a sort of attempt to become human, in a primitive, disorganized

fashion. Now do you see what I mean?"

"Yes," said the girl, with a violent shudder. "Dr. Carl, that's horrible!"

"Life sometimes is," he agreed. "Well," he continued slowly, "I opened up our patient's skull at the point where the fluoroscope indicated the bullet. I trephined it, and there, pierced by the shot, was this—" He hesitated, "—this tumor."

"Did you—remove it?"

"Of course. But it wasn't a natural sort of brain tumor, Honey. It was a little cerebrum, apparently joined to a Y-shaped branch of the spinal cord. A little brain, Pat—no larger than your small fist, but deeply convoluted, and with the pre-Rolandic area highly developed."

"What's pre-Rolandic, Dr. Carl?" asked Pat, shivering.

"The seat of the motor nerves. The home, you might say, of the will. This brain was practically all will—and I wonder," he said musingly, "if that explains the ungodly, evil fascination the creature could command. A brain that was nothing but pure will-power, relieved by its parasitic nature of all the distractions of a directing body! I wonder—" He fell silent.

"Tell me the rest!" she said frantically.

"That's all, Honey. I removed it, and I guess I'm the only surgeon in the world who ever removed a brain from a human skull without killing the patient! Luckily, he had two of them!"

"Oh God!" murmured the girl faintly. She turned to Horker. "But he will live?"

"I think so. Your shot killed the devil, it seems." He frowned. "I said it was a tumor; I told them it was a tumor, but I'm not sure. Perhaps, just as some people are born with six fingers or toes on each member, he was born with two brains. It's possible; one developed normally, humanly, and the other—into that creature we faced last night. I don't know!"

"It's what I said," asserted Pat. "It's a devil, and what you've just told me about tumors proves it. They're devils, that's all, and some day some student is going to cut one loose and raise it to maturity outside a human body, and you'll see what a devil is really like! And go ahead and laugh!"

"I'm not laughing, Pat. I'd be the last one to laugh at your theory, after facing that thing last night. It had satanic powers, all right—that paralyzing fascination! You felt it too; it wasn't just a mental lapse on my part, was it?"

"I felt it, Dr. Carl! I'd felt it before that; I was always helpless in the presence of it."

"Could it," he asked, "have imposed its will actively on yours? I mean, could it have made you actually do what it asked there at the end, just before I recovered enough sense to let out that bellow?"

"To take off—my dress?" She shivered. "I don't know, Dr. Carl.—I'm afraid so." She looked at him appealingly. "Why did I yield to it so?" she cried. "What made me find such a fierce pleasure in its kisses—in its blows and scratches, and the pain it inflicted on me? Why was that, Dr. Carl?"

"Why," he countered, "do gangsters' girls and apache women enjoy the cruelties perpetrated on them by their men? There's a little masochism in most women, and that—creature was sadistic, perverted, abnormal, and somehow dominating. It took an unfair advantage of you, Pat; don't blame yourself."

"It was—utterly evil!" she muttered. "It was the ultimate in everything unholy."

"It was an aberrant brain," said Horker. "You can't judge it by human standards, since it wasn't actually human. It was, I suppose, just what you said—a devil. I didn't even keep it," he added grimly. "I destroyed it."

"Do you know what it meant by saying it was a question of synapses?" she asked.

"That was queer!" The Doctor's voice was puzzled. "That remark implies that the thing itself knew what it was. How? It must have possessed knowledge that the normal brain lacked."

"Was it a question of synapses?"

"In a sense it was. The nerves from the two rival brains must have met in a synaptic juncture. The oftener the aberrant brain gained control, the easier it became for it to repeat the process, as the synapse, so to speak, wore thin. That's why the attacks intensified so horribly toward the end; the habit was being formed."

"Last night was the very worst!"

"Of course. As the thing itself pointed out, I made the mistake of drugging the normal brain and giving the other complete control of the body. At other times, there'd always been the rivalry to weaken whichever was dominant."

"Does that mean," asked Pat anxiously, "that Nick's character will be changed now?"

"I think so. I think you'll find him less meek, less gentle, than heretofore. More spirited, perhaps, since his energies won't be drained so constantly by the struggle."

"I don't care!" she said. "I'd like that, and anyway, it doesn't make a bit of difference to me as long as he's just—*my* Nick."

The Doctor gave her a tender smile. "Let's go home," he said, pinching her cheek in his great hand.

"Can you leave him?"

"I'll run back after a while, Honey. I think he'll do." He took her hand, drawing her after him. "Don't forget to slip in unseen, Pat, and rumple up your bed."

"Rumple it!" She gave him a weary smile. "I'll be *in* it!"

"Good idea. You look a bit worn out, Honey, and we can't have you getting sick now, or even pull a temporary faint like that one last night."

"I didn't faint!"

"Maybe not," grinned Horker. "Perhaps the proceedings grew a little boring, and you just lay down on the couch for a nap. It *was* a dull evening."