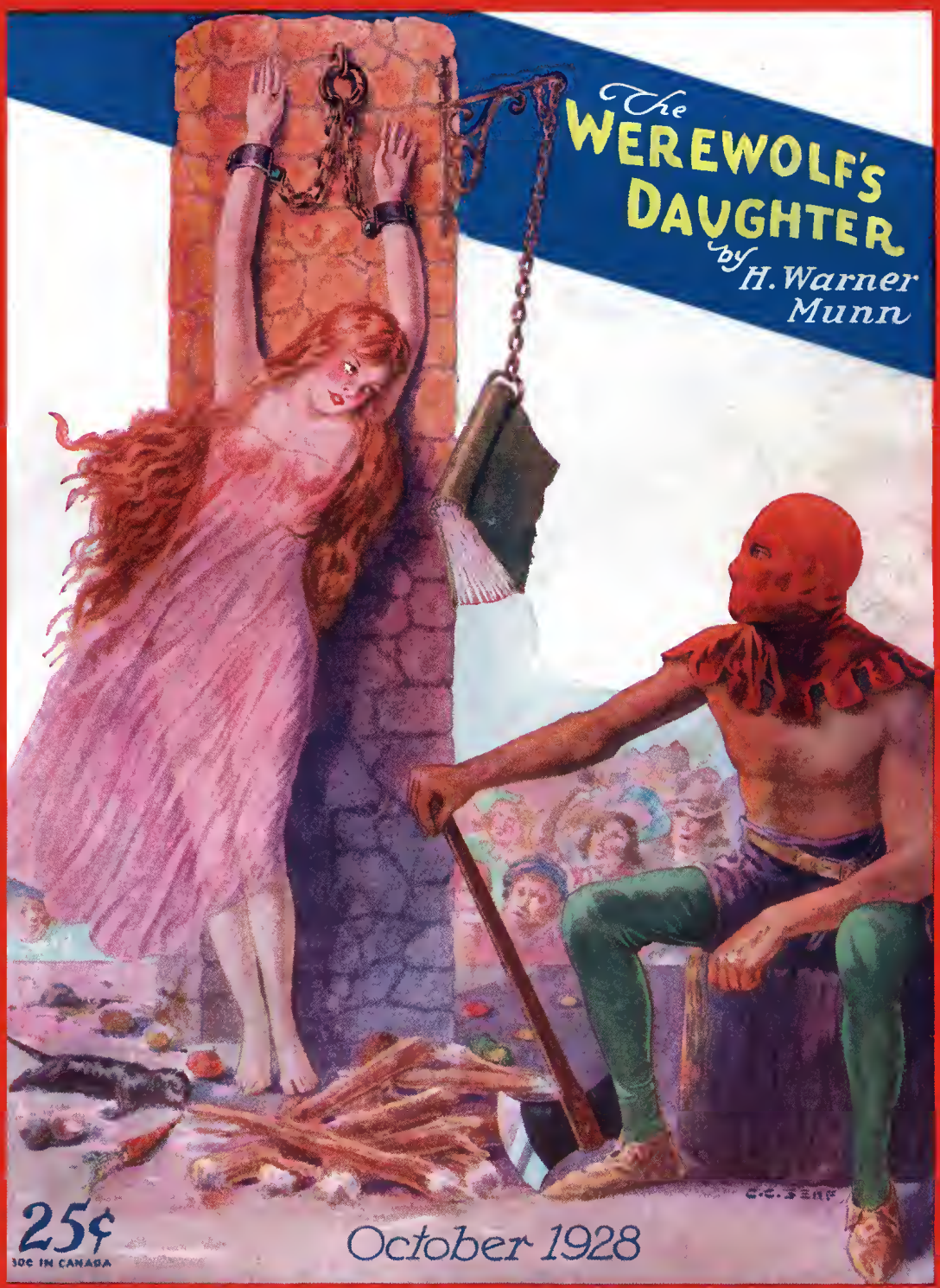
Weird Tales

The Unique Magazine



Seabury Quinn — Genevieve Larsson — Paul Ernst
Arthur J. Burks — Theodore Roscoe — and Others

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Weird Tales

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Contents for October, 1928

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THE EYRIE

"WHERE does WEIRD TALES get the wonderful stories it publishes?" writes Albert J. South, of New Orleans. "And where does it get such excellent writers? Many of your best writers seem to write only for WEIRD TALES, as I never see their names elsewhere. I have read stories by Eli Colter, Arthur J. Burks, Seabury Quinn, Robert S. Carr, Henry S. Whitehead and Murray Leinster in other magazines (though by far their best stories are those that you have printed); but Price, Long, Munn, Wandrei, and others of your unsurpassable coterie of literary craftsmen seem to appear only in WEIRD TALES. That is one of the many reasons why I spend a quarter each month to buy 'the unique magazine'."

How do we do it? The answer is very simple: simply by keeping an open mind toward every new name, by encouraging new writers, and authors unknown to us, and by accepting stories for their value as stories, regardless of the fame of their authors. The new writer is assured of a warm welcome in WEIRD TALES; for we find more joy in discovering a masterpiece by a writer we have never heard of than we could possibly find in reading a thrilling new story by Rudyard Kipling. We would naturally expect Kipling's story to be good, but in the case of an unknown writer we have the thrill of discovery. And the joy of discovering in the ruck of manuscripts brought in by the postman a masterpiece from a writer we have never heard of—that is one of the things that makes an editor's job extremely fascinating.

We might mention two examples of genius discovered and made public by WEIRD TALES: Edmond Hamilton, supreme master of the weird-scientific story, and Robert S. Carr, the apostle of the younger generation and author of the popular novel, *The Rampant Age*. Young Carr's first story was bought by this magazine when he was a fifteen-year-old high school boy living in Columbus, Ohio. The story needed careful editing, but it was *good* (and how!)—a fascinating horror-story called *The Composite Brain*. We asked for more, and worked with him—suggesting, criticizing, pointing out faults and advising changes, but always making him do the actual revision; and

(Continued on page 568)

I Pay Men $40 A DAY!

S. W. Allen of California made $40.80 in one day's "joyful work!" Charlie Horstman walked off with 53 orders in 8 hours! Hundreds of other men are reporting amazing incomes—many of them doubling and tripling their former salaries. And no wonder!

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The WEREWOLF'S DAUGHTER

by H. WARNER MUNN

"He sprang to his feet as though his hand had been bitten."

1. *Child of Wo*

A BAND of tired, dusty men, travelworn but gay, plodded down the road which led to Ponkert, as the swift summer night began to drop down upon Hungary.

In the barracks of the soldiers, who were quartered perhaps a mile from the village, scattered lights were shining, though the western sky was still red. The sentry that paced before the gate spat disgustedly on the ground as the men went by flinging cheerful gibes at one who was satisfied to risk life itself for hire when he might be his own master, free as the wind that blows through the forest.

He, in his turn, sneered at a folk too wild and unnatural to appreciate the comforts of a warm bed indoors, regular meals and the joy of service to the country.

It was the age-old quarrel of plainsman versus townsman, wanderer against stolid peasant; one the solid backbone of the nation, the other its restless blood ever on the move.

There were many such roving bands in this period of unrest. The times were ripe for change, and one was coming even then, for on the watery desert of the Atlantic, three small ships plowed an uncharted sea—ships manned by the scum of the water-fronts of Palos and emptied

prisons but which were a line flung from the Old World to the New, along which would flow news that would affect the destiny of countless yet unborn.

But now, Ponkert drowsed away among its surrounding hills, far enough from the Black Sea to be safe from the Turks with whom the country was sporadically at war; small enough to leave other communities in peace; and because the soil of that section was poor and stony, the people having little of value, they were not disturbed in their routine of life.

The wresting of food from the barren fields, squabbling in barter at the village shops, strolls at twilight by the riverside, devotion at the church; in such manner flowed the even current of their lives, pleasantly interrupted by an occasional caravan that passed through, such as now was on the border of the village. These wanderers were always welcome, for they brought news, a thing hardly come by, a breath of life to the stagnating community.

They were horse-traders, traveling merchants, musicians of note, and their women were possessed of strange magical powers. By these powers they could divine from the stars, a pool of ink, or the lines in a man's palm, what the future had in store for that man, and—most mysterious fact of all—anyone might enjoy these marvelous attainments for the price of a silver piece.

Their advent was borne before them on the wind which carried the squeal of ungreased cartwheels, the drone of foreign voices, the clank of horses' hoofs on stone and the excited yapping of the dogs which followed the caravan. Partly wolf they were, and the rest were mongrel breed and the town dogs met them with bared fangs. A dozen fights would follow before they won through Ponkert and the first wagon rolled into camp.

The wagons creaked and groaned into Ponkert, lurching wildly over the cobbled streets, the doughty little Tartar ponies straining every muscle on the unfamiliar footing. By the side of the wagons strode bronzed, bearded men of many races, but known by the general term of gipsies. Great, strapping fellows, hardly one over thirty, all showing mouthfuls of teeth in broad grins as they called to acquaintances among the townspeople, bandying coarse jests back and forth.

This was a band that had often passed through Ponkert, following a regular orbit of trade that swung through Germany, France, Italy and on into the colder countries, completing its circle at the starting-point in about two years. In all of these countries the band had acquired new recruits, adventurers all, that longed for excitement and variety or were called by the more prosaic lure of trade; so that faces of stolid, fair-haired Teutons were to be seen beside the dark countenances of the Latin races.

Mirko, the gipsy chieftain and a Pole, riding alone at the head of the caravan, dogweary but cockily twisting his long black mustachios in order to create a terrifying aspect which would awe the natives, was suddenly aware of a drumming of hoofs in his rear.

Out of the tail of his eye he saw the nose and head of a magnificent bay creep up to his side, nostrils flaring as the animal changed its gait from a trot to a walk. Well aware of the newcomer's identity, he gave no sign that he had noticed the coming, only twisting his appendages the more.

These mustachios were the pride of Mirko's heart and his greatest joy, for, hanging as they did like the tusks of a walrus, each full four inches long, they transformed his natural benevolent face into an ugly mask. Mirko was a gentle soul, but there were few even in his band that realized it, because of his bluster, his wit and his tremendous scowl. These had made him chief. The fiercest ruled in that

desperate crew! So again, he preened his mustache and scowled his ugliest, looking straight ahead between his horse's ears.

A gentle persuasive voice spoke: "How long in this village, Mirko?"

The chief grunted and turned around. "You, eh? I thought so. No one else would be addlepate enough to run his horse to death after it had traveled fifty miles since morning."

The boy grinned and wagged his finger reprovingly at his commander. "Naughty Mirko! What language to use to a poor fellow who came to visit because he thought you looked lonesome!"

Audacious speech to one as powerful as a gipsy chief, but Mirko loved the lad for it and his mock scowl vanished in spite of himself.

"Never been able to fool you, have I?" he said cautiously, looking back to see if any of the following troops were in earshot.

These two were chums. When Mirko had first met Gunnar, the young Frenchman was wandering alone in Russia in search of adventure, his only weapon a bandura or three-stringed violin, with which he sang like any troubadour for his supper, and a short dagger with which he carved that supper and his enemies alike. Mirko's heart warmed to the young daredevil so far from home and he invited him to become a member of the band, which offer Hugo accepted with alacrity, being ever on the lookout for new experiences. Since then they had covered many a weary mile together, and Mirko loved the boy like a son. Hugo set his cap askew with a slap of his hand, gave his own embryonic mustache a fillip and, ready for fight or frolic in the new encampment, he repeated his question.

"How long?" said the chief. "Three days, perhaps. Not more; less, I hope. We must be in Nizhni Novgorod for the great fair, and already we are far behind our plans. There's a sight for you, boy, when we get you back in Russia! Thousands of people, tents, shows, monsters, wrestling, bear-baiting, tame wolves, freaks, horse races! You'll never forget it. And the girls! Ah, Hugo, the girls! Every pretty girl in Russia goes to Nizhni Novgorod at fair time." Mirko smacked his lips. "We will have to buy some new clothes for you. Nothing like gay feathers at mating-time!"

"Bah!" Gunnar broke in. "You know I am not interested in girls. Chatter, chatter like rooks all day long, and when they have finished, nothing was said."

"Not int—Hugo, art ill?" the chief asked solicitously, but with a crinkle about his thin mouth. "Why, boy, you're not human! Now when I was your age, I——" but here came a clattering interruption of hoofs and Mirko bit his words short, his face resumed its usual saturnine scowl, and he snarled viciously at the intruder.

Only a trifling matter of a lost colt, but Mirko flew into a towering rage and must go back personally to see that the search for it was undertaken at once, so Hugo was left alone at the head of the caravan.

Although they had passed through the town, he was very appreciative of the honor and sat straight in the saddle, glancing now and then to left and right filled with a hope that people would believe *him* chief.

They had left Ponkert a mile behind, a forest to their left and a few scattered cottages upon their right dotted amongst cultivated fields, the camp ground not far, when Hugo, allowing his glance to rove carelessly over the nearest of the buildings to see if anyone was watching, saw upon a rude porch a girl standing. She was looking at him intently, and their glances met and clung.

With that meeting, soul spoke to soul and each, in a second's time, felt a sudden surge of emotion.

The riders behind reached the boy and passed him, some grinning, others frowning, but all with crossed fingers as they neared the cottage. When they rode before him, shutting off his view of the lovely girl, cheeks now beginning to crimson at his steady gaze, he scowled, making aimless gestures with one hand as a man does to drive away an annoying fly which buzzes by his face as he reads. A warm, strange glow of happiness filled his being as he looked.

Her hair was chestnut brown and curled just enough to form a natural wave that his fingers yearned to stroke. Her eyes were dark, but the color of them he could not distinguish, for her long lashes hid them. Her nose had that slight tilt which makes even an ordinary face adorable, but hers was no ordinary face.

At a later time, he saw that there were a very few small freckles, lightly sprinkled here and there like sun-kissed flower-dust. But the mouth did not agree with the rest of her perfect features; the corners drooped and cast a sad, forlorn look over the sweet face. It was a mouth that had smiled very little in her life, and suddenly it came to him that it would be worth anything he possessed if he could make that face light up with pleasure and hear her laugh.

So lovely she looked, yet so sad and sorrowful, so cuddlesome for someone's strong arms, yet so obviously unwanted by anyone; for one who is loved does not have *that* dejected air. But now her eyes were shining, her lips half parted, as they gazed at one another, oblivious of their surroundings, not noticing that there was any other person on earth except themselves, though men were shouting and urging on the beasts, the wagons creaking dismally, the dust of the road rolling high between them.

Hugo felt a blow upon his shoulder and a dig in the ribs. A jovial voice bellowed in his ear, "Aha, Hugo! Caught at last! Not interested in girls, eh? When they fall they fall hard, but who is the fair one?" and Mirko squinted through the clouds of dust. Then his face paled beneath the grime.

"White Christ!" he croaked, and crossed himself with unaccustomed fingers, his banter slipping from him like a cloak. "The witch! Come away, quickly! She will put a spell on you, boy!" And he struck Hugo's horse a blow on the haunch that set him moving.

Hugo had not been conscious that the horse had stopped, yet fully two-thirds of the caravan had passed while he sat staring at the sad girl, and now, while he and Mirko galloped on to their former place, he turned in his saddle for one last look, but the door of the cottage was shut and she was gone. Riding once more at the head of the caravan, Mirko explained the terror that hung over her and why she was feared by all in Ponkert.

The caravan swung to the left about the forest before he finished, and to a question he replied, "Her foster-father is an old grizzled giant, a marvel with the broadsword, and that is all that has saved her from the peasants of this accursed village. They fear him, so they hardly dare to look at her, but when he dies her life will not be worth that!"

He snapped his fingers, and the horse he rode took on a swifter gait, just as they entered a green clearing in the forest. Parklike it was, and spacious, and in its center bubbled up a clear spring of sweet water. By the time the two horses had drunk in the pool, the first wagon was rolling into the camp ground and the band were at home again for the night, one of many homes, and for many, the only home they knew.

2. Dmitri Tells the Truth

TO THE girl upon the porch, as she stood watching the tired caravan plod down the road, a voice from inside the cottage had spoken.

She turned and closed the door, walking with the easy swing of a young panther to the chair where the old man sat and waited for her.

There was about him a certain dignity that hangs about one who is used to commanding and being instantly obeyed. In person, he was huge with large hairy hands and tremendously muscled arms depending from broad, strong shoulders. His waist tapered and was lean, and above was great depth of lung. His head was large and crowned with a mass of iron-gray hair. His leonine face was gaunt and bony, with lines of patient suffering about his mouth. Now the deep-set eyes glowed with pleasure as the girl came toward him, and a greeting rumbled from his cavernous chest.

"More gipsies, Ivga?" he asked.

"Yes, father," she answered, a fond note in her voice as she smiled at him with a look of adoration. "Many of them this time."

The old man sighed. "Bound for the fair, I suppose. Well, some day you and I will go, dear—when my legs are well."

He smoothed the blanket that swathed his knees. For a year he had not taken a step, a paralysis of the limbs rendering him helpless. There were grave doubts that he would ever walk again, but the girl had never been allowed to suspect that the ailment was other than temporary and she looked forward daily to the time when they should stroll again by the river and through the forests as before.

She placed another stick upon the irons in the fireplace and a to-do and row of crackling began as the flames seized upon it. While she stared into the fire, the crippled giant spoke again: "Bring me my sword, Ivga, if you will."

From its pegs above the fireplace, she lifted down the massive weapon, peeled back the soft leather casing that covered it, and laid it across his knees.

It was a beautiful sword, a double-edged instrument of death, as sharp as Roland's sword Durandal, and on its five feet of blue steel was one word of gold inlay: *Gate-Opener.*

It had opened, in fact, many gates, both material and spiritual, being a crusader's sword that had hammered before the portal of Acre, swung again in the taking of the Holy City and in other battles, proving itself a gate-opener indeed between this world and the next.

In Dmitri, the sword of unknown history and age had found one who could wield it as it deserved, for although many owners had gripped it in battle since those roaring days and the ribbed black hilt was now smooth, it was too ponderous to be used as other than a two-handed sword for most men, and the day of such swords was nearly over.

Dmitri, with his strong right arm, had brandished it like an ordinary saber, smashing by brute force through those that opposed him, but Ivga, strong as she was, staggered beneath the weight of it, crossing the room. When he moved his arms, in the polishing, the cloth that covered them bulged with the play of his muscles. Often for fun, before his legs failed him, he would stand upright, thrust out his sword arm and dare her to bring it down if she could. And though she hung from it by her hands with her full weight, feet drawn up and not touching the floor, it would be minutes before the arm came down. Such was the giant's strength.

His pleasures during his year of illness were few: the sight of Ivga, ever busied with his comfort; rude wood-carving to kill the time which hung so heavily upon him; the rare visits of some of the soldiers that he had commanded years before; and last but greatest joy, the sharpening of his beloved sword.

A half-dozen times a day he would labor upon its keen edge, sharp-

ening it over and over until like the fabled sword of Roland it might almost have severed a pillow of down that floated upon water driven by the wind against its edge. Yet as Roland was dissatisfied with the keenness of *his* sword, recasting it until it would sever *three* pillows, so Dmitri labored in perpetual employment upon Gate-Opener's edge, breathing upon some fancied spot of rust upon its mirror surface, then dropping the polishing-rag to sharpen a roughness that no one else could see, never admitting that there was such a thing as utter perfection. For then his chief delight would be over, and he loved this heavy blade that could cut through bone like cheese.

This day he stroked the whetstone along its edge with soft loving movements, the thin "thweet-thwee-ee" whispering from the razor edge as though Gate-Opener answered its master's low crooning in some metallic language which only they two could understand.

To him, laboring at his endless task of love, she came with a query on her lips and with worried, perplexed eyes. She came listlessly across the room, dropped upon her knees beside his chair and laid a cool hand upon his wrist as he vigorously plied again the polishing-rag.

"Father," she said, as he looked up, "why do people hate me so?"

"Hate you, child?" Dmitri smiled. "No one hates you."

"They do," she insisted. "Everyone hates me. When I go down into the village, all of them look at me so strangely that it makes me feel afraid and I come home as soon as I can."

"How do they look at you?" asked Dmitri, a little vein on each temple commencing to throb viciously, and, unnoticed by either, the whetstone fell to the floor. "Slyly out of the corners of their eyes when I pass, and they edge far away from me if they can. Then sometimes after I have gone by, they make this sign and spit upon the ground behind me. Even the gipsies today——"

Here she closed the second and third fingers of her right hand into the palm and held them down with the thumb, thus making with the index and littlest fingers the sign of the Horns, a charm still used in some countries against the evil eye.

"What does it mean?"

Dmitri ignored the question. "Do they ever say anything to you?" he gritted.

"No," she hesitatingly replied, "not *to* me, but I have heard some say 'Witch' under their breath as I passed."

"By God! If I had my strength!" passionately exclaimed the cripple. His knuckles whitened as his hands clenched on the chair arms. Breathing hard, his whole body trembling, he half rose, but the exertion was too much; his paralyzed limbs refused to bear his weight, and he fell back into the chair, where he rested, eyes closed, for some moments.

The girl, alarmed by his silence, was about to speak when he said in a lifeless tone, "How long have they acted so toward you, Ivga?"

"About a year, but they always shunned me ever since I can remember."

"But they have been more open since I became sick? More insulting?"

"Yes, father," the girl confessed.

"So!" he muttered, half to himself, "when the lion is caged the dogs grow bold. Well, Ivga, best stay indoors for a while till my legs get better and then we'll leave this place. Ponkert? Pesthole!" He laughed shortly. "Keep away from the town. Stay here or near by, where I can see you. None shall touch you here. I think I can promise that!"

His face set into hard, sinister lines that his soldiers of old would have recognized as his fighting face, but which frightened the girl, who had

never seen the terrible look that he now wore.

"But why do they hate me?" she sobbed. "I never harmed them or anything belonging to them. I would love them all, everybody, if they would only let me. Nobody loves me but you, nobody ever has. No one would play with me when I was little. The games would break up if I tried to join. No one but you has ever taken me for boat rides on the river or for walks or picnics in the Old Forest."

"Weren't you happy so, little daughter?" Dmitri asked sadly. "I tried to make you happy, dear."

"Yes, I was—then, but now I want to be loved by other people, too. I want to be liked—I want to be loved because I am myself and not because I am your daughter. I don't want everyone to hate me when I have done nothing to hurt them. Oh, I would love anybody—*anybody,* so *much,* if they would treat me kindly just a little bit! But everyone hates me so. I don't know *what* I want, but I am so lonesome that I feel as though I ought to be dead!"

"I should have known!" the cripple groaned in remorse. "I was a fool to try living in this village. I have spoiled your life, Ivga. Can you forgive me?"

"There is nothing to forgive, father. Why should I?" She lifted a tear-wet face to him. "See, I am smiling! I didn't mean it, really I didn't. I don't mind these people. They are nothing to me, but don't make me stay inside, penned in like an animal. I couldn't stand it. I must be free. I should die!"

"You may die, if you don't stay in," he groaned. "These dogs yelp first, then bite and I—I am helpless to protect you. Ivga, dear, I am not your father, but I command you by the love you say you feel for me, to stay close by. Danger is coming near to us."

"Not my——" the girl began, in a dazed tone, but Dmitri interrupted with a quick gesture.

"Wait!" he said; "I will tell you everything. I should have done so long ago, but I could not bear to do it. They hate you, and now I believe it must be hate, because they fear you."

"Fear me?" The girl laughed. "I only wish they did. If I were big and strong like you, dear father, I might make them fear me, but why should they be afraid of a little girl like me? And why hate me?"

"They hate you because they fear you," the cripple repeated, "and all men hate the thing they fear, because they are ashamed of fear and deny that they are afraid, even to themselves. Still they do fear, and sometimes they remove the cause of that fear. If it is an animal, they cage or tame it. If it is a poisonous weed or fruit or snake, they avoid or destroy it. If it is a man, they slay him. And they, all of them in this village of Ponkert, are afraid of you.

"Don't!" as she was about to interrupt. "I will tell you a story that I should have told you long ago; and Ivga, think not too hardly of me because you never knew before. You see, I thought you were happy and I love you so, I could not bear to hurt you. I love you with all a father's love, but I am not your father. I am a Czech, hired by good King Matthias, the first really brave king Hungary has ever had. Many of us came here to fight for him, and as we were dressed in black armor we called ourselves the *Fekete Seres* or Black Brigade. Some of us were quartered here when we first noticed your father, who was a native-born Hungarian.

"FIFTEEN years ago, almost to a day, a beggar came running down this road with news for me. Terrible news it was, of how a jeweler had become a werewolf, a thing neither beast nor man, and had slain his wife while in

the wolf shape, and repentant awaited someone to slay him in turn.

"Quick with the information, I had my horse saddled and with a half troop of my riders following, set out to save the man alive if I could, for it would have been a great deed to me to bring before the king a werewolf.

"The werewolf, though often spoken of, is rarely and scarcely ever seen. One meets many a man who says that a friend of his has seen and fought with one, but it always turns out that this friend got his information from another friend and so on, until one grows weary of ever meeting the demon fighter. I expected, therefore, to gain promotion if I brought a real werewolf to the court, but I never did, and could I walk today I would still be a captain and no more. The poor crack-brain of a beggar, like the fool he was, stopped in the village before he came to me.

"It was ten miles to the village from the werewolf's house, and he might have hoped that someone would buy him a drink for the news. He had run nearly to Ponkert. So he babbled out his story to any who would listen, and they were many, but I fear he did not drink. I know Ponkert men! Then when everyone in town had gone to kill the jeweler, the beggar came to me.

"They had over an hour's start, but my horse was fast and my spurs were sharp, and I reached him in time to save him from being speared by an ignorant tanner. I struck the tanner over the 'head with my sword, this very sword that you see here, but not to kill, only to stun. Still, I struck too hard and addled his wits, so that he has been an idiot ever since. You have seen him often. He helps the blacksmith with his work—the heavy work that takes no skill. We took the jeweler to the barracks and he told us his tale.

"Ivga, we were hardened soldiers, used to battle, murder and sudden death, crimes and horrors of all descriptions, but some among us were sickened as he told us the things that had been done to him and the sights he had seen. And the pity of it was that it was not voluntarily that he had sold his soul, but under compulsion of a black fiend—a monster that he called Master, but whom we knew could be none but the Arch-enemy in person.

"There was not a man of us with dry eyes when he told, in his dreary voice, of the manner in which this Master had forced him to kill his wife and carry his baby girl out for the pack to eat, and all because he had tried to escape from the One who owned him, body and soul!

"He asked for our help and we gave it. We fought Satan and lived—most of us—but although we killed all the pack in a trap, the Master escaped and still lives—somewhere. Of course we could not kill him. He was no *man* to be killed.

"So we brought back the jeweler and prisoned him in a dungeon until he recovered from his wounds that he had suffered in the fight, and I sent a report to the king.

"The royal command returned that we should end the existence of the werewolves of Ponkert by making an example of the one that remained; that his hide should be tanned and upon it written the story of his fall to warn any who might learn of it, that the Master was to be shunned.

"Then came word, as he lay in prison, that his baby was not dead, but had been rescued by a hunter in the forest. Secretly I told him, for although orders were that he should not know, I pitied him. He asked my promise that I would always fill a father's place in her life, and I gave my oath, the oath of a Helgar which has never been broken. Later in his confession I read that he wished he had known me earlier, so that we might have been friends. It would have been well for both of us. He was a brave spirit, for there was a smile on his

lips as he went to the gallows and a jaunty tilt to his hat as he cried, 'Take good care of Ivga!' and so died.

"His name was Wladislaw Brenryk, and I have kept my promise, for *you* are his daughter, a fact that no one has ever dared to tell you, for fear of me!

"Your father's skin was made into a book, bound in leather and hung from the gallows for a time; then it was removed to the church, where it now is."

But the girl was no longer listening, wide-eyed, but lay, face buried in the blanket on his lap, while she whispered to herself: "The Werewolf's daughter! They *fear* me! *I—I* am the Werewolf's *daughter!*" and sank unconscious to the floor.

Upon her hair the old man placed his shaking hand, and bent his head. And quietly he mourned that her happiness was now forever done.

THE stars told that midnight was near, when from the Ponkert streets a girl entered into the church which at that time dominated most of Ponkert's life. Beneath it there were hewn many cells in the living rock, and into one of these she came from out a labyrinth of underground passages. The light of the candle she bore showed that the mark of tears was on her pale cheeks and her face was set in old lines. By Dmitri's directions she had found the correct room, although she had never been beneath the church before, and alone she entered unobserved.

Every man, woman and child in Ponkert knew the whereabouts of that cell and the horror it contained. All who could read the book of human hide (and they were few) had done so, but no one was unfamiliar with the story written in it. Yet so powerful is dread, that while Dmitri Helgar walked or rode in the streets, his ever-present sword with him, no word was ever spoken where the girl might hear. Although she had heard of the werewolf pack that long ago had laid waste the country (it was the one event that Ponkert had of which to boast, people marking time from the slaughter of the pack), she had never imagined that Dmitri was not her father.

Now the living and the dead were to meet for the first time.

She advanced timidly into the dark room. There was no visible means of ventilation, but the air was dry and pure. In a far corner a rough bench stood. This, with the exception of a heavy stool, was the only article of furniture that the room contained. Upon the bench lay a long taper and materials for its lighting. Beside them, out of any possible reach of moisture or decay, the *book* lay, covered by a linen altar-cloth.

She lit the taper and fixed it in its socket on the wall. Then reverently she lifted away the cloth and touched the book with loving fingers.

All that remained on earth of the father she had never known, lay before her between two thick leather covers, hand-tooled with figures representing the Resurrection and the Day of Judgment. The book was chained to a staple deep sunk in the wall.

Softly her white fingers stroked the pages of human parchment, and a sob caught in her throat. Her whole being called out for her unknown parents, for some affection in her love-starved existence. Only those who have never known a mother's love can realize the value of it.

Now all the suppressed longing of her life came rushing upon her and she cried aloud in the stillness, "Oh, father! Mother! If I could only see you once! I am so lonely and so afraid. Can't you help your little girl?"

There was no sign nor answer in the cell. The taper burned evenly as before. She lifted the cover and began to read.*

**The Werewolf of Ponkert*, the story of Ivga's father, was published in WEIRD TALES in July, 1925.

From the pages it seemed that her father was speaking, as though the account had been written for her alone. To his daughter, the Werewolf of Ponkert told his tragic story across the years. As she read how he had met the Master and was enslaved; of his mental agony as he tried to break loose from his miserable bondage; of his final success and the death of all that he held dear, she began to hate the Master with a deep, abiding hate.

It was *He* who had broken three lives along with countless others; it was *He* who had escaped unhurt when his poor victims had been killed in the ruined castle; it was *He* who even now roamed somewhere, scheming to accomplish more evil. For what purpose?

None of those he injured had harmed him, yet like a fiend he passed from one crime to another, leaving broken hearts and blasted lives behind him, and as the fierce, uncompromising religion of that time stated, even their souls were damned forever and there was no hope in the grave for those whom the Master had possessed.

A bitter anger against him; it passed; a wonder took its place, for in the silent room something else was moving!

A sweet peace drowned her black wrath, and though nothing was visible, a still small voice murmured. Not with the gross ear of flesh was the sound intercepted, but with the inner sense that yearned so desperately for love.

And the voice said, "Hate him not, my darling. He has suffered more than we."

3. The Singer and the Song

SHE stared vainly around the chamber.

"Who spoke?" she said, her voice rasping loud and harsh in the quiet room.

The contrast told her instantly that it was no mortal who was present. The calm and beautiful tones flowed placidly on. One felt that the stranger was beyond human passions; a disinterested spectator of the earthly struggle.

"Hate soils the mind, Ivga. Hate no one. Pity him rather. That would hurt him more if he knew. His proud spirit can not bear to be pitied. The Master likes to rule over all and denies that he is unhappy, but we who know his sorrow pity him though we can never forgive.

"Bitter times are coming, little daughter. We can not help you, but we are watching near you always. In your darkest hour, do what you believe is right and you will be happy."

The voice faded and died away. On her forehead Ivga felt a light touch, and a dainty perfume drifted by. For a second the girl felt that she was being watched by many benignant eyes; then an ineffable sense of peace and security soothed her trouble and her unseen observers had gone.

In the chamber, far beneath the ground and secure from any drafts, the lighted taper flickered.

Again that sweet fragrance permeated the atmosphere in elusive wisps; just once she thought she heard the faint rustle of a woman's skirts; then nothing.

She stared about the chamber. Already she began to doubt that she had seemed to hear a voice. Yet the taper had not done with trembling, and the aroma lingered.

"Oh, mother! My mother!" she whispered. "I have *heard* you. I have! But I wish I could have seen you. I would have loved you so much!"

She closed the book and replaced the cloth over it. Then, relighting her candle, she blew out the taper flame and left the cell. By the time she came from the church, it was well past midnight and a brave wind rumpled her hair about her face as she stepped out upon the street.

It is hard to feel sad and morbid long, when one is out in the wind and cool of the night. There is something in the feel of the rushing air which blows away the unhealthy miasmas from the brain, so that Ivga had not walked far before she felt more at ease and happier, with a curious sense of indefinable joy.

Her steps quickened as though she journeyed toward a meeting, yet she was scarcely aware of the direction in which she was traveling. Dimly conscious after a little that she was within the forest and had passed her home and remembering that it was late at night, she turned back.

As she did so, there came a sweet music of plucked strings far away, and then a clear voice singing in the distance and coming up the forest path from the road she had left.

The words were simple, the pathetic song of an elf to his fairy sweetheart who had deserted him for a mortal lover. The air was familiar to her, but the voice was new. Upon a stone by the side of the path she sat and drew a leafy bough down about her. Waiting there, she was hidden and could listen to the strange voice and perhaps see who the singer was that sang in the night. The song came nearer. . . .

It is necessary to go back a little. After the caravan had made camp and food had been properly disposed of, young Gunnar and a companion returned to the village to see the new sights. He looked for the girl as they passed again the cottage of their meeting, but she was nowhere to be seen and the two went on.

In Ponkert after hours of music, wine and dance, where Hugo made pleasure for the villagers with his bandura playing and ballads of far times and places, his companion left the younger singer. Later, Hugo also quitted the tavern and journeyed back to camp.

As he walked, his pockets chinked pleasantly, for Hugo's songs were not free, and somewhat stimulated by the load of coin and inward excitement he unslung the bandura from his back and swept his fingers across the strings. Taking a shorter way through the forest than the road would prove, he walked on amongst the trees, singing as he came:

Dancing down a beam of light
  There came a dainty fairy sprite.
Too well she loves a mortal
  Though he is in rags bedight.

When wandering over hill or plain,
  Laughing rill or stormy main,
She's guarding him from every wo;
  His sorrow is her pain.

His mortal eyes are blind to thee;
  This glorious love he can not see.
How canst thou vainly love him so
  And never glance at me?

Abruptly the song was cut short. Something darker than the shadows had moved in the gloom beneath a low-branched tree. Quick as thought itself, the boy hurled himself at the prowler, for the times were hard; men do not skulk for any good purpose by the side of the road, watching passers-by at night, and attack was ever the best mode of defense.

The two bodies struck together and the spy was overthrown by the blow, falling face down in a patch of moonlight, lying there very quietly.

The dagger was ready in the young man's hand as he bent over the prostrate figure and gripped it roughly by the shoulder. A second later, his fingers loosened on the blade and it dropped to the sod. He sprang to his feet as though his hand had been bitten, whipped off his plumed red cap and stood there, face fiery with shame and embarrassment, stammering idiotic apologies to the crumpled girl who lay still, face hidden in her arms.

Inanity after inanity stuttered forth in French, Hungarian and Romany dialects and receiving no answer, he began to back away, forgetting his dagger. Before he had taken two

steps, his heel caught in a root and flung him solidly to earth.

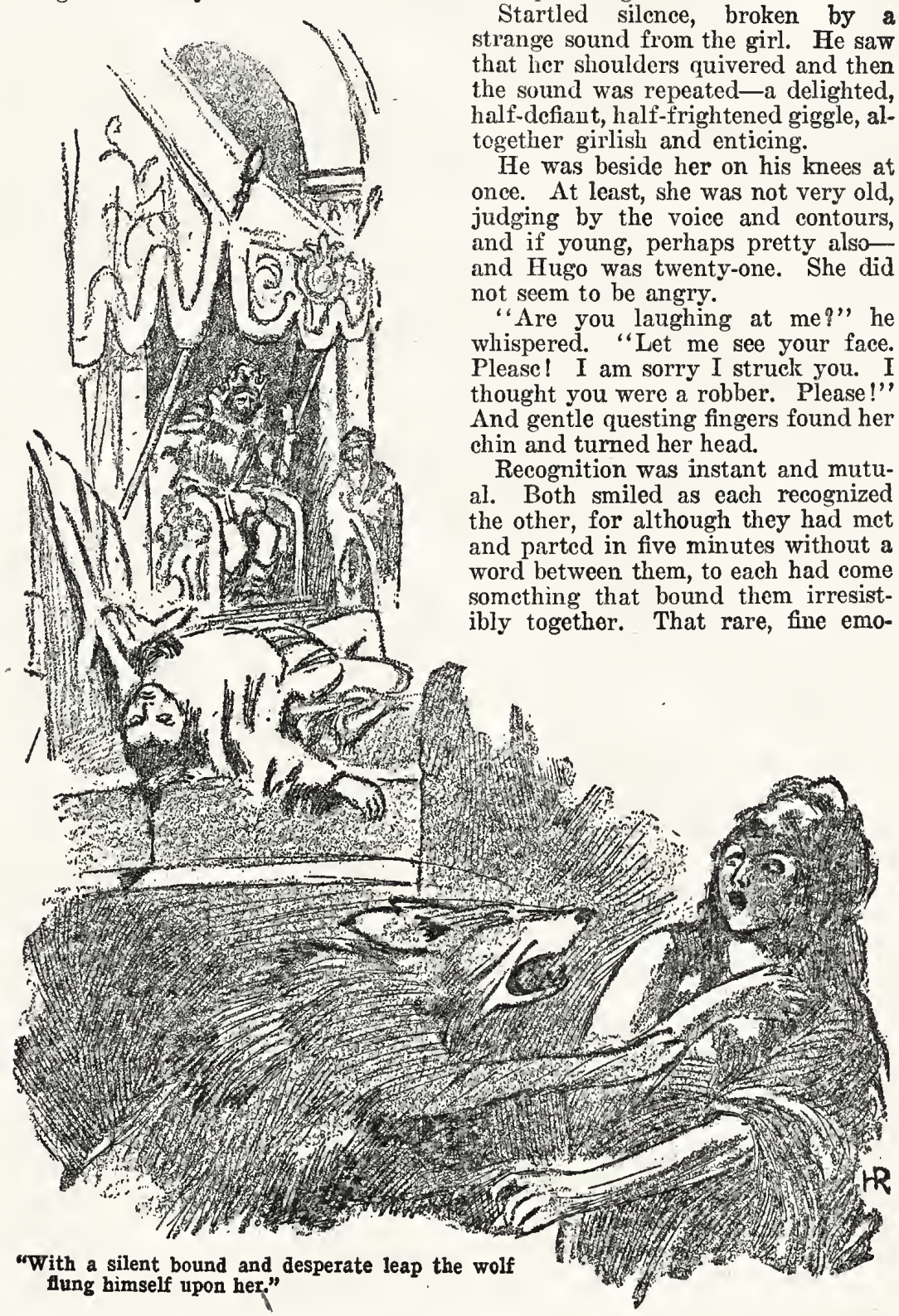
The breath whooped out of him in an explosive grunt.

Startled silence, broken by a strange sound from the girl. He saw that her shoulders quivered and then the sound was repeated—a delighted, half-defiant, half-frightened giggle, altogether girlish and enticing.

He was beside her on his knees at once. At least, she was not very old, judging by the voice and contours, and if young, perhaps pretty also—and Hugo was twenty-one. She did not seem to be angry.

"Are you laughing at me?" he whispered. "Let me see your face. Please! I am sorry I struck you. I thought you were a robber. Please!" And gentle questing fingers found her chin and turned her head.

Recognition was instant and mutual. Both smiled as each recognized the other, for although they had met and parted in five minutes without a word between them, to each had come something that bound them irresistibly together. That rare, fine emo-



"With a silent bound and desperate leap the wolf flung himself upon her."

tion was theirs which only a few ever know, a tender joy in each other's presence that when one is gone makes of life an empty and useless thing for the other left alone. And now, while they gazed upon each other once again, firmer grew the bonds of love and it seemed that they were not late acquaintances, but had long been friends and lovers.

"I crave your pardon," said the boy. "I wanted so much to see you again and now I have hurt you. I grieve!"

"You wished to see *me?*" amazedly questioned the girl, and he smiled. He had known before she spoke that her voice would be sweet, and now the very accent seemed dearly familiar.

"Me?" said Ivga. "You do not know who I am!"

"I know. Mirko, the chief, has told me of you. I believe you have been unjustly persecuted and I would like to be your friend if I may."

"I have no friends," she answered, now sitting up cross-legged, small hands on her knees, eyeing him wide-eyed and solemn. "Never has anyone wanted to be my friend but Dmitri."

Hugo felt a hot tide of jealousy surge through him—jealousy that anyone but him should be in the heart of this strange girl—jealousy that quickly passed as she continued, "But Dmitri is old and you are young like me. I have never played with anyone who was not afraid of me."

"I am not afraid of you," stoutly asserted the boy.

"No, I do not think you are. And I am glad we can be friends. I like you; do you like me?" she asked, with the charming simplicity of a little child.

"Very much," was the ardent reply.

"Then my name is Ivga—Brenryk." She hesitated over the last unfamiliar name. "And yours?"

"I am Hugo Gunnar, late of France and now a gipsy wanderer."

"You do not look like a gipsy, though I saw you with them at dusk, so big on your horse. Do you lead your band?"

Hugo wondered just how much she knew, decided not to risk it and modestly admitted that he didn't exactly command the troop, but left the vague idea that his was the guiding mind, and the girl was properly impressed and said so.

So in the age-old way, two had met and were on the way toward love and life together.

From that meeting, apparently so casual, innocent and ordinary, events were to spring that would stay the course of progress for many years in Europe, deal civilization itself a mighty blow from which it is even yet recovering. Mighty forces were busy that night, unseen and undreamed of by the chatting couple, and it is not too much to believe that the entire meeting had been foreseen and arranged.

But the two were conscious of none but themselves. For them the world was now a pleasant place, and for Ivga, this was the first happiness since she was old enough to know that she was hated.

So the night wore on. The stars paled in the east, and still they talked, until reluctantly the girl felt that she must return.

"Come," she said, "walk with me through the wood. I will go home now."

Hand in hand like children, they strolled beneath the shadowing trees toward the Helgar cottage, and the way was all too short for both. They stopped at the door, but Hugo did not release her hand.

"Tomorrow, I shall see you?" It was more a statement than a question that he whispered.

"Yes, tomorrow," she breathed—hesitated—then with a flash of daring, she said, "would it were morning now!"

Desire flamed up in his eyes and he took a step toward her, but frightened at her audacity, she snatched her fingers from his warm clasp and slipped through the door.

As she entered, he caught her shoulder and his arms went about her and held her close, a prisoner there, all woman now and yearning for his touch. Hungry for love, her starved lips sought his and clung in one mad, breathless kiss, then against his breast her hands fluttered like prisoned birds and suddenly pushed him away. She turned her head.

"No! Oh, no! You must not. I am the Werewolf's daughter. Go away, I am afraid!" she panted, and struggled to be free.

"Dear! I love you! I would love you, no matter what you were!" he gasped, and seized her fiercely again.

"You hurt me!" she wailed softly. "Please let me go!"

The blood of many nobles told. His arms went limp. The hand upon her shoulders slipped down her arm in a long caress and touched her fingers. Slowly he bowed his head as one might to some lovely, imperious princess, kissed her small palm and closed her fingers over it.

"Keep this for me—until tomorrow," he murmured. "I am sorry. I love thee. Good-night."

"Tomorrow," she echoed in the ghost of a whisper, and the door closed.

A short time he stood in the pebbled path, thoughtfully gazing at the unresponsive door, then went back along the road.

Somewhere he had mislaid his dagger. Was his heart also lost beyond the finding? He did not know.

4. Lovers—and a Lunatic

THEY had spoken of tomorrow, but the word should have been today to be truthful, for as Hugo walked into camp, little birds were singing in that half-light which heralds morning. He lay down in his usual cart with his clothes on, for he knew the call would soon come for arising. Before he was near sleep, a harsh peal brayed out from the cook's wagon, and soon that dignitary appeared in the open, a cow's horn in hand. Upon this he blew a second blast, and a general stir of rising and sleepy grunts of protest were heard from the covered carts.

Hugo slipped from his bed and being already dressed was one of the first to help at kindling fire. Now a bustle of yapping dogs told of breakfast, and things began to appear more cheery to tired men as they had something to kick out of the way and to curse at. Breakfast vanished with speed and in large quantities, and the business of the day began.

This was the first morning of the three days in Ponkert, and there was much work to do. The camp was not yet completely set in order, and there was tugging and hauling of carts into desired positions, better than the hurried selections of the night before. Driven by the gruff orders of Mirko, men scurried about, setting up a little platform at one end of the open ground. Upon this stage, with the forest for a back-drop and the sky for a canopy, would be presented entertainment for the villagers. At the other end, near the road, a heap of rock arose as if by magic and was quickly formed into a crude but serviceable forge. A portable smithy was a necessity to such a troop, and to it, after the few horses that had cast shoes had been shod again, Hugo repaired, having a moment's leisure. In his hand he bore an odd weapon. In length it was all of four feet and might have been termed a sword, except that it had neither edge nor point. It was nothing more than a rod of steel, fixed into a basket sword-hilt, as thick as a man's thumb where it joined the hilt, and oval rather than round. It tapered rapidly toward the tip, where it was perhaps a quarter

of an inch in thickness and the same in breadth.

This blunt tip Hugo thrust into the coals, and plying the bellows, he soon had a leaping flame. When the steel had taken the desired color, he drew it out and with a small hammer commenced to draw out the tip to a point of exceeding fineness. He was engaged upon this work when he heard a voice behind him. He turned to see Ivga standing there.

Dropping the hammer, he snatched off his cap and made a low salutation.

"A wondrous morning," he smiled. "I trust your majesty slept well?"

"Divinely," she returned in the same joking spirit, "but not long."

"I warrant," said the boy. "Would you like to walk about the camp?"

So, by his side, Ivga saw the little stage where tumblers were at practise, visited a blind harper who played a quaint air of the Southland and would accept no fee from any friend of Hugo's, and was introduced to an old woman whom the boy called Clauda and who crossed herself furtively as the girl turned her head away to watch a half-tamed wolf fighting with a dog from town. For by this time a sprinkling of villagers were mingling with the gipsies and certain silver pieces were already in different pouches than at daybreak.

Clauda, now that she was not noticed, skulked into a tent, lifted the back flap, and by a roundabout way, keeping out of sight of the girl, gained her own tent and did not return. None knew better than old Clauda the danger of being old and lean and odd of face. Many an old woman had crackled at a stake on no better proof of witchery, and to be seen with such a suspicious one as this girl when townsmen were about savored to Clauda most strongly of suicide. She was not seen about the grounds until the girl had gone.

The departure was somewhat hastened by a crowd of children, who, increasing in numbers and boldness, followed the two as they moved from one curious scene to another. So at last they became noisy and virulent, and Hugo turned upon them, jaw outthrust and eyes blazing.

"What's odd with you?" he scowled. "Did you never see me before? Can I not walk with a lady without a company at my heels?"

It was a town boy that answered from a mind biased by the prejudices of his elders.

"You I know not, nor care to. But the lady"—an unpleasant accent upon the word—"that you have with you, we know well. And a most sickening smell of sulfur clings to her!"

Hugo caught him a clout with a hard fist that sent him reeling, but the girl prevented the blow from being followed by another. White-faced, she drew him away.

"I am so sorry. I have brought trouble to you," she said, when they were again alone. "I should not have come." And she walked along with her gaze upon the road.

"Do not mind them, sweet," he comforted; "it was but children's talk. They know no better."

"Not all," she replied, sorrowfully. "They all hate me here. Where did he learn that? From what others say about me, who would love them all. It was only a word, but a spark shows the direction of a wind, and little words like that will light a flame against me soon."

"Is it as bad as that?" the boy asked.

"Dmitri has advised me not to leave his sight any more," was the indirect answer.

"And you disobeyed to see me!" Hugo exclaimed joyfully. "You really like me then?"

She did not answer the question, but suddenly she laughed.

"How I do talk on such a lovely day! Let us be happy and save this for some other time. Let us to the woods and I will show you Ponkert

from the old haunted castle on the hill."

"But I must work," Hugo protested, more than willing for a holiday, but wondering what Mirko would think of his delinquency.

"Love you your task then?" she pouted. "Why, go you to it, if you must," and she turned toward the forest path.

"Wait!" he cried; "I will come. Let me get my sword."

He ran back to the forge and recovered the uncompleted weapon.

SHE was waiting in the forest when he came. And as they walked through the wood, she teased him, in a mood for fun, remarking that this toy was no sword for a man to carry —nay, was no sword at all, but only a knitting-needle that she could use herself! Now, her father had a sword that was *worth* the seeing, and so on, until Hugo was nearly vexed; and seeing his glum look, she became penitent and was forgiven, she exacting a promise that Hugo would come and see her foster-father's sword on the morrow and he offering to bring Clauda to tell the fortunes of both the girl and Dmitri.

So they came at last to the old ruined castle upon the hill overlooking the river, forest, Ponkert and the plain. Here, resting beneath the very crumbling wall which once the Master in wolf shape leapt to safety with death bellowing at his heels, the boy observed another mountain far away near the river which almost encircled Ponkert, but on the other side of the village. The top of this peak was divided into two as though split down part-way with a giant's ax, and curiously he asked its name.

"It has no name," said Ivga, "but I call it my mountain, for I am there much. On the side near the river, father and I have a little boat where we go to fish and play. Or did, long ago." She fell silent, thinking of far-off happier days, when Dmitri's legs were strong.

"It must be hard to climb," he said idly, not dreaming of the conditions that would soon cause him to know just *how* hard it was to gain the summit.

"It is," said Ivga, "very hard. No one goes there but me. I can be all alone up there and forget how people hate me and be happy with the wind which has been so far and is so happy too and free. And when I am all alone, so high, I feel closer to heaven, mother, and my father too. They are happy because they are dead and have each other. They loved and were not long apart after mother died. What father did was not his fault. He was *made* into a werewolf; he did not seek it as many have. Yet because of that, they hate me."

"I do not hate you, Ivga, dear," said Hugo and took her hand. "Have you forgotten last night and what we said this morning?"

The curls shook vigorously. "No, but you were wrong. You did not know I was so bad. You said you—loved me." She looked down at the distant village. "They will hurt you some way if you stay here, and you must go away when the tribe goes anyhow. You will find someone else, better than I am"—the words caught in her throat, but she went on bravely with a steady voice—"someone not cursed. And I hope you will be very happy with her."

There were tears in her dark eyes now, but her voice did not tremble. "So it is a pretty dream, but it must die. No one can ever love me. Never!" The brown head sank lower. "I am the Werewolf's daughter, shunned, hated and feared by all, cursed at birth and despised by even the children; there is not, nor can there be, any love or rest for me in all this ugly world," she said bitterly and drew her hand away.

"Peace," he whispered and laid his fingers across her sullen lips. "I love thee and shall love thee always."

"How can you be so sure?" she breathed.

He bent his head, and seeing the look in her eyes, kissed her cheek, then greatly daring, found her lips with his—and was not denied.

She lay quiescent in his strong embrace and presently her arms went about his neck and drew him closer. Held captive, a willing prisoner in those dear bonds, he felt as though, far wandering, he had come home at last.

She moved away and looked at him, studying his earnest face.

"Hugo, *what* are we to do? Will you take me with you when you go?"

"I could not," he said, frightened at the thought. "You would not be safe with us. Anything might happen. No, I will stay here with you."

"That I will not have you do. It is more dangerous here for you than it would be for me to go, but——" she paused.

"What is it?"

"Dimitri—I can not go. He would be all alone."

The boy started to speak, but she smiled. "Never mind," she said, "we will forget it and be happy now, while we can. Tell me a story, Hugo. Now—you are from France, you say. Is it far away?"

"Very, very far. Many days' journey for horses, even."

"I have heard tales of France, but I have never seen it," said the girl wistfully, as she sat gazing across the valley, hands locked about her knees. "Tell me. Is it a lovely land?"

Hugo, remembering his home, knew it to be beautiful, and being far away, memories portrayed it still more pleasant than he had known it, and from that picture he described his home and country, finishing: "In France the flowers are lovelier and more fragrant than here; the birds carol a sweeter lay because they are French. Why, even the sun shines brighter over Blois than Ponkert!" rhapsodized the homesick boy. "And the blue of the sky! Oh, Ivga, you can not imagine how lovely it all is. I think the floor of heaven must hang very low over Blois!"

"Well," decided the girl in a judicious tone, "it is nice up here, too, sometimes. And now for the story. Must have a story."

Hugo grinned. "Must? Listen then and I will tell a story of my family, long, long ago, and then you will know why *I* am not afraid of a werewolf's little daughter.

"It is told of our house, that very long ago there was a count who lived under a dreadful spell, being at certain changes of the moon sorely afflicted by a transformation of his body into that of a wolf.

"At such times he would roam the forests after hiding his clothes in a sure place, known only to himself; for it was part of the witchery that without his clothes he might never resume his shape.

"Now the count's wife was evilly disposed toward him and yearned greatly toward a young soldier of the castle guard, so that with diligent and tormenting questions she discovered his secret and bode her time.

"When he wandered again, she followed at a distance, stole his garments from their concealment and fled to the castle, giving out after a decent time that the count was dead. But his magic garb she laid away."

"Why didn't she burn them?" the girl reasonably inquired.

"I don't know," Hugo confessed. "It doesn't seem very wise of her, but she kept them.

"The count roamed the country for long, after he knew he could not become a man again, and his heart was full of wrath against his faithless lady. He went hungry often when he might have eaten, for he would not slay the innocent and helpless, but preyed only on the real wolves and

the dangerous animals of the forests. He became gaunt with famine and his body scarred with battles, so that one day when the nobles were hunting and the dogs cried behind him, he could not outrun them.

"He burst through the pack and laid hold with his teeth upon the stirrup of the king, who was among the hunters and whom he had known in his former life."

"O-oh!" gasped Ivga. "And did they kill him?"

"Not at all," Hugo answered. "They were going to do so, but the gracious king saw there were *tears* in the wolf's eyes and that he fawned piteously upon those who came to spear him, rubbing like a cat against their legs, so the king, saying 'This makes for sorcery!' commanded that the werewolf should be given quarters in the palace till such time as he might regain his former shape, and that he should be called 'Gunnar.'

"While he dwelt among them, many tried their skill at breaking the spell, but to no avail, until one day a great ball was held at the palace. Nobles from all the country were present, and in their number came the heartless lady, now wived to her guilty lover. While they danced in gay ignorance, Gunnar rose from where he had lain couched before the throne as a trusted pet, and with silent bound and desperate leap flung himself upon the defilers of his honor. Her paramour he slew, but contented himself with one snap at his false lady, which left her noseless to her death.

"Then great excitement was toward, many claiming that the attack was cruel and unjust and clamoring for his death, but the wise king, mistrusting the evil countess, caused her to be so treated that she confessed the truth and found the magic garments for the werewolf. No sooner had he donned them than he became the count and fell at the king's feet swearing fealty anew to his just rule, and from that time he took the name of Gunnar in gratefulness to the king. His former marriage was annulled and he married again, more happily than before, for although he was always subject to the enchantment at moon-change, he ever found his garments where he had placed them and no hunters were allowed to enter the woods he ranged.

"So you see, little witch, that even if your father was a werewolf, one of my kin was also, and perhaps I might be one too; who knows? Aren't you afraid of me?" He smiled into her face, as she looked up at him.

"Not if you love me as much as I do you," she replied demurely, with a twinkle in her eyes.

"Love you, sweetheart? I worship you, but take care! Don't tease me too much, because you look sweet enough to eat and I might begin any time. Thus!" And he caught her hands in his and began kissing each fingertip in turn, while as his head was bent, she touched softly her lips to his thick black hair.

Feeling the gentle pressure he lifted his head quickly and their lips met; then a teasing mood seizing him, he cried, "Be careful! Now I am a werewolf! I have you, little one! Shall I bite off your nose?"

"If you can catch me!" she laughed as she slipped deftly from his eager arms and ran away toward the river, her skirts fluttering about her nimble limbs, the picture of happiness, with flushed and happy face; for it is good to love and to be loved for the first time when one has been very lonely. And now believing that Hugo had also a dark blot upon his ancestry, she did not feel so terribly isolated and alone in her misery. Nor did she ever know that he had lied to her with that exact object in his mind at the time, relating an old legend for her benefit as history and truth.

Shouting hoarsely, in mock rage, he followed, and by the river bank he

caught her fast in his arms and held her close.

"Now you are mine," he panted, "and I shall not let you go. You are mine for always, for I love you."

"And I also," she whispered.

"We will go away from here," he murmured. "We will go back to my father in Blois, who is very rich, and you will be his dear daughter and my love."

"But Dmitri? I can't go without him!" she said in alarm. "I can't leave him while he lives."

"We'll take him too," the boy promised largely. "Our castle is big. There is room enough for all of us."

And they sealed the bargain with a kiss.

The sun hung low when they left the river bank and wandered back toward home, talking together in low tones and planning far ahead. Yet while they chatted thus in teasing words, each happily conscious of the other's adoration but shyly ill at ease, speaking mostly with the silent language of eyes and kisses in that first bloom of young love, events were marching to a dreadful conclusion in Ponkert.

The morning before, a woodchopper had gone to his work in the Old Forest; two days had all but passed and still he had not returned. At that moment a small band of men were in the forest, searching patiently in the evening gloom.

As the sun went down, two men trudged home from their work in Ponkert. Tired they were, and sometimes stopped to rest. Passing the house of Helgar, they noticed that the door was open, and glanced within. The old man lay in his chair, covered with a robe and sleeping.

The day had been long for him without Ivga, and he had worried, but she had said that she might be gone some while, for the river was low and many of the fish had died, so that the fishing that she purposed to do might not be quickly done. And now he slept and dreamed perhaps of Ivga.

One of the workmen nudged his fellow. It was the former tanner, now crazed—on one subject worse than the rest, and that one was revenge for the blow which had made him so.

"See!" he muttered to his companion, an evil-browed lout. "He is alone. Is now the time?"

The blacksmith frowned. Always it was necessary to watch his mad helper lest he do himself or others a mischief.

"Not yet," he answered. "Come away. Some other time, not now."

The idiot grinned vacuously and resisted the other's restraining clutch, making as though to open the gate, while he loosened the knife by his side.

"He struck me once," he growled, as he struggled to be free.

The other man gripped him fiercely. "You cursed fool, now is not the time! The soldiers would be about our ears like bees. Some day they will all be gone. Wait!"

"I have waited fifteen years," he grumbled. "You always say that!" He allowed himself to be urged down the road.

"He struck me once!" the former tanner repeated and turned for a last look.

Two persons were coming up from the village, walking slowly. He stopped short, holding back the smith.

"Look! It is the witch," he muttered. "She has trapped a gipsy. He will die within the week!"

"Nay!" denied the smith, as he saw who walked beside the girl. "I saw them this morning walking together and he went willingly. 'Tis no beguilement of hers."

"He went willingly? Then he is a sorcerer too! Are you mad as these fools say I am? Would he go with her, knowing what she is, were he not as bad or worse? He is another menace to the town and they should both be burned."

The smith blinked stupidly at the idea. He was not quick of wit, and the thought seemed good to him.

"You are right, Wesoskas," he unwillingly agreed, revolving within his dull brain plans by which he might tell others on the morrow of the wondrous idea and by naming the boy as a sorcerer gain fame and credit for being a man of keen insight among the village folk.

They moved along, talking, and behind them came the girl and Hugo, having no eyes for anything but each other, never suspecting how the threads of destiny were being wound together into a cord that might mean death for all.

"And the morning and the evening were the first day."

5. *The Gathering Storm*

WOMEN talked in little groups the next morning, and there was a general air of suspense and expectancy in Ponkert for the most of the day. It began at sunrise with a story told by one of those who had been at the gipsy camp, and in the repeating the tale grew huge and dangerous.

As told by a woman in a group by the village well, it ran something like this: "You have not heard the evil that befell my little Millo? Yesterday he said something to the witch when she was at the gipsy camp and she told a great brute of a gipsy that was with her to kill him. The beast knocked my poor little boy down and trampled on him, but he crawled away. Then she cursed him—and see! When he was coming home, he climbed a tree to swing on the branches and a branch broke and he fell. His leg is broken now. May her bones be crumbled in fire or rot away while she lives!"

"Aye," chimed in another. "Remember how my lad was killed. Just for striking her with a stone, it was, in childish fun. Was he not missing only a month later and found buried in the sand pit where she had caused the bank to slide upon him?"

"Remember the widow Capelok's pigs? How they sickened and died after she was found watching them one day and the old woman drove her away?"

"And the blinding of young Switté only last season? Recall the day he was led out of the wood half mad, with his eyes blown out, when his gun exploded! Did he not say that the witch had punished him for staring at her over long?"

So the tales flew, each natural calamity discussed only from one point of view and all revolving around a single hub—the suspected witch.

Was the summer dry, so that the crops were poor and the river was low? The witch was to blame!

Did sheep die from an odd sickness that year? Ivga again! And ever through the talk that day ran two recurring motifs—the sending of a curse on Millo the day before, as he had lyingly claimed to his mother, and the yet unsolved mystery of the missing woodchopper now upon his third day of absence.

The searchers had straggled in late the night before, their hunt to no purpose, and now they were gone again, searching the woods and hills systematically, with slow, patient care where before they had been more hurried and less thorough. For now all knew he must be dead.

And through the village a suspicion grew hourly more defined, though no one knew who first had uttered it, that the manner of his passing had not been a natural one. People longed with a dreadful, sadistic desire that the thing they suspected would prove true.

What was *it* that had killed the missing man?

NOT a hint of this unrest came to the cottage beside the road, for no one tarried that passed that way;

and though Hugo early in the day, when he brought Clauda, the future-reader, to visit the girl, had already heard rumors, he said nothing to alarm her.

Clauda was less considerate. She had been loth to come, and only Hugo's insistence that she oblige him and his positive belief that she would not be seen, if they went early, had brought here there. Once there, she dispatched her business in haste and left, with no wish to linger.

From an inkhorn she poured a black pool into Dmitri's palm and peered into it, her small sunken eyes restlessly seeking for knowledge. Dmitri, unbelieving and skeptical, asked if she could see him walking in that pool of ink.

"Yes," said old Clauda, "once more you will walk, once more you shall fight, but from that fight you come back never. No feat of arms shall slay you, but I see you dying among a heap of slain. Rocky walls on each side reach high. It is dark. I can see no more."

"If no trick of battle causes my end," said Dmitri, "who then shall kill me? Can you see? Look again."

"His face I can not see. The night is heavy on the battlefield, but this I know. A dead man shall slay thee."

"You speak in riddles, Clauda," said Hugo, vexed by such an unhappy introduction to Ivga's guardian and fearing lest this might prove a poor beginning for all his great plans.

"You brought me here. I did not wish to come. I have told the truth!"

"Don't be angry, Clauda," said the boy, coaxingly. "A nice reading now for Ivga, please. What is her future to be?"

"Pour the ink. I will not touch her hand. Pour the ink yourself."

Hugo filled the girl's hand with the fluid, and the old crone bent over the pool with mingled dread and curiosity. A long time she looked, and as they watched, her face grew white and strained. At last she looked up.

"I can see nothing," Clauda said evenly. "I will not look again. Come back with me, Hugo. There is danger here."

"After a little time, mother, after a little." The boy laughed away his own disturbed thoughts.

"Wo and sorrow rest upon this house!" wailed the crone, and returned to the camp.

After she had gone, Ivga showed him Gate-Opener, and Dmitri told him all that he knew about it. Together they disposed of his worry over the reading of the prophetess and made him feel more easy and at home.

Not even Dmitri's grandfather knew much of Gate-Opener's past, save that its age was great. Its very appearance spoke of antiquity to those who knew swords well. Hugo's cheek flushed as he gazed upon it and compared it to that other almost legendary sword, Durandal, which it so much resembled.

"From similar times they came," thought the boy, "and perchance it may have swung and flickered icily upon some battlefield where thirsty Durandal was also drinking deep from the cup of a shattered skull."

So, dreaming of mightier days, he patted the hilt of the keen and ponderous brand.

When Hugo had quite finished with admiring the enormous broadsword, Ivga commanded with a delightfully imperious air of ownership that the boy show his own tiny weapon. Reluctantly he drew his rapier and laid it across the old man's knees. Although four feet long, beside Gate-Opener it was as insignificant as a dagger.

Dmitri's voice was grave, but about his lips there lurked the faintest suspicion of a smile, while Ivga did not trouble to hide her amusement at the ridiculous comparison.

"What might be the use of this toy?" asked Dmitri, his pleasant voice taking some of the sting from the words.

"Sire," replied the boy, bowing to hide the quick flush of resentment, "in the right hands, it is capable of making widows!"

"Ah?" queried Dmitri. "And has it been used for that purpose?"

"Not as yet, sire. It is but lately finished. The point I made this morning."

"Then how can you be so certain of its worth?"

"Its value has been proved in battle," replied Hugo proudly. "My father was the first to fight with this type of sword and it began thus:

"When my father was a very young man, our castle was besieged by an enemy who at one time entered the walls and almost conquered us. The fighting was hand to hand, and all who could bear arms fought beside our men-at-arms and peasants. My father chanced to have his sword broken in his hand and was beaten to his knees by the man who fought against him. As the man swung up his sword to cleave my father in twain, father's hand fell upon a fragment of spear, and leaning forward beneath the descending blade, he ran the soldier through.

"When the battle was over and we had won as always, father being of an ingenious turn of mind bethought himself of a new weapon, in shape a sword, but to be used in an unusual way. It should remain secret and thus carry surprize with it. It should be edgeless, therefore round, and amazing sharp in point like a cook's spit. It should be light in weight, the easier to parry with, and possess a good grip for the hand. Here you see its fellow."

Dmitri examined the primitive rapier critically.

"It has a wicked look, yet it is made for boys, not men to play with. Old Gate-Opener here," and he slapped the hilt of the broadsword affectionately, "would make six of this —this——" he hesitated.

"Knitting-needle!" supplied Ivga, laughing.

"To every man his weapon," smiled the boy, but the smile was only with the lips. "Would you see how one may play with it?"

Without waiting for an answer, he snatched his rapier from the old man's lap and sheathed it, then walked to the fireplace and selected a billet of wood nearly four inches thick. Standing near the wall, he tossed the stick into the air. Before it had begun to fall, he whipped out his sword more quickly than the eye could see the motion. Dmitri and Ivga heard a thud, and the boy stepped back empty-handed. Against the wall of the room the rapier trembled, driven through the stick, which it had pinned to the wall.

"Now," said Hugo, quizzically, "if that had been a man?"

Dmitri did not show the surprize he felt. "Is the steel as strong as your wrist?" he asked.

"Nearly!" Hugo grinned. "See!"

Seizing the hilt, he tore the rapier from the wall and set his foot upon the stick, then pressing sideways, bent the slender blade into an arc, after which he pulled it from the stick and returned it to the old man for examination. The point was apparently as needle-sharp as before.

"My father taught me many things with such 'toys,' and my brothers and I have practised daily with them since we were strong enough to lift one. Ours is the only family which knows their value."

Dmitri, having learned all that he wished, changed the subject abruptly.

"You spoke of 'our castle'," he said, bluntly. "Does that mean that you are noble in your own land?"

"The name of Gunnar is famous in France. I am a Gunnar!"

"Then how comes it that you trail with gipsies?"

"I was headstrong and the youngest son," answered Hugo soberly.

"Father and I quarreled. So I am here. Is it an answer?"

"It is enough," replied Dmitri. "Ivga, will you bring us wine?"

In this way, the two, who each in his way loved the friendless girl, looked upon each other and were satisfied, each finding the other a man to whom his heart warmed. So they met and parted, never to meet again, for Hugo did not enter the cottage that evening after he and Ivga had walked together along the river bank and planned and planned—very far ahead that afternoon, meaning to take Dmitri with them when the caravan left.

But in after years, Hugo remembered that day and Dmitri's simple, kindly smile, so loving when he spoke to Ivga, and often wondered how the three of them could have been so blind to the shadow that all the day was gathering closer about them.

IN THE streets the women talked and waited. In the forest men searched, hoping, yet fearing to find what they were certain would be found.

And that for which they sought lay hidden by brush beside a fallen oak, in territory which had been gone over several times. So securely was it laid away, that only those who had cunningly hid it there knew its hiding-place—only those, and now and then an inquiring fly that buzzed down hungry and arose later on sluggish wing, flying heavily away, full-fed.

So ended the second of the caravan's three days in Ponkert.

That night the searchers did not come home, but hunted by the light of torches, and by morning were scattered thinly through the forest. The sun was two hours high when a man, leaping over a fallen tree, fell short into the brush, lay face to face with the dead a space, and arose with the stench of corruption three days old upon him.

Then from the woods arose a cry, a vengeful whooping and halloo, that rose and sank, tossed from one to another of the searchers and carried on as, when the deer is sighted, the hounds give tongue.

From all the forest rose the cry, "Found! He is found!" and from a score of points the men converged toward the spot where the body lay, until all had come and clustered round.

He was grievously torn and mangled, scarcely to be recognized as human, but they knew by certain garments and his ax that it was the woodchopper; his wood chopped, his wandering done, his ax idle at last.

Still and quietly he lay, and quietly, ominously so, the group of men stood and stared at the sad ruin the forest beasts had wrought, the veins puffing out on their temples like writhing purple worms and the knuckles growing white as their hands clenched on the weapons that they bore.

For men that search for a definite thing twist all they see toward the supporting of their belief, and not a wooden-headed lout in the little band but would have told you that it was *not* wolves that had killed the woodsman, though the tracks were thick and plain for all to see.

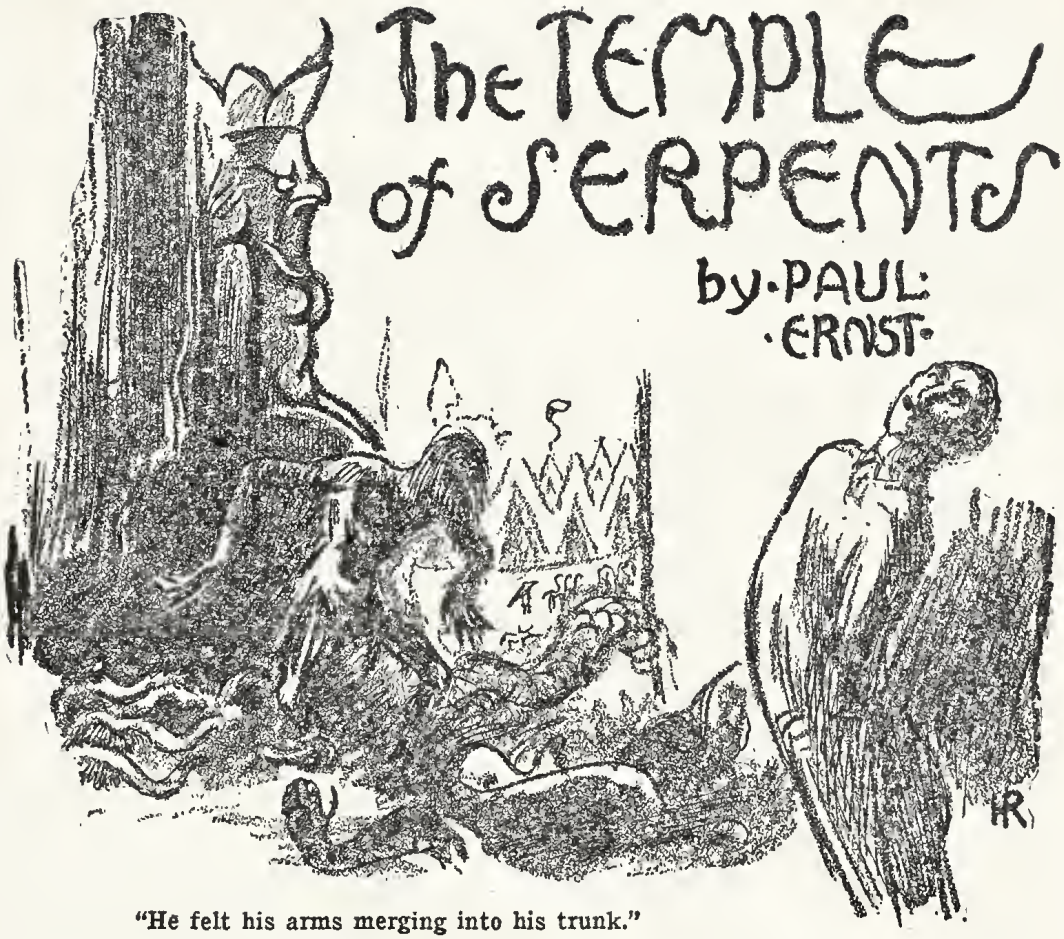
Through the crowd burst a lad, fierce and wild-eyed, crying, "Where? Where?" to the men so grimly silent, and spying the body, fell upon it, sobbing out his grief to the cold ears, for *it* had been his brother. Gentle hands lifted the lad away, and pitying voices mumbled stiff and stumbling words of sympathy, but the boy would have none of pity, and with the fierce intolerance of youth he struck away the comforters.

"Oh Christ!" he sobbed; "how long do we stand the curse that lies upon this town? How long do we groan under the rule of this seed of the Fiend? Sickness, famine and sorrow have we had; the river wanes away; the sheep die; terror stalks in the streets at night; and now this!

(Continued on page 571)

The TEMPLE of SERPENTS

by·PAUL·ERNST·



"He felt his arms merging into his trunk."

HOME from central Africa came Wells Beyerlein, the artist, with an imposing stack of canvases to his credit at a New York gallery. As usual, he went directly to Herbert Wayne's apartment. Wayne was his best friend, and it was in his comfortable bachelor suite that Wells put up during the infrequent periods he spent in New York.

"A wonderful trip, Wayne," said Wells as they sipped lazily at a tall drink apiece in front of Wayne's fireplace. "Not only from a productive viewpoint but also from a personal one. You've no idea how weird that country is down there."

"Down where?" asked Wayne.

"The back country of the Belgian Congo. It's wild and woolly, my son. The children play with skulls as our kids play with blocks. The fire is kept warm under the cooking-pot, and they eat little white men without salt or pepper!"

"How did you escape being eaten?" inquired Wayne with a smile.

"Oh, I managed," said Wells with a grimace. "My greatest source of worry was not myself but my paints."

"How come, Rembrandt?"

"It is the custom for the men to daub their faces and bodies with all the bright-colored pigments they can find. And you can imagine how my tubes of vari-colored, guaranteed paints attracted them! Especially the reds and yellows and greens. I finally had to spread a rumor that my paints were terribly bad medi-

cine, and that any black boy who touched them to his body would curl up and turn into a snake! They believed me implicitly—it seems that their witch doctor had a bad habit of turning his enemies into snakes, so they knew it could be done."

For a moment the two men were silent, dreaming into the fire. There was a tremendous contrast between them. Wayne was slender and almost delicate, with the sensitive features and deep dark eyes of a dreamer; while Wells was essentially a man of action, with broad, stocky body and round, practical-looking head.

Wayne broke the spell with a short laugh.

"The childishness of the human mind when it is left to itself!" he exclaimed. "Can you imagine an adult human being actually believing that another mortal is able to turn him into a serpent if he is angry and so desires?"

The artist gazed at his friend with somber eyes before replying.

"I can't laugh with you, Wayne. I've lost a lot of convictions since I began to travel around the darker corners of the earth. Some of our most precious laws of physics and common sense are knocked silly by the childish, savage mind that you deplore."

Wayne stared. "You don't mean to say that you believe in such things yourself?"

"I believe in nothing much. But at the same time I hesitate to disbelieve even the wildest statements."

"Did you ever see anyone being transformed into a snake?"

"No. Also I never saw a witch doctor change himself into a tiger or a lion—but it is supposed to have been done by the most powerful of them. I tell you, the things that some of those black-skinned, ferocious children of the jungle are capable of, would surprize you."

Wayne attempted to change the subject.

"What would you like to do tomorrow? You've been in the wilds for so long that we'll have to sophisticate you all over again."

"Now you're trying to humor me," laughed the artist. "But I'm not crazy, Wayne. And"—with a smile that was a mixture of earnestness and jest—"I've brought back proof of the snake story. I'll show you."

He rose abruptly and went into the bedroom that was always his when he was in town. There he opened a huge suitcase, one of those carryalls that expand at either side like an accordion. It was a mute testimony to its owner's travels, this battered case. It was stained and discolored, with auxiliary straps sewed crudely on to reinforce it where it had weakened at various times, and it looked as though it could tell a long and interesting tale.

From the capacious folds of the big case, Wells brought out an object that seeemed to be heavy and was about half as large as his clenched fist. As he took it up and handed it to his friend to look at, it glittered a dull green in the firelight.

Wayne gave an exclamation and nearly dropped it.

"What a gruesome thing! I thought it was alive at first."

He examined it carefully. It was a snake's head in stone, perfectly done. Blunt and flat and ominous-looking, with hard, glittering scales and dull, beady eyes, it seemed more like an actual petrified head than a work of human hands. The dull green sheen was intrinsic in the stone—a stone that Wayne had never seen before.

"What a curious thing, Wells! And it is quite perfect. Surely no jungle savage carved this out of the rock!"

"Not supposed to be carved at all," said Wells, still with his in-

scrutable smile. "It is supposed to be a real snake's head turned into stone. The old witch doctor who gave it to me assured me that it was one of his enemies whom he had playfully turned into a snake and then petrified! He had a dozen snake-heads just like this in his filthy hut. His greatest treasures. Actually I think they came from an old temple, the remains of some unknown civilization that was buried in the heart of the jungle. There were rumors of the existence of such a place, and I noticed several of the other blacks with fragments of ancient carvings and old metal statuettes."

"How on earth did you ever get this from the witch doctor?"

Wells grinned. "I painted a very snappy portrait of the old boy and got in his very best graces. I depicted him as a sort of giant, with his head above the tallest palms and the rest of the men playing about his toes like pigmies. Showed him what a wonderful man he was. It tickled him pink, and his parting gift was this snake-head. He seemed to be absolutely unimpressed by the wonder of its realistic detail—the main thing he harped on was a miraculous potency it is supposed to have."

Wayne raised his eyebrows inquiringly.

"It is said to grant wishes," explained Wells lightly.

"Oho, a wishing-stone, eh?"

"Yes. One may hold this snake-head firmly in his left hand and make any wish he pleases. The wish will then proceed to come true with swiftness and despatch. Only—the number of wishes is limited to two."

"What have you wished for?" asked Wayne. "And did it come true?"

"I haven't wished for anything. As you see, the head is green in color. The old villain assured me that it would stay green as long as its powers were unused. After it has been exhausted by being used for its two wishes, it will turn brown."

"I'll swear you half believe this tale, Wells. How is it that you haven't put it to the test and made your two wishes?"

The artist shrugged. "As you see, the head is a diabolical-looking thing. I've an idea that any wishes granted by it would end in grief."

WAYNE sat up very straight in his chair with mock awe in his face. He held the snake-head soberly in his left hand, extending the thing well over his head.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he began, "I will now proceed to make a wish. I assure you there is nothing up my sleeve, there is no trick of any kind to deceive you. You are about to witness a spectacle of black magic that will startle the world of science."

"Don't play the fool, Wayne!" said Wells. "Give me that thing."

He snatched at it but Wayne held it out of his reach.

"Nonsense, Wells. You're actually half afraid of this dead piece of stone. It's my solemn duty as your friend and mentor to drive the imp of credulity from your ivory skull. So here goes for the wish!" Again he held it up in his left hand with mock reverence.

"Mumbo jumbo, hocus pocus, and any other magical incantations that may be necessary. I am about to make a wish, and may the devils that hide in the dark places see to it that my wish comes true. Otherwise I might turn them into snakes!"

He held the snake-head higher.

"I wish," he said firmly, "I wish that I might see the craftsman who is really responsible for this bit of rock sculpture!"

An instant he sat there, rigid, half serious in spite of his levity. Then, slowly, he lowered his hand, the stone snake-head still firmly clutched in his fingers.

"Well, you see nothing drastic happened," he said, meeting Wells' intent stare with a cool grin. "Your marvelous snake-head is a fake."

"Do you feel all right?" the artist inquired anxiously, ignoring the sarcasm. "You look pale."

"Certainly I feel all right, but I'm a little chilly. Stir up that fire, will you?"

Wells' anxiety grew more marked at this. For if anything the room was too hot. "Wayne, you aren't well at all. I can see it in your face. You don't look normal."

Wayne started to reply, to laugh at his friend's fear. But he found himself unaccountably unable to speak. His tongue seemed paralyzed, and when he attempted to rise from his chair, his body was numb and lifeless.

The snake-head in his hand suddenly grew cold with a living coldness. Its clammy chill spread all over him, till he shook and trembled like a leaf on a dying tree. And then fear descended on his numbing brain. Again he tried to cry out, to call to his friend whose face was fading from his sight.

A thousand pinwheels of fire burned in his eyes. Around and around they flared in ever greater circles until a vast sheet of solid flame closed him in. The flame was extinguished, and with it his consciousness and life. . . .

Slowly he realized that he was among the strangest surroundings he had ever seen. He had a sense of being smothered in hot, dank gloom; he felt as though great, soggily warm blankets were over him, closing out all air and revivifying coolness.

Opening his eyes he found himself looking straight up at a ceiling of branches and leaves far over his head. This ceiling of greenery had an intensely tropical look; and running up to it and under it in every possible direction vines and more branches thrust aggressively, so thick as to choke the already stifled air. Dappled, excessive sunlight played on the topmost leaves, but down where he lay there was no sun. Bright as it was it did not penetrate through the almost solid wall of tropic growth that closed like green water over his head. Around him a continuous enclosure of underbrush shot crookedly up like tremendous, hopelessly tangled spider-webs. A dog could hardly have wormed a way through the twining mass.

Something seemed tugging at his hand; and looking curiously at his left arm he saw that it was stretched out, taut and rigid as though some force was trying to pull him to his feet. Observing the thing in his hand he gave a gasp of fear and tried to drop it but could not. It was a snake's head, cold with a living, repellent coldness.

Then he remembered—the scene in his apartment by the light of the fire —Wells Beyerlein handing him the snake-head.

"I suppose I'm dead!" he reflected, and he pitied himself, thinking of the interests he had given up in life for the sake of forbidden curiosity. "And I suppose this is the jungle—the African Congo!"

He felt again the insistent tugging at the hand that held the bit of stone. It was as though he held the end of a rope that was being slowly and inevitably wound up by a great drum, pulling him toward it. In helpless response he rose and started to walk in the direction from which the unknown power was tugging at him. And ever his outstretched arm with the snake-head in its clenched fist was as taut with strain as an iron bar.

He noticed that the wiry, tangled skein of undergrowth curled up into a leafy tunnel to let him pass. In and out among the tremendous tree trunks he wound a tortuous and unwilling path, always going toward the leaf-dimmed brightness of the jungle sunset. And ever the polished frag-

ment of stone seemed to writhe with cold life and to urge him irresistibly toward an unknown spot.

A sinuous black body, a crash of underbrush, the whirring of a slashing blade—and Wayne saw a jungle savage coming toward him. In one corded hand was held a knife that whipped from side to side, severing ropelike vines and branches, hewing out a path for the sweat-gleaming black body. As thoroughly at home as any four-legged beast was the two-legged one that hacked his way through the jungle. Great welts from long-healed scars, self-inflicted, beautified the ebony skin according to the savage mode. Splashes of yellow and red and white paint lent a ferocious bestial mask to the coarse black face with its thick lips and protruding lower jaw. The lobes of the big ears and the flare of the squat nostrils were stretched by incredibly large holes plugged with big wooden disks.

An instant the black man halted, staring straight at Wayne with mindless intensity. The stupid eyes opened wider till a ring of yellowish, blood-injected white showed clear around the opaque pupils. Then with jerky swiftness the savage turned in his tracks and began slashing a path away into the inscrutable shelter of the sinister monsters of trees.

And now as Wayne felt himself pulled inexorably along a new sound came to his ears. It was a hoarse, guttural bellow, accompanied by loud hollow beats as though some heavy hand were banging down on a big drum. The sound came from the path directly in front of him.

A darker shadow outlined itself in the jungle murk and Wayne saw the beast that had been making the noise. Tremendous, manlike shoulders heavily padded with matted hair, huge hands beating crashingly down on a barrel of a chest, short legs crooked under ponderous body—a gorilla. As the animal roared its rage and defiance a yellowish slaver flecked its fanged jaws and the little red eyes were terrible to see.

WAYNE put forth all his strength to combat the infernal something that was dragging him directly toward the peril that screamed and roared and beat its great chest. He leaned his body back in a slant of forty-five degrees and dug his heels into the mold and rotted wood that carpeted the jungle; but, neither faster nor slower, the intangible force hauled him on—straight toward the monster!

He was so close to the gorilla that he could see every detail of dirt-matted black hair, every calloused wrinkle of fingerlike toes. He stared fascinated at the long, broken talons that would soon rip at his flesh, at the great arms that would soon be tearing him apart in the senseless rage that seemed to fill the creature to bursting. And always he tried to hang back against the force that was pulling him on.

Then an odd thing happened.

The blood-shot little eyes looked squarely at him. A screaming growl was checked midway between the snarling lips. The gorilla's rank hair rose like the fur on a startled cat's back. With a spasmodic twitching of pads of muscles the huge, manlike thing turned and swung off among the evil tree branches.

Before Wayne could speculate on the sudden terror of this jungle king a new marvel forced itself on his attention.

Directly in front of him, apparently the goal toward which he was being forced, was what seemed to be the front of a gigantic, ruined temple. Two tremendous columns shot up into the murk, guarding the front of a ponderous, mausoleumlike structure that looked to be at least four stories high and that extended back into the jungle for an indeterminate distance. Between the columns was the pitch darkness of a forty-foot-square en-

trance into the unlighted cube of stone.

He saw that the building was buried to half its height by the accumulated debris of ages, and that there was an incline leading down to the great door which had been uncovered in more recent days. Then he was too close to the entrance to do more than mark the front of the building itself.

He observed that the two key columns that flanked the entrance were squared at the base to half their height and then rounded to their gracefully flaring tops. The huge blocks of stone that formed the front of the temple were deeply carved with the straight-lined figures and mystic pictures that came originally from Egypt. The big columns, too, were banded with innumerable carven symbols and figures in every conceivable pose. Squatted at the foot of each of the two big columns was a great stone image of an eaglelike bird. Harsh and intolerant were the glaring eyes, and harsh and cruel were the hooked beaks that jutted out as though about to rend and tear. On the flat, ominous head of each bird was set a tall stone crown, like a miter indicating royalty.

The weight of the thick roof was suspended over the void of the mighty entrance on a monolithic beam of stone that was fully ten feet square. This was also covered elaborately with the straight-lined figures and the picture writing. And directly in the center, jutting out over the gloomy entrance of the door, was a gigantic stone snake's head as big as a large man's body and with colored stones for eyes that glinted with dull menace.

So much he had time to notice. Then, with his unwilling arm still outstretched in front of him and taut with the power that hauled his body along, he found himself passing under the huge snake's head and into the towering entrance way.

Turns to right and left, winding passages in the pitch blackness—and the strain was suddenly relieved. His arm dropped to his side, but he found his fingers still clenched uncontrollably around the repellent, cold snake-head.

No slightest ray of light came to his eyes. The darkness was so thick that he could feel it pressing around him like swirling water. But gradually he was aware of a sound. It was like myriads of soft whispers, a rustling of ghostly silk, a pressure of dry scales on smooth rock flooring.

From every direction came the rustling whispers, the dragging of sinuous bodies. Something passed sluggishly over his foot, coiled lazily around his leg.

In panic he turned and ran through the darkness, his feet now and then touching writhing, squirming things. He banged against a wall, felt along it, and stumbled over a stair. Up and up he crawled around a twisting way, feeling the slippery, age-worn stone of the ponderous steps under his feet, until the hand that groped over him, the hand that still clutched the snake-head, came in contact with what seemed to be a trap-door. It was not of stone but of wood, and it felt rough and fresh-hewn, the work of some breathing human being in the midst of terrifying and impersonal rock.

A moment he crouched there panting, hearing in imagination the whisper of scaly bodies dragging themselves over smooth flooring. Then he exerted all his strength and pushed at the trap-door over his head. It seemed to give a little. Another heave and it swung sullenly upward. He scrambled through and slammed it down over the stairway.

THE great hall in which he now found himself was lighted from end to end by a faint, pervasive blue glow coming from some unknown source. In the blue light he saw that

it was evidently an inner shrine room, some ancient holy of holies; around the walls were more of the elaborate carvings and picture writing.

At one end of the hall was an immense statue, an idol representing a monster, half human and half bird, that squatted on its haunches and glared out over the room. It was set a little way from the end wall in such a manner as to hint at an entrance behind it.

And now he saw something else! On the floor of the hall, twisted and curled like willow twigs in the heat of a fire, were scores and scores of snakes. But these snakes did not move. They lay there as motionless, as rigid as though frozen. Obviously they were lifeless.

He advanced cautiously to the nearest and touched it with his foot. There was no motion from the serpent and no give to it. He soon ascertained why—it was stone! The snakes in this chamber in some manner had been petrified.

A movement caught the corner of his eye, and turning to the idol at the end of the room he saw a large snake gliding with frenzied haste away from the awesome image. It was writhing over the floor at incredible speed. Straight toward Wayne it came, but before he could feel apprehension there was a change in all its movements. More and more slowly it crawled, a sort of languor appearing in every move—more and more sluggish, till almost at Wayne's feet it assumed the rigidity of the others. He touched his foot to it and it was like feeling a stick of wood. He raised it, then dropped it—and it broke squarely in two! It also was stone!

And now there was a new diversion. Muffled sounds as of a struggle came from the entrance behind the idol. There was a hasty shuffle of bare feet. A black body hurtled around the statue and came bounding over the floor. It was one of the painted, bestial-seeming jungle men such as Wayne had seen on his enforced journey to the temple.

Suddenly the muscled black body was rooted to the floor, paralyzed. Wayne saw the arms and legs twitch with what was evidently a tremendous fight to overcome the spell that seemed to hold them in its grasp. The spasmodic jerkings stopped, and the man was motionless.

Then Wayne saw a transformation that was short and relentless and utterly appalling. The black body seemed to grow slimmer and rounder. The arms merged into the trunk so that they disappeared altogether. The legs melted into one columnar mass which also dwindled rapidly in size. Soon the entire body was a slim black cylinder of flesh with a flat head on it that had lost all traces of humanity. Before the details of the unearthly metamorphosis could be described it was complete. For an instant the snake, that had ten seconds before been a human being, balanced its length in air. Then it toppled swiftly over and with its fall was shattered into pieces like brittle glass.

The air seemed suddenly charged with evil as tangible as electric current. Wayne found his eyes dragged from the wonder that had occurred and riveted on the grim idol. Slow, dragging steps could be heard.

He was about to be granted his wish! He was about to see with his own eyes the sculptor of the snake-head that was clamped in his unwilling left hand!

For an instant the slow steps ceased. Then, out from behind the satanic-looking stone idol stepped a figure that seemed to have been evolved from a delirious nightmare.

The body, wrinkled with age, was bent and twisted and infirm. The shriveled black flesh was covered with stinking strips of untanned hide that flapped grotesquely with the creature's shuffling walk. The skinny arms were those of a skeleton, with claws at the end for hands that

clenched and unclenched constantly on themselves.

But it was the face of the Thing that was most unbearable. From brow to chin, from ear to ear, it was covered with coarse, yellowish gray hair! Like a mask it was, that unwholesome-looking thicket of fur that covered nose and chin and forehead; and from the caves of the eye-sockets, little red eyes peered forth like small twin fires seen through a tangle of underbrush.

THE creature stood for an instant just in front of the great stone image, looking at Wayne with an intensity that robbed him of every shred of his will power. Hypnotic as the glance was, he could not have moved if death itself had been the penalty. He felt turned to stone himself at the impact of that evilly intelligent, fiercely intent gaze.

Dragging his gnarled feet, the hair-faced black man advanced slowly toward Wayne. He seemed in no hurry about it, picking his way leisurely among the stiffened reptiles on the floor as though they were pollution he did not care to touch. And ever those red little eyes stared and stared, eating into Wayne's heart.

In them Wayne read a purpose that set him to trembling like a taut, vibrated cord. What he had seen happen to the unfortunate jungle black man was shortly to happen to himself! In a few seconds he too would crash to the floor, a human form no longer, breaking impotently into a dozen pieces!

The little eyes held his gaze with fascinated helplessness. They bored into his brain, feeling as tangible as red-hot needles. White and trembling, Wayne stared back. He saw the pupils of the creature's eyes so expanded that he seemed to be looking into two black holes, down into unguessable depths.

Wayne's head began to sway rhythmically back and forth on his slack shoulders. The little red eyes he was staring at increased in size until they became great, flaming circles. The huge circles became multitudes of rings, concentric, of many vivid colors. The hall melted away and became roofed with stars, every star a flaring pinwheel of sputtering fire.

He felt his arms merging into his trunk as the bewitched black man's had done. He felt his legs fusing into one piece of quivering flesh. With a roaring inside his head like the noise of a thousand cataracts, he felt his skull changing its shape.

The glaring little eyes blinked as though the strain of their weird stare was too much even for superhuman strength. And with the sudden filming of the hypnotic eyes, though it lasted for but a fraction of a second, Wayne had an instant's reprieve.

He felt the bit of stone in his hand that had brought upon him the fate so soon to be his. There was something about it that he ought to remember. Something that might save him. What was there about the stone? Oh yes. . . . It was a wishing-stone. It would grant the power of two wishes before it turned from green to brown and became exhausted. Two wishes. The stone was still green. Only one wish had been used. . . .

And Wayne screamed aloud. He writhed and struggled to move his arms and legs. His left arm slowly raised over his head, though it was like tearing strong linen to get it loose from his body.

"'I wish my first wish to be undone! I wish to get out of this awful place forever!"

For an eternity of suspense he waited. Nothing happened. The red eyes peering from behind the ghastly mask of hair held him once more in their hypnotic power. He turned and twisted to escape the spell that was

(Continued on page 575)

CARNATE CRYSTAL

BY MANO REISS.

"It was bursting through—flashing—sentient."

IT ALL began so simply. I had just finished reading an article in a popular scientific magazine which described in detail the method of "growing crystals" by filling a suitable receptacle with silicate of soda (commonly called "water-glass") and carefully depositing in this medium crystals of various kinds. These crystals, after periods varying from two hours to as many days, would, according to the article, proceed to "grow," forming weirdly beautiful "trees, shrubs, ferns and other chemical flora." This "crystal garden" would, the article stated further, remain in this condition of "an interesting ornament" until it received a jar, or shaking, sufficient in force to break down the crystal formation.

Simple enough—yet I would give all I possess had I merely read the article as an interesting bit of scientific information and forgotten it.

Unfortunately (though at the time I felt it a happy coincidence), as I looked about the laboratory I had arranged in the small room which had been intended by the builder of my rather comfortable apartment to be a "dinette," I saw all the needed articles for carrying out the experiment.

I am a bachelor, healthy, phlegmatic by temperament, fond of friends, yet sufficient unto myself in that a good book, an interesting magazine, an electrical or chemical experiment, or an odd job of tinkering, requiring the use of small tools, provides the means for an evening of contentment—accompanied always, of course, by the

solacing influence of a well broken pipe. I do not drink intoxicating liquors, but am a devoted subject of My Lady Nicotine, especially when she is typified by a short-stemmed "bulldog" containing my favorite blend.

My vocation is that of an attorney, with a clientele of substantial business men, and I have limited my endeavors to corporation and business problems. In this field I may say, with due modesty, I have achieved some measure of financial success. Prior to my admission to the bar, however, I had been, for some sixteen years, a physician. During that period I had been granted the honor of being chosen as president of the local "Research Society," an organization devoted to the working out of new methods of treatment, new remedies and experimentations, tending to the advance, no matter in how small a modicum, of our knowledge of a subject virtually limitless in its scope.

The enjoyment which I had derived from the research work was really intensified, now that I had left that field, when, on occasions which were becoming more and more rare, I found time to permit nature to demonstrate her immutable laws.

The laboratory contained a conglomeration of chemicals, retorts, test-tubes, Petrie dishes, microscope slides, in fact a hodgepodge of the remains of my old medical laboratory, and, as I mentally inventoried and checked the things I would need to carry out the experiment mentioned in the magazine article, I found everything available except the "water-glass." Lazily, and rather disconsolately, I considered the necessity of getting out of my comfortable lounging-robe, completing dressing, getting out the "old bus" and driving to the drug store for a stock of the necessary medium. It hardly seemed worth while, as the experiment could be conducted on the next available evening just as well. I had concluded to postpone the matter, when I recalled (how unfortunately I was soon to realize) that the manager of the apartment building had called my attention that very afternoon to a five-gallon container of that very same solution which she had purchased for the preservation of her winter's supply of eggs. We were on friendly terms, and I knew she would have no objection to my using a portion of the liquid, which I could return promptly the next day. I remembered that she had placed it on the back porch, within a few feet of where I was sitting.

With a smile—heaven forgive me! —I rose from my comfortable chair, picked up the two-gallon, globe-shaped fish aquarium which I had before mentally noted as a suitable container, and stepped out on the porch, where it took but a moment to fill it to what I considered the proper height.

From that moment on I gave myself fully and completely to the fascination of completing the experiment I had decided upon for the enjoyment —God!—of the evening.

Setting the globe on the small dining-table which graced the center of the laboratory, I glanced up to the triple row of shelves built against the southern wall, and haphazardly picked up several bottles containing crystals of various chemicals. Copper sulfate, alum, and half a dozen others, of various colors, sizes, and shapes, were deposited in the globe. With a slightly amused smile I watched them sink slowly through the heavy liquid, to come to rest finally, an inch or two apart, around the flattened edge of the bottom. Only the center of the base was unadorned. Certainly that portion was entitled, from the standpoint of artistic balance if for no other reason, to be the site of the most outstanding growth.

Idly I glanced over the shelves to pick out a crystal of particularly arresting color, when—God, if only death had taken me to his kindly

bosom at that moment!—my gaze was suddenly riveted to IT!

A FEW days before the time of which I write, Professor Willey, curator of the museum, had dropped in for a chat—an event of fairly frequent occurrence, due to our long-existing friendship—and to bring me a souvenir in the shape of a lump of metal, about the size of my fist, with a most peculiar granular, or rather crystalline, appearance. Unexpectedly light in weight, it proved to be fairly friable when I scraped it experimentally with the blade of my pocket-knife, emitting, as the edge passed over it, a high-pitched, enervating, nerve-racking *squeal* which seemed almost *sentient*.

My knowledge of metals, rather superficial at best, gave me not the slightest clue to the kind or origin of the metal—and metal it was, I felt sure—which I held in my hand, and rather shamefacedly I asked my friend what it was. My *amour propre* was partly reinstated when he confessed that he had been unable to catalogue the substance, which he had discovered as attached to, if not a part of, a meteorite which had fallen a few nights before in a field just outside of town. This visitor, or that portion of it which had survived the frictional effects of our protecting atmosphere, had been dug out, after cooling, and deposited in the museum. During his cursory examination of the mass the professor had discovered the specimen which I held, and which drew his attention through its totally different structure from that of the remainder of the meteorite, in a small pocket in the larger body of metal, formed by projecting lips on the top and sides. A few minutes' work with hammer and cold-chisel had sufficed to separate the granular mass from its protecting bed.

After the professor had left, I sat for some time holding that harmless-appearing mass of crystalline metal in my hand, studying it from various angles. A feeling of great depression began to steal over me, accompanied by strange, nightmarish thoughts so intangible that I could not quite resolve their import (oh God!—if I had only heeded that subconscious warning and thrown the hellish thing some place where it would have lain dormant forever!), and, to throw off the unpleasant sensation, I decided to occupy myself for a little while in determining some of the physical properties and characteristics of my find.

With hammer and chisel I set to work to break off a piece approximately a half inch in diameter. With the first blow, as the edge of the chisel penetrated deeply, I heard again that high-pitched, nerve-racking *squeal*, almost, I thought, whimsically, as though the crystalline mass were protesting, in pain, against the violence being done by a pitiless hand. Pitiless—I have experienced the meaning of that word to its ultimate!

However, after a few blows, I succeeded in separating the fragment I desired, and picking it up in a pair of pliers I held it in the intense flame of a Bunsen burner for some time. Finding that this heat had no effect on the specimen, I applied an oxy-hydrogen blowpipe. Even under this the mass showed no evidence of any effect whatsoever.

The feeling of depression which had prompted these experiments was mounting, and, too, I was aware of a distinct feeling of mal-ease, of impending horror, threatening I knew not what. Suddenly I was seized with an intense desire to rend, tear, destroy, break, and, to this moment I believe—nay, I know—that some *outside* influence prompted me to grasp the hammer I had been using shortly before and smash and batter at that innocent-appearing mass before me until I had reduced it to a pile of small fragments. The instant this had been accomplished the frenzy left

me as suddenly as it had taken possession of my actions, but the feeling of depression seemed to intensify. Gloomily I surveyed the debris, and wondered whether my close application to work might be precipitating a nervous breakdown. Surely I had received no warning of any overtaxing of my nervous system—yet how otherwise could I account for the maniacal frenzy which had possessed me a few minutes before, and for the haunting feeling of impending evil which I was even then experiencing?

With a mental determination to visit one of my old colleagues, at the earliest opportunity, for a complete physical examination I abstractedly picked up the pliers lying on the table and idly turned and milled in the heap of fragments. A red, baleful flash arrested my roving glance; carefully I pushed the concealing pieces away until I was able to see——

An octohedral crystal, of a peculiar blood-red color which made it seem strangely alive, sentient, evil, pregnant with an undisclosed menace, a balefulness almost unbearable, greatly intensified by a flickering flashing which seemed to emanate from within its being—an *animate* inanimate.

Almost fearfully I picked it up with the pliers—then dropped it instantly with a low cry of pain. I had felt a distinct shock. Was it pain? Reaction? I do not know how to describe the sensation, but there was no doubt as to its unpleasantness. This was followed by a feeling of such great lassitude that I decided to retire immediately to obtain the night's rest of which I felt greatly in need.

Leaving the thing where it had dropped, I went to bed and finally dropped into a troubled and restless sleep. The feeling of depression seemed almost unbearable when I awoke the next morning, and I decided that I would pass up all social engagements until I had regained my normal physical condition. I thought no more of the crystal or my experience with it, for with the coming of the morning and daylight everything seemed normal and usual. How little I knew!

Thus it happened that on the evening when chance brought to my attention the article, I had proceeded to the point where I looked for an especially outstanding crystal which was to provide the *pièce de résistance* of my "chemical garden," and I saw IT. Carefully, remembering the result of my handling on the previous occasion, I grasped it in the pliers, with absolutely no physical result whatsoever. Almost there seemed to be a lessening of that feeling of depression which still weighed me down. I smiled at this; surely I had been the victim of overwrought nerves, of nervous strain, hallucination.

Dropping the crystal with careful precision, I had the satisfaction of seeing it land in the center of the base, just where I had planned. Due, I thought, to some peculiar refractive effect of the liquid in which I had just immersed it, there seemed to emanate from the crystal an intense blood-red shower of flashes. Again I had that uncomfortable feeling of sentiency, of life-being. There was something triumphant, malicious, inimical, saturnine, which I seemed to sense in the radiancy of those flashes.

Determined not to permit myself to be influenced by what I was satisfied was merely an unpleasant symptom of my physical condition, I pulled down the adjustable light so as to throw as much illumination as possible on the globe, pulled a comfortable overstuffed rocker close to the table, filled and lighted my old, caked Jimmy-pipe, tightened the cord of the dressing-gown, and settled myself to a patient waiting for the phenomenon of the crystal growth.

For perhaps half an hour I could see no change. Little streamers of red, blue, green, orange and all the

various colors of the crystals I had placed in the globe seemed to form from them and rise lazily a short distance upward. But the crystals themselves were motionless, inactive, quiescent—wait, was that a movement? A quivering? So slightly that I could not at the moment be sure whether it had actually occurred, or whether my imagination, spurred by my tense expectancy, had deceived me, the red crystal seemed to stir; a moment later I was sure—the crystal was growing. Another crystal, of equal size, and attached to the first by one facet, had sprung into being. A moment later—another, and another. Faster and faster new crystals, each attached to the facet from which it had developed, materialized before my almost unbelieving gaze. Fascinated, breathless, my eyes riveted on the miracle occurring before me, I waited. New formations, endlessly branching, laterally, upward; each, as it formed, glowing with that same blood-red, vaguely threatening, *sentient* inner light which had so affected me on first seeing IT.

In less than ten minutes it had outgrown the bowl, spreading out above the curved lip of the top, forming new crystals so rapidly that the eye could not follow their ramifications, growing—growing. . . .

The feeling of depression, of impending evil, was becoming cumulatively more acute. Proportionately with the growth of the thing, the sensation became increasingly unbearable; I felt that I must tear myself away—or go mad.

And then it happened.

A single point, a few more, then many, then—a shower of flickering flashes (how else shall I describe them?) leaped from that ghoulish thing to surround, encompass, bathe me from head to foot. Instantly I was paralyzed, immovable, a frozen statue of horror. Only for a moment, however; then——

Such excruciating agony as would have drawn a sigh of pity from the most hardened fiend in hell took possession of my being; every muscle, nerve, fiber, every cell of my poor body seemed to be rended, dragged, forced, torn away from every other. A living dissolution, a disintegration of myself into the infinite particles which before had constituted me—and each particle suffering separately the agony which yet was the whole!

How long this unbearable, excruciating quintessence of pain endured I can not tell; it seemed ages, eons, infinity; then——

All those uncountable, infinitesimal, separate particles, which yet were the entity which constituted myself, rose to meet and mingle with IT.

Understand me—I was not absorbed, I did not lose my identity; I was myself, and yet—I was—IT.

Perhaps I can better describe the incredible occurrence by saying that the phenomenon which occurred was much the same as when two swarms of bees approach, mingle, and pass through each other, assuming and regaining their separate identity (which had never been lost) after the passage. So I met and mingled with IT—but I did not pass through.

I was agonized with pain, yet my being thrilled with a great, palpitant, unbearable happiness, an elation, an ecstasy beyond human comprehension. I was dead, annihilated; yet I lived more poignantly than ever. Each separate particle that had been a part of me was now myself—yet I no longer existed! My ego lived completely in every dissociated cell—yet I—I was IT. All those agonies of dissolution seemed now the labor pains of a great birth—IT had borne me—yet I was now the author of ITS being!

IT—I—WE were still growing. I could see IT—US—reaching out, enlarging, expanding—baleful, e v i l, pitiless, yet, withal, noble, a supreme intelligence, *consciously* wielding a force unknown to Earth to carry out

the instinct of propagation implanted by an all-knowing nature.

Dimly my—our mind seemed to dwell upon another scene—a bleak, sparsely vegetated plain with strange, g h a s t l y forms—obscene, slinking, nauseating, yet nevertheless life, as humans know it, dominated by sentient, intelligent, purposeful beings, such as I—we—were now; beings rooted in the thin layer of spongy, friable, silicate-bearing formation, such as that specimen which had been brought to what had been I (was it hours? ages? an infinity ago?); beings dependent for their life, their growth, their very existence upon the absorption of the silicate content of the material in which their roots were imbedded, and from the atmosphere; beings who realized that their slow growth and uncertain propagation were due to the small amount of the substance, so necessary to them, which was available in the restricted area to which they were confined, and who, through the ages, developed within themselves a force which, consciously directed, was powerful enough to disrupt the atomic formation of living tissue, breaking it up into its component parts, and drawing the whole into themselves, make it a part of their being.

Vaguely I seemed to sense these intelligences working their will upon all living things in that far distant world unfortunate enough to come within the scope of their force—taking unto themselves the lives, the vitality, the power, the knowledge, of their poor victims—*vampirism*, upon a scale undreamed of—unholy—annihilating—and now loosed upon this poor, defenseless, unsuspecting world.

Ever more acutely I became conscious of a sensation of loss, of weakening, of debilitation. The sense of exultation, of exaltation, seemed lessening, yet the tearing, rending pain seemed augmented, if that were possible; and, at first slowly, then ever more rapidly, the infinitesimal particles that had been I swarmed (there is no better way to describe the happening) from the annihilating embrace of IT, settled, coalesced, homogenized, became once more—myself!

The searing, tearing pain grew less, became almost a subconscious realization, as though a beneficent nature, recognizing that my poor body had undergone suffering to the ultimate, had mercifully spread upon it a numbing anesthesia.

Fearfully I raised my eyes to IT; then stared, incredible. All the light, the fire, the *sentiency*, were gone! IT was dying—dead! A mass, almost filling the room, of branched—crystals; no more!

I glanced at the bowl which had nurtured that evil cosmos—empty, dry, drained of every vestige of the life-giving fluid from which IT had drawn sustenance, and which had, in the concentrated form, destroyed the very thing it suckled by giving too freely to its insatiate demands, until there was no more.

Even as I watched it there came an appearance of opacity, a dullness; the mass took on an aspect of decomposition; branches began to drop off here and there, thudding to the floor and there disintegrating, so that, within a few minutes, all that was left of what had been an all-powerful, malignant entity, apparently threatening the life on our globe, was a dull red powder, scattered about the floor of the laboratory.

THERE is but little more to write. I feel no particularly bad physical effects from the terrible experience, but mentally I shall never recover. The horror of those few hours will remain with me to the grave—possibly even beyond that bourne of supposed rest and surcease. I have denied myself to all callers and am going to commit the entire experi-

ence to paper while the details are still fresh (as though I could ever forget them!) in my mind. They will make interesting reading for my friends, should I ever summon the courage to permit them to peruse this record. Most likely I should be accused of having patronized an especially bad bootlegger, or of having aspirations to being pointed out as a writer of weird fiction, possessed of an exceptionally imaginative mind.

I have just glanced over the last paragraph, and I note that I made the statement that I feel no particularly bad physical effects from my experience. I wish to modify that statement slightly, though I believe the matter of which I am about to speak has no direct bearing upon the experience itself. For the last two hours I have been feeling a sort of pressure—from the inside—just under the skin, all over my body, much as though a number of boils were trying to "come to a head." The sensation is not painful; it is more of irritation or itching. I have just noticed that little nodules are actually becoming noticeable! There is one developing on the back of my right hand as I write; it is growing larger very rapidly; strangely, the center is almost white, while the swollen surrounding tissue is a peculiar deep red. It is losing its symmetrical, round shape, and starting from the central point it slopes away, angularly, in several directions, almost like the facets of a crystal——

It is bursting through—a blood-red, flashing, sentient——

Oh—my—God——

* * * * * * *

June 16, 1927.

I hereby certify that the foregoing is a true and correct transcription of the document delivered to me for deciphering by Officer Slayton on the 13th inst., to the best of my knowledge and belief.

J. MANVILLE,
Chirographic Expert.

* * * * * * *

Reprint of an article in the Evening Herald, dated June 12, 1927:

Prominent Attorney Missing

Edward Martin, age 46, who has been a practising attorney in this city for many years, has been reported missing to the police department. His absence was first noted on the 5th, but no particular attention was paid to the fact, as his friends thought he had left for a short business trip and would soon return.

The protracted stay, however, alarmed them and an inquiry was set on foot. The manager of the apartment in which he has maintained bachelor quarters states that she spoke with Mr. Martin on the 3rd, and that he appeared in splendid health and spirits. He had made no statement of any anticipated trip. She willingly opened his apartment for the inspection of the officers, but a careful search disclosed no clues.

On the table of a room which he had evidently fitted up to be used as a chemical laboratory were found a number of closely written sheets, unintelligible to the officers, due to the rather illegible writing of Mr. Martin. While it is believed that these have no bearing on the inquiry, they have been turned over to the handwriting expert of the department and a full report of the contents will be in the possession of the officers in a few days.

The report also showed that the floor of the laboratory was covered with a heavy layer of some dark red powder, probably dry paint. A large-sized mound of this material was found between the folds of a lounging-robe, lying on the seat of an overstuffed chair in the laboratory. In this mound the officers discovered a valuable diamond ring, identified as the property of Mr. Martin, and worn by him when last seen.

Captain Ellsworth, chief of detectives, is of the opinion that Mr. Martin may be the victim of the gang which has terrorized the community for some time, as he was known to be moderately wealthy. Every possible effort is being made by the department to locate the missing man.

A Strange Tale of Dual Personality

The Dream Chair

By LEROY ERNEST FESS

FREE! By 11:15 o'clock tonight I shall be free.

Free! God, I wonder how many persons in the world can appreciate and sense the full significance of that one wonderful word. Not many, I assure you. In order to have the feeling of really being free, one has to be liberated from something. It follows that the more terrible and enslaving that something is, the greater will be the feeling of freedom when one has at last shaken it off completely.

Tonight, when the clock on the town hall chimes the quarter-hour after 11, I doubt if I shall be able to contain myself. I shall feel like a little boy on the last day of school in June. Only with the greatest difficulty shall I be able to restrain myself from dashing out into the city streets sans coat and hat and shouting to the multitudes as they pass: "Look at me! I am even as one of you now! Thank God, I am free! free! free!"

I said by 11:15 p. m. Easily it should be all over by that time. In fact, it should be earlier than that; yet, there comes a gnawing fear. What if something should slip up at the last moment? What if the governor should grant an eleventh-hour reprieve? God, it's unthinkable!

That I could not stand. My poor brain has been too near the breaking-point within the last few months to endure a single night more of that unnamable hell. I tell you I couldn't stand it. It would drive me to the madhouse!

It is now eleven minutes after 10. Just one hour more! In this brief time that remains, let me collect my scattered thoughts and put down on this paper in as orderly fashion as possible the events of the last few months. I have one reason only for doing this.

If anything should happen that Robert Nailer does not die in the electric chair at Hardaway prison a few minutes after 11 o'clock tonight, and I, in consequence of the state's failure to execute its sentence, am rendered a madman, I want the world to know the strange and unbelievable story of Hubert Simmons.

Ha! You will say that it is strange at least that my freedom and happiness should depend upon the death in the electric chair of another man. And you will say my story is unbelievable, too, when I admit to you that I have never seen or met the condemned man—never knew of his existence until I read the account of his brutal and hideous crime in the newspaper. Surely, tonight in his death cell at Hardaway prison he can not dream of my unhappy existence—unless——

But to begin at the beginning:

Now please understand that I am not given to either day or night dreaming. Until the night of September 26th last, I was an ordinary man, content to earn a modest living for my dear wife and our darling little ones, and with no criminal thoughts in the secret depths of my heart. Just to clinch the point that my weird experience was not

the result of an overwrought mind and a nervous temperament, let me say that I was not given to following the developments of the latest crime scandals that appear daily in our newspapers. No; what happened to me came out of an entirely clear sky.

I had retired early that fatal night of September 26th. When I closed my eyes in the first sweet sleep of night, I was a happy, normal man—so normal, in fact, that I did not realize my happiness or my freedom.

When I awoke in the middle of the night, it was to sleep no more. Large beads of cold sweat stood on my feverish brow; my hands were shaking; my lips were parched and dry. I had experienced a hideous nightmare. In my dream I had murdered an innocent little child!

The scene had dawned upon my dreaming consciousness with a sudden fury. I found myself in a forest clearing, with the wind whistling plaintively through giant trees and causing their gnarled limbs to sway like battling demons. A pale, cold moon shone down. Suddenly I became aware that I was not alone. I was leading by the hand a little boy of eight or nine years who sobbed continually: "Mister, mister, please take me back home!"

His words maddened me. I seized him by the throat with my two bare hands. I felt my fingers sink into the soft, yielding flesh. With fiendish glee I pressed harder and harder until I saw the little fellow's eyes bulge from their sockets, his tongue protrude from his mouth and become swollen and his complexion change from a pale white to a livid purple.

Then the stark horror of my brutal deed overcome me. I hurled the dead body from me. As I did so, one of my thumbs that had been encircling the boy's neck caught in a chain he was wearing and tore off a small signet locket. It fell with a dull clang on the hard, frozen ground. In the moonlight I could see the initials plainly. They were "S. J."

I was repeating those letters when I awoke in my own bed, my wife lying beside me and breathing evenly and our little ones asleep in their cradles in an adjoining room. All that day at the office the horror of that awful nightmare haunted me. It had been too vivid, too real, too horrible for an ordinary lobster or Welsh rabbit nightmare that one shakes off with the coming of dawn.

Somehow I dreaded the coming out of the afternoon newspapers. My worst fears were confirmed when I saw the newsboys rushing out with the latest editions and shouting as they ran: "Wuxtra! Wuxtra! All about the latest murder!" With feverish haste I ran to the nearest corner and bought a copy.

There it was under the scare headlines—the story of my nightmare! Every detail as to the finding of the poor little body where I had hurled it—even the telltale locket with the initials "S. J." which was discovered near the scene of the crime. The time given by the medical examiner as the approximate hour of the child's death also checked up with the time of my dream.

Upon arriving home that night I decided to make no mention to my wife of the strange coincidence. For that was all it was, nothing more, I argued. The scene of the murder was more than two thousand miles from the city in which I lived. I could not possibly have committed it between the time when I went to sleep and when I awoke, even if I had employed the fastest airplane known to science.

That night I had another dream. Again I was the murderer. I was fleeing and I sensed the fear of a hunted animal. The minions of the law were at my very heels. Every night for weeks following I played

the role of murderer-at-large, and every night I tramped through streets of unknown cities.

Finally my nocturnal travels took me to familiar places. One big city, particularly, I was able to recognize and name from landmarks I had noticed when there in person on a visit months before. From that time on I began to look forward with—shall I say pleasure?—to my nightly nightmares. One super-thought dominated my waking life: I wanted this murderer apprehended and put to death, for then I knew I should be free.

If only I could assist the police in locating the criminal! This was by no means easy, though. For in my dreams I became the hunted criminal only for split seconds during that one's night-life. Sometimes I caught him sleeping and was forced to dream his troubled and haunting dreams—dreams within a dream!

Then one night early in October my opportunity came. I became the murderer as he was walking out the side door of a squalid lodging-house of Buffalo's tenement section. Perhaps, in eluding the police dragnet laid for him in all the cities of the country, he had just changed his former place of abode and taken new quarters. At least he—or should I say I?—turned full around upon reaching the street and scrutinized the number on the building as if wishing to remember it. I remembered my lips repeating, "3215 Swan Street."

That was the clue I had been waiting for. Early the next morning I disguised myself, took a street car to a remote section of the city, and then summoned by telephone a telegraph messenger boy. I hastily scribbled a telegram and handed it to the lad with a liberal tip.

The message was addressed to the chief of detectives at Buffalo. It informed him that the brutal murderer of eight-year-old Sammy Joslyn was in hiding at 3215 Swan Street in his city. My message was not signed.

In the following day's papers I read the details of Nailer's capture in Buffalo. The Swan Street rooming-house had been surrounded by police, acting on the anonymous tip that came by wire from a distant city. Nailer had been surprized while shaving in the bathroom, and taken into custody without a struggle.

That night, for a few agonized moments of a nightmare, I paced the narrow confines of a prison cell!

It would be repetition here to narrate what followed. That, I trust, is familiar to everyone: Nailer's sensational confession and his subsequent trial and conviction. I might add, though, that nightly for the past month my soul, for brief fractions of a moment, has been confined in the death-house at Hardaway and destined in Nailer's body to pace up and down the caged room—in the very shadow of the electric chair.

God, but don't I know the feelings of a condemned man! That awful monotony of waiting for the day! The mock courtesy of the guards who watch you, awake and sleeping, as a cat watches a canary—lest you take your own life and rob the state of its just dues! The dismal efforts at bravado and cheeriness of other condemned prisoners who keep kidding each other with: "It won't be long now." That deathlike stillness that falls over the prison like a pall whenever one of the condemned takes that last walk out through the little green door at the side! The dull thump that the other prisoners in the death-house hear and the flickering of the electric light in the corridor they see when the lethal current is turned on!

Yes, I know! I have been there. Last night I was Nailer pacing his cell. Six steps up, then turn, and six

steps back. Then do it all over again. Six up, six back; six up, six back! Every once in a while I would pause to look down the corridor at the little green door at the end. "It won't be long now!" I said to a praying negro who occupied the cell next to mine on the right—and I tried to laugh. Laugh? It was a sorry attempt.

When I awoke in my bed I was laughing like an insane man and my hands were covering my face, hiding the vision of the little green door at the end of the hall!

I HAVE just looked at my watch. It is now two minutes after 11 and I must hurry. Nailer is enjoying his last few minutes on earth. Did I say enjoying? Ha! ha! In a few more minutes they'll be cutting Nailer in pieces on the autopsy table, and I shall be a free man. Dead men tell no tales; neither do dead men do anything to dream about. Just a big blackness without dreams, that's what death is. With Nailer dead I shan't dream any more of his hideous nightmares.

It is now five minutes after 11. It surely won't be long now. They're probably dressing him in the black suit—the one, you know, with the slit in the right pants-leg below the knee! And I bet two cents and a cookie that funny little priest with his graveyard face and black prayer-book is in the cell too, jabbering off some ritual—words that Nailer doesn't hear.

Ah, seven minutes after 11. I am feeling drowsy. But there isn't much more to tell or much longer to wait. . . .

By now like as not the two prison guards, dressed in their blackest and best, are knocking on Nailer's door. "Come right in, gentlemen, and take a chair! Ha! Ha!"

They're leading Nailer through his cell door! The wedding procession is on! There they go—tramp, tramp, tramp! Down the long corridor to the little green door at the end. Here comes the bride! Da, dum, da, da! Why doesn't someone play the wedding march from *Lohengrin?* I want to know.

The chair! The chair! That's what Nailer sees when that little green door opens. Kind of makes you shake a little bit in the knees, eh, Nailer? Now maybe you'll haunt my dreams again and make me a murderer by night, eh? (Gad, but I'm getting sleepy—I can hardly hold my eyes open. But it "won't be long now," as the boys in the death cells say.)

They're strapping him in the chair! That cold, steel electrode about the right leg calf doesn't feel so good, eh, boy? And that black cap that shuts off the light of this world. All done in a few seconds, eh, Nailer? These execution boys sure do know their ropes—not a moment wasted. Each one at his job and that job done neatly and with dispatch.

How'd you like to get up and give your seat to a lady, Nailer? Ha! ha! ha! You can't blame me for having my little joke, for in a minute or two now I shall be free! free! free! (I only hope I can stay awake for a minute or two more. Then it'll be all over.)

That funny—little—priest—he is standing—before—the—chair. (Gad, can I ever stay awake?) The executioner's hand is on the death switch and he is waiting—waiting. The—funny — little — priest — begins a prayer:

"Our—Father—who art—in . . ."

* * * * * *

HERE the manuscript ended abruptly in the middle of a sentence.

All the newspapers the following day carried under front-page streamers the detailed story of how the

arch-fiend and murderer, Robert Nixon, met his death in the electric chair at Hardaway prison at 11:13 the night before. It is doubted if any of the morbidly curious who devoured the account of the execution in the *Evening Star* noticed the following little item down at the bottom of an inside page:

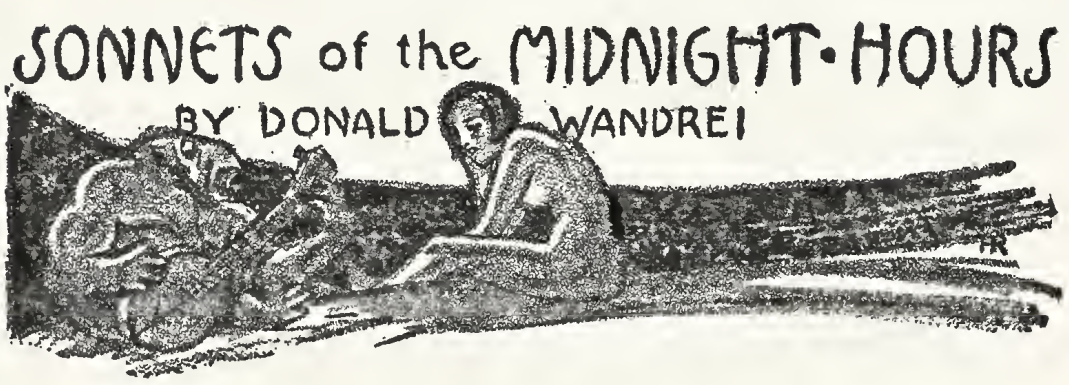
Hubert Simmons, 42 years old, of 47 Glendale Avenue, this city, was found dead in the library of his home shortly before midnight last night when his wife, Sarah Simmons, returned from a visit to some neighbors.

Medical Examiner Lancer, who investigated the case, declared that death apparently had been caused by heart failure, though he admitted being puzzled over the appearance of slight scorches of the flesh on the crown of the dead man's head and on his right leg below the knee. He will perform an autopsy on the body before issuing a death certificate.

A watch in Simmons' pocket was broken when his body crumpled from the chair on which he had been sitting before his library table and fell to the floor. The hands showed the mechanism had stopped at 11:13 o'clock, which probably marks the time of Simmons' demise. Several pages of a manuscript Simmons had been writing apparently up to the moment of his death were taken by the medical examiner.

In case the autopsy on Simmons' body indicates he met his death by any other than natural causes, Dr. Lancer said he would attempt to decipher the notes to see if they would throw any light on the case.

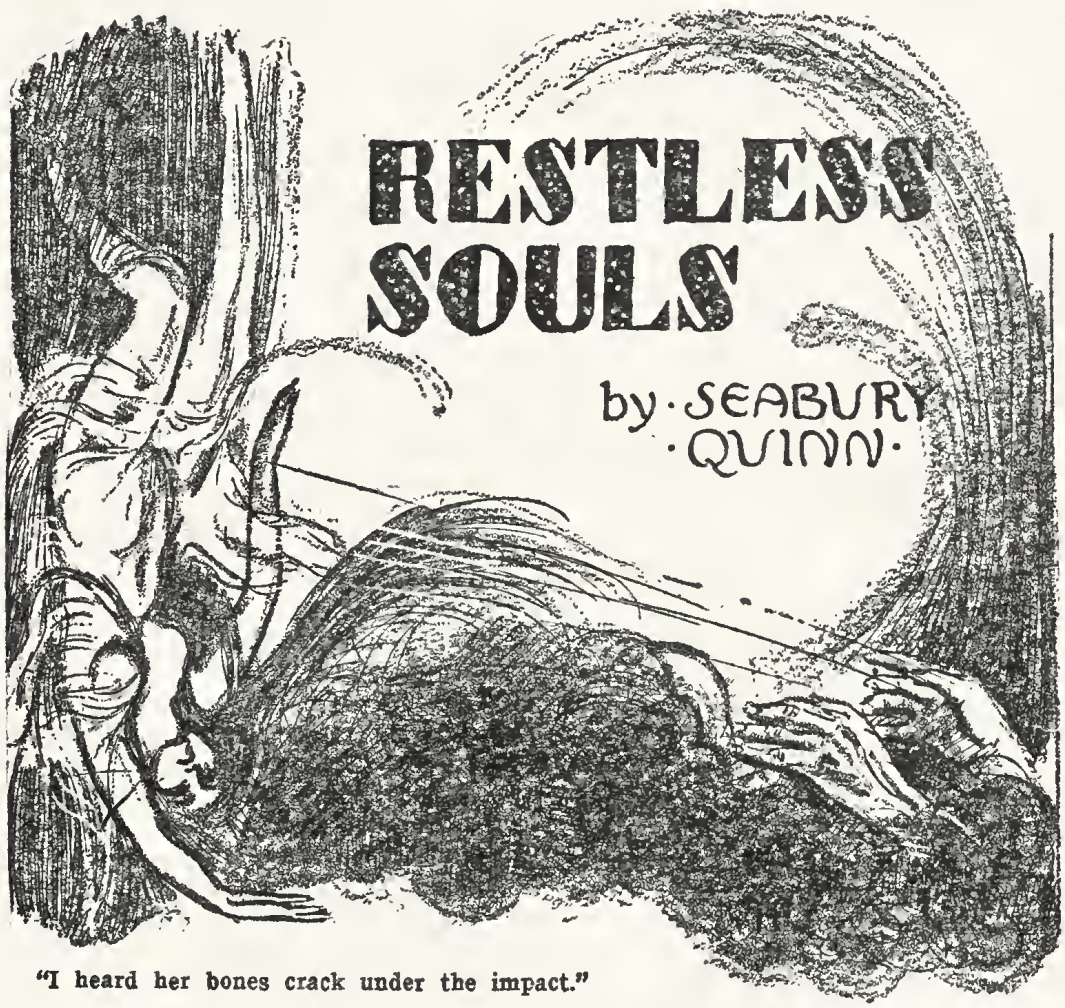
Simmons had been in ill health for the last three months, according to his wife. He did not rest well at night, and often had fits of nervousness that kept him awake for hours, all of which would indicate he died of natural causes, according to Dr. Lancer. Besides his wife, Sarah, the deceased leaves two small children, Alice, eight, and John, seven. Funeral services will be held at the home Wednesday afternoon at 2 o'clock.



7. *The Statues*

As one who wildly dreams, I knocked; with clang
  On long, metallic clang, the brazen door
  Rose upward, and I found myself before
Weird, lifeless birds that laughed and harshly sang.
Quick to my side, two black, sleek leopards sprang
  With eyes of golden fury, and a score
  Of graven figures burst into a roar
Whose mirthless muttering through the palace rang.

And so, the leopards led me on and on
  Where vast, dark marbles stood in endless aisles.
And when I saw these Titans, thereupon
  Their hideous marble laughter leaped long miles;
    But when I passed and left them in the gloom,
    The vacant halls were quiet as a tomb.



"I heard her bones crack under the impact."

"TEN thousand little green devils! What a night; what an execrable, odious night!" Jules de Grandin paused beneath the theater's porte-cochère, scowling ferociously at the pelting rain.

"Well, summer's dead and winter hasn't quite come," I reminded soothingly. "We're bound to have a certain amount of rain in October, you know. The autumnal equinox——"

"May the Devil's choicest imps fly away with the autumnal equinox!" the little Frenchman retorted. "*Morbleu,* I have seen no sun or blue sky since the good God alone knows when! Besides that, I am most abominably hungry."

"We can soon remedy that condition," I promised, nudging him from under the awning's shelter toward my parked car. "Suppose we stop at the Café Bacchanale? They usually have something good to eat."

"Excellent, capital," he agreed enthusiastically, skipping nimbly into the car and rearranging the collar of his raincoat and the turned-down brim of his hat. "Trowbridge, *mon vieux,* you are a true philosopher. Always you tell me that which I most wish to hear."

They were having an hilarious time at the cabaret, for it was the evening of October 31 and the management had put on a special Halloween celebration. As de Grandin and I sur-

rendered our wraps to the check-girl and entered the dining-room a burst of Phrygian music greeted us, and a dozen agile young women in abbreviated attire were performing the gyrations of the latest negroid dance under the leadership of an apparently boneless damsel whose costume was principally composed of strands of jangling hawk-bells looped about her wrists, neck and ankles.

De Grandin regarded the list of soft drinks on the menu's reverse with a jaundiced eye. "They make merry on the Eve of All Saints," he commented almost resentfully. "They would better be at home, attending their devotions."

"Don't be such a spoil-sport," I returned, ordering two Welsh rabbits; "there's plenty to look at if you'll only tear your mind away from prohibition for a while. That girl yonder, for instance"—I nodded toward a table several places removed from ours—"she's certainly a sight for tired eyes."

The little Frenchman dropped the *carte du jour* and turned in the direction indicated by me, his little blue eyes narrowing slightly with the intensity of his gaze. "*Parbleu,* yes," he admitted after a moment's discreet inspection, "she is all that you say, my friend! Me, I should very much like to know her." He tweaked the ends of his miniature blond mustache alternately, teasing the waxed hairs to needle-sharp points.

She fully merited the second long glance he gave her. In utter indifference to the prevailing vogue of cropped hair, this girl's tresses had never known the profanation of shears or clippers. Like a royal diadem they were, plaited and wound about her small, shapely head in a sort of Grecian coronel and looped in heavy coils at the nape of her slender, arching neck. Bright chestnut, almost copper-colored, the locks were, with deep, shadow-laden waves, and at times they seemed to give back sparkling, metallic glints under the rays of the crystal-beaded electroliers of the café. Her small, delicate nose had slender, sensitive nostrils which seemed to palpitate above her lusciously curving, crimson lips, and her rather long, oval face possessed a strange, indefinable charm, its ivory pallor enhanced by the shadows of long, silken lashes and the deep purple lights of the slightly slanting eyes which gave the exquisite visage a delicious Oriental flavor. They were extraordinary eyes, eyes blue with deepening violet tints, now sparkling and scintillating with the sudden flash of suppressed, now seemingly dimmed by welling, unshed tears.

As I stole a second glance at her, it seemed to me she had a vague yet unmistakable expression of invalidism. Nothing definite, merely the combination of certain factors which pierced the shell of my purely masculine admiration and struck response from my years of experience as a medical practitioner—a certain blueness of complexion, which meant only "interesting pallor" to the layman, but spelled imperfectly oxidized blood to the physician; a slight tightening of the muscles about the mouth which gave her lovely, pouting lips a pathetic droop; and a scarcely perceptible retraction at the junction of cheek and nose which meant fatigue and exhaustion, either nervous or muscular.

Idly mingling admiration with diagnosis, I turned my glance to her companion, wondering what manner of man he was who basked in the light of those captivating eyes. My lips tightened slightly as I made a mental note: "Gold-digger!" The man was large, big-boned, coarse, with wide, bunchy shoulders, round bullet-head set aggressively forward on a short, thick neck, and the pasty, unhealthy oyster-white complexion of one who drinks far too much and exercises far too little. His heavy, deep-lined face, as he listened to the girl's conversa-

tion, was almost totally expressionless; his small, rather prominent eyes reminded me unpleasantly of the lidless, unchanging eyes of a fish, and whether they rested with a look of proprietorship on the charming girl across the table or roved restlessly about the room, it seemed to me they were as set and fixed in their stare as those of a corpse. Yet, as I watched, I saw the fellow's lack-luster orbs glint sharply once or twice as they rested on some of the more attractive women, as though their leaden dullness had been scratched to sudden brightness. It was an unpleasant, a gross, an immoral face the man possessed, the kind of countenance which stamped him a gambler or crooked politician or the follower of some other equally unsavory trade where humanity or even common decency would be wholly out of place.

"Too bad," I muttered, turning impatiently from the ill-mated pair and giving my attention to the excellent Welsh rabbit the waiter set before us. But the thought of that lovely, delicate girl in company with that bestial ruffian took much of the flavor from the simmering golden-yellow delicacy on my plate.

For a while neither de Grandin nor I spoke. I was sick at heart to think of such a girl debasing her womanhood by appearing in public with such a man; the Frenchman seemed to have no earthly ambition but the acquisition of the greatest possible amount of Welsh rabbit in the least possible time.

AT LENGTH, as though continuing an uninterrupted conversation, de Grandin remarked: "Trowbridge, my friend, I do not like it. It is strange; it is queer; it is not right."

"Eh?" I returned.

"Those two over there"—with a curt sideways nod he indicated the couple on whom our attention had been focused—"they are, somehow, out of harmony. Attend me: On three separate occasions they have ordered food and spent considerable time in making their selections, yet each time they have allowed it to grow cold before them, let it remain untouched upon the table till borne away by the *garçon*. I ask you, is that right?"

"Why—er——" I began, but he hurried on:

"Once, indeed, my friend, as I watched, I saw the woman make as though to lift a goblet to her lips, but the gesture of her escort arrested the movement half made; she set the beverage down untasted. I do not understand."

"Well, are you going to investigate?" I responded with a grin. The little Frenchman's curiosity was almost as great as his gigantic self-esteem, and I should not have been surprized if he had marched over to the strange couple's table and demanded an explanation.

"Investigate?" he echoed thoughtfully. "U'm. Perhaps I shall."

He poured himself a cup of coffee, mixed it thoroughly with cream, and leaned forward, his little, round eyes staring unwinkingly into mine. "You know what night this is, my friend?" he demanded soberly.

"Certainly, it's October thirty-first, and tomorrow will be——"

"Another day," he supplemented, "but much may happen before that next day's sun ascends, Friend Trowbridge, for tonight is also the eve of All Saints, called by your people All Hallow Eve, or, more simply, Hallowcen."

"Quite so," I agreed. "I'd forgotten that. All the little devils in town will be out tonight, stealing garden gates, knocking at front doors, peeping into windows and——"

"And, perchance, the larger devils, or those who faithfully serve them, may also be abroad," he cut in.

"Oh, come, now," I protested, "you can't be serious, de Grandin! Bobbie Burns wrote a silly poem about Halloween, but——"

"*Pssst;* be still!" he interrupted sharply. "I have something to do besides listen to foolishment, Friend Trowbridge. *Regardez-vous!*" Another imperative nod from him fixed my attention on the pair at the farther table.

Seated directly opposite the strange couple was a young man, occupying a table to himself. He was a good-looking, sleek-haired youngster of the type to be found by scores on any college campus and by dozens in any of the larger New York brokerage offices. Had de Grandin brought the same charge of food wastage against him he had leveled at the other two, he would have been equally justified, for the youngster left an elaborate order practically untasted while his infatuated eyes devoured every line and lineament and movement of the lovely girl.

As de Grandin's curt gesture brought my gaze to bear upon the boy, I noticed from the tail of my eye that the girl's escort nodded once, peremptorily, in the same direction, bowed with awkward, big-waisted clumsiness to his companion and abruptly left the table, stalking to the door with never a backward glance.

The girl half turned in her chair and cast a single languishing look toward her youthful admirer, then averted her face with a subtle, provocative smile on her curving, crimson lips. The boy half rose from his seat, evidently bent on accepting the overture, but before he could cross the short space separating them the café's lights abruptly blinked out and the shrill, bombinating hum of fiddles, seconded by the titillation of mandolins and banjos sounded through the dark. A big, artificial moon rose slowly from behind the orchestra's stand, flooding the place with an eery blue-green light, and tripping noiselessly from the upper end of the place came a file of girls arrayed in the loose, black-and-white costume made famous years ago in the Yama-Yama dance, pointed witch-caps on their heads, splint brooms brandished in their hands.

"When the moon comes up like fox-fire
On the night of Halloween,
When the candles and the fire-logs
Burn with flames of ghostly green,
When the farmers and the townsfolk
Hide away from this night's harms,
Then the wizards and the witches
Weave their old, uncanny charms!"

sang the leader of the chorus, performing a grotesque rigadoon and screwing her pretty, rather vapid face into what she conceived to be a witch-like grimace.

I raised my hands in applause, but the sharp, urgent grip of the Frenchman's fingers on my forearm arrested me. "Quick, my friend, after them!" he ordered, half dragging me from my seat. "Leave money for our food on the table, but dally not with the waiter; it is of importance that we see which way they go!" With his free hand he pointed dramatically toward the exit.

Arm in arm, totally oblivious to the dancing girls' song, the young man and the beautiful young woman were leaving the place.

"Oh, for goodness' sake, be sensible!" I scolded. "Let them flirt, if they want to. I'll warrant she's in much better company now than she was when she came in here with that——"

"Precisely!" the little Frenchman's retort was almost a hiss. "You state facts, my friend, and it is of that 'better company' that I think when I have the anxiety. Come, immediately, at once, right away!"

Brushing past other diners, stepping over out-thrust shins and more than once treading on unwary toes, we made our way from the cabaret in the wake of the retreating boy and girl, recaptured our hats and raincoats from the check-girl, and hastened to the street.

"That couple, that young man and young woman—they did go which way, if you please, *Monsieur le Con-*

cierge?" de Grandin demanded of the imposingly uniformed doorman.

"Huh?" replied the other.

The Frenchman repeated his question, punctuating it with the display of a dollar bill.

"Oh, *them,*" the attendant answered, as though the offered bill had recalled his wandering memory. "Yeah, them. Uh, they went down th' street that-a-way. Little limey taximan drivin' 'em." He indicated the direction with a wave of his gold-laced arm. "Looked to me like th' young feller had made a mash. Yeah, he'll *git* mashed, too, if that tough bimbo 'at brought th' broad in ketches him messin' 'round wid his wren. He sure will. That gink's one awful mean-lookin' bozo, what I mean."

"But of course," de Grandin agreed. "And this Monsieur le Gink of whom you speak, which way did he go, if you please?"

"Huh, he went outa here 'bout ten minutes ago like th' income tax fellers wuz after him. Took off down th' street that-a-way hell-bent fer election. Uh huh, musta bin goin' faster than I figured, even, for I turned away a second when he wuz half-way down th' block, an' when I looked again he'd evaporated, dam' if he hadn't, though I don't see how he managed to cover that other half-block an' round th' corners in less'n thirty seconds."

"Ah!" de Grandin's reply was so sharp that the other looked at him with sudden suspicion. "Hurry, Friend Trowbridge. Hasten, rush, fly!" he called as I brought the car to a stop at the curb before him. "I would that we get them in sight before they are effectually lost in the storm."

IT WAS a matter of only a few minutes to pick up the tail light of the big car in which the truants sped toward the outskirts of town. Their conveyance was one of the better class of public vehicles, graduated downward from the rolling-stock of some prosperous funeral director to general taxi service, but still retaining its air of distinction and its strength of motor. My little two-seater was put to it to keep the fleeing car's lights in sight once the traffic-burdened thoroughfares of the downtown section were passed. More than once we lost our quarry, only to catch a fleeting glimpse of them several blocks away, ever speeding onward through the rain-washed, deserted streets, always bearing outward toward the unfashionable east end of town where row on row of workmen's cottages, a few scattered factories, a jumble of marble yards and the two principal cemeteries marked the boundary between city and frayed-out, poverty-stricken suburbs.

"This is the craziest thing we've ever done," I grumbled as I trod on my accelerator in an effort to draw closer to the larger, more powerful motor. "There isn't a chance of our —Great Scott, they've stopped!"

Improbable as it seemed, the car ahead had drawn up before the imposing Canterbury gate of Shadow Lawn Cemetery!

"Hurry, Friend Trowbridge, more speed, be quick!" the Frenchman bade, leaning forward in his seat like a jockey in his saddle, as though he would aid the motor in making haste.

Try as I would, my efforts were futile, and only an empty limousine and a thoroughly mystified and profane chauffeur awaited us when we drew up at the burying-ground, our engine puffing and laboring like a winded horse.

"Which way, my friend—where did they go?" de Grandin almost screamed, vaulting over the side of my car before I had a chance to shut off the engine.

"Hinside the blinkin' gryveyard—that's w'ere they went!" replied a fruity Cockney voice. "Can ye 'magine ut, gov'nor? Drags me out through the bleedin' ryne to this

Gawd-forsaken plyce, an' 'ands me the icy mitten, so they does! Says the lidy, says she: 'Ye needn't wyte fer us, chauffeur, we'll not be comin' back.' Gawd a'mighty—not be comin' back! Who but dead corpses goes to the comet'ry an' don't come back, I axes ye?"

"Who, indeed?" the Frenchman murmured; then to me: "Come, Friend Trowbridge, we must hasten, we must run, *parbleu*, we must fly!"

SOLEMN as the purpose to which it was dedicated, the burial park stretched dark and forbidding about us as we stepped through the grille in the imposing stone gateway. The curving graveled avenues, bordered by tall double rows of cedars and Lombardy poplars which swayed dolorously in the rain-laden north wind, stretched away like labyrinthine mazes, and the black turf, with its occasional corrugations of mounded graves or decorations of pallid marble monuments, sloped upward from us, seemingly stretching outward to infinity. To follow a trail in such surroundings was a task to tax old Leatherstocking at his best. To me it seemed worse than hopeless.

Like a terrier on the scent, de Grandin hurried forward, bending now and again to pass beneath the down-swaying bough of some rain-laden evergreen, pausing every few paces to throw his head back like a hunting dog sniffing the wind, then hustling forward along the smoothly kept roadway.

"You know this place, Friend Trowbridge?" he demanded during one of his brief halts.

"Better than I want to," I admitted. "I've been out here to several funerals."

"Good—*très bon!*" he returned. "You can tell me, then, where is the —how do you call it?—the receiving-vault?"

"Over there, almost in the center of the park," I replied, and he nodded understandingly, then took up his course, almost at a run.

At last, panting for breath, we neared the point where the squat, graystone receiving-mausoleum stood, and the Frenchman hurried forward, seizing the massive bronze ring-bolts in the vault's heavy doors and trying them, one after the other, as though he would violate the sepulcher. "A loss!" he ejaculated disappointedly as each of the tomb's great metal doors defied his efforts. "Come, we must search elsewhere."

Turning on his heel he half ran, half trotted to the open space in the road reserved for parking funeral vehicles, cast a quick, appraising look about, arrived at a decision and shot like a cross-country runner down the winding road toward a long row of imposing family mausoleums. At each tomb he stopped, trying the strong metal gratings with which they were stopped, even dropping to his knees and peering into their gloomy interiors with the aid of his pocket flashlight. Knowing how useless it was to argue or ask for information when he was in one of these frenzied moods, I trotted silently at his heels, mentally resolving to give him the scolding of his life when we got home.

Tomb after tomb we visited in the mad quest. At length, when my patience was about exhausted and I was on the point of announcing my intention of leaving, with or without him, he grasped me by the arm, halting in his tracks and pointing dramatically before him with his free hand. "Look, Trowbridge, my friend," he commanded sharply. "Look and tell me what it is that you see."

I followed the line of his pointing finger with my eyes, wagged my head and blinked my eyes with incredulity. "Wh—why, it's a man!" I gasped.

"*Prie Dieu* you may be right!" he replied, darting forward and dropping to his knees beside the dark, inert object which sprawled over the short

flight of steps leading to the mausoleum.

I took the electric torch from him and played its light over the prostrate figure. It was the young man we had seen leave the café with the strange woman, and at first glance I thought him dead. His hands, pale and stiff as though already in the grip of rigor mortis, clawed impotently at the stone steps; his face, pressed cheek-downward on the rain-chilled granite, was bruised and already discoloring; and on his forehead was a nasty cut as though from some blunt instrument swung with terrific force—a black-jack, for instance.

Quickly, skilfully, de Grandin ran his supple, practised hands over the youngster's body, pressed his fingers to his pulse, bent to listen to his chest. "He lives," he announced at the end of his inspection, "but his heart—I do not like it. Come; let us take him away, my friend."

"AND now, *mon enfant,*" de Grandin demanded half an hour later when we had revived the unconscious man with smelling-salts and cold applications, "perhaps you will be good enough to tell us why you left the haunts of the living to foregather with the dead?"

The young man made a feeble effort to rise from the examination table, gave it up as too difficult and sank back. "I thought I *was* dead," he confessed.

"U'm?" de Grandin regarded him narrowly. "You have not yet answered our question, young *Monsieur.*"

The boy made a second attempt to rise, and an agonized expression spread over his face, his hand shot up to his left breast, and he fell back, half lolling, half writhing on the table.

"Quick, Friend Trowbridge," de Grandin cried, "the amyl nitrite, where is it?"

"Over there," I waved my hand toward the medicine cabinet. "You'll find some three-minim capsules in the third white box."

In a moment de Grandin had secured the pearly little pellets, crushed one in his handkerchief and applied it to the fainting boy's nostrils. "Ah, so; you feel better now, my poor one?" he asked solicitously.

"Yes, thanks," the other replied, taking another deep inhalation of the powerful palliative, "much better." Then: "How'd you know what to give me? I didn't think——"

"My friend," the little Frenchman interrupted, "I was practising the treatment of angina pectoris when you were as yet unthought of. Now, if you are sufficiently restored, you will please tell us why you left the Café Bacchanale, and what occurred thereafter. We wait."

Slowly, assisted by de Grandin on one side and me on the other, the young man descended from the table and seated himself in an easy chair. "I'm Donald Rochester," he announced without further preliminary, "and this was to have been my last night on earth."

"Ah?" murmured Jules de Grandin.

"Six months ago," the youth continued, "Dr. Simmons told me I had angina pectoris. My case was pretty far advanced when he made his diagnosis, and he gave me only a little while to live. Two weeks ago he told me I would be lucky to see the month out, and the pain has been getting greater and greater and the attacks more frequent; so today I decided to give myself one last party, then go home and make a quick, clean end of it."

"Damn!" I muttered. I know Simmons, a pompous old ass, but a first-rate diagnostician and a good heart man, though absolutely brutal with his patients.

"I ordered the sort of meal they haven't allowed me in the last half year," Rochester went on, "and was

about to enjoy myself with it when—when I saw her come in. Man"—he turned from de Grandin to me, as though expecting greater sympathy from a fellow countryman—"did you see her, too?" An expression of almost religious rapture overspread his face.

"Perfectly," de Grandin answered. "We all saw her. Tell us more."

"I've knocked about quite a bit for a fellow my age," Rochester rejoined, "and thought I'd seen about all there was, but the first sight of that girl bowled me out. I always thought this love stuff was a lot of hooey, but I'm cured now. I know how it feels to love at first sight—I even forgot my farewell meal, couldn't see anything or think of anything but her. If I'd had even two more years to live, I thought, nothing could have kept me from hunting her out and asking her to mar——"

"*Parbleu*, yes, we concede you were fascinated," the Frenchman interrupted testily, "but for the love of a thousand pale blue monkeys, tell us what you did, not what you thought, if you please. This is no class in psychology."

"I just sat and goggled at her," the other responded. "I couldn't do anything else. When that big brute she was with got up and left, and she smiled at me, this poor old heart of mine almost blinked out, I tell you. When she rose to leave, and smiled again, there wasn't enough chain in the country to hold me back.

"You'd have thought she'd known me all her life by the way she fell in step when I joined her at the door. She had a big, black car waiting outside, and I climbed right in with her. Before I knew it, I was telling her who I was, how long I had to live, and how my only regret was losing her just when I'd found her. I——"

"You told her *this?*" There was something like horror in de Grandin's incredulous whisper.

"I certainly did, and a lot more. I blurted out that I loved her—worshiped the ground she trod and the air she breathed—before I knew what I was about."

"And she——"

"Gentlemen, I'm not sure whether I ought to have delirium or not with this disease, but I'm pretty sure I've had a touch of something. Now, I want you to know that I'm not crazy before I tell you the rest, but I might have had a heart attack, or something, then fallen asleep and dreamed it."

"Say on," de Grandin ordered, a trifle grimly. "We listen."

"Very well. When I said I loved her, that girl just put her hands up to her eyes—like this—as though she'd wipe away some unshed tears. I'd expected her to get angry, or maybe to giggle, but she didn't. All she said was : 'Too late—oh, too late!'

" 'I know it is,' I answered. 'I've already told you I'm as good as dead, but I can't go west without letting you know how I feel.'

"And she said, 'Oh, no, it's not that, my dear. That's not what I meant at all. For I love you, too, but I've no right to say so—I've no right to love anyone—it's too late for me, too.'

"After that I just took her in my arms and held her tight, and she sobbed as if her heart would break. Finally I asked her to make me a promise. 'I'd rest better in the grave if I knew you wouldn't ever go out with that ugly brute I saw you with tonight,' I told her, and she let out a little scream and cried harder than ever.

"Then I had the awful thought that maybe she was married to that beast, and that was what she meant when she said it was too late. The thought tortured me, and I asked her point-blank.

"She said something devilish queer, then. She told me: 'Oh, I must go with him whenever he wants me. Though I hate him as you can never understand hate, when he calls

I have to go. This is the first time I've ever accompanied him, but I must go again, and again, and again!' She kept screaming that one word till I stopped her mouth with kisses.

"Presently the car stopped and we got out. We were in front of some sort of park, I think. I was so engrossed helping her compose herself that I didn't notice much of anything.

"She led me through a big gate and down a winding road, and finally stopped before some sort of lodge-gate. Then I took her in my arms for one last kiss.

"I don't know whether the rest of it really happened or whether I passed out and dreamed it. What I *thought* took place was this: She didn't kiss in the ordinary way. Instead of putting her lips against mine, she put them *around* them and seemed to draw the very breath out of my lungs. I could feel myself getting faint, like a swimmer caught in the surf and mauled and pounded till his lungs are full of water, and my eyes seemed to go blind with some sort of mist. I could hear a sort of ringing in my ears, then everything went black and I began to sag at the knees. I could still feel her arms about me; but it seemed as if she'd transferred her lips to my throat. I kept getting weaker and weaker with a sort of languorous ecstasy, if that means anything to you. It was like sinking to sleep in a soft, dry bed with a big drink of brandy in you after you're dog-tired from a tour of duty on the firing-step, or slipping into a warm bath when you're lousy-dirty and chilled to the bone from crawling through mud and filth and dodging flares and 'typewriter' bullets half the night. The next thing I knew I'd toppled over and fallen down the steps with no more strength in my legs than a rag-doll has. I got an awful crack on the head as I went down, I reckon, for I passed completely out, and the next I remember was waking to find you gentlemen working over me. Tell me, did I dream it all? I'm—about—played—out."

The sentence trailed off slowly, as though he were falling to sleep, and before either of us realized, his head had dropped forward and his hands slipped nervously from his lap, trailing flaccidly on the floor beside him.

"Has he gone?" I whispered as de Grandin sprang across the room and ripped his collar open.

"Not quite," he answered. "More amyl nitrite, if you please; he will revive in a moment, but go home he shall not, unless he promises faithfully not to destroy himself. *Mon Dieu,* destroy himself he assuredly would, both body and soul, were he to send a bullet through his brain before—ah, behold, Friend Trowbridge. It is even as I thought!"

On Donald Rochester's throat were two tiny, perforated wounds, as though a fine needle had been thrust through a fold of skin.

"H'm," I murmured. "If there were four of them, I'd say a snake had bitten him."

"She had! Name of a little blue man, she had!" de Grandin snapped. "A serpent more virulent and subtle than any which goes upon its belly has sunk her fangs in him; but by the wings of Jacob's angel, we shall thwart her, Friend Trowbridge. We shall show her that Jules de Grandin must be reckoned with here. Yes, *cordieu,* her and that fish-eyed paramour of hers, as well, or may I eat accursed stewed turnips for Christmas dinner and wash them down with ditch-water!"

IT WAS a serious face de Grandin showed at breakfast next morning. "You have perhaps half an hour's liberty this morning?" he asked as he drained his fourth cup of well-creamed coffee.

"H'm, I suppose so," I replied. "Anything special you'd like to do?"

"But yes. I would that you drive me to that Shadow Lawn Cemetery once more. There is that there which I would examine by daylight, if you please."

"Shadow Lawn Cemetery!" I echoed in amazement. "What in this world——"

"Only partially," he interrupted. "Unless I am more mistaken than I think, our business has much to do with another world, as well. Come; you have your patients to attend, I have my duties to perform. Let us go."

The rain had vanished with the night and a bright November sun was shining brightly when we drew up before the graveyard.

Making straight for the tomb where we had found young Rochester a few hours earlier, de Grandin inspected it as carefully as though he contemplated buying it. Carefully he walked round it, noting its massive masonry construction, examining the strong, porteullislike bronze grille with which its wide entrance was stopped. On the lintel of the doorway he invited my attention to the single incised word:

HEATHERTON

"U'm," he commented, nursing his narrow, pointed chin in the cupped palms of his hand. "That name, I must remember it, my friend."

Inside the tomb, arranged in two superimposed rows, were the crypts containing the remains of deceased Heathertons, each sealed by a white marble slab set with cement in a bronze frame, a two-lined legend telling the name and vital data of the occupant of each narrow tenement. The withered remains of a funeral wreath clung by a knot of ribbon to the bronze ring-bolt ornamenting the marble panel of the farthest crypt, and behind the disintegrating circle of roses and ruscus leaves I made out the epitaph:

FULVIA HEATHERTON
Sept. 28, 1904 *Oct. 2, 1928*

"You see?" he demanded.

"I see that a girl—I suppose Fulvia is a feminine name—died a month ago at the age of twenty-four," I admitted; "but what that has to do with last night is more than——"

"But of course," he broke in. "There is a very great much which you can not see, Trowbridge, my friend, and there is much more at which you blink tight your eyes, like a child passing over the unpleasant pages of a picture-book or a fundamentalist 'refuting' the doctrine of behaviorism, but I fear I must ask you to unfurl your lids upon some unpleasant sights before we write *finis* to this matter. Now, if you will be so kind as to leave me, I shall interview *Monsieur l' Intendant* of this so beautiful park, and perhaps several other people as well. If possible, I shall be home by dinner time, for my conscience would smite me without ceasing were I to miss a meal. However"—he elevated his narrow shoulders and pursed his lips in a gesture of resignation—"even a good dinner must sometimes be slighted."

THE consommé had grown cold and the roast lamb was kiln-drying in the oven when the stutter of my office telephone bell called me to the instrument. "Trowbridge, my friend," de Grandin's rather shrill, excited voice came over the wire, "come at once. Meet me at the Adelphi Mansions as soon as you can! I would have you for witness."

"Witness?" I echoed, but the sharp click of the receiver thrust unceremoniously into its hook announced he had rung off without further ado, and I was left staring bewilderedly at the unresponsive instrument. There was nothing to do but go; so, with a hasty apology to Nora McGinnis, my household factotum, for deserting her elaborate dinner untasted, I hustled into hat, coat and gauntlets and set out for the fashionable apartment house de Grandin had named as rendezvous.

He was striding impatiently back and forth across the sidewalk when I arrived, and refused to answer a question as he fairly dragged me through the apartment's ornate doorway and to the elevators. As the car shot upward, he reached into an inner pocket and produced a shiny, thumb-smudged photograph which he handed me with the explanation: "I did beg it from the office of the *Journal* this afternoon. They had no further use for it."

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed as I glanced at the picture. "Why—why, it's——"

"Assuredly it is," he answered in a level, expressionless tone. "It is the young Mademoiselle Heatherton, beyond a doubt; she whose tomb we did visit this morning, she whom we did see with the young Rochester last night."

"But that's impossible!" I protested, yet felt a chilling horripilation at the back of my neck, even as I voiced the denial. If the girl of the picture were not the one we had seen last night, she was enough like her to be her identical twin.

He laughed shortly. "I was convinced you would say that," he informed me. "Come, let us visit Madame Heatherton."

A trim negro maid in neat black-and-white uniform answered our summons and took our cards to her mistress. As she left the sumptuous reception room I glanced covertly about me, noting the rugs from China and the Near East, the early American mahogany, the subdued luster of old blue and mulberry china, and the elaborately wrought mediæval tapestry depicting a scene from the *Nibelungenlied* with its legend in formal Gothic text: "*Hic Siegfriedum Aureum Occidunt.*"

"Dr. Trowbridge? Dr. de Grandin?" the soft, cultured voice recalled me from my study of the needlework as an imposing, white-haired lady entered the room.

"*Madame*, a thousand pardons for this intrusion!" De Grandin clicked his heels together and bowed stiffly from the hips. "Believe me, we have no desire to trespass on your privacy, but a matter of the utmost importance brings us here. You will forgive me if I inquire concerning the circumstances of your daughter's death, for I am from the *Sûreté* of Paris, and make my investigation as a scientific research."

Mrs. Heatherton was, to use an overworked term, a "perfect lady." Nine women out of ten would have frozen at de Grandin's announcement, but she was the tenth. The direct glance the little Frenchman gave her and the evident sincerity of his tone, combined with his perfect manners and immaculate dress, carried conviction. "Pray be seated, gentlemen," she invited. "I can not see where my poor child's tragedy can interest an officer of the Paris secret police, but I've no objection to telling all I know, for you could get a garbled account of it from the newspapers anyway.

"Fulvia was my youngest child. She and my son Ralph were two years apart, almost to the day. Ralph graduated at Cornell year before last, majoring in civil engineering, and went to Florida to take charge of some construction work. Fulvia died while visiting him."

"But—pardon my seeming rudeness, *Madame*—your son, is he not also dead?"

"Yes," Mrs. Heatherton returned. "He is dead, also. They died almost together. There was a man down there, a fellow townsman of ours, Joachim Palenezke—not the sort of person one knows, but Ralph's superior in the work. He had something to do with promoting the land development, I believe. When Fulvia went down to visit Ralph, this person presumed on his position and the fact that we were all from the same city,

and attempted to force his attentions on her."

"U'm? And then?" de Grandin prompted softly, nodding thoughtfully.

"Ralph resented the fellow's overtures. Palenezke made some insulting remarks—some scurrilous allusions to Fulvia and me, I've been told—and they fought. Ralph was a small man, but a thoroughbred. Palenezke was almost a giant, but a thorough-going coward. When my boy began to best him in the fight, he drew a revolver and fired five shots into my poor son's body. Ralph died the next day after hours of terrible suffering.

"Palenezke fled to the swamps where it would be difficult to track him with dogs, and, according to some negro squatters, committed suicide, but there must have been some mistake, for——" She broke off, pressing her crumpled handkerchief to her mouth as though to force back the sobs which rose unbidden to her lips.

De Grandin reached from his chair and patted her hand gently, as though consoling a child. "My poor lady," he murmured, "I am distressed, I am grieved, I am desolated at your sorrow, but I pray you believe me when I say I do not ask questions from idle curiosity. Tell me, if you will, why you think the report of this vile miscreant's self-destruction was an error."

"Because—because he was seen again!" she gasped in a muted, horrified whisper. "He killed Fulvia!"

"*Nom d'un nom!* Do you tell me so?" de Grandin's comment was a suppressed shout. "Tell me, tell me, *Madame,* how came this vileness about?" His words fairly tumbled over each other in his eagerness. "This is of the greatest importance. This explains much which was inexplicable. Say on, *chère Madame,* I implore you!"

"Fulvia was prostrated at the tragedy of Ralph's murder, and for a time it seemed that she would be seriously ill, but she rallied like the true gentlewoman she was, and set about making preparations for returning north with her brother's body. There was no railway nearer than fifteen miles, and she wanted to catch an early train, so she set out by motor the night before her train was due. As she drove through a length of lonely, unlighted road between two stretches of undrained swampland, someone emerged from the tall reeds—I have the chauffeur's statement for this—and leaped on the running-board. He struck the driver senseless with a single blow, but not before he was recognized. It was Palenezke, of course. The car ran into the swamp when the chauffeur lost consciousness, but fortunately for him the mud was deep enough to stall the machine, though not deep enough to engulf it. He recovered in a short time and raised the alarm.

"They found them both next morning. Palenezke had apparently slipped in the bog while trying to escape and been drowned. Fulvia was dead—from shock, the physicians said. Her lips were terribly bruised; there was a wound on her throat, though not serious enough to cause death; and she had been——"

"Enough! Say no more, *Madame,* I beseech you!" de Grandin cried. "*Sang de Saint Denis!* Is Jules de Grandin a monster that he should roll stones upon a mother's breaking heart? *Dieu de Dieu, non!* But tell me, if you can, and I shall ask you no more thereafter, what became of this ten thousand times damned—your pardon, *Madame!*—this so execrable *cochon* of a Palenezke?"

"They brought him home for burial," Mrs. Heatherton replied softly. "His family is very wealthy. Some of them are bootleggers, some are in the real estate business, some are politicians. He had the most elaborate funeral ever seen in the local Greek Orthodox Church—they say the flowers alone cost more than five thousand

dollars. But Father Apostolakos refused to say mass over him, merely recited a short prayer, and denied him the right of burial in the consecrated part of the church cemetery."

"*Ah!*" De Grandin looked meaningly at me, as though to say, "I told you so!"

"This may interest you, too, though I don't know," Mrs. Heatherton added: "A friend of mine, who knows a reporter on the *Journal*—newspaper men know everything," she added with simple *naïveté*, "told me that the low coward really must have tried suicide and failed, for there was a bullet-mark on his temple, though, of course, it couldn't have been fatal, since they found him drowned in the swamp. Do you suppose he could have wounded himself purposely where those negro swamp-dwellers could see him, so that the story of his suicide would get about and the sheriff's posse would stop looking for him?"

"Quite possibly," de Grandin agreed as he rose. "*Madame,* we are your debtors more than you suspect, and, though you can not know it, we have saved you at least one pang this night. *Adieu, chère Madame,* and may the good God watch over you—and yours." He laid his lips to her smooth, white fingers and bowed himself from the room.

As we passed through the outer door we caught the echo of a sob and Mrs. Heatherton's despairing cry: "Me and mine—there are no 'mine.' All, all are gone!"

"*La pauvre!*" de Grandin murmured as he closed the door softly. "All the more reason for *le bon Dieu's* watchfulness, though she knows it not!"

"Now what?" I demanded, dabbing furtively at my eyes with my handkerchief, for Mrs. Heatherton's story had affected me profoundly.

De Grandin made no effort to conceal his tears. They trickled down his face as though he had been a half-grown schoolboy.

"Go home, my friend," he ordered. "Me, I shall consult the priest of that Greek Church. From what I hear of him, he must be a capital fellow, and I think he will give credence to my story. If he do not so, then, *parbleu,* we shall take matters into our own hands. Meanwhile, crave humble pardon for us from the excellent Nora; have her prepare some slight refreshment, and be you ready to accompany me forth again when we shall have regaled ourselves. *Nom d'un canard vert,* I fear we shall have many offices to perform before the blessed sun drives away the shadows of this night!"

IT WAS nearly midnight when he returned, but from the sparkle in his eyes I knew he had successfully attended to some of the "offices" of which he had spoken.

"*Barbe d'une chèvre,*" he exclaimed as he disposed of his sixth cold lamb sandwich and emptied his coffee cup with three famished gulps, "that Father Apostolakos of the Orthodox Church, he is no man's fool, my friend. Well learned in the ways of the world, he is, and wise in matters concerning other things, as well; no empty-headed modern, knowing so much that he knows nothing at all is he, but a man to whom one skilled in occult matters may talk freely and be as freely understood. He will help us."

"U'm?" I commented noncomittally.

"Precisely," he agreed, refilling his coffee cup and stirring a liberal portion of cream and sugar into the steaming beverage. "Exactly, my friend. The good *Papa* is supreme in matters ecclesiastical, and he will give the necessary orders tomorrow morning, without so much as 'by your leave' from the so estimable bootleggers, real estate agents and politicians who compose the illustrious Palenezke

family. It is very well. Now, if you are ready, we will go."

"Go—go where?" I demanded.

"To Monsieur Rochester's, of course. I would have further talk with that young man."

As we left the house I saw him transfer a small oblong packet from his jacket to his overcoat. "What's that?" I asked.

"Something the good father lent me. I hope we shall have no occasion to use it, but it will prove most convenient, if we do."

A LIGHT mist, dappled here and there with chilling November rain, was settling over the early-morning streets as we departed for Rochester's home. Forms of occasional late passengers loomed dim and ghostly through the fog and the street lamps showed faintly cruciform bars of luminance.

Half an hour's cautious driving brought us to the bachelor apartment where Donald Rochester lived. As I drew up at the curb the Frenchman tapped me lightly on the shoulder, pointing upward as he did so.

"You see?" he asked. "That light burns in the young *Monsieur's* rooms. Can it be he entertains visitors at this hour?"

The night elevator operator was sound asleep, and guided by de Grandin's cautious gesture, I followed his lead in tiptoeing past him and ascending the stairs.

"There is no need to announce ourselves prematurely," the Frenchman whispered when we were safely out of earshot. "It is better that we arrive as a party of surprize, I think."

He rapped lightly on Rochester's door, repeated the summons a second time, and was on the point of trying the handle when the young man himself responded.

He was arrayed in the same faultless dinner clothes he had worn the night before, and there was no hint of sleep or fatigue about him. On the contrary, he seemed wide awake, and not particularly pleased to see us.

"We are unexpected, my friend," de Grandin announced, "but we are here, nevertheless. Have the kindness to permit us to enter, if you please."

"But—but you can't come in at this hour," Rochester protested. "I really can't see you now. If you'll come back tomorrow, I'll be glad——"

"This is tomorrow, *mon vieux,*" the Frenchman returned, brushing past our reluctant host and walking rapidly down the hall to the lighted living-room.

It was a typical well-to-do bachelor's "diggings" we entered. The room, larger than the average apartment chamber, was tastefully and substantially furnished, a rich Turkey carpet on the floor, strongly built pieces of maple and hickory—mostly low, roomy armchairs — scattered about. A shaded lamp on the table cast a circle of subdued light over the center of the room, and the leaping, crackling flames from the fireplace threw constantly shifting splashes of illumination on the white bearskin rug spread before the polished brass andirons. In the darker corners of the place we could make out tall cases in which rank on rank of handsomely bound volumes stood at attention, the reflection from the dancing flames picking out pleasing highlights on their gold-embossed covers. The scent of Egyptian cigarette smoke hung heavy in the air, but mingling with it was another odor, the faint, hardly perceptible yet alluringly provocative scent of heliotrope.

I stared about me with an almost guilty feeling. Rochester, clean-cut, masculine to the tips of his long fingers and the smoothly brushed hairs of his head, was not the sort of man to use perfume—yet there the scent was. There was no mistaking it.

De Grandin was less formal than I. At the farther side of the room was a wide archway closed by two

Paisley shawls hung lambrequinwise from a brass rod. Toward these the Frenchman strode with an assured step, his right hand deep in his top-coat pocket, his ebony cane, which I well knew concealed a keen sword blade, held lightly by its silver-mounted handle in his left hand.

"De Grandin!" I cried in shocked amazement, dumfounded at his air of proprietorship.

"Don't!" Rochester called warningly, hurrying to place himself between the Frenchman and the door. "You mustn't——"

The rich hangings at the archway parted, and a girl stepped forward between them. The long, clinging gown of purple silk-tissue, utterly unadorned, in which she was clad hung to her exquisite form like a veil, disclosing, rather than concealing, the perfection of the ivory body beneath. Her luxurious copper-colored hair, smoothly parted in the middle, was unbound and swept in a double cascade of rippling brightness across her high, white forehead and swirled like sun-flecked, flowing water about her bare white shoulders. Halted in the act of advancing, one tiny, high-arched foot, innocent of covering, showed its blue-veined whiteness against the deep red of the rug like a single spot of moonlight upon a midnight woodland pool. As her gaze met the advancing Frenchman she paused with a sibilant intake of breath, and her right hand, from which the flowing, loose sleeve of her silken garment had fallen back, clutched at the curtain as if for support while her eyes widened with an expression of mingled fright and horror.

Yet it was no shamefaced glance she gave him; no look of detected guilt or brazen attempt at facing out a hopelessly embarrassing situation. Rather, it was the look of one in imminent peril of death; such a look as she might have given had it been a tiger or rattlesnake advancing on her instead of the immaculately dressed, debonair little Frenchman.

"So!" she breathed, and I could see the rise of her laboring breast beneath her robe as she spoke; "so you knew! I feared you would, but I did not think——" She broke off with an expression of acute distress as de Grandin advanced another step and swerved till his right-hand coat pocket was within arm's length of her.

"*Mais oui, mais oui, Mademoiselle la Morte,*" he returned, retreating a step or two and bowing ceremoniously, but without removing his hand from his coat. "I knew, as you say. The question now rises, 'What shall we do about it?' "

"See here"—Rochester flung himself between them—"what's the meaning of this unpardonable intrusion, Dr. de Grandin? I demand an explanation."

The little Frenchman turned toward him, an expression of mild inquiry on his face. "*You* demand an explanation?" he returned. "I should think, if explanations are in order——"

"Damn your innuendos!" Rochester cut in. "I'm my own man, and accountable to nobody. Fulvia came to me tonight, and I love her. I'm going to marry her, if it's the last thing I do on earth!"

"It probably will be," de Grandin replied *sotto voce;* then, aloud: "How did she come, if you care to tell?"

The young man seemed to catch his breath, like a runner struggling to regain his wind at the end of a hard course. "I—I went out for a little while," he faltered, "and when I came back—when I came back——"

"My poor one!" de Grandin interrupted sympathetically. "You do lie like a gentleman, but also you lie very poorly. Listen, I will tell you how she came: This night, I know not exactly when, but well after the evening's shadows had replaced the

cleanly light, you did hear a knock-rap at your window or door, and when you looked out, there was the so beautiful *demoiselle*. You thought you dreamed, but again the lovely fingers tap-tapped at the window-pane, and the beautiful eyes opened wide and looked love into yours, and you opened the sash and cried out to her to enter, content to entertain the dream of her, since there was no chance of her coming in the flesh. Tell me, young *Monsieur*, and you, young and beautiful *Mademoiselle*, I recite the facts, *n'est-ce-pas?*"

Rochester and the girl stared at him in dumb amazement. Only the quivering of the young man's eyelids and the tremble of the girl's sensitive lips gave testimony he had spoken accurately.

For a moment there was a tense, vibrant silence; then, with a little gasping cry the girl tottered forward on soft, soundless feet and dropped half prostrate before de Grandin. "Have pity—be merciful!" she besought, grasping him about the knees. "Be merciful to me as you may one day hope for mercy yourself. It is such a little thing I ask. You know *what* I am; do you also know who I am, and why I am now—now the accursed thing you see, instead of being free to love as other women do? Oh, it is too cruel—too cruel!" She released her hold and buried her face in her hands. "I am young," she sobbed. "I'm only a girl, and all of life lay before me. I'd never known real love till it was too late. You can't be so unkind as to drive me back now; you *can't!*"

Tears quivered on de Grandin's lashes and his voice was very soft and sorrowful as he gently placed his hand on the girl's shining head and replied: "My poor little one, my poor, innocent lamb, slaughtered before you had even the lambkin's right to play! I know all there is to know of you. Your sainted mother told me more than she dreamed this afternoon. I am not cruel, my lovely one; I am all sympathy and sorrow, but life is cruel and death even more so, and you must know what the end will be if I do not do that which I must. *Hélas,* were I a worker of miracles, I would roll back the gates of the tomb and bid you be happy with life and love until your natural time had come to die, but——"

"I don't care what the end may be!" the girl blazed, sinking backward till she sat upon her upturned, bare soles. "I only know I was denied every woman's birthright, and I've found love and want it; I want it! He's mine, I tell you; mine, and I love him.

"Think"—she crept forward and took de Grandin's hand in both of hers, fondling it and pressing it to her cheek—"think how little it is I ask. Just a tiny ruby of blood now and then. Only a tiny drop, to keep my beautiful body whole. If I were alive—if I were like other women, and Donald were my lover, how gladly he would submit to a transfusion—to giving pints, quarts of blood, if necessary for my health and strength. Is it so much then if I ask only an occasional drop? Just a drop now and then, and once in a while a draft of living breath from his lungs to——"

"To slay his poor, sick body and then destroy his wholesome, clean soul!" the Frenchman interrupted softly. "It is not of the living that I think so much, but of the dead. Would you deny him the right to lie quietly in his grave when he shall have lost his life because of you? Would you refuse him the comfort of peaceful sleep until the dawn of God's Great Tomorrow?"

"O-o-oh!" the cry wrung from her pale lips was like the wail of a lost spirit. "You are right—it is his soul we must protect. I would crush that, too, even as mine was crushed that night in the swamps. Oh, pity, pity me, dear Lord! Thou who didst heal

the unclean lepers and despised not the Magdalen, have mercy on me, the soiled, the unclean!"

Scalding tears of agony trickled down her lovely face and fell between the fingers of her long, transparent hands as she held them before her face. Then:

"I am ready," she announced suddenly, seeming to find courage for complete renunciation. "Do what you must to me. If it must be knife and stake, strike quickly. I will not scream or cry, if I can help it."

For a moment de Grandin looked pitifully into her face as he might have looked into the coffin of a dear friend, then: "Monsieur Rochester," he announced suddenly, "I would look at you. I would examine into the state of your health."

We stared at him astounded, but he calmly proceeded to strip back the young man's waistcoat and open his shirt, listening carefully to the action of his heart, testing his chest by percussion, counting the pulse action, then feeling slowly up and down the arm.

"U'm," he remarked judicially at the end of the examination, "you are in bad condition, my friend. With medicines, careful nursing and more luck than the physician usually has, I might keep you alive a month. Again, you may drop over at any moment. But in all my life I have never given a patient his death warrant with greater happiness."

We regarded him in mute wonder a moment, but it was the girl who spoke first. "You mean," she trilled, laughter and a light such as never was on land or sea breaking in her eyes, "you mean I can have him until——"

"Precisely, exactly, quite so," he responded before she could conclude. Turning from her he addressed Rochester directly.

"You and Mademoiselle Fulvia are to love each other as much as you please, while life holds out," he announced. "Afterward"—he extended his hand and grasped the girl's slender fingers—"afterward, *Mademoiselle,* I will do the thing which is needful—for you both. Ha, Monsieur Diable, I have tricked you; Jules de Grandin has made a fool of all hell!"

He threw back his head and stood in an attitude of defiance, his eyes flashing, his lips twitching with excitement and elation.

With a sob of grateful joy the girl bent forward, pressing de Grandin's hand again and again to her lips. "Oh, you are kind—kind!" she cried. "No other man in all the world, knowing what you know, would have done what you have done!"

"But of course not," the Frenchman returned imperturbably. "You do forget, *Mademoiselle,* that I am Jules de Grandin.

"Come, Friend Trowbridge, we do intrude most unwarrantably here," he told me. "What have we, who drained the purple wine of youth long years ago, to do with those who laugh and love the night away? Let us go."

We turned to leave, but a stifled scream from the girl and a choked exclamation from Rochester brought us up short.

Rat-tat-tat! Sharp as the merciless clatter of a machine-gun, something was striking against the fog-glazed window-pane. Wheeling in my tracks, I felt the breath go hot and chokingly sulfurous in my throat as I gazed toward the window. Outside in the night, seemingly floating in the lazily whirling mist, was a human form!

A second glance told me it was the brutal-faced man we had seen at the café the previous night. But now his ugly, evil face was the visage of a demon fresh from lowermost hell, the eyes unnaturally wide open, the mouth gaping, the tongue lolling and protruding as though an invisible hand had him by the throat, and the whole loathsome countenance instinct

with hate and inexpressible wickedness.

"Ha, *Monsieur*, is it you, indeed?" de Grandin asked nonchalantly. "I thought you might come, so I am prepared.

"Do not invite him in!" he called in sharp command to Rochester. "Hold your beloved—place your hand upon her mouth, lest she, being his thing and chattel, however unwillingly, give him permission to enter. Remember, he can not cross the sill without the bidding of someone in the room!"

Flinging up the sash, he regarded the hovering apparition with a sardonic smile. "What have you to say, *Monsieur*, before I bid you be off?" he demanded coolly.

The thing outside mouthed and gibbered at us, very fury depriving it of words. At last:

"She's mine!" it shrieked. "Mine—I made her what she is, and she belongs to me. I'll have her, and that dough-faced, dying thing she holds in her arms, as well. All, all of you are mine! I shall be king, emperor, god! You nor any mortal can not stop me. I am all-powerful, I am supreme, I am——"

"You are the greatest liar outside burning hell!" de Grandin cut in icily. "As for your power and your claims, *Monsieur*, tomorrow you shall claim nothing, not so much as a little plot of earth to call a grave. Meantime, behold this, devil's spawn; behold and tremble!"

Whipping his hand from his overcoat pocket, he produced a small, flat case, like the leather containers sometimes used for holding photographs, pressed a concealed spring and snapped back the folding doors of the container. For a moment the thing in the night gazed at the object de Grandin held with stupefied, unbelieving horror; then, with a wild cry, fell backward, its uncouth motion somehow reminding me of the convulsions of a hooked bass.

"Ah, you like it not, I see," the Frenchman mocked. "*Parbleu*, you stinking truant from the charnel-house, you defiler of hell's own self, begone!" He advanced the leather object in his hand till it seemed to touch the phantom face outside the window.

A wild, blood-freezing screech echoed through the fog-bound night as the thing reeled backward, and on its lowering, unwholesomely white forehead there showed a red weal, as though the Frenchman had scored it with a white-hot iron.

"Close the windows, *mes amis*," de Grandin directed as casually as though nothing hideous hovered outside. "Shut them tight and hold each other close till the morning comes and the shadows flee away."

"For heaven's sake," I besought as we began our homeward drive, "tell me what it all means, de Grandin. You and Rochester called that girl Fulvia, and you said her mother had told her story to you. Fulvia Heatherton is dead; died a month ago. I saw her tomb this morning, and her mother described her death this afternoon. If she's dead, how could she be there? Is this girl her double, and if she is——"

"She is no double, Friend Trowbridge," he answered in a tone of finality. "It was Fulvia Heatherton whom we saw tonight, and none other."

Daylight had not yet broken, though the eastern horizon was beginning to show streaks of light when de Grandin's insistent pounding on my bedroom door roused me from a troubled sleep.

"Up, Friend Trowbridge!" he shouted, punctuating his summons with a second double knock. "Up and dress as quickly as may be. We must go immediately, right away, at once. Tragedy has overtaken them!"

Hardly aware of my movements, I stumbled from bed, felt my way into my clothes and, with the film of sleep still dimming my eyes, descended to the lower hall where the little Frenchman waited in a perfect frenzy of impatience.

"What is it?" I asked as we began a mad drive toward Rochester's.

"Misfortune—the worst!" he panted. "Fifteen minutes ago, just before the first crowing of the cock, I was awakened by the telephone. 'It is for Friend Trowbridge,' I told me. 'Some patient with the *mal de l'estomac* desires a little medicine and much sympathy. I shall not waken him, for he is all tired with the night's exertions.' But the bell rang violently and without ceasing, and so, as you continued to chant hymns to Morpheus with your nose, I descended to the office to take the message. My friend, it was Mademoiselle Fulvia. *Hélas,* great as was her love, her weakness was greater. But when the harm was done, she had the courage to call and tell us. Remember that when you come to judge her."

I would have paused for explanation, but he waved me on impatiently. "Hurry, hurry, my friend," he besought. "We must to the young Rochester's house at once; perhaps it is even now too late."

There was no traffic in the streets, and we made the run to Rochester's in record time. Almost before we realized it we stood before the polished door of the apartment again, and this time de Grandin stood on no ceremony. Flinging the door open without so much as a warning knock, he raced down the hall and into the living-room, pausing at the threshold with a sharp gasp of indrawn breath.

"So!" he breathed. "He was thorough, this one."

The room was a wreck. Chairs were overturned, pictures hung awry on the walls, bits of broken bric-à-brac strewed the rug, and the long throw-cover of the center table had been snatched bodily from its place, overturning the litter of odds and ends with which the table was laden and dumping them indiscriminately in the center of the floor.

Lying supine on the bearskin rug before the dead fire was Donald Rochester, one leg crumpled queerly beneath him, his right arm stretched flaccidly along the floor, the hand bent at a sharp right-angle to the wrist.

De Grandin crossed the room at a run, unfastening the clasps of his medicine case as he leaped. Dropping beside the still form, he bent forward, listened intently at the young man's heart a moment, then stripped back his sleeve, swabbed the arm with alcohol and inserted the needle of his hypodermic syringe. "It is a desperate chance I take," he muttered as he shot the plunger home, "but the case is also desperate."

Rochester's eyelids fluttered as the powerful stimulant took effect. He moaned weakly and turned his head with great effort, but made no attempt to rise. As I knelt beside de Grandin and helped him raise the injured man I understood the cause of his immobility. His spine had been fractured at the fourth dorsal vertebra, paralysis resulting.

"Young *Monsieur,*" de Grandin whispered softly, "you are going fast. Your minutes are more than numbered in the circle of the watch-face. Tell us, and quickly, what happened." Once more he injected the stimulant into Rochester's arm.

The young man wet his drawn, blue lips with the tip of his tongue, attempted a deep breath, but found the effort too great, then replied in a voice so low we had to bend down to understand. "It was he—that fellow you scared off last night.

"Fulvia and I lay on the hearth-rug, counting our minutes together as a miser counts his gold. I heaped the fire with logs, for she was cold as death itself, but it didn't seem to do

any good. Finally she began to pant for breath and I put my mouth to hers and let her draw breath from me. That revived her, and when she'd sucked a little blood from my throat she seemed herself once more, though I could not feel the movement of her heart as she lay beside me.

"It must have been just before daybreak—I don't know just when, for I'd fallen asleep in her arms—when I heard something clattering against the window-pane, and someone calling to be let in. I remembered what you said and tried to hold Fulvia, but she fought me off, ran to the window and flung it up, saying, 'Enter, master; there is none to stop you now!'

"He made straight for me, and she realized what he was about and tried to stop him, but he flung her aside as if she were a rag-doll—took her by the hair and dashed her against the wall. I heard her bones crack under the impact.

"I grappled with him, but I was no more his match than a three-year-old child was mine. He threw me down and stamped on me, breaking my arms and legs under his feet, and the pain was so great I could hardly stand it. Finally he grabbed me up and hurled me to the floor again, and then I felt no more pain, except this dreadful headache. I couldn't move, but I was conscious, and the last thing I remember was seeing Fulvia stepping out the window with him, hand in hand. She left without so much as looking back once."

For a moment he paused, fighting desperately for breath; then, lower and weaker than before, as though there were scarce air enough in his tortured lungs to force the words forth: "Oh, Fulvia, Fulvia—how could you? And I loved you so!"

"Peace, my poor one," de Grandin whispered in return. "She did not do it of her own accord. That fiend holds her in a thrall stronger than you can know. She is his thing and creature more completely than ever black slave belonged to his master. Hear me, my friend, and go with this thought uppermost in your mind: She loves you. It is because she called us that we are here now, and her last word was one of love for you. Do you understand? 'Tis sad to die so young, *mon pauvre,* but surely it is something to have walked hand in hand with love, if only for a little while, and to have seen the shadow of his purple wings fall across your lady's face. Many a man lives out a whole life without as much, and many there are who would trade a span of four-score and ten gladly for five little minutes of the ecstasy which was yours last night.

"Rochester—do you hear me?" he called more sharply, for the young man's face was taking on the grayness of impending death, and his light breathing was sinking till it could no longer be heard.

"Ye-yes," the other gasped. "She loves me"—he essayed a weak, wan smile—"she loves me. Fulvia—Fulvia!" And with the name sighing from his lips, his facial muscles loosened, his eyes took on the set, unwinking stare of eyes which see no more, and a convulsive tremor fluttered his breast.

DE GRANDIN gently drew the lids across the sightless eyes and raised the fallen jaw, then set about straightening the room with methodical haste. "As licensed practitioner you will sign the death certificate, Friend Trowbridge," he announced matter-of-factly. "Our young friend has long suffered from angina pectoris. This morning he suffered an attack, and, after calling us, fell from a chair on which he stood to reach his medicine, thereby fracturing several bones. He told us this when we arrived to find him dying. You understand?"

"No, I'm hanged if I do!" I returned. "You know, as well as I, that——"

"That we were the last ones to see him alive," he supplied, "and that the police may have embarrassing questions to answer if we have not a plausible story to tell. Think you for one little minute they would believe the true facts if we did relate them?"

Much as I disliked it, I followed his orders to the letter and the poor boy's body was turned over to the ministrations of an undertaker within an hour.

As Rochester was an orphan without known family, de Grandin assumed the rôle of next friend, made all arrangements for the funeral, and gave orders that the remains be cremated without delay, the ashes to be turned over to him for final disposition.

Most of the day was taken up in making these arrangements and in my round of professional calls. I was thoroughly exhausted by 4 o'clock in the afternoon, but de Grandin, hustling, indefatigable, seemed as fresh as he had been at daybreak.

"Come, Friend Trowbridge," he urged as I would have sunk into the embrace of my favorite armchair for a few minutes' rest, "there is yet much to be done. Did not you hear my promise to Monsieur Palenezke last night?"

"Your promise——"

"*Précisément.* Unless the good Father Apostolakos has failed us, we have one very great surprize in store for that Monsieur Palenezke, one from which he is not likely to recover in a hurry. Are you ready?"

Grumbling, but with a curiosity which overrode my fatigue, I followed him outside and drove to the parsonage of the little Greek Orthodox Church. Parked before the door was an undertaker's service wagon, its chauffeur yawning audibly at the delay in getting through his errand.

De Grandin ran lightly up the steps to the rectory, gained admission and returned in a few minutes with the venerable priest arrayed in full canonicals. "*Allons, mon brave,*" he called to the funeral chauffeur, "be on your way; we follow!"

It was not till we had driven the better part of two hours that I realized our purpose. Even when we neared the imposing granite walls of the North Hudson Crematory I failed to understand de Grandin's hardly suppressed glee.

All arrangements had apparently been made. The retort was ready for reception of the body, and the crematory attendants went about their task with the speed of practised experts. In the little chapel over the oven Father Apostolakos recited the orthodox burial office, and the coffin sank slowly from view on the concealed elevator provided for conveying it to the incineration chamber below.

The aged priest bowed courteously to us and left the building, seating himself in my car, and I was prepared to take my place at the wheel when de Grandin motioned to me imperatively. "Not yet, Friend Trowbridge," he remarked. "Come with me and I will show you something."

Together we made our way to the subterranean chamber where incineration took place. The body was ready for committal to the heat, but de Grandin stopped the attendants with upraised hand. Tiptoeing across the tiled floor, he bent above the open cradle in which the dead man lay, motioning me to approach.

As I paused beside him, I recognized the heavy, evil features of the man we had first seen with Fulvia in the cabaret, the same bestial, furious face which mouthed curses and obscenities at us from Rochester's window the night before. Prepared though I was, I felt myself going sick and weak at the recognition, but de Grandin was jubilant.

"Ah, *Monsieur le Cadavre,*" he asked in a whisper so low that none but I could hear as he bent above the dead thing's ear, "what think you of this, *hein?* You who would be king, emperor and god of the dead, you who boasted no power on earth could keep you from claiming that man and that woman—did not Jules de Grandin promise you that before this day's sun had set you should claim nothing, not even one poor little plot of earth to call a grave? *Pah,* murderer and ravisher of women, killer of men, where now is your power? Go through the fire of this furnace to the hell-fire that knows no quenching, but take this with you!" And he spat full in the cold, upturned visage of the corpse.

It might have been the trick of overwrought nerves or an optical illusion produced by the electric lights, but I still believe I saw the dead, long-buried body writhe in the cremation cradle and a look of terrible, unutterable hate disfigure the waxen features. Whatever the cause of my impression, it did not last long, for the Frenchman made a quick, imperative motion to the attendants, the sheet-iron trough slid smoothly forward on its tracks, and the heavy metal door of the furnace clanged shut.

For a moment the Frenchman stood with his eye glued to the peep-hole of the door, then turned away with a smile so cold and cruel and terrible that it froze the blood in my veins. "Aye, writhe, foul offsweeping of hell," he murmured. "Wriggle, turn and twist. You will find a fire hotter than this awaiting your soul, and the damned of hell will bow their heads beneath a new indignity when you are put amongst them!

"Come," he turned to me, "we must convey the good father to his parsonage, and then comes dinner, and last of all—*cordieu,* how I dread it!—there is one more duty to be performed, one more promise to be kept."

IT WAS somewhat after midnight when we made our way once more to Shadow Lawn Cemetery. Unerringly as though going to an appointment, de Grandin led the way to the Heatherton family mausoleum, let himself through the massive bronze grille with a key he had procured somewhere, and ordered me to stand guard outside.

Lighted by the flash of his electric torch he entered the tomb, a long, cloth-covered parcel clasped under his arm. A minute later I heard the clank of metal on metal, the sound of some heavy object being drawn across the floor; then, as I grew half hysterical at the long-continued silence, there came the short, half-stifled sound of a gasping cry, the sort of cry a patient in the dental chair gives when a tooth is extracted without anesthetic.

Another period of silence, broken by the rasping of heavy objects being moved, and the Frenchman emerged from the tomb, tears streaming down his face. "Peace," he announced chokingly. "I gave her peace everlasting, Friend Trowbridge, but oh! it was pitiful to hear her moan, and more pitiful yet to see that lovely, live-seeming body shudder into the embrace of relentless death. *Sang de Saint Denis,* she is now with the blessed ones above—perhaps her spiritual lips feel those of her dead lover—but Jules de Grandin's soul will be in torment whenever he thinks of what he had to do for mercy's sake this night!"

JULES DE GRANDIN selected one of my coronas from the humidor, applied a match with infinite care and sent a cloud of fragrant smoke drifting toward the ceiling. "Yes, my friend," he admitted, "the events of the last three nights are, as you say, decidedly queer. But what would

you? All that lies outside our experience is queer. To the untutored peasant the sight of an ameba beneath the microscope is queer; the Eskimos undoubtlessly thought M o n s i e u r Byrd's airplane queer; we think the sights which we have seen these nights queer. Luckily for us, and for all mankind, they are.

"To begin: Just as there exist today certain of protozoa which are probably identical with the earliest forms of life on earth, so there still persist, though in constantly diminishing quantities, certain holdovers of ancient evil. Time was when earth swarmed with them—devils and devilkins, imps, satyrs and demons, elementals, ghouls, werewolves and vampires. All were once numerous; all, perhaps, exist in considerable numbers to this day, though we know them not, and most of us never so much as hear of them. It is with the vampire that we had to deal this time. You know him? No?

"Strictly, he is an earthbound soul, a spirit which because of its manifold sins and wickednesses is bound to the world wherein it worked its evil and can not betake itself to its proper sphere. He is in India in considerable numbers, also in Russia, Hungary, Rumania and throughout the Balkans, also in Egypt, Turkey and Mesopotamia—wherever civilization is very old and decadent, there he seems to find a favorable soil. Sometimes he steals the body of one already dead; sometimes he continues in the body which he had in life, and then he is most terrible of all, for he needs nourishment to support that living-though-dead body, but not such nourishment as you or I take. No, he can subsist on the life of the living, imbibed through their blood, for the blood is the life. He must suck the breath from the living, or he can not breathe; he must drink the blood of the living, or he starves to death. Here is where the great danger arises, then: A suicide, one who dies under a curse, or *one who has been inoculated with vampire virus* by having his blood sucked by a vampire, becomes a vampire in his turn after death. Innocent of all wrong he may be, often is, yet he is doomed to tread the earth by night, preying ceaselessly upon the living, ever recruiting the grisly ranks of his tribe. You apprehend?

"Consider this case: This Palenezke, because of his murder and suicide, perhaps partly because of his Slavic ancestry, maybe also because of his many sins as well, became a vampire when he had killed himself. Madame Heatherton's information was right, he did destroy himself; but his evil body and more evil soul continued to cling together, ten thousand times a greater menace to mankind than when they had been partners in natural life.

"Enjoying the supernatural power of his life-in-death, he rose from the swamplands, waylaid Mademoiselle Fulvia's motor, assaulted her chauffeur, then dragged her off into the bog. There he worked his awful will upon her, gratifying at once his vampire's thirst for blood and his revenge for her rejection of his wooing. When he had killed her, he had made of her such a thing as he was, although she was innocent of all wrong.

"Now, if the vampire added all the powers of men to his supernatural powers, we should have no defense, but he is governed by certain unbreakable laws. He can not independently cross the thread of a running stream, he must be carried; he can not enter any house or building unless expressly invited by someone already there; he can fly through the air, enter at keyholes and window-chinks or through the crack of a door, but he can move about only at night —between sunset and cock-crow. From sunrise to dark he is only a corpse, helpless as any other, and must lie in his tomb. At such times he can most easily be slain, but only

in certain ways. First, if his heart be pierced by a stake of ash and his head severed from his body, he is dead in good earnest and can rise to plague us no more. Second, if his sinful body be completely burned to ashes, he is no more, for fire cleanses all things.

"Now, with this information, fit together the puzzle which has so mystified you: The other night at the Café Bacchanale I liked the looks of this Palenezke not at all. He had the face of a dead man and the look of a villain, as well as the eye of a fish. Of his companion I thoroughly approved, though she, too, had an otherworldly look. Wondering about them, I watched them from my eye's tail, and when I observed that they ate nothing, although they ordered in abundance, I thought it not only strange, but menacing. Normal people do not do such things; abnormal people are dangerous and usually bear investigating.

"When Palenezke left his so charming companion alone, after having indicated that she might make overtures to the young Rochester, I liked the looks of things very little. My first thought was that it was a game of decoy and robbery, and I thought I would follow them and see what I could see. *Eh bien,* my friend, but we did see a very great plenty, *n'est-ce-pas?*

"You recall the young Rochester's experience in the cemetery, and as he related it to us, I saw at once what manner of foe we were pitted against, though as yet I did not know how innocent the sweet Fulvia was. Our information from Madame Heatherton confirmed my worst fears. What we saw at Rochester's apartment that night proved all I had imagined, and more.

"Ah, but I had not been idle meantime. No. I had seen the good Father Apostolakos and told him what I had learned. He understood at once what was needed, and made immediate arrangements to have Palenezke's foul body exhumed and taken to the crematory for incineration. He also lent me a sacred *ikon,* the blessed image of a saint whose potency to frighten off demons had been proved more than once in the old country. You did notice, undoubtlessly, how Mademoiselle Fulvia shrank from me when I approached her with the relic in my pocket, and how the restless soul of Palenezke fled from it as living flesh shrinks from burning iron?

"Very well. Rochester loved this woman already dead. He himself was moribund. Why not let him taste of love with the shade of the woman who returned his passion for the few days he had yet to live? When he died, as die he must, I was prepared so to treat his poor clay that, though he were already half a vampire from the vampire's kisses on his throat, he could yet do no harm. You know I have done so. The cleansing fire which sterilized Palenezke's sinful corpse will cleanse him, also. Also I pledged myself to do as much for the poor, beautiful, sinned-against Fulvia when her brief aftermath of earthly happiness should have expired. I have kept my word.

"It was unfortunate that Palenezke should have killed young Rochester, but he only hastened death by a few hours, at most, and, thanks to kindly heaven, the rascal's very violence prevented his victim's suffering much, since he broke his spine, thereby providing complete anesthesia.

"The end of Palenezke you witnessed today. Young Rochester will be cremated tomorrow or the day following—the harm he can do is *nil;* poor Mademoiselle Fulvia—her I rendered harmless with stake and knife this very night, nor do I think she suffered greatly, for I took with me, in addition to my implements of mercy, a syringe loaded with two grains of morphine, and I gave her an injection before I began my work. Her moan at dissolution and the tor-

ture of her poor body, they were but reflex acts, not signs of conscious suffering."

"But look here," I objected, "if Fulvia was a vampire, as you say, and able to float about after dark, how comes it that she was in her coffin when you went there tonight?"

"Ah, my friend," he replied, and tears welled up in his eyes, "she awaited me. We had a definite assignation, and the poor child lay in her coffin awaiting the knife and stake which should set her free from bondage. She—she smiled at me, and pressed my hand when I dragged her forth from the tomb!"

From the long-necked bottle on the table he poured an ounce or so of cognac into a tall, wide-mouthed glass, passed the goblet under his nostrils, inhaling the liquor's rich bouquet, then drained it at a gulp.

"To you, young Rochester," he announced, elevating the empty glass in salute, "and to your lovely lady. Though there be neither marrying nor giving in marriage where you have gone, may your restless souls find peace and rest eternal—together."

Bizarre Was the Fate of the Physician

The Conradi Affair

By AUGUST W. DERLETH *and* CARL W. GANZLIN

Excerpts from the diary of Professor R. H. Conradi, M. D., F. R. S., found in his room on the morning of October 30:

OCTOBER 17 . . . There can be no doubt that I have at last isolated the *Bacillus leprœ*. According to the theory I have advanced to a selected number of my colleagues, it will now be possible for me to develop this germ and cause its mass propagation. I suppose I shall encounter difficulty in feeding it at first, but after I have overcome this difficulty, I shall feed it in proportion to its growth.

Dr. Herrick has loaned me his large glass vat for the purpose of keeping the germ in its various stages.

October 19 . . . My success is imminent. The germ has multiplied, as I anticipated. It—or perhaps I should say *they*, for it is no longer one, but a spongelike mass of millions of cells that threaten to outgrow the capacity of the vat—has increased to the diameter of one inch.

On the eighteenth I fed the germ a half-pound of beef and bone. The meat was consumed by this morning. There was nothing visible save a slimy coating at the bottom of the container, which I watched during the entire day. Toward evening the slimy coating had drawn together to form a globular mass of about one inch in diameter.

October 20 . . . Last night I threw five pounds of raw beef to the germ mass. This morning the meat was gone, and in its place I found a slimy layer with a bulbous center, which again drew together during the day. Tonight it is ten inches in diameter.

I am going to try fasting the germs, to watch their reaction.

October 21 . . . Today the diameter of the germ mass has decreased to five inches, and it is obvious that the individual germs have resorted to attacking one another for sustenance. I shall feed the germ mass ten pounds of beef and bone at once; there is no telling how swiftly these germs may annihilate themselves.

The mass immediately surrounded the food and devoured it. Tonight its diameter is twenty inches.

October 23 . . . For the past two days I have fed the germ mass; it has grown to approximately forty inches in diameter. I am very well satisfied with this result, and I am taking accurate observations, recording every available fact that may be useful in the ultimate extermination of the germ.

October 24 . . . Yesterday I fed the germs twenty pounds of meat. It was consumed with remarkable rapidity. This is quite natural, however; the rapid consumption I should say is due to the maturing of the individual germs.

The diameter of the germ mass has reached sixty inches. The vat will hold little more; consequently, I shall have to fast the germs for twenty-four hours.

October 25 . . . This morning there is a very perceptible movement within the germ mass itself. It is a sort of undulation prevalent in the entire mass. I watched it carefully, and it seemed almost as if the mass were making an effort to slither upward and out of the vat. There is a strong suggestion of an upward surge. At the same time the germ mass is decreasing; because of their period of fasting they (the individual germs) have again turned on themselves for sustenance.

The mass has reduced itself to thirty-five inches in diameter.

October 26 . . . Twenty pounds of meat today! It will not be long before they reach their former diameter, when I shall begin my experiments on the life of the individual mature germ.

Later . . . I am elated! The food has greatly rejuvenated my germs. There is again that undulating movement, but this time it is certainly not an individual germ movement but a mass movement. It is again sixty inches in diameter. I am certain that by tomorrow I shall be able to experiment with my new-found serum.

I am just a little nervous, worrying about the hugeness of the germ mass and the success of my experiment.

October 27 . . . Only a few hours until I can bring my experimentation to an end. What will Herrick say? The work is very tiring, but not monotonous.

I am horribly nervous. What if something should happen? If the germ mass should get out?

The following is an excerpt from the Chicago Times dated the thirtieth of October:

Disappearance of Professor Conradi

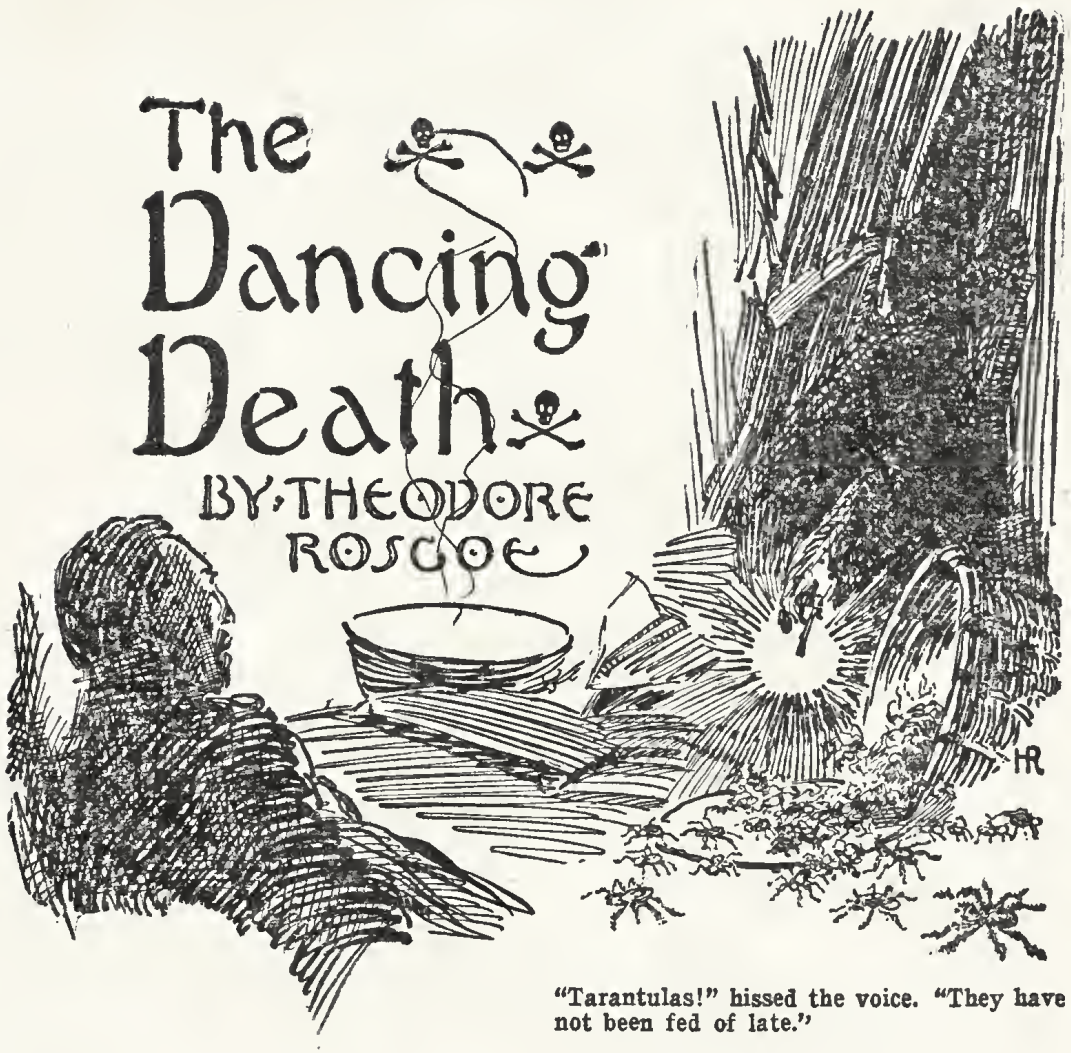
This morning at about 8 o'clock, two officers, led by Dr. E. C. Herrick, a neighbor, broke into the apartments and laboratory of Dr. R. H. Conradi at the Windermere Apartments here.

Dr. Herrick had expressed considerable anxiety during the past few days, when his friend and colleague, Dr. Conradi, failed to leave his room. Dr. Conradi, it seems, was engaged upon some research work, the secret of which he was carefully withholding from the public.

Nothing of Dr. Conradi was discovered. His effects were apparently all in his room. A thorough search was made, but no clue was found. A diary found open on the table was at once appropriated by Dr. Herrick, who refused police officers and reporters a sight of it. It is remarkable to note that on the floor of the room, near a large, broken glass vat, were found some of Dr. Conradi's personal belongings: his watch, his ring, and his belt buckle.

The Dancing Death

BY THEODORE ROSCOE



"Tarantulas!" hissed the voice. "They have not been fed of late."

1. *The Dwarf Rider*

SILENCE, the intense, brooding silence of desolation, hung a somber cloak over the desert as mournful twilight stole down from the country of Khost. Silvered moon with a star at its crescent tip cruised from behind a feathery tumble of cloud to drift in boundless night sky; emblem of the Moslim world it watched, long-awaited signal to terminate the month of Ramadan and end the torturing daily fasts endured by Islam's fanatic sons. Moonlight straying on the sands was ghostly and unreal—ghostly as the distant Suleiman peaks; unreal as the fantasies in the minds of the *charas*-smoking cameleers who puffed in soporific meditation beside their drowsy charges.

Captain Hague of the British Frontier Police watched a pool of moonbeams creep toward the tent door, and grunted.

"Was a time," he grumbled, "when a night like this would o' sent me off the deep end. Sighin', an' thinkin' of girls an' roses an' God. But no more!" He shot a beady glance at Sim Edwards, the American who squatted beside him. "I tell you, lad, this bleedin' land has burnt an' bit th' last parcel of romance outa my skin. Only thing I ever got outa Indian Service was fleas an' colic.

This ain't God's country, lad. He never made it. Any Moslim will tell you Allah had a grudge when this desert was built. Why a blighter comes out here beats me. Romance-huntin', I wager. Most folks that never smelt it think the East is romantic."

Sim Edwards watched a wisp of smoke spiral out of his cheery pipe-bowl.

"I didn't come out here huntin' romance," he confided grimly. "I came out here to get away from it."

"You've got away from it, all right," the captain murmured. "But take my advice, Sim. Your time is almost served. Sign out when we get back"—his smile was a bit wry—"that is, *if* we get back."

The American looked up in surprize. "*If* we get back," he returned. "Why shouldn't we get back?"

Captain Hague chuckled mirthlessly.

"A Yankee does beat hell. I just been tellin' you we gotta go through that rotten border town, run a gantlet of Wazir pot-shots—those natives will be wild as the devil durin' this Ramadan festival—and monkey with that mysterious castle up there. You're a shirty devil, Sim. Lucky, too. Way you got outa that riot on the Kurram River with four bullet-holes in your helmet was a crime. But you're gonna need all your nerve an' luck this trip. All of it. When th' commissioner in Dera Ismaeel Khan handed me this job, an' told me to take 'that Yankee sergeant of yours, who's such a plucky bounder,' I asked him why he didn't murder us outright. Crossin' Waziristan an' goin' through a border town with a few bullets in our pants is plain monotony. But this castle business oughta rate a mystery-merchant from Scotland Yard, not a policeman. When I have to chase down Oriental hoodoos I get scared."

There was no fear, however, in the captain's speech. Fear was not in the vocabulary of that sun-burnt handful who battled to police the far-flung British outposts in the hottest corner of the Empire—a land where knives waited in every sash, where rifles lurked behind every mud-heap. Captain Hague could speak of death in the tone with which he might address a Peshawar egg-vender. There was irony in his tone, but no fear, as he continued:

"I got what Americans call a hunch. A premonition, Sim. There's plenty trouble up ahead. It isn't just a lot of scared tourists marooned in a haunted castle. It's a mighty queer affair. From th' first I've had a funny feelin' I won't pull through this time——"

Sim Edwards said nothing, but stared at the moonlit sands, at the tinted shadows, at the camels kneeling with their cameleers in the nearby wash. Removing his pith helmet he ran slim fingers through his bleached hair; his eyes, cobalt-blue against the bronze of desert-leathered cheeks, studied the horizon.

"Well," he inquired finally, "what's up, Captain? I had an idea from what you first told me that this was something different."

THE older man shifted his camp-stool and sighed smoke through his mustache. A febrile breath of heat whispered out of the night, dusting the men with fine white sand.

"You know that old ruined castle on the hill north of Jelaladore?" he began. "The castle of Addadud Khan? A hell of a place. Spooky as a graveyard. Of course there's a legend about it. Natives rig up legends about everything, but that's a jolly good place for one, believe me. It seems that this ancient blighter Addadud Khan was a bandit like these princes been ever since. He robbed the caravans on their way up to Gomal Pass, an' did a first-class business. An' he hid the treasures he looted in th' castle. Legend says this

Addadud was an ugly little dwarf, and a killer. Well, one night he was stagin' a wild party, an' during this hullabaloo a *peri* sent by Allah started dancin' with him. She kept him dancin' like the devil until the old boy just couldn't stop, an' he danced himself to death—disappeared dancing, see? That's the story. Then the legend goes on to say that the old dwarf haunts his castle, an' anybody who goes near there gets under the spell, an' dances himself to death. You can bet the natives around here hate that place like a sore eye."

"I've heard the yarn," Sim Edwards admitted.

"Sure. They all tell it. And nobody goes within a mile of that castle if they can help it. But last month a Yankee archeologist an' his party got permission to go camp up there lookin' for nomadic records or somethin'. The commissioner didn't want to let 'em through, but they insisted. A girl with 'em, too. So yesterday a Shinwari rides like a bat outa hell up to headquarters with a wild story an' a message that was mighty strange. The party is marooned up in that damned castle, an' some queer business called the 'dancing death' warned them away, an' then killed off three of 'em. The natives in the town are scared mad, thinkin' the *feringhis* are charmed, and won't let 'em out. What we gotta do is get 'em out of there—also find out what this 'dancing death' is all about. That Shinwari who brought the message was so scared he lied a blue streak. But listen, Sim. Three of that party were killed—murdered; the one who scribbled the note couldn't tell how. An' here's the best part of it. It said there was a *dwarf* hidin' in there. Now look"—the captain pointed into the night—"Jelaladore lies straight down that trail about six miles. I'd go on tonight if it wasn't for the festival riot in the town. Those Moslims are worked up fit to kill. Just let 'em catch a *feringhi* in there at midnight! So I figure we'll best stay camped here until dawn. Then we'll bust through Jelaladore an' tear up to the castle an' get those folks out of there. There'll be lots of action, I'm thinkin', an' as for this mystery business, only God knows what it's about. How do you like that, Sim?"

It was characteristic of Sim Edwards' blue eyes and whittled jaw that he should answer: "I like it. And look there! Where you've been pointing. Isn't that a horseman on the desert out there? See? On the ridge there? Heading this way——"

"Sure enough." The captain rose to his feet. "Making for our camp, all right. Looks like he was coming from Jelaladore. Kick up that campfire, Sam. It may be word for us——"

Automatics in hand they waited the horseman's arrival. A fleeting shadow in the moonlight, the desert-rider approached, now lost to view in a wash, now flitting along a ridge. Captain Hague's surmise proved accurate, for the rider galloped straight toward their camp, pulling up his pony a short distance from the tent. The sweating animal reared to a halt. From the fluttering folds of his burnoose the rider raised a hand.

"*Salaam aleikoum!*" he chanted.

Captain Hague returned the salutation.

"*Wa' aleikoum!*"

The rider wrenched his reins and pulled the pony closer to the tent. Hunched over the saddle, he peered at the two policemen, and the policemen stared in return. Captain Hague stared; and Sim Edwards stared. This desertman who had ridden out of the night was something to stare at, too. Crippled and bent as a stunted juniper he was, a veritable dwarf squatting like a grotesque toad astride the pony. Shielding his deformity, a sheepskin cloak hung from his stooped shoulders. From the bandages wound about his face, his eyes glittered like pools of ink in the moonlight. The in-

evitable long-barreled Afghan rifle was slung from his waist, and a withered, twisty-fingered hand caressed the jeweled gun-stock. For a brief second the American thought the newcomer was going to shoot, and his hand sweat on his automatic. Then a sepulchral voice issued from the bandaged jaw in a torrent of Pushtu. Plunging the malformed hand beneath the sheepskin cloak, the rider withdrew a folded missive, and handed it to Captain Hague. Then sliding from saddle, he crouched beside the American. Captain Hague read the note.

"From the party in the castle," he informed Edwards. "This fellow was on his way for help. We're to follow him through Jelaladore at once. Go beat those cameleers awake, Sim. I'll give this bloke a spot of wine to fix him up. We'll move as soon as he's rested. Saddle the camels, an' I'll be with you in a moment."

Saluting, Edwards hurried for the wash. From the corner of his eye he saw the captain, followed by the hobbling cripple, duck into the tent. The young American shuddered despite himself. What a ghastly cripple the little rider was! Curious coincidence after all the captain's talk about dwarfs and haunted castles. This was the strangest commission Edwards had ever found himself on. He had never heard Captain Hague talk so uneasily. And all this "dancing death" and mysterious murder stuff sounded like drama he had seen in the old days back in the States. But if there was any scrapping to be done, Edwards, like Captain Hague, would have preferred to fight something tangible and out in the open. Well, he would soon find out what it was all about. A glance at his wrist-watch showed an hour lacking midnight. Bah, he snarled at himself, the moonlight had gotten on his nerves. He cursed at the cameleers, and kicked at the sniffling mounts. And he damned himself for a nervous fool when his fingers fumbled at the camel-straps.

2. The Haunted Castle

JELALADORE is a huddle of hutches and wriggling lanes scribbled down the bottom of a narrow valley and blistered by the fiercest sun that ever bleached the bones of man. The commissioner in Dera Ismaeel Khan said of the town of Jelaladore that it boasted more villains per square foot than flees on a Pathan's goat. Not a wall in the town unpeppered with little bullet-holes. Not a man of its sun-scorched citizenry untutored in the delicate art of sinning. To stroll in the ovenlike mosque of Alam Gul with shoes on is heinous crime. To drop a cousin with a bullet in the eye is honorable accomplishment.

On the hot slope sweeping north of the town rise the crumbly walls of the ancient Castle of Addadud Khan, black against night sky, grim in sunlight, always forbidding. The natives who joy in gunfire and chuckle at knife-play will walk ten miles out of their way to avoid the castle. They know the legend of the "dancing death," and they believe. The East has faith.

On the evening of the Ramadan festival when Jelaladore prepared to discard religion and take on the happier mien of dopes and drinks, bullets and blood, four men and a girl stood frozen-still in a gloomy arcade of the castle behind the town. They stood frozen-still and waited, in murk made dismal by two fluttering lanterns, for death to enter the gloomy hall. They waited for death to enter and snatch the life flickering so horribly in the man spraddled on the cot before them. Marble-white, his good English countenance was screwed into the grin of a false-face. He was shivering in every limb, muscles jerking spasmodically. His fingers clawed. His lips curled. His boot-heels rattled together. Eyes

blank, he did not see the terror in the faces of those watching him.

"God!" cried the little man with the Cockney chin, dropping to the cot-side. "I say, Harry! What is it, old chap? I say!"

The eyes in the twitching face were expressionless as stone.

"Harry!" The little man's voice was a wail of despair. "Gawd! Can't none of us do nothin' for him?"

The girl, her cheeks like wet marble, buried her face in the shoulder of the gaunt man at her side. He patted her arm with a leathery hand, and dazedly brushed his droopy mustache.

"Come away, Laurie," he urged her. "I'm afraid he's going the way the others did."

The third man, tall, stooped, bearded with thick brown bush, coughed nervously and turned to the girl and her father.

"I tell you, Merrick Scott, there was no warning of this. None. Clark had gotten himself a drink of wine before going to search the lower passageways with his brother, here."

"But Brown-Rogers!" the gaunt Merrick Scott protested. "You were a doctor. Haven't you any idea what's wrong?"

"None. It seems to be a fit. I've done all I can. He fell over and lost consciousness exactly as did the others. In a fit. Now he dies. My God! If we could only get out of here!"

The fourth man now bent over the cot to inspect the prone figure. He was a man of peculiarly long countenance and loose carriage. Dusky tinge to his cheek betrayed trace of native blood, Afghan perhaps, though he claimed himself Russian-Turkoman. Clad in the same trim drill as his companions, he might have been taken for a European but for the gleam of his teeth and the gloss of his black eyes. His voice was guilty of no accent, and as he talked he always gestured a lean, brown hand. This was Stepan Stepanovitch, geologist from Samarkand.

"He dies," was his comment. "There seems no way of stopping it. This is dreadful, my friends. The fourth to die. Who will be next?"

Brown-Rogers, the tall English scientist, gave a baffled groan, and tugged his beard.

"We *must* get away. If we only had our rifles!"

Merrick Scott, the American, swore softly. "To think they were filched right out from under our noses!"

The Turkoman gave him a mystified smile. "Do not wonder at that, Dr. Scott. These Afghans steal the guns from the very belts of the Tommies. The Tommies are forced to chain them down at night. What I wonder at is the ghastly death of our comrade. He is dying. Who has done it? Who has sent those strange warnings? What does it all mean?"

Merrick Scott snarled. "No time to ponder, Stepanovitch. I've got to get my daughter away from here."

"But those two Moslims still guard the outer gate. To try a dash through would be fatal," objected Brown-Rogers. "We must wait for the arrival of the police. It is our only hope." He glanced at his watch. "Eight o'clock, Merrick. If Mardo won his way through to Dera Ismaeel Khan and our rescuers set out at once they ought to reach Jelaladore late tonight."

"Do you think they will come tonight?" sobbed the girl.

"No," said Brown-Rogers bluntly. "They'd be shot to pieces in Jelaladore if they did. The festival will have the natives insane. Tomorrow they can get here."

"When you sent for help," interpolated the Turkoman, "why didn't you let me know? I could have aided with the message. It may not have gotten through. If they are not here tomorrow I will try myself. And come, my friends, let us not stand idle. For Clark we can do nothing. Let us

leave him with his brother. Perhaps if we search the passages further we can find some rear way of escape. There must be another exit from this place. Are the tribesmen still watching on the hill?"

Laurie nodded hopelessly. "I've kept an eye on them and they've been stationed there all day," she declared.

Leaving her father's side she darted to a narrow slit of window that opened on barren compound. The compound was overrun with weed, acacia, and ragged rhododendron, and shaded by a venerable peepul-tree brilliant with scarlet blossoms. "It's getting too dark to see," she called. "But I think they're still on watch."

"Better not go too close to the windows," warned the Turkoman. "These Afghans are the world's best shots, Miss Scott. Now as long as we stay in here, we're safe. They'll never dare come near here——"

"Safe from the natives," growled Brown-Rogers; "but how about this murderer that's on us?"

"We won't find out anything standing here," protested Stepanovitch. "I suggest that Miss Scott try to rest. We can leave Mr. Clark with his brother, and we can make a further survey of the cellars below. That is my humble advice, my friends. If you gentlemen will search the forward dungeons I will examine those in the rear. Let us conduct our hunt, then."

The geologist's quiet assurance calmed the panic about to descend on that shadowy chamber where death had stalked its fourth victim in as many days. Clark sat speechless beside his dying and now motionless brother. Laurie allowed herself led to the room where she had taken up her quarters and where she had spent her nights in exhaustive vigil with her father.

"Stay here," he enjoined her, "and try to rest, Laurie. Stepanovitch is right. We want to work fast and try to run down any way of escape. This place is honeycombed with passageways, and there must be one leading outside. I hate to leave you here, little daughter, but Clark is near and we won't be long."

Terrifying prospect, waiting there in that shadow-hung, tomblike room darkening with the nightfall while a man died without and bats flitted across the ceiling. But Laurie Scott took her father's hand, and pressed it firmly.

"I'll be all right. The police will soon be here. I'll keep watch over the compound and perhaps the guards will leave. And—and—Father, please be careful."

He kissed her and hurried to join Brown-Rogers and Stepanovitch. Picking up a lantern, the tall Englishman led the way to a staircase that wound down to the dungeons deep in the fore-part of the castle. The Turkoman vanished in the shadows of a rear corridor.

Silvered moon with a star at its crescent tip cruised from behind a feathery tumble of cloud. A white pool of light fell across the stone floor of Laurie's room. In an agony of fear she sat alone and listened to the wind soughing through the casements high overhead, to the fluttering of bats, to the labored breathing of the man, alive and dying, in the darkened hall. She sat there, breathless, for half an hour before she realized that something was at her window. She shrieked when she saw.

A crippled, twiglike hand, a withered tangle of bony, twisted fingers reached up over the sill; rattled the stone grating; gestured. A brown sheet of paper dropped from the knotty talons and fell into the room.

Laurie's screams echoed and reechoed in the cavernous corridors. Clark came bounding from the hall. Brown-Rogers and Merrick Scott raced up from the passageways beneath.

"A dried-up thing—an awful hand—dropped that paper through the window——"

The archeologist snatched it. Written in precise and clearly penned English it bore the words:

> Again you are warned to replace the jewels one of you has taken, or tomorrow another will die. The police you expect will not arrive. THE DANCING DEATH.

Laurie coughed and faited.

Brown-Rogers sprang to the window. In the compound—nothing, save moonbeams sprinkling through the blossoming foliage of the peepul-tree.

3. The Dancing Death

THE two cameleers were prodded into activity; the three camels were saddled and loaded; Sim Edwards had inspected the water-bags, and sat on the sand going over his guns. From the wash where the camels had been hobbled the captain's tent could not be seen. The young American sergeant waited, impatient for the start. He looked at his watch. Eleven-thirty. Captain Hague was taking his time. Edwards was about to start for the tent when he was surprized to see the crippled desertman appear on the ridge, go bobbing over to his pony, mount and ride away. The pony swept past the camels. The desertman waved. Then pony and rider vanished among the moon-thrown shadows of the dunes.

"That's funny!" muttered Edwards. "I thought that bird was going to guide us through the town. Wonder why the captain sent him off. Hell of a looking guy, anyway."

Lighting a cigarette he sat down again. Captain Hague failed to come. Edwards barked at the cameleers to wait ready, and scrambled out of the wash.

Even as he sighted the little tent he knew something was wrong. Heaving shadows danced against the canvas walls; heaving shadows flung by the lantern on the table within; shadows that waved and ducked and bowed. With a curse on his lips Edwards ran to the tent and whipped aside the flap. The sweat crawled down his face at what he saw.

Sprawling on his camp-stool, the big police captain was jerking and twitching and kicking like a giant marionette of which every string was being yanked at once. The captain's body writhed in the grip of spasm. His hands quivered and curled in his lap. His feet rapped the sand and tinkled the pieces of his dropped gin-glass. His face was white as paste, eyes staring, lips opening and shutting in voiceless oration.

Sim Edwards' cry clattered out in the night.

"Cap!" he shrieked, rushing into the tent and clasping the officer's shoulders. "Cap! What is it, Cap?"

The shuddering shoulders stilled under his grip. The twitching features chilled to a set grimace. The mouth snapped shut. The whole body seemed to quiet and collapse. Sim Edwards worked with the sweat streaming down his cheeks. He chafed the officer's cold hands. He snatched the gin-flask from the camp-table and forced a drink through the captain's teeth. He tore open the drill tunic and clapped a hand over the captain's heart. With a horrified start he let the body fall from his clasp. The captain's heart was not beating. The captain's hunch had proved correct.

"Dead! What in God's name will I do now? Died of a stroke—a fit——"

Nonplussed, the American rose from his knees, stared about him, strove to think. Incredible that Captain Hague was dead—had died in the twinkling of a moment—died in the ghastly throes of a convulsive fit. There were the fragments of his drinking-glass smashed from his shaking fingers. There was his flask on the camp-table. There was the empty cup drained by the little desertman. . . .

Edwards jumped. Pinned to the wall of the tent, just behind the lantern, a ragged sheet of paper was rustling in the breeze. Edwards tore

it from the canvas; held it in the light. Amazement, fear, rage, played successively over his face as he read the words scrawled in English:

Keep away from the forbidden castle. Do not push on. Beware the Dancing Death.

And that was all Sim Edwards, American sergeant of the British Frontier Police, needed to know. A human hand had dealt death to Captain Hague—a malignant human hand that struck in diabolic fashion and dropped its victim with horrible malady—the withered hand of that malformed dwarf who had fled in the night. Suddenly Edwards remembered the mission to Jelaladore, the legend of the haunted castle where the white party was imprisoned. That was where the dwarf was heading!

Darting from the tent, Edwards fled for the wash. Yelling at his cameleers to wait right there for him until he returned, and on pain of death to keep away from the captain sahib's tent, he snatched a halter and mounted one of the gaunt beasts. With a shout and a whack at his camel he was rocking off across the desert on the trail to Jelaladore.

4. Vanished!

SIM EDWARDS was no novice at camel-riding. Otherwise he could never have endured the pace he held, for it takes no little experience to stay aboard a fast-galloping camel. Fortunately no recent simoom had obliterated the desert trail, and the ungainly beast raced over the beaten path. Moreover, a moonlight revealed fresh pony-tracks in the sand. Clinging to his jutting saddle-horn, Edwards snarled with delight as he saw the betraying hoof-prints. Automatic in fist, he urged his mount to a frenzied gait.

Past looming sandbanks fantastic in shadow, down smooth slopes, across breeze-swept ridges the trail led. Topping a hilly dune, Edwards caught his first sight of Jelaladore, a twinkling huddle of lights clustered at the foot of a line of hills that stood like a motionless caravan against the night sky. And Edwards saw something else—a pony dashing down the trail far ahead.

At the same time the rider ahead sighted him. Edwards saw the flame of the gun stab out in the darkness, heard the moan of a bullet winging past his head and the crackle of the echoing shot. Walloping the shabby rump of his camel, he sent the animal bounding. Fire spouted from the automatic under his fingers. Flame-tongues streaked the night as, shooting from the saddle, Edwards chased the desertman toward the town. A wild race. The American was gaining slowly, but that creature on the pony could ride. He could shoot, too. Edwards could see him clearly in the moonlight, his sheepskin cloak flagging from his hunched shoulders, his turban streaming. He would swing in his saddle, there would be a flash, and a bullet would croon close to Edwards' helmet.

Over the sands the riders fled, the low walls of the town drawing ever nearer. Edwards' gun heated in his hand. But he could not hit the desertman, and the pony gained an archway in the town wall several rods ahead of the camel. Edwards did not halt his chase. Hard on the flying pony-hoofs he held his mount, straight into the seething town. Through a scuttering bazar the mad race wove its way. Natives yowled and scattered like leaves whirling in wind. The American fired with abandon, hoping to drop the fleet pony. The froglike desertman returned shot for shot. Up one lane and down another. Across a crowded marketplace.

A mighty racket rose in the town. Bullets hummed like darting bees. Rioting tribesmen joined battle. In brilliant patches of light and shadow Edwards glimpsed a rolling sea of ducking turbans, the glint of gun-barrels and knives. Squawks, shots,

howls rang in his ears. Dust eddied like smoke under scurrying sandals. Through the milling, frantic mobs Edwards charged his camel, never losing sight of the man he chased. How he ever followed that dwarf through the town was a miracle. Across a maze of alleyways evil with water-holes and stench, down lanes jammed with animals and men, dodging across the town and through the northern gate the dwarf rider fled. And Sim Edwards fled after him. Both had exhausted their ammunition.

The moon rode clear and its wan glow transformed the sandy slope behind the town to a silvered mound and cast strange shadows from the walls of the castle squatting on the hill. Drawing rein at the foot of the slope, the dwarf leapt from the saddle and ran fast as a deer, making for the ruin. Edwards cursed in surprize at the fleetness of the crippled fugitive; dropped from his camel, and followed, running hard. Sand flew from his heels and breath whined from his lungs as he pounded up the slope. The dwarf, bent in grotesque posture, was legging it along the castle wall. Edwards sprinted. He was just in time to see the stooped figure scoot around a corner of the wall, dart across a weedy compound, and plunge into a clump of rhododendrons at the base of a spreading peepul-tree. Recklessly the American followed, scrambling into the thicket. So great was his haste that he flopped headlong into a yawning tunnel-mouth that opened at the roots of the tree.

Sound of footsteps beating a retreat down the Stygian passageway that dropped into the earth brought Edwards leaping to his feet and jumping down a crumbled flight of stone steps to follow. The tunnel was very narrow, low, fusty and choked with dust. Edwards hurried along with outstretched hands blindly feeling over the walls. In the inky darkness he stumbled over roots and slipped on loose stones. A blow on the head from a jutting point of rock tore off his helmet and warned him to go slowly. Twice he paused to listen. Each time he heard the fugitive just ahead of him, and ran on. It was no fun hustling down that winding, pitch-black hole, but Sim Edwards was driven by fierce desire to get his hands on the throat of the dwarf. Panting, he redoubled his speed. The dwarf could not be far away.

SUDDENLY the passage took a sharp turn and opened abruptly on a wide, rock-walled cavern mistily lighted by tallow burning in a dish suspended from the low ceiling. So abruptly did the passage end that Edwards crashed into the wall on the turn, and reeled blindly into the center of the cave. Rubbing his eyes and gasping, he stared about him. At one end of the cavern a deep, circular pit was scooped out of the floor, and in this pit a huge cauldron—a great iron kettle some five feet in diameter and four feet deep—simmered over fire-coals and emitted a bilious odor. At the side of the cauldron stood a little wicker basket. But it was not big enough to hold the dwarfed desert-man. And the dwarf was nowhere to be seen.

Edwards swore, and rushed about the cavern. In a far corner he found a stack of rifles—two Enfields, a Winchester, an old LePage. Snatching up an Enfield, he continued his hunt—a useless search, for there was absolutely no place where the fugitive could have hidden. He was not in the pit. He was not in the bare cavern. With a cry of surprize Edwards discovered the sheepskin cloak the dwarf had worn lying against the wall in a shadowy nook.

"Thrown off his cloak. So he came in here after all! Where the——"

Stooping to pick up the cloak, Edwards discovered the crack in the floor.

"Trap-door! So here's where he escaped!"

A hand-niche was cut in the stone. Edwards tugged, pulled up a square flag and disclosed a steep flight of steps dropping into the abysmal darkness of a still deeper subterranean tunnel. And someone was down there. Wavering light revealed the approach of someone bearing a lantern.

Drawing away from the trap-door, Edwards crouched in shadow, gun ready, nerves taut. And then, to his complete bafflement, no hunchbacked, ragged dwarf, but a tall, drill-clad man clambered from the hole and stood, lantern in hand, blinking uncertainly in the dusk. When he saw Edwards his jaw dropped, and he sprang back in surprize.

"An Englishman!" he exclaimed. "What? Who——?"

"Hands high!" snapped Edwards. "Put down that lantern, and stand over there against the wall. Where's the dwarf?"

"Dwarf! What the devil! Who are *you?*"

"Where's the dwarf who escaped down that tunnel? Come on! I followed him in here. That's the only place he could have gone. Where is he?"

"Why, this is all very astounding! Dwarf? I—why—it must be the same creature who has terrorized the natives and—you are of the police? Thank God! Thank Allah!" The man lapsed into Russian profanity.

Edwards lowered his gun.

"You! Are you one of the party marooned in this castle? Are you one of the men who sent for help?"

"But, yes! Stepan Stepanovitch is my name. The others are in the castle above. I—I have been wandering about in these underground passages for four hours, hunting means of escape. This ground is honeycombed. I—I found this passageway and was just searching it when I saw the light from this door you have opened. I came up the steps. Find this cavern. Find you here." He looked about him. "Why! Name of Allah, but there are the guns stolen from us! In that distant corner, there! What is that pit, and that kettle? How did you get in here? Does that tunnel, there, lead from the town?"

"Listen to me!" interrupted Edwards. "I chased an old hunchback into this cavern. He *must* have gone down that door. Here's the cloak he dropped, right here."

"But no one was down there! I saw no one at all! I was just coming toward those steps as you opened the door——"

"Well, damn *me!*" Edwards snarled. "This is th' craziest affair!" He clenched his fist. "I tell you there's a crippled-up devil came in here, an' I chased him right on his heels. A murderin' little desertman all runted up like a demon. He came in here, an' I'm goin' to get him! There must be another door leadin' out of here!"

There was no other door. Search high and low, inspect floor, walls, ceiling, the pit where the cauldron simmered, search as they might, they could find nothing to betray means of escape.

"Someone keeps that fire alive under that stinkin' kettle," growled Edwards. "That devil is around here somewheres."

Lowering himself into the pit, he peered into the kettle. Nobody could have hidden in that steaming, bubbling brew. Edwards sickened at the smell of it. Reaching down, he unhooked the cover of the little wicker basket, and hastily shut it again. Spiders! The basket was filled with a writhing, moving mass of hairy legs, black, brown, nauseating. Swearing and ill, Edwards climbed from the pit, and faced the man holding the lantern. Suddenly he was hot, tired, suffocated by the thick air of the cavern.

"You say there are others in the castle above? All right. And those

guns in the corner belong to them? Good enough. I'll carry them. Everybody in this place is under arrest and going to help hunt for that dwarf. Lead me to your friends. Let's get out of here."

As he picked up the rifles and slung them under his arm, he gave a final glance about the cavern. And he had to admit himself utterly confounded. The malformed desertman whom he had chased from the camp south of Jelaladore, on whose heels he had clung through the night-black passage, had disappeared—vanished as easily as did the ghosts of legendry—vanished, and left behind nothing but a ragged sheepskin mantle. Edwards picked up the cloak, studied it. He would hardly have been surprized had it faded from sight. With a baffled oath he flung the cloak from him, and started after the tall man who called himself Stepan Stepanovitch. The ragged garment fell into the pit where the cauldron simmered—an incident worthy of mention; for among the startling events to follow, that ragged sheepskin cloak was to play an important part.

5. *An Incredible Story*

IN THE eery gloom of the castle arcade they stood, a strange company lined back to the wall. Wavering lantern-flame painted bizarre shadows down the floor. A shaft of moonlight filtered through a casement high in the tower overhead. From the purlieus of the town in the valley rose the banshee wail of wild dogs chorusing. Sim Edwards stood facing the others, talking. His first move, on being led up from the dungeon passages by the Turkoman, had been to call the party together.

"I want to talk with all of you at the same time," he began grimly, "and see where we start. I'm Sergeant Edwards, British Frontier Police. Which one of you is head of this party?"

The tall, elderly man at the end of the line stepped forward, and spoke in a quavering voice.

"I am. Merrick Scott of Baltimore. This girl is my daughter Laurie. The gentleman next her is Professor Brown-Rogers of London. Then Curtis Clark, our excavating engineer, and Stepan Stepanovitch whom you have already met——"

"Good. If the young lady is tired she is free to go."

Laurie Scott shook her head. "I should like to stay."

Edwards nodded. "All right. Now listen. Two days ago your message reached Dera Ismaeel Khan. I did not see it. But Captain Hague, who ordered me out on this trip with him, told me about it." Edwards explained briefly how they had set out, deciding to camp that night outside of Jelaladore and push on to the castle in the morning. He told of the strange rider who had brought the spurious message for help; of the horrible and inexplicable death of Captain Hague; of the warning written in English and left by the dwarf; of the chase through Jelaladore, the pursuit into the tunnel, the disappearance of the dwarf, the meeting with Stepanovitch. "That the dwarf was responsible for my captain's awful death I know. And I know he is hiding somewhere within this castle." Edwards smacked a fist to a palm. "I'm going to get to the bottom of this murdering business, and you must help me. You're heading this party, Scott. Will you try to outline your experience here——"

"We have had a terrible time!" Merrick Scott's voice was strained with anxiety. Edwards noted that they all looked as if worn by fearful nervous tension. "We have had a frightful five days. Unable to get out of here; harassed and murdered by that—that ghastly *thing;* waiting here in the heat, in the awful quiet at night. . . . " The old scientist glared about nervously. "I'll tell you. We started from Baltimore,

Laurie and I, to meet Brown-Rogers in London. Our intention was to get up a party to explore this region, hunt records of the lost nomad Ouigur tribes. We knew this region was particularly rich in such lore, and desired mightily to explore this castle. I'm backed by a Baltimore society, and Brown-Rogers is of the *London Survey*. In London we acquired the services of Curtis Clark and his brother Harry as excavating engineers. Both had worked before in the Egyptian Sudan. In Bombay we were met by Austin Yard, Frank Rossiter, and Mark Van Lue——" Merrick Scott's voice broke. "They—they were to come with us. We journeyed across India into the Northwest Province, and obtained governmental permission to enter Afghan territory. We were in Dera Ismaeel Khan for several weeks, then set out for Jelaladore. We arrived at Jelaladore at night and put up at a *caravanserai*. We were warned by the innkeeper there that it was no time to be in the city, as the Moslims were stirred to fever heat by religious ceremonies. When he found out we were going to the Castle of Addadud Khan he was even more horrified. An old Mohammedan *mullah* warned us strenuously to go back. I—I thought it was all foolishness. This —Stepan Stepanovitch, here, happened to be in the *serai* that evening. Overhearing our discussions, he begged the liberty to urge us to depart at once. He told us the legend of the dancing death, and we laughed. Then he volunteered to come with us. As a geologist he would be of great value. We were glad he came."

"What were you doing in Jelaladore?" interrupted Edwards, turning on the Turkoman.

"I had been there for a month," Stepanovitch replied. "Came but recently from Samarkand. I know the country well, and the natives. I have been studying rock strata throughout the region."

"And you warned these people to stay away?"

"Indeed, I entreated them. The legend of the castle is on every tongue. Many natives swear to having seen the ghost of Addadud Khan, and the week before these people arrived at the *serai* the whole town was terrified by the story of an Afridi tribesman who claimed he had seen the dwarf in the castle compound that night—undoubtedly the same creature you pursued here. It is because of their fear of this place that the tribesmen in the town did not follow you. We have been safe from them as long as we remained within the castle."

"He warned us, and we thought it was just the usual Oriental voodoo stuff," admitted Brown-Rogers, wiping his face.

"Nor was I actually convinced," explained the Turkoman. "Would to Allah I had been! But then I offered to come with them, not a little interested in their project."

A bat flitted down from the whispery shadows of the tower, and they all started uneasily. Weird bay of the wild dogs chilled the turbid gloom. Clark sniffled audibly. Edwards brushed drops of sweat from his upper lip, and the rifles slung under his arm felt reassuring.

"We came into the castle next morning," Merrick Scott went on, "and found it a comfortable place to camp. Our native bearers refused to come with us, all except Brown-Rogers' Shinwari boy, Mardo. That day we spent exploring the old place. We found many things of interest. Clark and his brother were to excavate portions of the ruined dungeon. I spent the day with Laurie making notes. Brown-Rogers, Van Lue, Rossiter and Yard and Stepan were exploring the underground passages. Suddenly I discovered that our rifles had disappeared. I was about to step outside the arch opening on the compound when a bullet clipped past me,

and I saw a pair of riflemen on a hill shooting at me. Frightened, I called the party together. Nobody knew what had become of the guns, and we realized they had been stolen. We also realized that we were hemmed in, as there was no other means of exit from the castle than the one guarded. Thank God we had enough food and a supply of wine to drink. We decided to wait the night out, and in the morning try to find out the intention of the Moslim enemy.

"That night the—the first message came. It was almost ridiculous. We —we thought it was a joke. That's what we thought. Frank Rossiter, one of the students from Bombay, found it near our packs." The old scientist fumbled in a pocket, drew some crumpled papers, and held them in the lamplight. "There's the first warning that came."

Sim Edwards took the extended slip, and frowned as he read it:

Replace the jewels one of you has found, or tonight one of your party will die. Beware. THE DANCING DEATH.

"That's the first warning that came, and we thought it was a prank. Each of us accused the other, and then because of Laurie I thought the joke had gone far enough. But nobody would admit it. And not an hour later Mark Van Lue died!" Merrick Scott's voice fell to a hoarse undertone. "Van Lue died a ghastly death—I swear to God he did. I happened to be at his side before the others. He was jiggling—seemed to have lost muscular control—eyes wide—he—it —it was like Saint Vitus' dance—a *dance*, I tell you. Horrible! Terrible!"

"I had once studied and practised a bit of medicine," declared Brown-Rogers, "and never in my experience had I encountered anything like it. Nor had the rest of us. Poor Van Lue was stricken down and dead inside of ten minutes."

"And in what manner we could not tell," Merrick Scott continued. "That first night was a frightful night. We were all too much terrified to think. But we could do nothing except wait, and daylight showed the Moslims still watching on the hill. When we appeared in the archway they fired at us again. We were trapped. We—and then came another warning. Here it is. The same as the first. And it caught Frank Rossiter. Rossiter died that second afternoon; and that night, after a third warning, Austin Yard was killed. All in the same manner. You can imagine how terrible it has been! Just sitting here, waiting. The third afternoon I scribbled a message for help, and we prevailed on Brown-Rogers' boy to take it. Perhaps the Moslims would let a Shinwari through. The Shinwari made a dash for the gate, signaled, and his fellow tribesmen let him go. I knew the note would fetch police. Another night of waiting. Then this morning a fourth warning came, and about 7 o'clock this evening Harry Clark was struck by the—the dance. All day we have hunted in the underground passages, hoping to find means of escape or trace of the dwarf. Laurie saw the creature the second evening—a mere shadow crossing the compound. But, while we were in the forward dungeons searching—we have buried the victims there—we heard screams. Running up, we found Laurie with another warning. Not five hours ago! An awful hand had dropped it in her window. The last three hours have been frightful. We could not find Stepanovitch—it was necessary to place the last murdered beside the others—and—and thank God you have come! Thank God you found the rifles! Thank God——"

Exhausted by the long recital, Merrick Scott slipped to his knees. Laurie ran for a bottle of wine. Clark, Brown-Rogers and Stepanovitch crowded about the fainting man. Edwards grabbed up a lantern, and studied the paper slips the old scien-

tist had handed him. All five bore the same message, were scribbled in English by the same hand. Edwards glared at Clark, the excavation engineer; at Brown-Rogers of the *London Survey;* at Stepanovitch, geologist from Samarkand; at the white face of Merrick Scott.

"My oath on it that someone is playing hand in glove with that old dwarf," he murmured to himself. "Someone who knows the inside dope. One of this gang found a treasure in here. The bird who's done all this is making a big play for it. And that dwarf——"

Laurie Scott was crying out. Edwards was at her side in a bound. She had been unpacking a fresh wine-bottle from the provision kit, and had found the message slipped under a strap. It had been scrawled in haste, and read:

> Send the girl to the cavern and the rest of you can go unmolested. Send her at once, or it will mean death to all. Last warning. THE DANCING DEATH.

A breath of oppressive heat sighed out of the desert. Bats streaked in crazy flight across the ceiling of the arcade. From the precincts of the town came the dismal lament of wild dogs mourning at the moon.

6. *Ensnared!*

LAURIE SCOTT spoke in a low voice. "I'll go."

Edwards could not clearly see her face, but he knew from her tone that she was terrified and that she would go.

"No you don't," he hushed her. "And don't let your father hear of this."

"I mean it," she insisted. "We haven't a chance against this—this death. For the sake of all the others—for the sake of my father I will follow the demand——"

"No!" Edwards dropped a hand on her wrist. It was like ice. "Of course we couldn't let you." He swung around on Brown-Rogers. "That note was placed there while we were at the other end of the hall. It must have been. The dwarf must have crept out of this back passage. Quick! Do as I say and nothing can hurt you. You, Clark, and you, Brown-Rogers, take a rifle. Miss Scott, you take this one. I'll keep the LePage. Now you three stay up here with Miss Scott's father. Don't leave this hall. Stepanovitch, can you lead me back through those passages to the cavern? Good. I'll follow you. You take the lantern. We must hurry. We'll nab that devil this time!"

"Can't we come?" begged Clark, fingering the rifle.

"I want you two to stay with the girl and her father. He's done out, and they mustn't stay alone. If anything comes up, don't hesitate to shoot. We'll get out of here as soon as I come back. Come on, Stepanovitch. Make it quick!"

Ducking down the rear corridor, Edwards followed the Turkoman. Down twisty passageways, rank with foul air; along low tunnels where cobwebs hung in veils; through dank dungeons thick with mist and carpeted with century-lain dust. The Turkoman in the lead did not hesitate, and Edwards, trailing with rifle in taut fingers, urged his guide to greater speed.

"We'll catch that beggar, now. And if he isn't in the cavern it won't matter. I want to look into that pit, again."

Out of breath and sweating when the steps below the trap-door were finally reached, Edwards panted to Stepanovitch: "Wait. I'll go first. You follow with the lantern."

His heart was pounding as he slowly shoved up the stone flag. The cavern was dark as a whale-hole, for the tallow in the dish had apparently burned out. Streaks of light from the lantern dropped yellow strips on the cavern ceiling, misted the thick darkness. Edwards poked his rifle into the

gloom as he cautiously crept up the steps. Then he saw the cavern was empty, and he motioned the Turkoman to come up.

The air in the cavern was oppressive, and the lantern flame wavered. Edwards blinked and glared about uncertainly.

"Nothing here," muttered the Turkoman.

"Wait by the steps," commanded Edwards. "I want to take a look at what's in that pit."

The fire-coals were still burning beneath the big kettle, and as Edwards approached he could hear the gurgle of the bubbling brew, smell the evil aroma of the simmering mess. He was kneeling on the edge of that mysterious pit, bending down to see.

"Stepanovitch," he called. "Bring the light."

Crash! To the clinkle of shattering glass the cavern was plunged into night.

"Help! Allah!" The Turkoman's cry choked out in the blackness. Edwards heard the shuffle of scuffling boots, the whine of gasping breath. As the lantern smashed he had flung about and to one side. Now he crouched low in that infernal dark, groped his way to the wall, and started crawling toward the racket at the other end of the cave. His hand grew wet on his gun, and sweat wriggled down his cheeks. Something was bumping and banging along the wall. He dared not fire. Tense as strung wire, he waited.

Crack! Slugging out of the pitch-black murk an unseen missile caught Edwards on the forehead, and he crumpled.

A CHOKING gag bound his jaw, and thongs cut flesh where they lashed wrists and ankles. There was no light, and he could not see what he could hear and feel moving near him. For a minute he wondered whether he was blind. Desperately he tried to spit the gag from his teeth, and he was squirming fiercely when a hand fastened a grip on his collar.

"Lie still," a whispery voice commanded; and the next minute he was being dragged across the floor.

The hand released him and he sank back on his shoulders. A dull ache surged across his forehead, but his reviving senses were keen. A faint bubbling sound reached his ears; a nauseating aroma drifted to his nostrils, told him he was lying on the edge of the pit. Pain seared his neck as he tried to raise his head, and he could only succeed in turning it to one side. He had guessed aright. He was lying on the rim of the pit. He could just see the coals smoldering beneath the great cauldron, a cluster of hot cinders glowing, throwing a faint, crimson phantom-light on the floor of the pit.

The hidden voice breathed out of the darkness. "So you are conscious."

Edwards spat in the gag and fought to loosen the thong binding his wrists.

"Do not struggle," the voice whispered. "Die peacefully, as befits a sergeant of the British Frontier Police." The tone was ironic. "Yes, die nicely. The Turkoman is already dead. The others will die. The dancing death claims all who come within the shadow of my castle. All except the girl."

A maniac, thought Edwards, working at his bonds. Or was it one of those he had left in the castle hall, disguising his voice?

The whispering continued: "I tell you this to make you suffer the more. What a fool you are—American no doubt—who so rashly defies the powers of the East! Ah—to defy the dancing death! The dancing death that hides in that cauldron below you!" A mocking laugh, chill as clinking metal, sent a shudder down Edwards' spine. "Oh ho! A drop, a single drop of that brew in one's drink—pah!—and that one is waltzing and dancing like a madman. Oh ho!" Edwards felt the hair prickle

on the nape of his neck. "That is the dancing death! Tarantula wine! You had guessed, eh? And now the others all will taste it—all except the girl—and *you.*"

Edwards was jerked to a sitting posture, slung like a sack of meal over the edge of the pit, let fall to the bottom. Lying there groaning on his back, the bulging side of the hissing cauldron not a yard from his face, heat from the glowing coals smarting his eyes, he was assailed by a horrible thought. He could hear his unseen captor scrambling down beside him and chuckling as he did so. Was the monster going to boil him alive?

"I could drop you into the brew," the voice whispered on, "but that might spoil it. Might spoil my wine. But I have something better, and slower, than drowning."

Cold hands fumbled over Edwards' face, and he was tugged about so that he was farther from the cauldron.

"Good. The better you can see. And the better they can see you, my friend; the better *they* can see you."

There followed a curious rattling sound like the undoing of a hasp. And a hairy black spider scuttled across that square patch of stone lit by fire-glow, circled, darted back into shadow.

"Tarantulas!" hissed the voice. "A nice basket of them. They have not been fed of late. No doubt they will enjoy the company of the police as soon as they find it palatable. And now I go to take a flask of *my* wine and add it to the drinks of those above. Good-bye, my friend."

A match flickered, sheltered by a cupped hand. The shaded flame revealed the wicker basket tipped on its side, cover off, releasing a horde of venomous, black tarantulas. It was not at those lethal spiders that Edwards stared. He stared at the hand holding that flickering match. A gnarled, twisty-fingered, crippled hand it was—the withered hand of the dwarf!

The match glimmered out. Edwards could hear his captor clambering from the pit. An appalling silence, broken only by the insidious burbling of the steaming brew, settled in the cavern. Turning on his side, Edwards saw a score of the deadly spiders, like the scattered advance guard of an army, moving with measured, slow insistence toward him, crossing the strip of pit-bottom lit by the phantom-light of the coals glowing beneath the kettle.

7. The Cloak

FIGHT to the last, that was what he would do—what he had always done. Fight to the last! He stifled the wild grip of panic, the frigid terror that threatened to freeze reason. Instinctively he rolled as far as he could from the oncoming mass of spiders; rolled and writhed and shoved himself across pit-bottom until he brought up against the farther end. And lying there in the pitch-dark with a thousand deaths crawling toward him he started a terrific struggle to get loose. His shoulders ached; ankles and wrists went numb; sweat stung his eyes; the gag was choking. He fought until all but exhausted; then lay quiet, thinking. If he could only get near the cauldron and burn the thongs on the smoldering coals! But the floor between him and the dying fire was alive with tarantulas. For a moment he contemplated a wild lunge, an attempt to crush the horrid pack. Impossible—some would be certain to bite him. He shivered violently, and wrenched at his bonds. The swarming horde crept nearer; soon they would be crawling up his boots, over his legs. Edwards lurched to a sitting posture; kicked out with his bound feet. What was that his boots encountered? Flinging himself about, he groped as best he could with his trussed hands. Something soft and hairy touched his fingers. He shrieked in his throat as he jerked himself to one side. And then he could have

yelled. He knew what it was he had found. The sheepskin cloak! The ragged cape the dwarf had left behind, that he had found and thrown away.

With a lunge, he pitched himself on to the outspread garment, braced his back against the pit wall, and shoved himself to his knees. He could take his time now. He could take his time and push that cloak before him across the floor and kneel on that cloak as he burnt the thongs from his wrists. He knew. Every desertman on the border, every caravaneer from the plains of Turkestan to the reaches of Nepal knew. Every nomad knew that the loathsome, black tarantula, dreaded denizen of the steppes, would not come near a sheep or approach a sheepskin. Edwards was saved!

BROWN-ROGERS hurried to Merrick Scott's side. The old scientist was sitting on the floor, head on fists, gaspy moans shuddering beneath his drooping mustache. The lantern-light falling on his face drew deep lines of misery down his cheeks. His hands gestured as he looked up; his voice echoed despair.

"Laurie! Laurie!" was his choked cry. "Laurie! My daughter! Laurie!"

The engineer Clark knelt at the old man's side. Clark's face was livid, terrified to mottled pallor.

"Easy," he groaned. "We'll find her! I promise it!"

"She's gone! Laurie's gone! Oh, my God!"

Brown-Rogers held a crumpled note to the light.

"Look! I just found this in Laurie's alcove! See! It had just been dropped through her window from the outside. She found it, and—and——"

Merrick Scott snatched the paper. Clark bent to see, and together they read the scrawl:

The policeman is dead, and so is the Turkoman. The dancing death has failed recovering its treasure, but it will not fail now. Does the girl want to save her father and the lives of two others? Then she must follow the rear passages to the cavern.

Scott's bloodless face screwed up in agony. He could utter no word.

"She's gone," stammered Brown-Rogers. "She read it—and has gone —to save us——"

Clark snatched up his rifle.

"No, by God! She can't! Listen! I—my brother Harry found those jewels that first day. He hid them. My God! I was afraid to tell—and then—then he died, and——"

Groaning, Merrick Scott covered his face with his hands. Brown-Rogers turned a sweat-glazed countenance on the engineer, snarling: "You dog! You bloody cur! *You* knew what those warnings meant all the time——"

"No! I was afraid. Harry only told me he had found a treasure here. He did not say where he had hidden it. And after Van Lue was killed we didn't dare admit! Didn't dare!" Clark's voice was shrill.

"Shut up!" barked Brown-Rogers. "Here! Scott's passed in a faint. Run, you rotter, and fetch some of that wine."

Dropping his rifle, Clark darted away, returning with a half-filled flask of wine. Brown-Rogers grabbed the bottle, and held it to the colorless lips of the old scientist.

Pang! Smash! Roar of a shot tore the dusk of the arcade, and the bottle in Brown-Rogers' hand flew to pieces. Crying out, the Englishman whirled around. Framed in the archway that led to the rear corridor, a tall, stooped figure with yellow hair hanging over smoke-blackened face stood with rifle aimed. The rifle was slowly lowered.

"The policeman!" gasped Clark.

The apparition stepped aside, and a girl fled from the gloom; fled to clasp Merrick Scott in her arms.

"Father! Father!"

Edwards—a ghost of the man they had seen before—ran up, panting.

"I had to shoot! Had to! Another second and he'd have had some of that stuff in his mouth! Deadly poison! Tarantula wine! That's what the others were given. Quick! I was running up from the cavern and bumped into the girl in the passageway below. She was going to the cavern to meet the dwarf! Bring your guns! We're goin' back to that hole! We'll get him now!"

8. *The Dwarf*

IN THE impermeable blackness of the cavern they crouched waiting, hands itching on guns, senses alert. Black as coal-tar it was, the hot air fetid with the odor seeping from the pit. All had heard and stiffened to the sound of soft footfalls advancing in the tunnel that led from the compound into the cave. Scarce daring to draw breath, they waited. The sly footfalls sounded nearer, and finally they knew this unseen visitor had reached the cavern.

"Is the girl here?" a voice hissed out of the dark.

Edwards nudged Laurie, and she spoke in low tone: "Yes."

A match flared and the tallow in the dish hung from the low ceiling sputtered. Dim light flooded the cavern, and the one who had ignited the tallow turned around. The light revealed four men and a girl crouching, guns leveled, in the corner near the trap-door. And the light glowed on the shocked countenance of Stepan Stepanovitch!

Sim Edwards was on the Turkoman with a bound.

"So!" he snarled, fastening a trap-like hold about Stepanovitch's wrist. "*You!* Hand in glove with the dwarf, eh? Where's the dwarf!"

Stepanovitch wrenched away. His black eyes flickered. His face turned the color of grass. Words rasped from his teeth.

"What lie is this, you——"

Dynamite might have driven Edwards' fist. Whipping up from his hip, it caught that tall Turkoman squarely on the point of the jaw. That blow rang! Rang like a hatchet on wood. And an amazing thing happened. The Turkoman reeled back, sagged as if his knees had been cut from under him, staggered. A violent paroxysm sent his hands clawing at the air, face twitching to an incredible grimace. As if his mainspring of muscular control had been snapped by Edwards' furious blow he tottered backward, arms writhing, legs buckling strangely. Edwards, Laurie, Brown-Rogers, Clark and Scott watched aghast, as the lean Turkoman seemed to collapse and contract and fold up like a trick doll. A mad contortion bent his shoulders out of joint, drew his head down, snapped his arms to distortion, jerked his legs into crippled malformation. Struggling and weaving about he fell as if stricken by magic into the hideous posture of the dwarf. The next second he had lost balance, tottered to the edge of the pit, rocked on his heels and flopped from sight. His shocking cry was muffled by a splash.

Rushing to the edge of the pit, Sim Edwards was just in time to see the simmering brew in the cauldron close over the twiglike fingers of the contortionist's knotted hand.

9. *Sun Up*

TINTED glow of dawn bathed the dome of the mosque of Alam Gul with warm color, dissolved the evil shadows in the lanes near the Gate of Mohamet Yar Khan, glinted on the gun-barrels of the strange party of white men who had journeyed down from the hill at daybreak and crossed the town. Abdesalam Daood, the mangy dragoman who trailed the white party across town, vowed in truth that the *feringhis* and their woman would never have gotten that far at night, or had they not carried such powerful rifles. The dragoman also told how the white party had pur-

chased mounts to carry them at the *serai,* and how pale they were, and how silent: "Like a vision of corpses —Allah spit on their bones!"

They were pale and they were silent as they rode that morning out of Jelaladore, protected by the majesty of the British *Raj* as vested in the military khaki of Sim Edwards' tunic and the sheen of their guns. Clearly all suffered from the strain of their ghastly experience. Edwards thought Laurie Scott had held up marvelously well for a woman. He had thought a lot about the girl as she rode along beside him; covertly watched her effort at self-possession, then noticed more banal things like the sunbeams sprinkling through her dark hair. Yes, Sim Edwards had thought a lot about the girl. And he had begun to think, as they turned their mounts to the south where, washed lapis lazuli by the sunrise, the Suleimans marched down the horizon, about how he had come to the Orient to escape romance, and what a fool he had been.

WARNING

By CLARK ASHTON SMITH

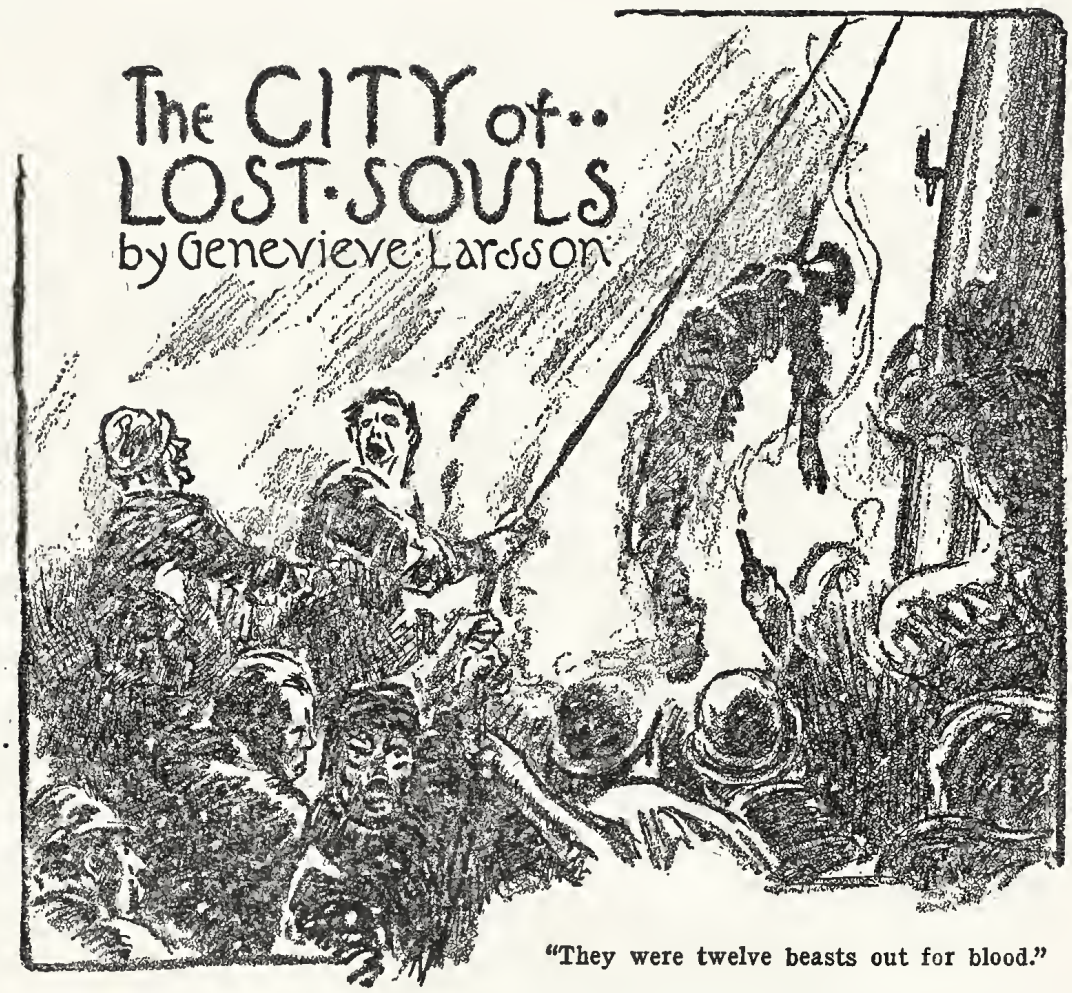
Hast heard the voices of the fen,
That softly sing a lethal rune
Where reeds have caught the fallen moon—
A song more sweet than conium is,
Or honey-blended cannabis,
To draw the dreaming feet of men
On ways where none goes forth again?

Beneath the closely woven grass,
The coiling syrt, more soft and deep
Than some divan where lovers sleep,
Is fain of all that wander there;
And arms that glimmer, vague and bare,
Beckon within the lone morass
Where only dead things dwell and pass.

Beware! the voices float and fall
Half-heard, and haply sweet to thee
As are the runes of memory
And murmurs of a voice forcknown
In days when love dwelt not alone:
Beware! for where the voices call,
Slow waters weave thy filthy pall.

The CITY of·· LOST·SOULS

by Genevieve Larsson



"They were twelve beasts out for blood."

THE train, snaking its way through the snowdrifts of the Colorado plains, seemed to Jack Renshaw to be entirely unheated. He was frozen through. Back a short distance, while the train was stalled, his glow of anticipation at being so near his friends had dulled. He wished he had a drink of whisky. But that would soon he supplied, he mused—trust the old gang for that! He'd been a fool not to send word he was coming. What a rousing welcome there would have been for him! Ten years he'd waited to return, ten years of grinding toil in the mines of Arizona, before he'd struck it rich. It would be great sport surprizing all of them, the Terrible Thirteen, as they'd called themselves in the old days. They'd be at Pryor's, or down at Nell's. He knew their haunts. Queer, how sure one could feel of certain people, even after a lapse of ten years, even after ten years of silence on both sides. "Wish I were as sure of heaven!" he thought.

There'd be Dan, roaring and funny as ever, booming out poetry in his strong, ringing voice, and lighting cigarettes with twenty-dollar bills in honor of Jack's homecoming, in honor of their friendship restored. For they had quarreled, Dan and Jack, over Nell, the scarlet woman of the town. "What difference does it make what she's done?" Dan had boomed. "It's what she *is* that counts. And look at me. I'm not such a prize!" But the quarrel wouldn't matter now;

Jack knew he'd been right, and Dan would have found it out long ago. How Dan, the superior one in the group, could have taken a woman of that sort seriously, Jack could not understand.

In the midst of these musings, irrelevant pictures, too, flashed into his mind. That time in the saloon in the back of Pryor's Hotel, when they'd got the German farmer Giesling to fight with his neighbor—what a fight that had been! Curious, that he should remember this now; he hadn't thought of it in years. Other pictures, quick-flaming, quick-receding, came and went, gay, carefree, full of the spirit of the West, vivid with life and color.

Renshaw was roused from his thoughts by the conductor stopping at his seat. "You—get off here?" he asked hesitatingly.

"Sure do—it's my old town!" brightened Jack. Then, as the man did not seem inclined to bestow the praise Jack had expected, he added, "Some town, too, believe me!"

The conductor looked at him narrowly. "Yeh, some town," he agreed, a sardonic glinting look in his eyes.

Jack felt insulted by the tone and manner. "I ought to know!" he snapped.

The train was slacking down. He lifted his overcoat from the red plush seat, and slipped it on.

Jack was surprized that no one else was getting off. Instead of the blaze of lights he had somehow expected to see, a heavier darkness descended upon the outside world.

The conductor leaned forward, looking furtively out the window. "Lights off again!" he muttered. He glanced up at Jack. "How long since you been here?"

"Ten years," answered Jack coldly. "But it's the same town, I'll wager. Nothing could ever change the spirit of this place!"

He snatched his suitcase and made for the door.

"Good luck to you!" remarked the conductor. "Pity you chose *this* night to come back."

Jack did not answer. He was cold with fury and the fact that, in spite of himself, the man's words roused in him a distinct feeling of apprehension. As he stepped down, the conductor gave the information, "The next train through is the Midnight Flyer. It doesn't stop here ordinarily, but you can flag it."

THE train puffed on, as if in a hurry to leave. It left Renshaw in a darkness that was sinister in its heaviness. It seeped into his veins, chilling him still more. A sickly yellow light flickered from the window of the station house. As he turned at the end of the platform, the wind rushed, shrieking, around the telephone pole that rose like a pale ghost in the blackness.

He pulled the collar up more closely about his neck. He was grateful that in a few minutes he'd reach his friends. What an awful thing it would be, left desolate, on a night like this! He set off down the street. He'd stop at Pryor's, first. A clear vision of his friend Pryor rose before him, warming him. Pryor, the dispenser of joy. Past hilarity in Pryor's back room cheered him momentarily.

All of a sudden, as if unprepared for, unpremeditated, snow began to fall. There was something uncanny about it. This was too cold a night for snow. It was almost as if the elements were playing a trick on him. It whirled about Jack, and the suddenness of the stinging flakes blinded him. The wind tore at the ends of his long coat, whipping it about his legs. There was a tone of anger in it, a high note of defiance.

The houses he passed were completely black, no sign of light anywhere. But now the snow began lighting the way a little, so that he could see. Or was it the snow, giving out this queer half-twilight, this spec-

tral yellowish glow? The trees along the street, though bare of outline, had about them now gray-white veils that draped them into ghostly shapes, from which at the sides protruded angry black arms. A feeling of utter desolation descended upon Jack Renshaw. He resented that there were no lights, wondering, savagely, why the residents did not resort to candles, or lamps. Ten-thirty, and the whole town seemed dead, buried in narcotic sleep. And for Jack's company, the shrieking wind, which he had always hated. It did things to him, with its skirling claws, and its tearing voice.

A weird, unearthly noise startled him. The air was suddenly surcharged with an insidious, potent atmosphere of lust and brutality. He was brought up rigid, the blood running cold in his veins. The noise grew louder, more insistent. It was like nothing he had ever heard. Rather like the sound one might hear in a nightmare, like the demoniacal screaming of lost souls. He peered down the street, numb with cold and an indefinable terror.

The flakes of snow were coming more thickly now, in fine, stinging sprays. He wiped away clusters of them on his glasses. He peered again, straining his eyesight to see.

A white procession was coming up the street, figures made white from their coat of snow, terrifying in their grotesqueness. Jack bent forward, leaning against a tree, shaken and weak. Who, in the name of the Lord, were these creatures, rising as from a bottomless pit of blackness, to invade the world on some mission of destruction?

There was about the men a distorted dignity; their bodies were knit for action, emanations of lust and brutality issued from them like a heavy fetor. Their eyes were shrouded, their heads lowered, like gnus. Swirling about them, and over them, and clinging tenaciously to them, were veils that gave the impression of windingsheets. Ghoulish, unyielding, bent toward some hideous and awful deed, they aproached him.

He tried to call to them, but either they did not hear, or no strength was left in his voice, for they heeded him not. He struggled to continue on his way, but he remained rooted, powerless to move. As they came nearer, he made out guns, belligerently drawn, that the figures were carrying. Their faces, what he could see of them with their shrouded eyes in the sickening yellowish light, were ghastly. With a wild throb at his heart, he recognized something familiar about them. The shape of a head here, a gesture there. Surely—surely that was—Steffins!

He peered closer, throwing out his hand in an entreating movement. "Steffins!" he cried. But his voice was lost in the unearthly noise issuing from the procession, and his hand fell back limp against him. Steffins passed on, unknowing, his body set toward some determined goal.

THE wind blew a cloud of white over Jack's eyes, and as he wiped it off he made out other familiar figures, several of the old devil-may-care gang to which he had belonged, the gang that had been the terror and pride of the city before he left. He called to them, loudly, he thought. There was no answer. He stood, leaning against the tree, held by an intangible, menacing fear. Had the cold numbed his mind as well as his body, he wondered?

How swiftly they sped, almost as if they did not touch the ground! They seemed to expand, to fill all space, then be blotted out again. His eyes hurt from the strain. How long had he stood there, and would he ever again be able to move? Then, as he looked, he was startled out of his benumbed state. For there was Dan, bringing up the rear of the procession, stumbling after the rest with

halting, clumsy, bewildered steps. Jack made a last desperate effort.

"Dan!" he called, using all his voice, and found himself surprized when Dan stopped. "Dan!" he cried again, with more assurance, his heart pounding madly.

Dan approached him, still in that uncertain way, one hand brushing his face as if to wipe away a terrible sight.

"What on earth, Dan, what on earth are they doing?" asked Jack, clutching at the arm of his old friend, his eyes fixed on the moving procession.

"Then—*you* see them, too?" asked Dan, in a hopeless, dead voice, a voice that Jack would never have recognized.

"*See* them? Good God, Dan, why shouldn't I see them? What's wrong with you?"

Under his hand he felt Dan's arm tremble violently, as if a spasm had passed over his whole body. He looked down, and saw how stooped Dan was, how broken and aged he looked. Pity stabbed through him. He flung one arm about Dan's shoulders, and turned him away from the fleeing figures.

"Come, old scout, let's get to the hotel."

Jack supported him as they walked on. At the corner near the hotel he spoke, raspingly, "No, not over there, Jack. Let's go——"

"But I wanted to see Pryor tonight."

"No, not now. We—we better go down to Nell's." His voice was cut off by a violent fit of coughing.

"But——"

"That's all right," said Dan, unsteadily. "Nell doesn't hold any grudge."

"She won out, evidently." Jack could not repress the words.

"Yes, she won out," Dan answered.

They walked in silence through the main section of the city, out to the far edge of town, where Nell's bungalow stood. Jack remembered it as cleanly painted, with green, cool shutters, and always at night merry voices ringing from behind closed doors. . . . At Dan's knock, a disheveled, weary-looking woman, the shadow of the former Nell, opened the door. All her attention was instantly centered on Dan.

"You came back!" she cried, putting her hands up to his shoulders. "How are you, Dan? How do you feel?"

"Here's Jack Renshaw," he answered.

She looked at Jack as though her mind were not on him. Her face assumed an expression of apathy. She started to withdraw.

"Won't—won't you shake hands with me, Nell?" Jack asked.

"Sure." She held out a thin, blue-veined hand. "What did you come back for?" she asked then, suspiciously.

"Why, to see all of you, but from——"

"Bring us a whisky," Dan choked, sinking into a dilapidated chair, staring out from empty eyes at the bleak room.

Jack looked quickly at him, and saw how warped and yellow his face was, how withered and sunken the eyes that had been so gay.

Nell moved about eagerly waiting on him, getting glasses, pouring out whisky with hands that trembled.

"You should have stayed where you were—you shouldn't have come back," she said to Jack, sullenly, as she handed him the drink.

"Nell, what's the matter? What's come over you two? What's come over the whole—darn town?" he asked, quivering with foreboding.

She started to reply, and Dan said, quickly, "You go to your room, Nell. I want to talk—to Jack."

"You—you're not going to—to *tell* him?" Her voice, cracked, falsetto, quavered.

"Go on out," said Dan.

Her skirts trailed over the bare floor as she made for her room. She turned at the door with a last beseeching look at Dan. Her hair stuck out, wispy and tousled, about her forehead. Then her eyes lighted with a look of eloquent devotion, suffusing her whole face. At that instant she reminded Jack of the old Nell, only that the loveliness which now touched her was softened, less arrogant, more of the spirit. The bleak room brightened momentarily.

"You'll call me—if you need me, Dan?" she asked humbly.

"All right, Nell," he answered.

Something in the quality of his voice caused Jack to look up, searchingly, and it seemed to him that Dan had responded to her.

"Good Lord," he thought, "he's still in love with—*that.*"

When the door had closed behind her, Jack turned. "Now then, whatever it is, tell me quickly! I can't stand this much longer."

DAN put his hands to his throat as if choking, half pulled the kerchief from his neck. The flickering gaslight fell over him, and Jack felt, with an inner divination, the terrific struggle he was going through. Dan fumblingly adjusted the kerchief again, his shoulders hunched over with the fit of coughing that shook him.

"You're sick, Dan. You're all in. Here, drink this whisky."

Dan gulped down the whisky that Jack handed him.

"Don't tell it, Dan—if——"

"It's got to be told," Dan answered, and with a violent effort began his story.

"You remember, Jack, how we were—in the old days. How we used to run things. The Terrible Thirteen. Went about like knights of old, righting wrongs, and all that sort of thing. Caroused about, but when anything struck us as wrong, we took things—into our own hands. Remember how I used to joke about the slogan, 'Live clean, right wrong, follow the Christ, the King'? Only I thought *myself* the king to be followed! That's what—I really meant by it——"

"Rats!" said Jack. "You were always——"

"You remember Giesling, the German farmer two miles north of town?" Dan spoke thickly, the words coming out in mumbled syllables. Jack had a fleeting vision of the arrogant Dan he'd known, lighting cigarettes with twenty-dollar bills, hating anything underhanded, gambling cleanly, running the others. This was but the caricature of the man he had been.

"Giesling? Why, yes, I thought tonight of that fight we staged between him and Sharpner. He was always fussing with his neighbor over the water rights——"

"That's the one," Dan interrupted. "Ten years ago tonight is—when it happened. You'd been gone—only a short time. It was a stormy night like this—with a stiff norther blowing across the plains. Enough to chill your bones. Giesling and his wife were getting ready for bed. There was a queer sound at the door. They thought at first it was a rat gnawing somewhere. It kept on, scratching—fumbling. Giesling went to the door—opened it. There stood a stranger. He was—chilled through—had been wandering about for days. His clothing was thin and frayed. His eyes were wild, peculiar——"

Dan stopped, drank more whisky, went on in a stronger voice.

"He asked for food and shelter. Giesling, you remember, wouldn't take a sick dog in—didn't believe in feeding tramps. Not much like Nell, eh? Remember her gathering in the stray cats, and feeding them? Oh, well." He stared ahead for a moment, a softened expression passing over his face. "Giesling told the tramp to get out. The man got down on his knees,

tried to worm his way into the house. 'Hungry—hungry—hungry,' he kept saying. He begged, in the name of Christ, to come in. A starved, shivering animal he was, with barely enough on—to cover him. He cried, and the tears froze on his face. Giesling's wife fought for him; she wanted to take him in—and feed him. He wouldn't let her, but finally—he said the stranger could sleep in the stable. They went to bed, and he kept nagging at her, saying that if anything happened she'd be to blame. He kept on worrying for fear the tramp would set set fire to the barn. 'I ought to've sent him over to Sharpner's,' he said. 'As if *he* would do anything for him!' his wife answered. There was a flare of light—on their window, and he jumped out of bed. The haystack was on fire. Giesling cursed, got into his clothes. He was so furious, his wife thought he would leap at *her*. He rushed down to the fire. She waited. . . . He didn't come back——"

There was a pause, and as Jack leaned forward, he noticed Dan's face contorted out of all semblance to his former self.

"Go on," he urged. "He didn't come back?"

"She waited for some time, more afraid of her husband than of the stranger. Then she put some clothes on—and went down——"

"Well?" questioned Jack, breathless.

"Giesling lay sprawled on the ground, the stranger over him—his face at Giesling's throat. . . . She screamed, and the tramp got up—blood around his mouth. 'Warm,' he said, smiling at her, 'warm.' "

"Good God!" breathed Jack. "He—he——"

"He held a pocket-knife, dripping, in his hand. Giesling—was dead. His wife ran back to the house. She tried to reach town—by telephone, but the storm had played the devil with the wires. She ran all the way in, through that blizzard. The news spread like wildfire through the city. Some of the gang—were at Pryor's—some at their homes——"

"You mean—*our* gang?"

"It was work for them, don't you see? All the more because they'd always hated Giesling. I was down here—at Nell's. The boys came here——"

He struggled with his breath, his face like crumpled dusty paper. Desperately he seized the bottle on the table and drank great drafts. Some color ran into his cheeks.

"You know how gay we were—how quick to settle things. The gang came for me——"

"Well? You went, I hope?"

"Nell begged for the man. 'Give him a chance,' she said. 'You've got to give him a chance! You're in no condition to judge anybody!' she told us."

"You mean you let *her* interfere? You let her tell you what to do?" Jack's voice was full of contempt.

Dan did not answer the question, but went on:

"The mob got to Giesling's too late. The sheriff had beat them to it. He had put the prisoner in the ramshackle jail here, until he could get him out to the next town. You can imagine how wild the boys were, how hell-bent that he should not be smuggled out. Here was their kind of a case! There were no two ways about an affair like this!"

"I should think not!" Jack flared.

"You can imagine how their lust grew as they marched back to town, and through the street to the jail. They overpowered the sheriff and deputies. The lights were out, and they lit matches to see. The prisoner blew them out. He talked some strange jargon they didn't understand. He laughed at them as they were breaking the bars of his cell—laughed in a queer, demented way, as though he had a good joke on them. They lost their reason, or what was left of it. They dragged him over to

the telephone pole at the depot, twelve men against one, and the storm beating around them—beating and shrieking and swirling around them—twelve beasts, out for blood. . . ."

"Good for them!" Jack broke forth. "They weren't cowards!" he added, his voice like brittle glass.

"Pryor was close to the stranger, and he noticed the stain—around his mouth. He struck him on the mouth—you remember Pryor's fists? Huge, iron fists. The stranger fell back against Steffins; Steffins caught him and set him on his feet. His lips were bleeding. 'Have you no heart?' he cried, with tears rolling out of his eyes. And Steffins answered, 'I'll cut yours out of your miserable body.' Would have done it, too, only the mob wasn't going to be cheated. The stranger started to laugh again, this time softly—a purring sound that made your brain reel. The ringleader grabbed him and shook him. 'Have you anything to say?' he asked, and the prisoner answered, 'The Lord will reward you men.' The wild look was gone from his eyes. The ringleader gave the order for the noose to be slipped over his head. Then the man began, in the quietest voice—to say—the Lord's prayer. 'Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name; Thy kingdom come——' The ringleader pulled the rope and up he swung. They might have let him finish the prayer—might have let him finish——" Dan's voice droned on, over and over.

"As though that made any difference!" cried Jack. "He deserved what he got, if anyone ever did. I'm glad they didn't weaken—I'm proud of them. Wish to God I'd been there. He was just clever, thinking to play——"

"The next day the sheriff cut him down, and found a number inside his vest," Dan went on, regardless of the interruption. He was an escaped lunatic——"

"My God!" whispered Jack. A palpable silence fell, while Jack saw, vividly before him, the lonely, demented creature driven by the storm, driven to his death by the angry mob. "Not—not responsible for his deed. Hungry—to the point of drinking—no clothing, no food—wandering for days. . . . And who is to know what deviltry that bull-headed German played on him before he finally killed——"

"He didn't kill Giesling," Dan cut in, in a throttled voice. "Sharpner, dying, confessed two years later. He had turned the stranger out, himself, before he'd sent him over to Giesling's. Then he followed him, and carried out his diabolical scheme. *He* set fire to the haystack, and when the German rushed out, as he expected him to, Sharpner killed him. He gave the knife to the stranger, and said, 'You're hungry. Well, drink this!' The stranger did as he was told. Then Sharpner sneaked back to his home."

Jack sat immovable, immersed in the tragedy as it poured from Dan's lips.

"The gang never confessed," he continued, each word an effort. "The officers could get nothing on them. You see they had covered their eyes. . . . No, they never confessed. . . . And though people suspected, they didn't *know* definitely, at least not at first. As time went on, things got from bad to worse. Pryor was the first to go. . . . Something happened to his mouth—his teeth fell out—he couldn't speak for months before he died——"

A low moan of pain escaped from Jack. The clock on the mantel above his head ticked on, as though it were taking him toward some definite, relentless end.

"Steffins—was the next. A train—got him. I never could see—how his heart—could be wrenched—from——"

"Oh God!" cried Jack, shuddering away from the picture.

"You can guess what it did to the rest," Dan's voice, thickening, strangling, went on. "They slunk about, expecting the worst—more dead than alive. It got them all——"

"All, Dan, every one of them?" It was a cry, twisted fearfully from Jack.

"And they never confessed—none ever confessed. A sort of pledge among them, a flimsy garment of bravado worn by each. The ringleader is left—the one who pulled the rope—left him dangling with his breath cut off——"

Jack jerked himself back to a semblance of normalcy by a violent effort of his will. "What really got them," he said, trying to speak evenly, "was *fear*. And it's got you, Dan, brooding over their fate. We can't help them by that; but you—we've got to think of you! Thank God Nell *did* keep you from going that night! Thank God for that!"

Dan seemed not to hear. He glanced fearfully up at the clock. It was fifteen minutes of 12. "What hurts the most, Jack, is what we did to the town. If we had only stopped to think! We should have known he was—demented. Anybody would have known it, from what he'd done. Gloom hanging over the whole city now. Throughout the valley we're called the City of Lost Souls. Every—anniversary of that night they gather—a few more each year, as you saw them tonight. At midnight—they gather around the telephone pole. They adjust the rope, but the man who swung is—missing. I've seen it every year. No rest . . . no rest for them . . . no rest for the town. I thought by confessing——"

Jack leaned forward, clutching at Dan's shoulder. "Then—you did go? You were with them?"

Dan looked again at the clock. "I? Why, yes, I——"

Jack stifled the cry that rose to his lips. He found his voice, but it did not seem to be his voice at all. "You're—sick with brooding, Dan. We'll go to Arizona. We'll get out at once——"

Dan did not notice, but went on, "You see this room, stripped? Remember how it used to look? Everything rich and fine, with the gifts the boys gave Nell. She's been taking care of me—the whole town's shunned us—guessed it, after a while. *She* never went back on me——"

"No, she wouldn't," said Jack soberly.

"I thought by confessing——"

"You'll have to buck up," Jack spoke sharply. "You're killing yourself with this superstition, Dan. It's—not like you. There's still time. You come with me tonight on the Midnight Flyer——"

Dan started to laugh. Hideous, strangled laughing. "The Midnight Flyer!" He choked over the words. Then he glanced up at Jack out of his faded, dead eyes. He pulled off the kerchief that bound his neck, bared his throat for Jack to see. Jack shrank away, appalled and unbelieving, before the sight.

"You see, *I* pulled the rope."

He stood up, and in a queer, strangled voice began mumbling something unintelligible. It filled Jack with a sense of impending doom. What was it—a prayer? Was Dan praying? Then, suddenly, as if the breath were jerked out of him, he doubled over and fell with a muffled, gasping cry, to the floor.

Jack leaped up, but before he could reach him, Nell entered and rushed to Dan's side. She lifted his head. It sagged against her breast. Over her desolate face passed a look of utter peace.

She looked up at Jack for an instant, and then flamed passionately, "Don't ever tell—what he said, tonight. I'll not have it known. Leave me—with my——"

The last word was lost to Jack, as she bent crooning over the inert body, cradling it to her heart.

THE Midnight Flyer slowed down at Jack's signal. He boarded it. The conductor was leaning against a window. He looked up, curiously inspecting the passenger.

"See anything?" he asked. "Out there—around the telephone pole?"

Jack bent forward to look. The wind had died down. Snow was falling quietly, clean and white, coming down softly in great white wings, as if to cleanse the town forever from even the memory of scars.

"Queer," said the conductor, as the train ground on, "I could have sworn this was the night."

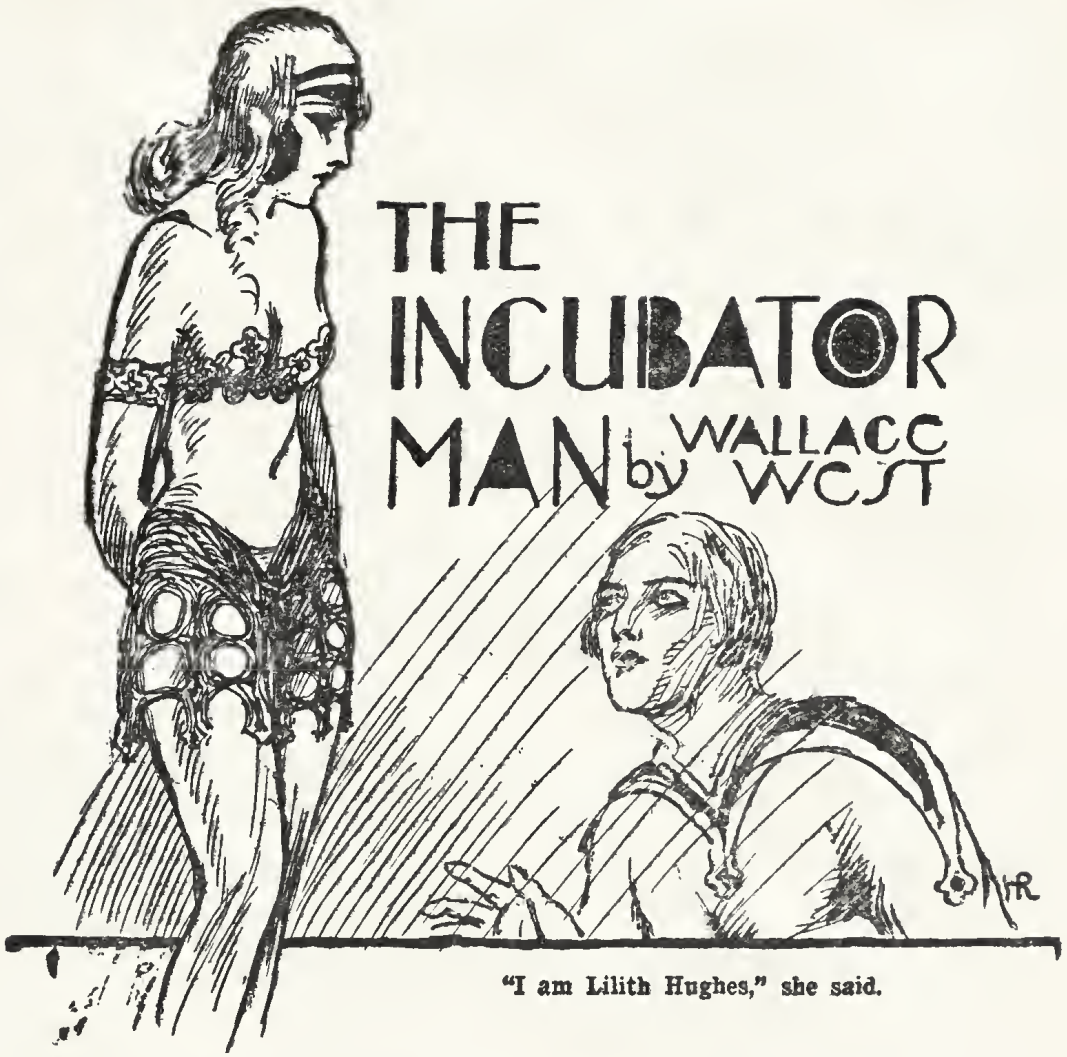
THE PHŒNIX

THE earliest description we have of that wonderful bird which has given its name to insurance companies and other business, to clubs and what not, which has bequeathed to orators and writers that time-worn expression, "arising, phœnixlike, from its ashes," is in Herodotus (484-424 B. C.). He says that every 500 years the bird appeared, coming from Arabia to Heliopolis, Egypt, bringing its father embalmed in a ball of myrrh, and buried him in the Temple of the Sun. The phœnix was described to Herodotus as having red and golden plumage and closely resembling an eagle in size and shape. It is this conception of it which is generally used in emblematic designs.

Pliny says that there is only one phœnix at a time, and that at the end of his long life he builds a nest of cassia and frankincense, in which he dies; from the body comes a worm which grows into the young phœnix. Tacitus claims that the young bird lays its father on the altar in Heliopolis and burns him there.

The commonest conception is that of the *Physiologus,* a collection of early Christian legends, in which the phœnix is said to be an Indian bird subsisting on air, who, at the end of 500 years, loads himself with spices, flies to Heliopolis, enters the Temple and is burned to ashes on the altar. From the ashes arises the young phœnix, which by the next day is feathered. On the third day, fully grown, he salutes the priest and flies back toward India. The period at which he appears is usually given as 500 years, though other writers go as high as 1,461 or even 7,006 years.

Tacitus says the bird first appeared under Sesostris (a legendary Egyptian king), then about 550 B. C., then about 225 B. C., and then in 34 A. D., though many questioned whether this last one was a real phœnix, as it came too soon. The phœnix shown in Rome in 47 A. D. was generally admitted to be an imposture. Ezechiel, a Jewish writer, and others speak of the sweet song of the phœnix, which was said to accompany the rising of the sun.



THE INCUBATOR MAN

by WALLACE WEST

"I am Lilith Hughes," she said.

"The best and ultimate test of the ability of man to live long beyond his present allotted score of years would be to have a man, from his babyhood up, live in what practically would be a sterilized test-tube. He would breathe sterilized air. He would eat sterilized food. He would drink sterilized liquids. He would thus be placed as far as humanly possible beyond the range of the myriad microbes that in many ways are the enemies of man and that bring about many of his ailments. Such a man, growing and living under special conditions, might live to be 200." —Sir Ronald Ross.

SIR RONALD ROSS, great scientist though you were, and dead though you have been these hundred and twenty-five years, I lay a curse upon you for those words.

I, Columbus Norton, the Incubator Man, am that creature Sir Ronald foretold, and I have lived a life of blackest hell that humanity might view me dispassionately through the gigantic glass test-tube wherein I have existed for one hundred and fifty years, and learn how to increase the length of life of the worthless race thereby.

My father, Dr. Philip Norton, lived in what was then Newark, New Jersey, and enjoyed a nation-wide reputation as a specialist in germ diseases. He loved germs. He dreamed of germs. His whole life was filled with germ culture and the new and strange diseases he had discovered or had

learned to check. In fact, he had almost ceased to be human.

Then, in 1927 A. D., as time was reckoned in those days, he read an interview which Sir Ronald Ross, discoverer of the malaria microbe, had given to a newspaper reporter in what must have been an unguarded moment. This interview suggested to my father the idea of growing a man under glass, so to speak—I am the result!

The idea of growing a man in an absolutely healthful environment fastened upon the mind of my father like one of the diseases whose master he was. It made him give up all his other work so that he might devote his time to that one plan. It made him send me, his as yet unborn son, into the most pitiful slavery man has ever suffered.

I have read how it all was done. Dr. Norton constructed an air-tight glass chamber approximately three hundred feet square and twenty feet high. He equipped it with heating and cooling devices of the latest type, and fitted it with gymnastic apparatus, comfortable lodgings, a magnificent library and a swimming-pool.

The glass used was of the then new type which permitted the passage of ultra-violet rays. By the use of temperature-regulating devices an ideal outdoor climate of exactly even temperature was assured, winter and summer. He installed filtration plants for the air and water to be used, and an air-tight chamber by which food and other necessary articles could be passed into the enclosure without the slightest danger of any germ life entering with it.

When I was born, I was whisked immediately into this prison. While I was an infant a white-clad nurse cared for me. She wore rubber gloves and a respirator so that her touch could not contaminate me nor her breath mingle with mine.

I have often wondered what sort of woman my mother must have been to allow her son to be snatched from her so easily. According to the books I have read (which, by the way, have given me almost my only knowledge of the outside world), mother love is not expressed so. Perhaps she also had given her life to science, or did not realize what she had done. I never found out. She died before I learned to talk.

During my childhood the imprisonment wasn't so bad. I knew nothing else. As I became able to care for myself, the nurse withdrew. After that I had contact with the outer world only through loud-speaking telephones which my father had installed and through the books and cinema films slipped through the fumigation chamber into my cell.

The best teachers were procured for me; the best of books and apparatus provided. The most perfect care was taken of my health. Living under such ideal conditions, I progressed in my studies with amazing rapidity, soon outstripping my teachers. At the age of twelve I passed the Harvard University entrance examinations, and in my sixteenth year was granted a Ph. D. degree. Yes, Dr. Norton had cause to be proud of his experiment.

I remember him well—a man with a stern, handsome face, who sat outside my cage, day after day, taking endless notes and talking pleasantly with me, yet watching my every reaction as though I were a guinea-pig.

He induced me to study medicine, and I made rapid progress, until we ran into the difficulty that live animal tissues could not be introduced into the chamber for fear of bringing disease germs with them. So, to this day, my knowledge of medical science is purely academic.

Oh, don't think I never rebelled! I did, bitterly; but my sense of duty, which had been fostered by my father in his many talks with me, conquered my rebellion. Dr. Norton continually pointed out the great service I was

doing to humanity—that through me and through him the world was learning to control itself, and to live sanely and keep healthy and live long.

The only time I ever saw my father angry was when, in a fit of boyish rage, I threatened to smash the glass and escape. His face turned white as marble. He stood, trembling with passion, hands clenched above his head, like some prophet of old about to hurl imprecations upon sinners.

"Boy," he thundered, "you hold the future of humanity in that club which you have in your hands. Mankind must live longer to become wise enough to conquer his environment. Shatter that glass, and man's future collapses into the dust with it. Aye, and if there is a hell, your soul will be consigned to the deepest pit."

What could a mere child do against the force of such a personality? I crept away trembling and never after that dared oppose his wishes.

His prophecy soon proved itself correct. The human race entered a new cycle as the result of dietary truths which I exemplified. Dr. Norton proved that a purely vegetable diet was more healthful for the human animal; that certain combinations of foods were poisonous while others were beneficial; that toxic substances in the blood will kill a man as surely as strychnin; that under right conditions of living, human machinery is little subject to breakage or deterioration—in short, during the first thirty years of my life, preventive medicine was advanced to such an extent that the average expectancy of human life jumped from 55.3 to 68 years.

ONE thing my father had not counted upon was the fact that I would become a man, with a man's dreams of love and fair women. And by the time I reached maturity there was no help for the matter. He regretted again and again that he had not also placed a girl baby in the chamber.

It was too late for that by the time he realized the desirability of such an experiment. I believe I hastened the day of his death by refusing to allow him to place a newly born girl in the chamber, even then, so that she might grow to maturity under the same ideal conditions, and perhaps, years later, become my mate. He must have been a soulless monster, even to think of such a scheme—and yet—and yet I loved him and while he lived did not greatly mind my confinement.

I slept eight hours daily, studied eight hours and played eight hours. The best books, cinemas and apparatus were provided for my research work. By the time I was fifty I can unhesitatingly say that I knew more than any one man in the world.

I was well developed physically also, in spite of the restricted space in which I lived, for my father had always impressed upon me the fact that a healthy body makes a healthy mind. I know that I must have been, even then, a splendid specimen of manhood, for I could not help but hear, through my loud speakers, the comments of the people who by this time were flocking from the ends of the earth to see me.

It was a strange thing to see my father and the other members of his establishment growing old, while I remained at the peak of my vitality. It has become a common thing to me since then, but the knowledge that death was stalking those outside, while I escaped unscathed, was at the time inexpressibly sad.

My father died when I was near fifty years old. With my consent he willed his laboratories and my glass cubicle to the government, with the understanding that I was to be carefully guarded and tended. His last words to me were: "Carry on, boy. Some day, through you, this silly thing that I am about to do won't be necessary."

With his passing my last real contact with the outside world was bro-

ken. I never could grow attached to the vapid guards and caretakers who took his place, or the obsequious officials who periodically came to refresh their shallow minds with my learning and advice.

For this reason the thing I am about to do no longer seems wrong to me. I have spent my life in the service of humanity. Men live longer and are, perhaps, somewhat wiser, but I often wonder, now, whether the sacrifice was worth while. At least, in a few hours I shall know whether the world is worth saving. My only wonder is that I have waited thus long.

But to return to my story. As the years passed I confined myself more and more to my studies, and ignored the crowds that gathered outside the walls of my cage to look and admire. I can truthfully say that my scientific treatises, written here, have been the wonder of the world. It was I who first explained the true time and space equation, and showed that Einstein, handicaped as he was by lack of equipment and the faulty work of his predecessors, had only half glimpsed the truth in his theory that space is subject to curvature. But enough of such nonsense.

It was when I was seventy-three years old, in the year 2000 A. D., or the year One, Free Time, that the Ruskinite rebellion broke out in the United Americas. There must have been some atavistic streak in me, for I sympathized heartily with those poor, benighted Ruskinites who dreamed of a breakdown of the gigantic monster of Science that mankind, like a Frankenstein, is building up about him, and who tried to smash it and return to the simple agricultural life of their forefathers.

Of course the outbreak was doomed to failure from the start, though streets of the country ran blood for a few bitter weeks. The very science which they hated subdued them. How could disciples of Ruskin stoop to heat rays, poison gases and atomic bombs? They perished fighting to the last, but I know that for weeks government troops guarded my chamber as though it were a precious jewel. Sad would have been my lot, I am sure, could the Ruskinites have captured my cubicle. I know that I, who was at heart their best friend, was hated by them as the heart and soul of the scientific system.

I will skip over the next seventy-five years of my life with but a few words. Strange—three-quarters of a century—time enough for most men to live a full life and die content. For me they passed in a dreary succession, enlightened only by my studies and my dreams. As I look back, I conceive myself as a being almost in a state of hibernation, waiting for the vital spark which would awaken me.

In me metabolism and catabolism seemed exactly balanced. After my thirty-fifth year, I grew no older physically. I never was sick. I was amply confirming that prediction of Sir Ronald, made so long ago. My only regret was that my father could not have lived to appreciate his triumph—a triumph which had turned dust in my mouth ages ago, and which seemed no more remarkable than those silly experiments by which early Twentieth Century doctors were able to keep chicken hearts alive indefinitely in a sterile medium.

I devoted myself to study as before, until I conceived that I had in my one head the whole sum of human knowledge. I gave out that knowledge to the world until it drew so far ahead of present understanding that scientists could no longer comprehend it. Oh, the silly fools! With so much to do, man dawdles by the way like a lazy schoolboy. Well, soon now they must begin working out their own salvation.

And now I draw near the end of my story. As I said, I had conceived that on my one hundred and fiftieth birthday I held in my brain

the sum of human knowledge, together with much that was beyond the comprehension of any but myself. Savants from all the world consulted me regarding knotty problems of science and government. I might add, also, that the present expectancy of life is eighty years.

Yet how little we know, poor things that humans are! My complacency lies in ruins about me. A whole new set of complexes and speculations has been released within me. Three days ago, while resting on the lawn outside my quarters, I was struck by something totally outside my experience. As I lay there a shadow fell on the grass and I looked up at a girl who stood not ten feet away from me on the other side of the glass barrier.

"Good morning," I said inanely, knowing that the telephones would make me perfectly audible outside the enclosure.

She nodded slightly and continued to look at me with wide, luminous eyes, in which there was, I somehow felt, an infinite sadness.

She was a beautiful thing—beautiful with the glory which perfect health and well-being give to our modern girls. Her eyes were dark and soft, with that slightly oblong slant which is giving more and more of an Oriental appearance to the people of America.

Her body was a thing to dream of as it was revealed by the short kilt and embroidered band across the breasts, which is the fashion of today. Her feet, in little, gold-tipped sandals, were high-arched and sentient. Her hair was the color of gold taken from Inca mines—but I perceive I grow ridiculous.

"Did you wish to consult me?" I asked foolishly, growing uncomfortable under that steady gaze.

Again she shook her head, but added, in a voice that tinkled silver music: "Why should I wish to consult you?"

And strangely, I could think of no reply. What could I tell that radiant being that she did not already know?

"Your name?" I ventured.

"Why," she answered, as though surprized that it could be of the slightest interest to me, "I'm Lilith Hughes, 3684."

"Of the National Theater," I exclaimed, interpreting the last two figures. "Of course you would be."

She smiled faintly. "Thank you." A pause followed. "I must be going," she said at last. "Performance in San Francisco, you know."

And then I said a strange thing. The words seemed to form themselves without my volition. "Can't you stay and talk with me a little longer?" I pleaded. "It's lonely here."

Again she smiled that slow, enchanting smile of hers. "Can't. I'm sorry. The Torpedo doesn't wait, you know. And then you have your work to do." Her voice sank to the faintest murmur, which she did not realize I could hear plainly through the amplifiers. "You have your work to do—poor thing!"

When I looked up, she was gone.

The hell of one hundred and fifty years of loneliness has been nothing to the hell of the last three days!

Last night I made up my mind to leave all this. Humanity must take care of itself. To be perfectly frank: to hell with humanity; I want out of this.

I am a man, sound and strong and well-favored. I look and feel and think like one of thirty-five and I—am in love. Strange that such a primal urge, which I had considered merely a trick of nature's to prolong the race, should sweep me away at last!

I am going to seal this statement of my case in an envelope, so that if anything happens to me in this strange world I am about to explore, people will understand why I have done this. Tonight I'll smash this cursed glass and go in search of Lilith. Pretty name—Lilith.

THE foregoing manuscript, carefully typed and sealed, was found on the body of Columbus Norton, the Incubator Man, who died of an almost unknown disease—the measles—two days after he broke out of his sealed chamber.

Attendants at B. Hospital, where he was taken, say that because of his long stay in an absolutely germless atmosphere he had failed to develop any resistance to disease and was 100 per cent susceptible to the first microbe which found lodgment in his body. He died a very few hours after being brought to the hospital.

Evidently he had spent his time, until the disease struck him, in becoming acquainted with a world whose ways he knew only by hearsay. At least there is no evidence that he ever took the San Francisco Torpedo, as the manuscript implies was his purpose.

Ol' Black Sarah

By BERNARD AUSTIN DWYER

Ol' Black Sarah come up outen de groun'—
  Go 'way, Black Sarah! go 'way!
Don' yo' heah de yelp o' dat ol' black houn'?
  Ooh! go 'way! Black Sarah, go 'way!

Fotch in de chilluns—shet de do'—
  Go 'way, Black Sarah! go 'way!
Snack up de shutters—Ah heah her fo' sho'—
  Ooh! go 'way! Black Sarah, go 'way!

De screech-owl screech—de moon am dim—
  Go 'way, Black Sarah! go 'way!
De bat fly ovah de hick'ry limb—
  Ooh! go 'way! Black Sarah, go 'way!

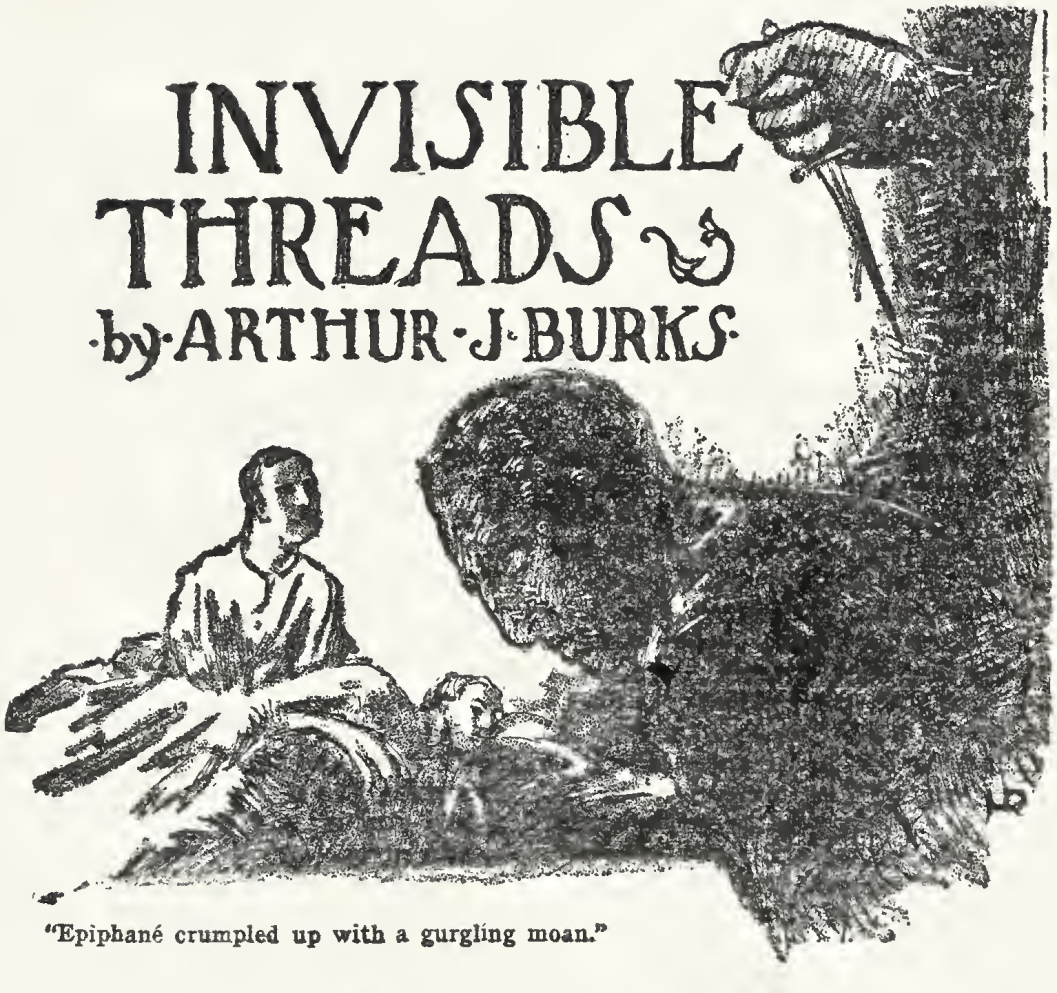
Her teef am sharp—her lips blood-red—
  Go 'way, Black Sarah! go 'way!
Her eyes am white, turn back in her head!
  Ooh! go 'way! Black Sarah, go 'way!

Ol' Sarah was a voodoo—long ago!—
  Go 'way, Black Sarah! go 'way!
De pickaninny's bone an' de mistletoe—
  Ooh! go 'way! Black Sarah, go 'way!

When de ol' houn' bark—de moon jus' gleams—
  Go 'way! Black Sarah, go 'way!
Ol' Sarah's face fill de darkies' dreams—
  Ooh! go 'way! Black Sarah, go 'way!

INVISIBLE THREADS

by ARTHUR J. BURKS



"Epiphané crumpled up with a gurgling moan."

The Story Thus Far

ABBOTT, answering a want ad, enters the service of Epiphané, who employs two young men, Hoffman and Dietz, as agents to redress wrongs. While they sleep, he sends their souls out to bring retribution. The visitation of Dietz's spirit to the iron magnate, Shuman, brings about Shuman's confession that he had murdered his daughter Coral, and Shuman then commits suicide. Abbott, visiting the courtroom where the millionaire Goetsche is trying to divorce his wife by perjured testimony, sees Goetsche brought to his senses by the visitation of Hoffman's spirit.

3

EPIPHANÉ had promised me another step that would be taken this very night. I was anxious to take this step. His work had seized my imagination, and I gasped as I tried to visualize the limits to what might be accomplished through the medium of what Epiphané called his new science. The limits were only outermost fringes of the vast world of written and unwritten crime—crimes that had been docketed for years in the brains of criminals who were known to the world as pillars of the church and society and who would go to the grave with their secrets locked tight within their breasts. Would Epiphané turn his attention to these? Or would he let sleeping dogs lie? We are all criminals at one time or another, with varying differences in degree, and there are few of us who do not feel stirrings of conscience when a person faces judgment for doing something that causes us to recall certain closed chapters in our own lives. Who may assign the boundary line between these two classes, the known and the unknown? Who may say of this one, "Get thee from me, raca, and give

thyself to the hangman!" or to this one, "Go thou and sin no more, for who am I to judge thee!"

Judge not that ye be not judged.

But I digress. At this time I was concerned only with the activities of Epiphané, taking no thought as to his right to judge his neighbor. Time will tell whether he possessed that right and whether, possessing it, he exercised it properly. I am, in this instance, but an humble recorder of the facts.

This evening when we took our several places in the room of the billowy draperies, Epiphané placed a lighted candle on the table, midway between the heads of Hoffman and Dietz. I knew not at this time upon what missions these two were to be engaged during the night to come, since I had not read the papers and Epiphané had made no reference to them. If the taking of newspaper clippings comprised all I was required to do, then my work was certainly light enough to please the most indolent. But I had been told that I was to learn the workings of Epiphané's great scheme. Did he mean that I was to become his first disciple? That I was destined to follow in his footsteps should he be found out and the switchboard broken? I could think of no other explanation, since his story of newspaper clippings was manifestly a mere excuse. If my final conclusions were correct, when would he see fit to draw aside the veil in order that my eyes might see? I was a bit impatient.

"You have promised me another step tonight, Epiphané," I said. "What is it to be?"

"You are to watch the candle," he replied enigmatically.

And we took the positions we had held the night before. We talked a bit, as we had done that other time, and I knew that those two mummies on the table still housed their alter egos. I can not say how I knew this. It was rather an impression than certain knowledge. I knew, however, that Hoffman and Dietz were still present in flesh and in spirit, and that the latter awaited the touch of the mental hand on the switchboard to go forth upon the missions assigned them by Epiphané.

"Now!"

The single word came from Epiphané in a soft murmur that I barely heard. It filled me with a feeling of expectancy such as I have never before experienced. Unconsciously I drew deeply upon my cigarette and looked at the face of Epiphané. From him my eyes went to the dark folds of the hanging draperies and noted that the hangings, always billowing heretofore, hung downward as though weighted at the bottom with heavy bits of metal. There seemed to be not a single bit of air in the chamber that moved; for this second of time the room was dead space, as though the draperies, the men on the table, Epiphané and myself had taken a deep breath at one and the same time, and held it, keyed to the highest pitch of expectancy.

I watched the candle.

There was only a moment of the waiting, yet it was pregnant with a vast and awesome meaning. For the flame of the candle flickered and seemed to incline toward Hoffman, as though a breath of air had come from the mouth of Dietz and played for a moment upon the flame. Just a flash, so swift as to be almost unnoticeable; then the little column of flame bent back the other way as though it were a yellow, inverted pendulum, completing its arc, or as though Hoffman himself had blown against it.

I glanced at the sensitive draperies which, heretofore, had registered even the slightest air currents with the delicacy of a seismograph registering a disturbance on the earth's surface thousands of miles away. They hung, dead weights of lifeless material, straight toward the floor. But as I watched, the extreme end of the long

curtain flipped back, twice, as though pulled by unseen hands to allow for the passage of invisible bodies. You have pulled a silk handkerchief from beneath a brim-filled glass of water, without moving the glass? It was like that. Just two flashes, lightning-swift, so deftly executed that the motion imparted to the hanging draperies was local only, dying as soon as it was born, leaving the rest of the black curtain motionless.

This was my impression then: that, at and after this instant, Epiphané and I were alone in the room; that the two figures on the table were the corporeal forms of men, but lacking the divine essence. Whither had this essence flown?

"Teach me, Epiphané! Teach me!" I cried, hardly realizing that I had spoken, until I found myself upon the table and lying down beside those other two.

"You are entirely ready, Abbott?" asked Epiphané, quietly.

"I ask but one thing," I replied: "that you give me leave to recall all that happens to me."

He nodded and came to stand over me, his eyes gazing stedfastly into mine.

"Yours is another murder case," he said. "An old man was killed this afternoon on the Rathdale Road outside the city, his body, literally cut to ribbons, being placed in a trunk afterward and hurled over an embankment along the road, presumably from a fast-moving automobile, as marks on the embankment showed that the trunk bounced a great number of times before it came to rest in the spot where the police found it. Go to that place and trace the murderer! The police haven't a single clue upon which to build up a case. The old man has not been identified. This is your last command: you will receive the impressions caused by horror and fear of punishment."

He paused, and his eyes seemed to glow as they rested on my face. They became twin balls of yellow fire and, before the room with the billowing draperies faded from my view, I heard his last words: "You will remember all that occurs."

A FLASH of oblivion, then a new being. It was I. I knew that at once. Yet it was a vastly more volatile I, filled with the ecstasy of a new being, new life. I knew myself, yet I was without substance or shadow. I was conscious of no form that I recognized as my corporeal self. I was alive and tingling with a vast feeling of power, a power that recognized no limitations. I could move with the speed of thought itself, and solid bodies hindered me not at all. I was as full of exuberance as though a nectar of the gods had been taken into my being, filling me with its heady vigor. I was like a schoolboy when the school day is finished and he turns wild handsprings to relieve his bubbling emotions. I was moving, I knew that, yet there was no impression of moving, really. I can not explain it. There was but a flash, as of a bright light flaring up for an instant in a well of gloom, and I found myself above an embankment on the Rathdale Road.

"Receive the impressions of horror and fear of punishment," came the command of the mental switchboard.

I was above the scene of the recent murder. My whole being pulsated with ghastly horror, and I who claimed that I had never known fear was trembling with a fear that consumed me as though I were afire. I was the murderer, looking down upon the scene of my crime! And the fear I felt was the fear of the noose or the electric chair! The atmosphere was vibrant with the feelings that obsessed me. The impressions impinged upon my consciousness as though they were living, breathing waves of feeling, recording themselves upon the most sensitive instrument known to man. I knew that these impressions

were the result of the invisible aura given off by the murderer, but so vivid were they that they seized upon me and made me their own. I, and not the unknown, was the actual murderer! Such was the power of those impressions.

I fled from them with the speed of the wind. Yet they remained with me and I could not escape them. I found myself upon the road and moving at a great rate of speed. I had the impression of riding in a high-powered car; but beneath me there was no car, nor shadow of a car—only the ribbon of the night-shadowed road leading into the city, which unwound beneath me as though it were a broad ribbon thrown out to unroll with uncanny swiftness. My movement was caused by no conscious effort of my own. I moved because I must—because an unseen power propelled me—because I strove to escape that aura of horror and of fear.

Before me now, in the heart of the city, I saw the black lines of a system of street-car tracks. Not a car was visible, though I looked wildly in each direction. The city was silent with the silence of late nighttime. Yet, when I reached those two tracks, the car which I could not see was no longer under me. I followed the street-car tracks and, so vivid was the impression, my body—I call it that for the sake of clarity—swayed from side to side with the motion of the car. There was no car—only the impression. And that other impression of a fear that I could not escape. I was fleeing from my peace of mind, and from that terrible thing that I had left beneath the embankment on the Rathdale Road! I could smell the odor of burning flesh as it arose on the air in a closed and terrible chamber—from a heavy chair with ghastly trappings on arms and legs and headrest! God! God! God!

Anything is better than facing that terrible chair! I rise to my feet and hurry to the front of the swaying car. Though I see nothing, I feel that the front window of that car is open. In the grip of horror and despair I feel myself lifted and hurled headlong through that open window. There is a sensation of falling. Heavy wheels pass over me and the impressions fade as though instantly blotted out. I am in the midst of nothingness, feeling nothing, hearing nothing.

I open my eyes to see Epiphané bending over me. I recall everything, just as I have written it here, yet the feeling of horror has passed as completely as though it had never been. I have a feeling of tiredness, and that is all—as though I had worked myself to the point of exhaustion.

Epiphané smiles as he tenders me the morning paper, for I have been absent from this room the entire night. I open the paper and read:

TRUNK MURDER MYSTERY SOLVED BY POLICE

The first clue, which puzzled the police when first discovered yesterday, was a badly smashed car found just beyond the intersection of the Rathdale Road with the interurban street-car line. The car had driven full speed against a brick building at the edge of the city.

The driver has been found, who told a tale of a wild ride from Dorrisdale, far out on the Rathdale Road, where, he said, he was hired by a wild-eyed man who demanded that he (the driver) take him and his trunk to this place with all possible speed. Above the embankment where the murder trunk was found, says the driver, his fare had suddenly hurled the trunk out of the car, yelling to the driver at the same time to get all the speed out of the car of which it was capable. He emphasized the need of haste by pressing the cold muzzle of a revolver against the back of the driver's neck.

At the street-car crossing the man had leaped from the car and landed running. Fearing that a horrible crime had been committed in which he might be implicated, the driver had lost his head for a moment. He leaped from his car without slacking speed, and came to his senses only after the car had half buried itself in the side of the brick house.

By this time his strange fare, and the street-car which he had caught, had vanished. The driver hid himself away and watched the newspapers for account of a crime that would fit the queer circum-

stances in his own case. When he realized that the very worst had happened he gave himself up to the police and told his story.

The street-cars which run on the line in question are those affairs where the motorman and the conductor are often one and the same person. It is easy to understand how one man, however good a memory he might possess, might never miss one passenger out of the great crowd which patronized his car. There is no record anywhere along the line of such a person as that described by the driver of the death car having left the street-car.

This left but one conclusion, providing the driver spoke the truth—that the strange man had left the car while it was in motion. Just how he did this may never be known, but an early search this morning, from the junction where the automobile crash took place, to the car stop, resulted in the finding of the mangled body of a man, stretched across the rails, cut almost to ribbons by the passage of many cars across his body.

The driver identified this man positively by the clothes he wore. Neither he nor the murdered man has been identified by name, but the police have found something at last upon which to build a case. There remains but the necessary identification, when the affair will be docketed. The driver of the death car has been exonerated and released.

4

I WAS satisfied now that Epiphané attained his results through a kind of hypnotism of which only he was master. He had learned the secret of taking the living subject to the very brink of the grave, where, hypnotists tell us, the subjective mind reaches perfection. This would explain the fact that, when I first saw Hoffman and Dietz in their trance-like state upon the table in the room of the billowing draperies, I had thought them to be, indeed, dead. Yet they had come back. But there was still something about the thing that puzzled me: did the divine essence, the inner I, of the subject, remain away from the body until called back by the tremendous will of Epiphané? If he did not call it back, would it ever be able to return of its own volition? When this thought occurred to me I went straightway to Epiphané and put the question.

For the first time I saw a startled expression on his face. Fear was written there in large and easily readable capitals.

"That," he explained slowly, "is why I sought for someone to share my secret. Suppose that something should happen to me while Hoffman and Dietz were on a mission of some kind? As soon as you have learned both to stand upright and to take steps by yourself, I wish to give the secret into your keeping! I can not bear to think of those two manly boys becoming what they would certainly become should the switchboard be broken in their absence."

"It would merely mean that they would die, would it not?" I questioned.

"That is just the difficulty: they would not die!"

"You speak as though death might be the very least of their difficulties."

"Which it would. Death would be far, far better for them both."

"But if their souls were absent from their bodies they would be dead, would they not?"

"When I speak of the soul," answered Epiphané, "I mean the astral being, the subjective ego. They would waken instantly, were anything to happen to me. But the divine essence would be absent! Do you hear me, Abbott? They would be living men—without souls. No memories, no language, no reason beyond the reason exercised by the lowest brutes of the field! That is what would happen."

This was horrid in the extreme, even to contemplate; yet neither of us could foresee just how soon this very thing was to happen, or know that I alone, of the three agents, would win back to my corporeal abode in the flash of an eyelash before the smashing of the switchboard; that Epiphané, whole-souled benefactor of mankind, was to be the undoing of his two agents, his two very best

friends, who trusted him implicitly—all because of a boundless brotherly love which even the great ideals of Epiphané could not cause him to overlook.

But to my story. Catastrophes come fast enough, unbidden, without bringing them before they are due.

Days and weeks went by. Hoffman, Dietz and I spent as much time on that table as we spent in wakefulness. Epiphané, as though driven by a great invisible whip, worked us without mercy. It was well indeed that we three were possessed of constitutions that were virtually cast iron. Yet had we been the veriest weaklings, we must still have hewed to the line, our necks bowed at the inspiration of Epiphané himself. Even we could realize that, while to us the terrible strain of almost constant mental activity was exhausting in the extreme, Epiphané, since he controlled us entirely, must have been veritably bowed beneath the weight of his responsibility.

His burden was tenfold as great as our own. We appreciated it and strove all the harder to please him.

Then came the day.

THE newspapers had been full for days of the usual gory incidents of a crime-laden civilization. These had kept us busy enough. Yet our work had become almost routine. Each of us three was now so accustomed to sloughing off our corporeal bodies for hurried plunges into the Land Beyond the Shadows that it had become habit with us. We almost felt that we could have taken the step ourselves, without the mediation of Epiphané. We had but to ponder upon this, however, to realize the impossibility of it. To go forth without an invisible thread to guide us was to become will-o'-the-wisps upon the face of the earth. There must needs be a hand to pull upon the thread when the time came for the return. Several times had criminals, driven by our efforts to confess, published descriptions of one or another of us three. Even the slow-witted police had at last summoned their wits to compare accounts. Even they could see where the accounts coincided in many instances. Yet, as long as we were not ferreted out, Epiphané felt that this would help, rather than hinder us. It would fill the newspapers with speculations, which, in turn, might act as deterrents to those who felt the urge to overstep the well-defined boundary of the written law.

He reckoned, however, without the medical mind of another man whose knowledge of the human brain was only less vast than was that of Epiphané himself. This man must have been inspired. Just how near he came to guessing the whole secret may never be known, yet that he partly guessed it is almost a certainty, for he seized upon the ideal moment, when the city was in the throes of superstitious fear, to turn his own powerful mind into the rough and rocky road of criminality—right when the papers were full of the mysterious visitations which had caused the confessions of so many criminals.

This man's approach was far less subtle; it was more material, but none the less forcible. I have stated that we are all criminals to a certain extent, the difference being merely of degree. Perhaps this unknown man knew this, or was psychologist enough to guess at it, even, perhaps, taking his own life as an example. Who knows? I only know that the papers suddenly turned out scareheads two inches high, telling of half a score of mysterious letters which had been addressed to as many wealthy men of the city, letters which were almost word for word the same. The gist of them is given below:

I AM THE INVISIBLE POWER BEHIND THE VISITATIONS WHICH HAVE FILLED PEACE-LOVING PEOPLE OF THIS CITY WITH NAMELESS DREAD! UNLESS YOU LEAVE $100,000.00, IN UNTRACEABLE BILLS, BENEATH THE CORNER OF THE OLD WOODEN SIDEWALK AT ——— AND ——— STREETS,

AT 9 O'CLOCK EXACTLY, TOMORROW NIGHT, I SHALL GO TO THE POLICE AND TELL ALL I KNOW! I SEND ONE WARNING ONLY!

As it developed later, five men, of the ten addressed, carried out these strange orders to the very letter, after which they went home and covered their fear-trembling heads with their bed-clothes. Three of them left lesser amounts, together with notes saying that they could raise no more on such short notice but that, given sufficient time, they would find the full amount and finish carrying out the order. One of the men fled the city after receiving the note. The other man, gifted with a lawyer's bent for the technicalities of things, calmly sat him down and went over his life in retrospect. Perhaps he recalled things that would not bear the light of day, did they become known, but, regarding them carefully, he decided that so much time had elapsed since the deeds in question, that no tribunal in the land could prove him guilty. Whatever his motive, he calmly went to the police and turned over the note. When pressed by them for details of the dangerous knowledge in the hands of the unknown writer of the note, he merely shrugged expressive shoulders.

The police published the note in the next issue of the city's newspapers, together with the request that, were there others in the city who had received like commands, they should communicate with the police at once. Some of the men were diffident but, after several days had passed and but nine of the notes were forthcoming, the police decided that this had been the total number written. They shrewdly guessed that there might be another, basing their guess on the efficacy of the even number as against the odd, but if they connected the possible missing note with the hurried business trip of one of the city's lights of finance, they said nothing.

There was not a single clue. Those who had paid over the blackmail had lost their money, for when the police visited the place mentioned in the note they found nothing at all.

I was given this mission. I shall regret it as long as I live.

I TOOK my place on the table and was sent into the outer ether with orders to proceed to the spot where the blackmail was deposited, and to receive the impressions of greed.

The impressions were almost tangible, so strong were they. I was a being filled to bursting with the lust for power: not for the power that comes with fame or the opportunity to command others, but for the weird power which comes from the possession of great wealth. I had the impression of lifting great bundles of beautiful green currency from the hiding-place, and of walking down the street with it securely hidden in my clothes, looking to right and left as though I feared that someone might smite me and take away my riches. The impressions were easy to follow. I found myself at length before a small bungalow of a place on the very outskirts of the city. I entered the place by that strange necromancy of which Epiphané was the only living master.

I found myself face to face with Epiphané himself!

Bewilderment, horror—a feeling of helplessness!

Then I looked more closely, feeling glad indeed that I could see and not be seen, unless Epiphané willed it. For I saw almost at once that the man was not really Epiphanè. There was Epiphané's great breadth of brow, the same hair, the same bulk of body. But there was a great scar across the right cheek of this man that would mark the difference at once. And the expression on the face was different, too. The face of the real Epiphané was the noble face of the man with a great and overmastering ideal—as great and overmastering as it was unselfish. This man's face was a battleground of greed and innate malignancy.

I came to myself on the table and looked up into the face of the real Epiphané. This was the second time I had seen him shaken with uncontrollable emotion.

"Do not tell me, Abbott," he moaned. "I know! I know! God in heaven! The man is my own brother!"

Then Epiphané was much as other men, having brothers and sisters, perhaps, and somewhere a father and a mother who loved him. Up to now I had thought of him as a being apart.

"My God, Abbott!" cried Epiphané; "I can't treat him as I have treated the others. I have thought all along that, were such a thing to befall me, I would lead my own kin to justice as quickly as I would lead a stranger. But I can't! I can't! Ties of blood are too strong, even for me!"

All that night, with Hoffman and Dietz out on their never-ending missions, whither he had sent them in order that they might not witness his sufferings, Epiphané fought his great fight. And he lost. For when morning came he gave Hoffman and Dietz holidays and sent for his brother.

There was no mistaking the great brute of a man who entered the very room where I had first seen Epiphané. He was enough like Epiphané to be his twin; although, prior to his coming, Epiphané assured me that this was not a fact, that they were maternal brothers only, having the same mother but different, and legitimate, fathers. I saw at once that, though the newcomer held his half-brother in awe, he hated him, too.

In as few words as possible Epiphané told the fellow that he knew everything. The man's fear of exposure was pitiful—or a marvelous piece of acting. Epiphané made him promise to return every cent he had blackmailed from the men of wealth, telling him in return that nothing would be said about the matter, if he would carry out his side of the bargain.

The big fellow agreed and sneaked out of the place like a whipped cur.

Epiphané spent a day that was pregnant with melancholy. Was that melancholy a future event that cast its weird shadow before?

In the evening Hoffman and Dietz came back and were assigned regular missions. After they had gone Epiphané looked sorrowfully at me for many moments. Then he made a gesture of resolute decision.

"Come, Abbott," he said; "I wish to make sure that my half-brother intends to carry out his promise. I know him of old. He is wofully weak where money is concerned."

I TOOK my place on the table and was sent forth.

Instantly I was in the bungalow of Epiphané's brother. I received the impression of fear, and another impression, weirdly terrible and horror-inspiring, that made me will with all my strength, to be back in that drapery-bordered room with Epiphané. For Epiphané's brother was not in the bungalow! In a flash I knew where he had gone. Did that queer current travel back over the invisible thread to a contact with the brain of Epiphané? I do not know. But I opened my eyes, there on that table, just in time to see an arm reach in from behind those draperies—and a hand that held a slender stiletto poised to strike.

Before I could cry out, the hand descended. Epiphané crumpled up with a gurgling moan. That hand with the stiletto had been at such a height as only one other man possessed besides Epiphané! In those last moments did Epiphané recall those other two, Hoffman and Dietz, as they lay there on the table? I know that his face was set in an expression of iron resolve—I saw his indomitable will straining to hold his spirit this side the curtain for the necessary iota of time. But to no avail. He died there in his chair, within a brace of heartbeats.

And Hoffman and Dietz still lay on the table like marble statues!

Epiphané had gone without telling me the essential secret!

Even as his spirit must have been leaving his body, those two statues stirred and sat up, slithered sidewise with queer, animal-like motions, and stood upright beside the table.

God in heaven! Their eyes were absolutely devoid of expression, set in the inscrutability of two carven Buddhas! Weird noises came from their lips, grunting noises devoid of meaning. They started around the table in opposite directions and came together with a crash that almost threw them off their feet. There was a blue bruise on the forehead of Hoffman, and red blood sprang from the nose of Dietz; yet their masklike faces did not change expression. I knew that, had not the crash thrown them slightly out of line with each other, they would have collided again. Their bodies felt the pain, of that I was certain; yet there was no memory that could warn them against a repetition of the collision. Their limbs twitched oddly, and their arms flapped here and there as though they were the lifeless arms of animate scarecrows.

I was alone with two corporeal substances which lacked the essential essence of the soul! They had no memory, no language—they were mechanical automatons, nothing more. They were not idiots, for idiots possess brains of a sort. These Things had nothing!

I had no fear. Perhaps you do not believe me, but I state the truth. I tried to recall all I had ever read about hypnotism. Could I recall the essential essence of these two—Things? I seized Hoffman by the arms and tried to place him on the table. He seemed not to know that I was there. I could not budge him. He walked—stumbled rather—toward me, brushing me out of the way as easily as though I had been a babe in arms. And he never knew I was there! In life Hoffman had been the weaker of the two men. What could I do with Dietz? Nothing, I realized at once.

These two men began an aimless circling of the room, bumping their heads against each other and against the walls, senseless as bluebottle flies that butt their heads against the window-pane. Dietz brushed against the drapery and walked through it. I hurried on ahead of him and locked the door which led out of the house. I made fast the windows, and drew back the drapery so that the two Things would not tear it down.

Who shall realize what I went through to get these two Things into the room with the pallets, and how I kept them there long enough to allow the police to remove the body of Epiphané and to start their investigations which might, in the end, discover the murderer? I told them his name, but I knew that he must have left the city at once. They had but to broadcast a picture of Epiphané himself to have the police throughout the continent on the trail of the killer.

How I ever persuaded them to allow me to go free I do not remember. I only know that they went away, finally, and left me. What did they think, I wonder, when those two Things in that other room knocked over chairs in their aimless and senseless gropings? Perhaps they never heard them. Perhaps, keyed up as I was, my ears were keener than theirs. But they went away and left me alone with the soulless ones.

Who shall visualize the week that followed? Neither Hoffman nor Dietz could be induced to take his place on the table. I tried to send forth my will to recall their alter egos, but I knew not whither Epiphané had sent them. I felt like a blind man groping among the shadows—feeling my way with senseless hands—threading my way through the universe for two beings that were without substance or shadow — groping, groping, always groping, but lacking the all-powerful

secret that Epiphané may have been trying to give me at the last.

And ever the stumbling about of the two Things—ever those expressionless eyes upon me.

I could not tell the police. I could, in my mind's eye, see the huge headlines in the papers. Perhaps their bungling might somehow place the alter egos of Hoffman and Dietz forever beyond the reach of mortal hands or living minds. There lacked a man with the vast mentality of Epiphané himself, yet I could not go forth in the highways and the byways to seek him.

At last I have hit upon this way to find him: the medium of the press—keeping the name of the city and the house number a secret until the man I seek shall see what I have written here. If his mind is the mind I am seeking he will know how to communicate with me.

Read and hurry! Hurry! Hurry! For while you hesitate I grow weak with the mental exhaustion engendered by the constant groping—groping—groping. . . .

* * * * * * *

IT WAS after writing the above account that I received notification of the capture of the murderer of Epiphané. There was all the evidence in the world to convict him, especially after he brazenly admitted that his hand had struck the blow. All this appeared in the newspaper account telling of the capture. But what struck me like a blow between the eyes was the fact that the fellow made public the fact that he knew all the facts in the case of the two soulless ones. He had leered knowingly at the reporters when he told his story, further stating that he possessed almost the same power as the man he had killed—that he could actually bring back the two to normality. But he demanded his freedom and full exoneration as the price. The police had refused his demand, leaving me in a greater quandary than before. Here was the answer to my questioning, and I couldn't make use of it!

But the papers had the story, and reporters came to interview me—and to gaze in horror at the two Things which I kept confined in the quarters recently occupied by the great Epiphané. Their stories, under the pens of imaginative reporters, blazed across a thousand papers in great black scareheads.

They brought the answer to my question! For readers, championing Dietz and Hoffman, whose pictures, wherein could be easily read the great calamity which had befallen them, had been used in the write-ups—fairly drowned the police in written words of protest. Let the murderer go free, they demanded, and bring back to life and understanding the two who were far more valuable to humanity—Dietz and Hoffman. The police mulled the matter over and finally came to me, bringing the murderer with them, securely handcuffed to the wrists of two officers. He sneered at us all when the police promised to free him if he could recall the souls of the two agents.

He sat in the chair so often occupied by Epiphané, still fastened to the officers. Soothing Dietz and Hoffman as though they had been babies, I induced them to take their places on the table.

And the murderer was successful! The police struck his shackles from him, thus returning to society the most dangerous criminal unhung. I was terribly bitter against this man, and even to feel the hearty slaps on my back administered by Dietz and Hoffman could not entirely compensate me for the loss of my great teacher.

"Here, you fratricide," I cried, tendering him the knife with which he had done the deed and which I had found beyond the curtain after he had fled, "take this with you as a

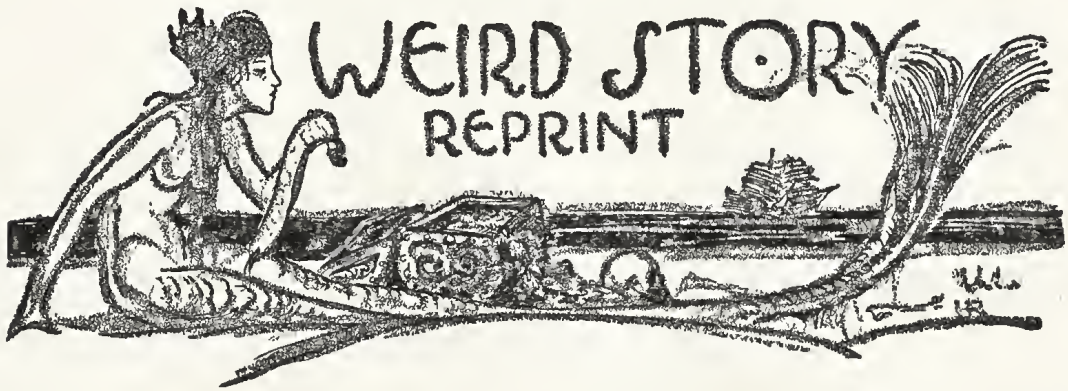
memento! I hope that it will aid you to keep always in mind the ghastliness of your deed! That it will aid you to remember for always, waking or sleeping! Further, I hope that you will one day go out as your brother went, and by that knife."

The fellow grinned, flipped the knife into the air and caught it deftly by the point. He turned and left the room, still twirling the knife and grinning back at me over his shoulder, with a mocking light in his eyes which I would fain have brushed away with my bare hands at his throat, had I dared.

He slammed the door behind him with a force that rattled the window-panes. I heard his step on the stairs, then a scream that I shall remember always, and the thudding of a heavy body falling down the stairs.

The police hurried out. They returned in a few moments, awe in their faces, and they looked at me queerly.

"It was the darkness in the stair-well that caused him to miss his footing," said one of the officers, "and he must still have been carrying the knife by its point; for you, young man, have had your wish! Epiphané has been avenged!"



*The Specter of Tappington**

By RICHARD HARRIS BARHAM

"IT IS very odd, though; what can have become of them?" said Charles Seaforth, as he peeped under the valance of an old-fashioned bedstead, in an old-fashioned apartment of a still more old-fashioned manor-house; "'tis confoundedly odd, and I can't make it out at all. Why, Barney, where are they?—and where the devil are you?"

No answer was returned to this appeal; and the lieutenant, who was, in the main, a reasonable person—at least as reasonable a person as any young gentleman of twenty-two in "the service" can fairly be expected to be—cooled when he reflected that his servant could scarcely reply extempore to a summons which it was impossible he should hear.

An application to the bell was the considerate result; and the footsteps of as tight a lad as ever put pipe-clay to belt sounded along the gallery.

"Come in!" said his master. An ineffectual attempt upon the door reminded Mr. Seaforth that he had

* From *The Ingoldsby Legends.*

locked himself in. "By heaven! this is the oddest thing of all," said he, as he turned the key and admitted Mr. Maguire into his dormitory.

"Barney, where are my pantaloons?"

"Is it the breeches?" asked the valet, casting an inquiring eye round the apartment;—"is it the breeches, sir?"

"Yes; what have you done with them?"

"Sure then your honor had them on when you went to bed, and it's hereabout they'll be, I'll be bail;" and Barney lifted a fashionable tunic from a cane-backed armchair, proceeding in his examination. But the search was vain: there was the tunic aforesaid; there was a smart-looking kerseymere waistcoat; but the most important article of all in a gentleman's wardrobe was still wanting.

"Where *can* they be?" asked the master, with a strong accent on the auxiliary verb.

"Sorrow a know I knows," said the man.

"It *must* have been the devil, then, after all, who has been here and carried them off!" cried Seaforth, staring full into Barney's face.

Mr. Maguire was not devoid of the superstition of his countrymen; still he looked as if he did not quite subscribe to the *sequitur*.

His master read incredulity in his countenance. "Why, I tell you, Barney, I put them there, on that armchair, when I got into bed; and, by heaven! I distinctly saw the ghost of the old fellow they told me of, come in at midnight, put on my pantaloons, and walk away with them."

"Maybe so," was the cautious reply.

"I thought, of course, it was a dream; but then—where the devil are the breeches?"

The question was more easily asked than answered. Barney renewed his search, while the lieutenant folded his arms, and, leaning against the toilet, sunk into a revery.

"After all, it must be some trick of my laughter-loving cousins," said Seaforth.

"Ah! then, the ladies!" chimed in Mr. Maguire, though the observation was not addressed to him; "and will it be Miss Caroline, or Miss Fanny, that's stole your honor's things?"

"I hardly know what to think of it," pursued the bereaved lieutenant, still speaking in soliloquy, with his eye resting dubiously on the chamber-door. "I locked myself in, that's certain; and—but there must be some other entrance to the room—pooh! I remember—the private staircase; how could I be such a fool?" and he crossed the chamber to where a low oaken doorcase was dimly visible in a distant corner. He paused before it. Nothing now interfered to screen it from observation; but it bore tokens of having been at some earlier period concealed by tapestry, remains of which yet clothed the walls on either side the portal.

"This way they must have come," said Seaforth; "I wish with all my heart I had caught them!"

"Och! the kittens!" sighed Mr. Barney Maguire.

But the mystery was yet as far from being solved as before. True, there *was* the "other door"; but then that, too, on examination, was even more firmly secured than the one which opened on the gallery—two heavy bolts on the inside effectually prevented any *coup de main* on the lieutenant's bivouac from that quarter. He was more puzzled than ever: nor did the minutest inspection of the walls and floor throw any light upon the subject: one thing only was clear—the breeches were gone! "It is *very* singular," said the lieutenant.

TAPPINGTON (generally called Tapton) Everard is an antiquated but commodious manor-house in the eastern division of the county of Kent.

A former proprietor had been high-sheriff in the days of Elizabeth, and many a dark and dismal tradition was yet extant of the licentiousness of his life, and the enormity of his offenses. The Glen, which the keeper's daughter was seen to enter, but never known to quit, still frowns darkly as of yore; while an ineradicable bloodstain on the oaken stair yet bids defiance to the united energies of soap and sand. But it is with one particular apartment that a deed of more especial atrocity is said to be connected. A stranger guest—so runs the legend—arrived unexpectedly at the mansion of the "Bad Sir Giles." They met in apparent friendship; but the ill-concealed scowl on their master's brow told the domestics that the visit was not a welcome one; the banquet, however, was not spared; the wine-cup circulated freely—too freely, perhaps—for sounds of discord at length reached the ears of even the excluded serving-men, as they were doing their best to imitate their betters in the lower hall. Alarmed, some of them ventured to approach the parlor; one, an old and favored retainer of the house, went so far as to break in upon his master's privacy. Sir Giles, already high in oath, fiercely enjoined his absence, and he retired; not, however, before he had distinctly heard from the stranger's lips a menace that "There was that within his pocket which would disprove the knight's right to issue that or any other command within the walls of Tapton."

The intrusion, though momentary, seemed to have produced a beneficial effect; the voices of the disputants fell, and the conversation was carried on thenceforth in a more subdued tone, till, as evening closed in, the domestics, when summoned to attend with lights, found not only cordiality restored, but that a still deeper carouse was meditated. Fresh stoups, and from the choicest bins, were produced; nor was it till at a late, or rather early hour, that the revelers sought their chambers.

The one allotted to the stranger occupied the first floor of the eastern angle of the building, and had once been the favorite apartment of Sir Giles himself. Scandal ascribed this preference to the facility which a private staircase, communicating with the grounds, had afforded him, in the old knight's time, of following his wicked courses unchecked by parental observation; a consideration which ceased to be of weight when the death of his father left him uncontrolled master of his estate and actions. From that period Sir Giles had established himself in what were called the "state apartments," and the "oaken chamber" was rarely tenanted, save on occasions of extraordinary festivity, or when the yule log drew an unusually large accession of guests around the Christmas hearth.

On this eventful night it was prepared for the unknown visitor, who sought his couch heated and inflamed from his midnight orgies, and in the morning was found in his bed a swollen and blackened corpse. No marks of violence appeared upon the body; but the livid hue of the lips, and certain dark-colored spots visible on the skin, aroused suspicions which those who entertained them were too timid to express. Apoplexy, induced by the excesses of the preceding night, Sir Giles's confidential leech pronounced to be the cause of his sudden dissolution. The body was buried in peace; and though some shook their heads as they witnessed the haste with which the funeral rites were hurried on, none ventured to murmur. Other events arose to distract the attention of the retainers; men's minds became occupied by the stirring politics of the day; while the near approach of that formidable armada, so vainly arrogating to itself a title which the very elements joined with human valor to disprove, soon interfered to weaken,

if not obliterate, all remembrance of the nameless stranger who had died within the walls of Tapton Everard.

Years rolled on: the "Bad Sir Giles" had himself long since gone to his account, the last, as it was believed, of his immediate line; though a few of the older tenants were sometimes heard to speak of an elder brother, who had disappeared in early life, and never inherited the estate. Rumors, too, of his having left a son in foreign lands were at one time rife; but they died away, nothing occurring to support them: the property passed unchallenged to a collateral branch of the family, and the secret, if secret there were, was buried in Denton churchyard, in the lonely grave of the mysterious stranger. One circumstance alone occurred, after a long intervening period, to revive the memory of these transactions. Some workmen employed in grubbing an old plantation, for the purpose of raising on its site a modern shrubbery, dug up, in the execution of their task, the mildewed remnants of what seemed to have been once a garment. On more minute inspection enough remained of silken slashes and a coarse embroidery to identify the relics as having once formed part of a pair of trunk hose; while a few papers which fell from them, altogether illegible from damp and age, were by the unlearned rustics conveyed to the then owner of the estate.

Whether the squire was more successful in deciphering them was never known; he certainly never alluded to their contents; and little would have been thought of the matter but for the inconvenient memory of one old woman, who declared she heard her grandfather say that when the "stranger guest" was poisoned, though all the rest of his clothes were there, his breeches, the supposed repository of the supposed documents, could never be found. The master of Tapton Everard smiled when he heard Dame Jones's hint of deeds which might impeach the validity of his own title in favor of some unknown descendant of some unknown heir; and the story was rarely alluded to, save by one or two miracle-mongers, who had heard that others had seen the ghost of old Sir Giles, in his night-cap, issue from the postern, enter the adjoining copse, and wring his shadowy hands in agony, as he seemed to search vainly for something hidden among the evergreens. The stranger's deathroom had, of course, been occasionally haunted from the time of his decease; but the periods of visitation had latterly become very rare—even Mrs. Botherby, the housekeeper, being forced to admit that, during her long sojourn at the manor, she had never "met with anything worse than herself"; though, as the old lady afterward added upon more mature reflection, "I must say I think I saw the devil *once.*"

Such was the legend attached to Tapton Everard, and such the story which the lively Caroline Ingoldsby detailed to her equally mercurial cousin, Charles Seaforth, licutenant in the East India Company's second regiment of Bombay Fencibles, as arm-in-arm they promenaded a gallery decked with some dozen grim-looking ancestral portraits, and, among others, with that of the redoubted Sir Giles himself. The gallant commander had that very morning paid his first visit to the house of his maternal uncle, after an absence of several years passed with his regiment on the arid plains of Hindostan, whence he was now returned on a three years' furlough. He had gone out a boy—he returned a man; but the impression made upon his youthful fancy by his favorite cousin remained unimpaired, and to Tapton he directed his steps, even before he sought the home of his widowed mother—comforting himself in this breach of filial decorum by the reflection that, as the manor was so little out of his way, it would be un-

kind to pass, as it were, the door of his relatives without just looking in for a few hours.

But he found his uncle as hospitable, and his cousin more charming than ever; and the looks of one, and the requests of the other, soon precluded the possibility of refusing to lengthen the "few hours" into a few days, though the house was at the moment full of visitors.

The Peterses were there from Ramsgate; and Mr., Mrs., and the two Miss Simpkinsons, from Bath, had come to pass a month with the family; and Tom Ingoldsby had brought down his college friend the Honorable Augustus Sucklethumbkin, with his groom and pointers, to take a fortnight's shooting. And then there was Mrs. Ogleton, the rich young widow, with her large black eyes, who, people did say, was setting her cap at the young squire, though Mrs. Botherby did not believe it; and, above all, there was Mademoiselle Pauline, her *femme de chambre*, who "*mon-Dieu*'d" everything and everybody, and cried "*Quel horreur!*" at Mrs. Botherby's cap. In short, to use the last-named and much-respected lady's own expression, the house was "choke-full" to the very attics—all save the "oaken chamber," which, as the lieutenant expressed a most magnanimous disregard of ghosts, was forthwith appropriated to his particular accommodation. Mr. Maguire meanwhile was fain to share the apartment of Oliver Dobbs, the squire's own man: a jocular proposal of joint occupancy having been first indignantly rejected by "*Mademoiselle,*" though preferred with the "laste taste in life" of Mr. Barney's most insinuating brogue.

"COME, Charles, the urn is absolutely getting cold; your breakfast will be quite spoiled: what can have made you so idle?" Such was the morning salutation of Miss Ingoldsby to the *militaire* as he entered the breakfast-room half an hour after the latest of the party.

"A pretty gentleman, truly, to make an appointment with," chimed in Miss Frances. "What is become of our ramble to the rocks before breakfast?"

"Oh! the young men never think of keeping a promise now," said Mrs. Peters, a little ferret-faced woman with underdone eyes.

"When I was a young man," said Mr. Peters, "I remember I always made a point of——"

"Pray how long ago was that?" asked Mr. Simpkinson from Bath.

"Why, sir, when I married Mrs. Peters, I was — let me see — I was——"

"Do pray hold your tongue, P., and eat your breakfast!" interrupted his better half, who had a mortal horror of chronological references; "it's very rude to tease people with your family affairs."

The lieutenant had by this time taken his seat in silence—a good-humored nod, and a glance, half-smiling, half-inquisitive, being the extent of his salutation. Smitten as he was, and in the immediate presence of her who had made so large a hole in his heart, his manner was evidently *distrait,* which the fair Caroline in her secret soul attributed to his being solely occupied by her *agrémens:* how would she have bridled had she known that they only shared his meditations with a pair of breeches!

Charles drank his coffee and spiked some half-dozen eggs, darting occasionally a penetrating glance at the ladies, in hope of detecting the supposed waggery by the evidence of some furtive smile or conscious look. But in vain; not a dimple moved indicative of roguery, nor did the slightest elevation of eyebrow rise confirmative of his suspicions. Hints and insinuations passed unheeded—more particular inquiries were out of the question:—the subject was unapproachable.

In the meantime, "patent cords" were just the thing for a morning's ride; and, breakfast ended, away cantered the party over the downs, till, every faculty absorbed by the beauties, animate and inanimate, which surrounded him, Lieutenant Seaforth of the Bombay Fencibles bestowed no more thought upon his breeches than if he had been born on the top of Ben Lomond.

ANOTHER night had passed away; the sun rose brilliantly, forming with his level beams a splendid rainbow in the far-off west, whither the heavy cloud, which for the last two hours had been pouring its waters on the earth, was now flying before him.

"Ah! then, and it's little good it'll be the claning of ye," apostrophized Mr. Barney Maguire, as he deposited, in front of his master's toilet, a pair of "bran' new" jockey boots, one of Hoby's primest fits, which the lieutenant had purchased on his way through town. On that very morning had they come for the first time under the valet's depurating hand, so little soiled, indeed, from the turfy ride of the preceding day, that a less scrupulous domestic might, perhaps, have considered the application of "Warren's Matchless," or oxalic acid, altogether superfluous. Not so Barney: with the nicest care had he removed the slightest impurity from each polished surface, and there they stood, rejoicing in their sable radiance. No wonder a pang shot across Mr. Maguire's breast, as he thought on the work now cut out for them, so different from the light labors of the day before; no wonder he murmured with a sigh, as the scarce-dried window-panes disclosed a road now inch-deep in mud, "Ah! then, it's little good the claning of ye!"—for well had he learned in the hall below that eight miles of a stiff clay soil lay between the manor and Bolsover Abbey, whose picturesque ruins,

"Like ancient Rome, majestic in decay,"

the party had determined to explore. The master had already commenced dressing, and the man was fitting straps upon a light pair of crane-necked spurs, when his hand was arrested by the old question, "Barney, where are the breeches?"

They were nowhere to be found!

MR. SEAFORTH descended that morning, whip in hand, and equipped in a handsome green riding-frock, but no "breeches and boots to match" were there: loose jean trousers, surmounting a pair of diminutive Wellingtons, embraced, somewhat incongruously, his nether man, *vice* the "patent cords," returned, like yesterday's pantaloons, absent without leave. The "top-boots" had a holiday.

"A fine morning after the rain," said Mr. Simpkinson from Bath.

"Just the thing for the 'ops," said Mr. Peters. "I remember when I was a boy——"

"Do hold your tongue, P.," said Mrs. Peters—advice which that exemplary matron was in the constant habit of administering to "her P.," as she called him, whenever he prepared to vent his reminiscences. Her precise reason for this it would be difficult to determine, unless, indeed, the story be true which a little bird had whispered into Mrs. Botherby's ear—Mr. Peters, though now a wealthy man, had received a liberal education at a charity-school, and was apt to recur to the days of his muffin-cap and leathers. As usual, he took his wife's hint in good part, and "paused in his reply."

"A glorious day for the ruins!" said young Ingoldsby. "But, Charles, what the deuce are you about? you don't mean to ride through our lanes in such toggery as that?"

"Lassy me!" said Miss Julia Simpkinson, "won't you be very wet?"

"You had better take Tom's cab," quoth the squire.

But this proposition was at once overruled; Mrs. Ogleton had already nailed the cab, a vehicle of all others the best adapted for a snug flirtation.

"Or drive Miss Julia in the phaeton?" No; that was the post of Mr. Peters, who, indifferent as an equestrian, had acquired some fame as a whip, while traveling through the midland counties for the firm of Bagshaw, Snivelby & Ghrimes.

"Thank you, I shall ride with my cousins," said Charles, with as much nonchalance as he could assume—and he did so; Mr. Ingoldsby, Mrs. Peters, Mr. Simpkinson from Bath, and his eldest daughter with her album, following in the family coach. The gentleman-commoner "voted the affair d——d slow" and declined the party altogether in favor of the gamekeeper and a cigar. "There was no fun in looking at old houses!" Mrs. Simpkinson preferred a short *séjour* in the still-room with Mrs. Botherby, who had promised to initiate her in that grand *arcanum,* the transmutation of gooseberry jam into guava jelly.

"DID you ever see an old abbey before, Mr. Peters?"

"Yes, miss, a French one; we have got one at Ramsgate; he teaches the Miss Joneses to parley-voo, and is turned of sixty."

Miss Simpkinson closed her album with an air of ineffable disdain.

Mr. Simpkinson from Bath was a professed antiquary, and one of the first water; he was master of Gwillim's *Heraldry,* and Milles's *History of the Crusades;* knew every plate in the *Monasticon;* had written an essay on the origin and dignity of the office of overseer, and settled the date of a Queen Anne's farthing. An influential member of the Antiquarian Society, to whose *Beauties of Bagnigge Wells* he had been a liberal subscriber, procured him a seat at the board of that learned body, since which happy epoch Sylvanus Urban had not a more indefatigible correspondent. His inaugural essay on the president's cocked hat was considered a miracle of erudition: and his account of the earliest application of gilding to gingerbread, a masterpiece of antiquarian research. His eldest daughter was of a kindred spirit: if her father's mantle had not fallen upon her, it was only because he had not thrown it off himself; she had caught hold of its tail, however, while it yet hung upon his honored shoulders. To souls so congenial, what a sight was the magnificent ruin of Bolsover! its broken arches, its moldering pinnacles, and the airy tracery of its half-demolished windows. The party were in raptures; Mr. Simpkinson began to meditate an essay, and his daughter an ode: even Seaforth, as he gazed on these lonely relics of the olden time, was betrayed into a momentary forgetfulness of his love and losses: the widow's eye-glass turned from her *cicisbeo's* whiskers to the mantling ivy: Mrs. Peters wiped her spectacles; and "her P." supposed the central tower "had once been the county jail." The squire was a philosopher, and had been there often before, so he ordered out the cold tongue and chickens.

"Bolsover Priory," said Mr. Simpkinson, with the air of a connoisseur —"Bolsover Priory was founded in the reign of Henry the Sixth, about the beginning of the Eleventh Century. Hugh de Bolsover had accompanied that monarch to the Holy Land, in the expedition undertaken by way of penance for the murder of his young nephews in the Tower. Upon the dissolution of the monasteries, the veteran was enfeoffed in the lands and manor, to which he gave his own name of Bowlsover, or Beeowls-over (by corruption Bolsover), —a Bee in chief, over three Owls, all proper, being the armorial ensigns borne by this distinguished crusader at the siege of Acre."

"Ah! that was Sir Sidney Smith," said Mr. Peters; "I've heard tell of him, and all about Mrs. Partington, and——"

"P., be quiet, and don't expose yourself!" sharply interrupted his lady. P. was silenced, and betook himself to the bottled stout.

"These lands," continued the antiquary," were held in grand sergeantry by the presentation of three white owls and a pot of honey——"

"Lassy me! how nice!" said Miss Julia. Mr. Peters licked his lips.

"Pray give me leave, my dear—owls and honey, whenever the king should come a rat-catching into this part of the country."

"Rat-catching!" ejaculated the squire, pausing abruptly in the mastication of a drumstick.

"To be sure, my dear sir: don't you remember the rats once came under the forest laws—a minor species of venison? 'Rats and mice, and such small deer,' eh?—Shakespeare, you know. Our ancestors ate rats;" ("The nasty fellows!" shuddered Miss Julia in a parenthesis) "and owls, you know, are capital mousers——"

"I've seen a howl," said Mr. Peters; "there's one in the Sohological Gardens—a little hook-nosed chap in a wig—only its feathers and——"

Poor P. was destined never to finish a speech.

"Do be quiet!" cried the authoritative voice; and the would-be naturalist shrank into his shell, like a snail in the "Sohological Gardens."

"You should read Blount's *Jocular Tenures,* Mr. Ingoldsby," pursued Simpkinson. "A learned man was Blount! Why, sir, His Royal Highness the Duke of York once paid a silver horseshoe to Lord Ferrers——"

"I've heard of him," broke in the incorrigible Peters; "he was hanged at the Old Bailey in a silk rope for shooting Dr. Johnson."

The antiquary vouchsafed no notice of the interruption; but, taking a pinch of snuff, continued his harangue.

"A silver horseshoe, sir, which is due from every scion of royalty who rides across one of his manors; and if you look into the penny county histories, now publishing by an eminent friend of mine, you will find that Langhale in Co. Norf. was held by one Baldwin *per saltum, sufflatum, et pettum;* that is, he was to come every Christmas into Westminster Hall, there to take a leap, cry hem! and——"

"Mr. Simpkinson, a glass of sherry?" cried Tom Ingoldsby, hastily.

"Not any, thank you, sir. This Baldwin, surnamed *Le*——"

"Mrs. Ogleton challenged you, sir; she insists upon it," said Tom still more rapidly, at the same time filling a glass, and forcing it on the *sçavant,* who, thus arrested in the very crisis of his narrative, received and swallowed the potation as if it had been physic.

"What on earth has Miss Simpkinson discovered there?" continued Tom; "something of interest. See how fast she is writing."

The diversion was effectual; everyone looked toward Miss Simpkinson, who, far too ethereal for "creature comforts," was seated apart on the dilapidated remains of an altar-tomb, committing eagerly to paper something that had strongly impressed her; the air—the eye "in a fine frenzy rolling"—all betokened that the divine *afflatus* was come. Her father rose, and stole silently toward her.

"What an old boar!" muttered young Ingoldsby; alluding, perhaps, to a slice of brawn which he had just begun to operate upon, but which, from the celerity with which it disappeared, did not seem so very difficult of mastication.

But what had become of Seaforth and his fair Caroline all this while? Why, it so happened that they had been simultaneously stricken with the picturesque appearance of one of those high and pointed arches, which that eminent antiquary, Mr. Harseley Curties, has described in his *Ancient Records* as "a *Gothic* window of the *Saxon* order;" and then the ivy clustered so thickly and so beautifully on the other side, that they went round to look at that; and then their proximity deprived it of half its effect, and so they walked across to a little knoll, a hundred yards off, and in crossing a small ravine they came to what in Ireland they call "a bad step," and Charles had to carry his cousin over it; and then, when they had to come back, she would not give him the trouble again for the world, so they followed a better but more circuitous route, and there were hedges and ditches in the way, and stiles to get over and gates to get through, so that an hour or more had elapsed before they were able to rejoin the party.

"Lassy me!" said Miss Julia Simpkinson, "how long you have been gone!"

And so they had. The remark was a very just as well as a very natural one. They were gone a long while, and a nice cozy chat they had; and what do you think it was all about, my dear miss?

"O, lassy me! love, no doubt, and the moon, and eyes, and nightingales, and——"

Stay, stay, my sweet young lady; do not let the fervor of your feelings run away with you! I do not pretend to say, indeed, that one or more of these pretty subjects might not have been introduced; but the most important and leading topic of the conference was—Lieutenant Seaforth's breeches.

"Caroline," said Charles, "I have had some very odd dreams since I have been at Tappington."

"Dreams, have you?" smiled the young lady, arching her taper neck like a swan in pluming. "Dreams, have you?"

"Aye, dreams—or dream, perhaps, I should say; for, though repeated, it was still the same. And what do you imagine was its subject?"

"It is impossible for me to divine," said the tongue;—"I have not the least difficulty in guessing," said the eye, as plainly as ever eye spoke.

"I dreamt—of your great-grandfather!"

There was a change in the glance—"My great-grandfather?"

"Yes, the old Sir Giles, or Sir John, you told me about the other day: he walked into my bedroom in his short cloak of murrey-colored velvet, his long rapier, and his Raleigh-looking hat and feather, just as the picture represents him; but with one exception."

"And what was that?"

"Why, his lower extremities, which were visible, were—those of a skeleton."

"Well?"

"Well, after taking a turn or two about the room, and looking round him with a wistful air, he came to the bed's foot, stared at me in a manner impossible to describe—and then he—he laid hold of my pantaloons; whipped his long bony legs into them in a twinkling; and strutting up to the glass, seemed to view himself in it with great complacency. I tried to speak, but in vain. The effort, however, seemed to excite his attention; for, wheeling about, he showed me the grimmest-looking death's head you can well imagine, and with an indescribable grin strutted out of the room."

"Absurd! Charles. How can you talk such nonsense?"

"But, Caroline—the breeches are really gone."

ON THE following morning, contrary to his usual custom, Seaforth was the first person in the breakfast parlor. As no one else was present, he did precisely what nine young men out of ten so situated would have done; he walked up to the mantel-piece, established himself upon the rug, and subducting his coat-tails one under each arm, turned toward the fire that portion of the human frame which it is considered equally indecorous to present to a friend or an enemy. A serious, not to say anxious, expression was visible upon his good-humored countenance, and his mouth was fast buttoning itself up for an incipient whistle, when little Flo, a tiny spaniel of the Blenheim breed—the pet object of Miss Julia Simpkinson's affection—bounced out from beneath a sofa, and began to bark at—his pantaloons.

They were cleverly "built," of a light gray mixture, a broad stripe of the most vivid scarlet traversing each seam in a perpendicular direction from hip to ankle—in short, the regimental costume of the Royal Bombay Fencibles. The animal, educated in the country, had never seen such a pair of breeches in her life—*Omne ignotum pro magnifico!* The scarlet streak, inflamed as it was by the reflection of the fire, seemed to act on Flora's nerves as the same color does on those of bulls and turkeys; she advanced at the *pas de charge,* and her vociferation, like her amazement, was unbounded. A sound kick from the disgusted officer changed its character, and induced a retreat at the very moment when the mistress of the pugnacious quadruped entered to the rescue.

"Lassy me! Flo, what *is* the matter?" cried the sympathizing lady, with a scrutinizing glance leveled at the gentleman.

It might as well have lighted on a feather bed. His air of imperturbable unconsciousness defied examination; and as he would not, and Flora could not, expound, that injured individual was compelled to pocket up her wrongs. Others of the household soon dropped in, and clustered round the board dedicated to the most sociable of meals; the urn was paraded "hissing hot," and the cups which "cheer, but not inebriate," steamed redolent of hyson and pekoe; muffins and marmalade, newspapers and Finnan haddies, left little room for observation on the character of Charles's warlike "turn-out." At length a look from Caroline, followed by a smile that nearly ripened to a titter, caused him to turn abruptly and address his neighbor. It was Simpkinson, who, deeply engaged in sipping her tea and turning over her album, seemed, like a female Chrononotonthologos, "immersed in cogibuntidy of cognition." An interrogatory on the subject of her studies drew from her the confession that she was at that moment employed in putting the finishing touches to a poem inspired by the romantic shades of Bolsover. The entreaties of the company were of course urgent. Mr. Peters, "who liked verses," was especially persevering, and Sappho at length compliant. After a preparatory hem! and a glance at the mirror to ascertain that her look was sufficiently sentimental, the poetess began:

"There is a calm, a holy feeling,
Vulgar minds can never know,
O'er the bosom softly stealing—
Chasten'd grief, delicious wo!
Oh! how sweet at eve regaining
Yon lone tower's sequester'd shade—
Sadly mute and uncomplaining——"

—Yow!—yeough!—yeough!—yow!—yow! yelled a hapless sufferer from beneath the table. It was an unlucky hour for quadrupeds; and if "every dog will have his day," he could not have selected a more unpropitious one than this. Mrs. Ogleton, too, had a pet—a favorite pug—whose squab figure, black muzzle, and tortuosity of tail, that curled like a head of celery in a salad-bowl, bespoke his Dutch

extraction. Yow! yow! yow! continued the brute—a chorus in which Flo instantly joined. Sooth to say, pug had more reason to express his dissatisfaction than was given him by the muse of Simpkinson; the other only barked for company. Scarcely had the poetess got through her first stanza when Tom Ingoldsby, in the enthusiasm of the moment, became so lost in the material world, that, in his abstraction, he unwarily laid his hand on the cock of the urn. Quivering with emotion he gave it such an unlucky twist that the full stream of its scalding contents descended on the gingerbread hide of the unlucky Cupid. The confusion was complete; —the whole economy of the table disarranged;—the company broke up in most admired disorder;—and "vulgar minds will never know" anything more of Miss Simpkinson's ode till they peruse it in some forthcoming Annual.

Seaforth profited by the confusion to take the delinquent who had caused this "stramash" by the arm, and to lead him to the lawn, where he had a word or two for his private ear. The conference between the young gentlemen was neither brief in its duration nor unimportant in its result. The subject was what the lawyers call tripartite, embracing the information that Charles Seaforth was over head and ears in love with Tom Ingoldsby's sister; secondly, that the lady had referred him to "papa" for his sanction; thirdly and lastly, his nightly visitations, and consequent bereavement. At the two first items Tom smiled auspiciously;—at the last he burst out into an absolute guffaw.

"Steal your breeches! Miss Bailey over again, by Jove," shouted Ingoldsby. "But a gentleman, you say —and Sir Giles too. I am not sure, Charles, whether I ought not to call you out for aspersing the honor of the family."

"Laugh as you will, Tom—be as incredulous as you please. One fact is incontestable—the breeches are gone! Look here—I am reduced to my regimentals; and if these go, tomorrow I must borrow of you!"

Rochefoucault says, there is something in the misfortunes of our very best friends that does not displease us; assuredly we can, most of us, laugh at their petty inconveniences, till called upon to supply them. Tom composed his features on the instant, and replied with more gravity, as well as with an expletive, which, if my Lord Mayor had been within hearing, might have cost him five shillings.

"There is something very queer in this, after all. The clothes, you say, have positively disappeared. Somebody is playing you a trick; and, ten to one, your servant has a hand in it. By the way, I heard something yesterday of his kicking a bobbery in the kitchen, and seeing a ghost, or something of that kind, himself. Depend upon it, Barney is in the plot."

It now struck the lieutenant at once that the usually buoyant spirits of his attendant had of late been materially sobered down, his loquacity obviously circumscribed, and that he, the said lieutenant, had actually rung his bell three several times that very morning before he could procure his attendance. Mr. Maguire was forthwith summoned, and underwent a close examination. The "bobbery" was easily explained. Mr. Oliver Dobbs had hinted his disapprobation of a flirtation carrying on between the gentleman from Munster and the lady from the Rue St. Honoré. *Mademoiselle* had boxed Mr. Maguire's ears, and Mr. Maguire had pulled *Mademoiselle* upon his knee, and the lady had *not* cried *"Mon Dieu!"* And Mr. Oliver Dobbs said it was very wrong; and Mrs. Botherby said it was scandalous, and what ought not to be done in any moral kitchen; and Mr. Maguire had got hold of the Honorable Augustus Sucklethumbkin's powder-flask, and had put large pinches of the best

Double Dartford into Mr. Dobbs's tobacco-box; and Mr. Dobbs's pipe had exploded, and set fire to Mrs. Botherby's Sunday cap; and Mr. Maguire had put it out with the slop-basin, "barring the wig;" and then they were all so "cantankerous," that Barney had gone to take a walk in the garden; and then—then Mr. Barney had seen a ghost!

"A what? you blockhead!" asked Tom Ingoldsby.

"Sure then, and it's meself will tell your honor the rights of it," said the ghost-seer. "Meself and Miss Pauline, sir—or Miss Pauline and meself, for the ladies comes first anyhow—we got tired of the hobstroppylous scrimmaging among the ould servants, that didn't know a joke when they seen one: and we went out to look at the comet—that's the rory-bory-alehouse, they calls him in this country—and we walked upon the lawn—and divil of any alehouse there was there at all; and Miss Pauline said it was becase of the shrubbery maybe, and why wouldn't we see it better beyondst the trees? and so we went to the trees, but sorrow a comet did meself see there, barring a big ghost instead of it."

"A ghost? And what sort of a ghost, Barney?"

"Och, then, divil a lie I'll tell your honor. A tall ould gentleman he was, all in white, with a shovel on the shoulder of him, and a big torch in his fist—though what he wanted with that it's meself can't tell, for his eyes were like gig-lamps, let alone the moon and the comet, which wasn't there at all:—and 'Barney,' says he to me—'cause why he knew me—'Barney,' says he, 'what is it you're doing with the *colleen* there, Barney?'—Divil a word did I say. Miss Pauline screeched, and cried 'murther' in French, and ran off with herself; and of course meself was in a mighty hurry after the lady, and had no time to stop palavering with him anyway: so I dispersed at once, and the ghost vanished in a flame of fire!"

Mr. Maguire's account was received with avowed incredulity by both gentlemen; but Barney stuck to his text with unflinching pertinacity. A reference to *Mademoiselle* was suggested, but abandoned, as neither party had a taste for delicate investigations.

"I'll tell you what, Seaforth," said Ingoldsby, after Barney had received his dismissal, "that there is a trick here, is evident; and Barney's vision may possibly be a part of it. Whether he is most knave or fool, you best know. At all events, I will sit up with you tonight, and see if I can convert my ancestor into a visiting acquaintance. Meanwhile your finger on your lip!"

" 'Twas now the very witching time of night,
When churchyards yawn, and graves give up their dead."

Gladly would I grace my tale with decent horror, and therefore I do beseech the "gentle reader" to believe that if all the *succedanea* to this mysterious narrative are not in strict keeping, he will ascribe it only to the disgraceful innovations of modern degeneracy upon the sober and dignified habits of our ancestors. I can introduce him, it is true, into an old and high-roofed chamber, its walls covered on three sides with black oak wainscotting, adorned with carvings of fruit and flowers long anterior to those of Grinling Gibbons; the fourth side is clothed with a curious remnant of dingy tapestry, once elucidatory of some Scriptural history, but of *which* not even Mrs. Botherby could determine. Mr. Simpkinson, who had examined it carefully, inclined to believe the principal figure to be either Bathsheba, or Daniel in the lions' den; while Tom Ingoldsby decided in favor of the King of Bashan. All, however, was conjecture, tradition being silent on the subject. A lofty

arched portal led into, and a little arched portal led out of, this apartment; they were opposite each other, and each possessed the security of massy bolts on its interior. The bedstead, too, was not one of yesterday, but manifestly coeval with days ere Seddons was, and when a good four-post "article" was deemed worthy of being a royal bequest. The bed itself, with all the appurtenances and palliasse, mattresses, etc., was of far later date, and looked most incongruously comfortable; the casements, too, with their little diamond-shaped panes and iron binding, had given way to the modern heterodoxy of the sash-window. Nor was this all that conspired to ruin the costume, and render the room a meet haunt for such "mixed spirits" only as could condescend to don at the same time an Elizabethan doublet and Bond Street inexpressibles.

With their green morocco slippers on a modern fender, in front of a disgracefully modern grate, sat two young gentlemen, clad in "shawl-pattern" dressing-gowns and black silk stocks, much at variance with the high cane-backed chairs which supported them. A bunch of abomination, called a cigar, reeked in the left-hand corner of the mouth of one, and in the right-hand corner of the mouth of the other;—an arrangement happily adapted for the escape of the noxious fumes up the chimney, without that unmerciful "funking" odor which a less scientific disposition of the weed would have induced. A small pembroke table filled up the intervening space between them, sustaining, at each extremity, an elbow and a glass of toddy;—thus in "lonely pensive contemplation" were the two worthies occupied, when the "iron tongue of midnight had tolled twelve."

"Ghost-time's come!" said Ingoldsby, taking from his waistcoat pocket a watch like a gold half-crown, and consulting it as though he suspected the turret-clock over the stables of mendacity.

"Hush!" said Charles; "did I not hear a footstep?"

There was a pause:—there *was* a footstep—it sounded distinctly—it reached the door—it hesitated, stopped, and—passed on.

Tom darted across the room, threw open the door, and became aware of Mrs. Botherby toddling to her chamber, at the other end of the gallery, after dosing one of the housemaids with an approved julep from the Countess of Kent's *Choice Manual.*

"Good night, sir!" said Mrs. Botherby.

"Go to the devil!" said the disappointed ghost-hunter.

An hour—two—rolled on, and still no spectral visitation; nor did aught intervene to make night hideous; and when the turret-clock sounded at length the hour of three, Ingoldsby, whose patience and grog were alike exhausted, sprang from his chair, saying:

"This is all infernal nonsense, my good fellow. Deuce of any ghost shall we see tonight; it's long past the canonical hour. I'm off to bed; and as to your breeches, I'll insure them for the next twenty-four hours at least, at the price of the buckram."

"Certainly.—Oh! thank'ee;—to be sure!" stammered Charles, rousing himself from a revery, which had degenerated into an absolute snooze.

"Good night, my boy! Bolt the door behind me; and defy the Pope, the Devil, and the Pretender!"

Seaforth followed his friend's advice, and the next morning came down to breakfast dressed in the habiliments of the preceding day. The charm was broken, the demon defeated; the light grays with the red stripe down the seams were yet *in rerum naturâ,* and adorned the person of their lawful proprietor.

Tom felicitated himself and his partner of the watch on the result of their vigilance; but there is a rustic

adage, which warns us against self-gratulation before we are quite "out of the woods."—Seaforth was yet within its verge.

A RAP at Tom Ingoldsby's door the following morning startled him as he was shaving;—he cut his chin.

"Come in, and be d——d to you!" said the martyr, pressing his thumb on the scarified epidermis. The door opened, and exhibited Mr. Barney Maguire.

"Well, Barney, what is it?" quoth the sufferer, adopting the vernacular of his visitant.

"The master, sir——"

"Well, what does he want?"

"The loanst of a breeches, plase your honor."

"Why, you don't mean to tell me —by heaven, this is too good!" shouted Tom, bursting into a fit of uncontrollable laughter. "Why, Barney, you don't mean to say the ghost has got them again?"

Mr. Maguire did not respond to the young squire's risibility; the cast of his countenance was decidedly serious.

"Faith, then, it's gone they are, sure enough! Hasn't meself been looking over the bed, and under the bed, and *in* the bed, for the matter of that, and divil a ha'p'orth of breeches is there to the fore at all:—I'm bothered entirely!"

"Hark'ee! Mr. Barney," said Tom, incautiously removing his thumb, and letting a crimson stream "incarnadine the multitudinous" lather that plastered his throat,—"this may be all very well with your master, but you don't humbug *me*, sir:—tell me instantly what have you done with the clothes?"

This abrupt transition from "lively to severe" certainly took Maguire by surprize, and he seemed for an instant as much disconcerted as it is possible to disconcert an Irish gentleman's gentleman.

"Me? is it meself, then, that's the ghost to your honor's thinking?" said he, after a moment's pause, and with a slight shade of indignation in his tones: "is it I would stale the master's things,—and what would I do with them?"

"That you best know:—what your purpose is I can't guess, for I don't think you mean to 'stale' them, as you call it; but that you are concerned in their disappearance, I am satisfied. Confound this blood!—give me a towel, Barney!"

Maguire acquitted himself of the commission. "As I've a sowl, your honor," said he solemnly, "little it is meself knows of the matter: and after what I seen——"

"What you've seen! Why, what *have* you seen?—Barney, I don't want to inquire into your flirtations; but don't suppose you can palm off your saucer eyes and gig-lamps upon me!"

"Then, as sure as your honor's standing there I saw him: and why wouldn't I, when Miss Pauline was to the fore as well as meself, and——"

"Get along with your nonsense—leave the room, sir!"

"But the master," said Barney, imploringly; "and without breeches?—sure he'll be catching cowld!——"

"Take that, rascal!" replied Ingoldsby, throwing a pair of pantaloons at, rather than to, him; "but don't suppose, sir, you shall carry on your tricks here with impunity; recollect there is such a thing as a treadmill, and that my father is a county magistrate."

Barney's eye flashed fire,—he stood erect, and was about to speak; but, mastering himself, not without an effort, he took up the garment, and left the room as perpendicular as a Quaker.

"INGOLDSBY," said Charles Seaforth, after breakfast, "this is now past a joke; today is the last of my stay; for, notwithstanding the ties which detain me, common decency obliges me to visit home after so long an

absence. I shall come to an immediate explanation with your father on the subject nearest my heart, and depart while I have a change of dress left. On his answer will my return depend! In the meantime tell me candidly—I ask it in all seriousness, and as a friend—am I not a dupe in your well-known propensity to hoaxing? have you not a hand in——"

"No, by heaven, Seaforth; I see what you mean: on my honor, I am as much mystified as yourself; and if your servant——"

"Not he:—if there be a trick, he at least is not privy to it."

"If there *be* a trick? why, Charles, do you think——"

"I know not *what* to think, Tom. As surely as you are a living man, so surely did that spectral anatomy visit my room again last night, grin in my face, and walk away with my trousers; nor was I able to spring from my bed, or break the chain which seemed to bind me to my pillow."

"Seaforth!" said Ingoldsby, after a short pause, "I will—but hush! here are the girls and my father.—I will carry off the females, and leave you a clear field with the governor: carry your point with him, and we will talk about your breeches afterward."

Tom's diversion was successful: he carried off the ladies *en masse* to look at a remarkable specimen of the class *Dodecandria Monogynia*,—which they could not find;—while Seaforth marched boldly up to the encounter, and carried "the governor's" outworks by a *coup de main*. I shall not stop to describe the progress of the attack; suffice it that it was as successful as could have been wished, and that Seaforth was referred back again to the lady. The happy lover was off at a tangent; the botanical party was soon overtaken; and the arm of Caroline, whom a vain endeavor to spell out the Linnæan name of a daffy-down-dilly had detained a little in the rear of the others, was soon firmly locked in his own.

"What was the world to them,
Its noise, its nonsense, and its breeches all?"

Seaforth was in the seventh heaven; he retired to his room that night as happy as if no such thing as a goblin had ever been heard of, and personal chattels were as well fenced in by law as real property. Not so Tom Ingoldsby: the mystery—for mystery there evidently was—had not only piqued his curiosity, but ruffled his temper. The watch of the previous night had been unsuccessful, probably because it was undisguised. Tonight he would "ensconce himself"—not indeed "behind the arras"—for the little that remained was, as we have seen, nailed to the wall—but in a small closet which opened from one corner of the room, and, by leaving the door ajar, would give to its occupant a view of all that might pass in the apartment. Here did the young ghost-hunter take up a position, with a good stout sapling under his arm, a full half-hour before Seaforth retired for the night. Not even his friend did he let into his confidence, fully determined that if his plan did not succeed, the failure should be attributed to himself alone.

At the usual hour of separation for the night, Tom saw, from his concealment, the lieutenant enter his room, and, after taking a few turns in it, with an expression so joyous as to betoken that his thoughts were mainly occupied by his approaching happiness, proceed slowly to disrobe himself. The coat, the waistcoat, the black silk stock, were gradually discarded; the green morocco slippers were kicked off, and then—ay, and then—his countenance grew grave; it seemed to occur to him all at once that this was his last stake—nay, that the very breeches he had on were not his own—that tomorrow morning was his last, and that if he lost *them*—— A glance showed that his mind was made up; he replaced the single but-

ton he had just subducted, and threw himself upon the bed in a state of transition—half chrysalis, half grub.

Wearily did Tom Ingoldsby watch the sleeper by the flickering light of the night-lamp, till the clock striking one, induced him to increase the narrow opening which he had left for the purpose of observation. The motion, slight as it was, seemed to attract Charles's attention; for he raised himself suddenly to a sitting posture, listened for a moment, and then stood upright upon the floor. Ingoldsby was on the point of discovering himself, when, the light flashing full upon his friend's countenance, he perceived that, though his eyes were open, "their sense was shut"—that he was yet under the influence of sleep. Seaforth advanced slowly to the toilet, lit his candle at the lamp that stood on it, then, going back to the bed's foot, appeared to search eagerly for something which he could not find. For a few moments he seemed restless and uneasy, walking round the apartment and examining the chairs, till, coming fully in front of a large swing-glass that flanked the dressing-table, he paused, as if contemplating his figure in it. He now returned toward the bed; put on his slippers, and, with cautious and stealthy steps, proceeded towards the little arched doorway that opened on the private staircase.

As he drew the bolt, Tom Ingoldsby emerged from his hiding-place; but the sleep-walker heard him not; he proceeded softly downstairs, followed at a due distance by his friend; opened the door which led out upon the gardens; and stood at once among the thickest of the shrubs, which there clustered round the base of a corner turret, and screened the postern from common observation. At this moment Ingoldsby had nearly spoiled all by making a false step: the sound attracted Seaforth's attention—he paused and turned; and, as the full moon shed her light directly upon his pale and troubled features, Tom marked, almost with dismay, the fixed and rayless appearance of his eyes:—

> "There was no speculation in those orbs
> That he did glare withal."

The perfect stillness preserved by his follower seemed to reassure him; he turned aside; and from the midst of a thickset laurustinus, drew forth a gardener's spade, shouldering which he proceeded with greater rapidity into the midst of the shrubbery. Arrived at a certain point where the earth seemed to have been recently disturbed, he set himself heartily to the task of digging, till, having thrown up several shovelfuls of mold, he stopped, flung down his tool, and very composedly began to disencumber himself of his pantaloons.

Up to this moment Tom had watched him with a wary eye: he now advanced cautiously, and, as his friend was busily engaged in disentangling himself from his garment, made himself master of the spade. Seaforth, meanwhile, had accomplished his purpose: he stood for a moment with

> "His streamers waving in the wind,"

occupied in carefully rolling up the small-clothes into as compact a form as possible, and all heedless of the breath of heaven, which might certainly be supposed at such a moment, and in such a plight, to "visit his frame too roughly."

He was in the act of stooping low to deposit the pantaloons in the grave which he had been digging for them, when Tom Ingoldsby came close behind him, and with the flat side of the spade——

THE shock was effectual;—never again was Lieutenant Seaforth known to act the part of a somnambulist. One by one, his breeches—his trousers—his pantaloons—his silk-net tights—his patent cords—his showy grays with the broad red stripe of the Bombay Fencibles were brought to

light—rescued from the grave in which they had been buried, like the strata of a Christmas pie; and, after having been well aired by Mrs. Botherby, became once again effective.

The family, the ladies especially, laughed;—the Peterses laughed;—the Simpkinsons laughed;—Barney Maguire cried "Botheration!" and Ma'mselle Pauline, *"Mon Dieu!"*

Charles Seaforth, unable to face the quizzing which awaited him on all sides, started off two hours earlier than he had proposed:—he soon returned, however; and having at his father-in-law's request given up the occupation of rajah-hunting and shooting nabobs, led his blushing bride to the altar.

Mr. Simpkinson from Bath did not attend the ceremony, being engaged at the Grand Junction Meeting of *Sçavans*, then congregating from all parts of the known world in the city of Dublin. His essay, demonstrating that the globe is a great custard, whipped into coagulation by whirlwinds, and cooked by electricity—a little too much baked in the Isle of Portland, and a thought underdone about the Bog of Allen—was highly spoken of, and narrowly escaped obtaining a Bridgewater prize.

Miss Simpkinson and her sister acted as bridesmaids on the occasion; the former wrote an *epithalamium*, and the latter cried "Lassy me!" at the clergyman's wig. Some years have since rolled on; the union has been crowned with two or three tidy little offshoots from the family tree, of whom Master Neddy is "grandpapa's darling," and Mary Anne mamma's particular "Sock." I shall only add, that Mr. and Mrs. Seaforth are living together quite as happily as two good-hearted, good-tempered bodies, very fond of each other, can possibly do: and that since the day of his marriage Charles has shown no disposition to jump out of bed, or ramble out of doors o' nights—though, from his entire devotion to every wish and whim of his young wife, Tom insinuates that the fair Caroline does still occasionally take advantage of it so far as to "slip on the breeches."

DREGS

By JOSEPH UPPER

There have been dreams that poisoned all our sleep
  With visions of the thing that might not be,
  And filled the measureless immensity
Of night with gliding griefs that could not weep,
And dared not speak, and would not die. The deep,
  Implacable, uncomprehending sea
  Of thought was choked with their foul progeny,
A plague of scaly things that swim and creep.

My soul is like that slow congealing sea
  Where loathsome creatures breed and churn the wave
    Into an oozing flat, a black morass.
Serpents sleep there, and all the seasons pass
  Unnumbered, and the crystal love I gave
    Away lies there and hugs futility.

The Eyrie

(Continued from page 436)

soon he was turning out such stories as *Spider-Bite* and *Whispers* for your delectation. Just nineteen now, he is already the author of a best seller, and hailed by newspaper critics as the apostle of flaming youth.

Edmond Hamilton sent his first story to this magazine—a colorful thing called *Beyond the Unseen Wall.* We had never heard of Edmond Hamilton, and neither had the world as yet; but the story was colorfully written and contained an extremely good weird plot. However, it sagged in the middle, and contained a number of faults which kept it below the standard we sought to maintain in WEIRD TALES; so we wrote Hamilton a three-page, closely typed letter, pointing out its defects, suggesting improvements in handling the story, and also asking to see more of his work. A year later the story came back to the editorial desk, completely rewritten into an excellent weird story, and retitled *The Monster-God of Mamurth.* WEIRD TALES bought the story, and since then Edmond Hamilton has not had a story rejected by any magazine. He has taken rank as one of the giants of weird-scientific fiction, though he is still in his early twenties. WEIRD TALES, which published his first story, will continue to print the cream of his stories.

Then there is E. Hoffmann Price, swordsman, Orientalist, and former soldier of fortune, whose unique genius was first recognized by this magazine. His total output is only two or three stories a year, but when they leave his hands they are finished works of literary craftsmanship. It was in WEIRD TALES, also, that Lieutenants Arthur J. Burks and W. J. Stamper first saw publication, with their thrilling tales of Santo Domingo and Haiti, for which their many months in the Black Island with the Marine Corps had given them the background. WEIRD TALES can not claim the credit for discovering the literary genius of H. P. Lovecraft (would that we could!), but it is this magazine in which his uncanny imagination and descriptive ability have found their full flower and perfect expression. And that trio of original young geniuses and friends of Lovecraft who look to him as their literary father-confessor (much as Goldsmith and his fellows sat at the feet of Samuel Johnson in the coffee-shops of London) were the unique discovery of this magazine—Frank Belknap Long, Jr., author of *The Space-Eaters;* H. Warner Munn, author of *The Werewolf of Ponkert;* and Donald Wandrei, author of *The Red Brain.* Any magazine in the world could be proud to have such varied and imaginative masterpieces as these within its covers, but it remained for WEIRD TALES to recognize their unusual artistic merit, and give them to the world. This magazine seeks originality and expert literary craftsmanship, whether from well-known authors or from writers we never heard of before. Therein lies the opportunity of the young writers—if they can touch our standard. In brief, we want good stories, original stories,

(Continued on page 570)

FUTURE ISSUES

A WEALTH of fascinating stories is scheduled for early publication in WEIRD TALES, the unique magazine. The brilliant success of WEIRD TALES has been founded on its unrivaled, superb stories of the strange, the grotesque and the terrible—gripping stories that stimulate the imagination and send shivers of apprehension up the spine—tales that take the reader from the humdrum world about us into a deathless realm of fancy—marvelous tales so thrillingly told that they seem very real. WEIRD TALES prints the best weird fiction in the world today. If Poe were alive he would undoubtedly be a contributor. In addition to creepy mystery stories, ghost-tales, stories of devil-worship, witchcraft, vampires and strange monsters, this magazine also prints the cream of the weird-scientific fiction that is written today—tales of the spaces between the worlds, surgical stories, and stories that scan the future with the eye of prophecy. Among the amazing tales in the next few issues will be:

THE CHAPEL OF MYSTIC HORROR, *by Seabury Quinn*
A startling tale of Jules de Grandin, the little French scientist and ghost-breaker—a story of a Cyprian castle, and the Knights of the Temple, and sinister rites and human sacrifice.

THE ISLE OF MISSING SOULS, *by Joel Martin Nichols, Jr.*
The author of "The City of Glass" in this fascinating serial projects his characters into the Fourth Dimension, and paints a vivid narrative picture of buried treasure, and thrilling battle on Bakelief Island, where the treasure of the murdered Russian Tsar lies buried.

SKULLS IN THE STARS, *by Robert E. Howard*
As strange and unusual a ghost-story as was ever penned is this eery tale by the author of "Red Shadows"—a story of Solomon Kane and a wild adventure on a moonlit moor—an eldritch tale of shuddery horror.

THE LAST TEST, *by Adolphe de Castro*
Dr. de Castro, who was author with Ambrose Bierce of "The Monk and the Hangman's Daughter," has written for WEIRD TALES a superb novelette, through which, like a cold breeze from the tomb, sweep suggestions of unthinkable horrors from the elder world.

THE FLYING DEATH, *by B. Wallis*
A strange, unearthly monster comes from the sky, and the horror of its coming robs mankind of its age-old feeling of security, and brings stark terror to the earth.

THE POLAR DOOM, *by Edmond Hamilton*
Hidden away for centuries under the arctic ice was a strange city—a breath-taking narrative of the horror that burst upon the world when that frozen city was brought again into the sunlight.

THE COPPER BOWL, *by Captain G. F. Eliot*
A gripping torture-story of China—a powerful horror-tale that will make the blood run cold.

THESE are but a few of the many super-excellent stories in store for the readers of WEIRD TALES. To make sure of getting your copy each month, and thus avoid the embarrassment of finding your favorite news stand sold out, just fill out the coupon below and let us send it right to your home. That's the safest way.

WEIRD TALES,
450 E. Ohio St.,
Chicago, Ill.

Enclosed find $2.50 for 1 year's subscription to "Weird Tales," to begin with the November issue. ($3.00 in Canada.)

Name _____

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(Continued from page 568)

thrilling tales fascinatingly told; and we don't care whether they come from a world-famous author or an unknown, so long as they are *good.*

Here is an interesting letter from Mrs. K. Quarles of Hamburg, Germany: "We have quite a circle here in this German city to read the fascinating stories in WEIRD TALES, and the members of our reading-society are always impatiently awaiting the next issue. We particularly enjoy to read The Eyrie and find out what other readers think about the stories, and we always vote amongst ourselves for the best three stories in every issue. Afterwards we compare notes with the votes of the other readers, and we sometimes think that the pseudo-scientific stories are unduly preferred, though stories as *The Bird of Space* and *Cattle of Furos* were very interesting. We also liked Mr. E. Hamilton's story *The Monster-God of Mamurth* immensely, and this is a story we always like to read again. Really *weird* tales like *Whispers* by Robert S. Carr, *Gray Ghouls* by Bassett Morgan, *Leonora* by E. Worrell and all the Jumbee-stories are our favorites. Also H. Warner Munn, Greye La Spina, Seabury Quinn *(The Curse of Everard Maundy)* and lots of others write splendid and highly satisfactory stories. We have kept all the magazines since 1927, and after selecting all the stories we liked unanimously we had them bound as books."

Readers, what is your favorite story in this issue? Your favorite in the August issue, as shown by your votes, was Eli Colter's unusual ghost-story, *The Man in the Green Coat;* your second and third choices were the first part of *Crashing Suns,* by Edmond Hamilton, and Robert E. Howard's novelette of weird adventure and black magic, *Red Shadows.*

MY FAVORITE STORIES IN THE OCTOBER WEIRD TALES ARE:

Story	Remarks
(1)----------	----------
(2)----------	----------
(3)----------	----------

I do not like the following stories:

(1)----------	Why? ----------
(2)----------	----------

It will help us to know what kind of stories you want in Weird Tales if you will fill out this coupon and mail it to The Eyrie, Weird Tales, 450 E. Ohio St., Chicago, Ill.

Reader's name and address:

The Werewolf's Daughter

(Continued from page 460)

Oh, my brother, my brother, we will avenge you soon; but how much longer do we wait?''

The men shifted on uneasy feet; neighbor looked furtively at neighbor and quickly turned his glance away, for each read the other's thought and found him willing for desperate and unholy deeds as the boy raved on:

''Owned are we by this devil-chick, this werewolf's daughter! Are we slaves or men? I say to you all, that if you do not help to end this menace to our happiness and lives, then I kill this witch myself!''

From the crowd, one pressed forward, the idiot tanner.

''I will help,'' he chuckled. ''Give me old Helgar and I will help. He struck me once!''

''I will help, too,'' came a second voice as another was encouraged by this example and stepped to the front.

''And I!'' ''I also!'' the men chorused, only a few hanging back.

''Why do you wait?'' the boy cried. ''Come! Did you ever see wolf tracks as large as this?'' He pointed to the signs in the rich loam.

Many had indeed seen larger tracks, but so distorted at this moment were their imaginations, and the majority of opinion was so great, that those who might have spoken for the girl felt the words die in their throats, for after all they were not quite sure.

Perhaps the tracks were those of a werewolf, although they were exactly like those of a real wolf! Then they would be making a hideous mistake in attempting to save the girl. And so against their weak judgment they joined the others in the cry for the innocent blood.

So shifting is the mood of men that before the mourners reached Ponkert they were more rabid and vicious than the young lad, who had suffered most.

Spurred on by the news he bore, a

runner had gasped out the story, and as they entered the village, a rabble met them already armed and waiting only for confirmation of the story. Like a revolutionary mob, they filled the street from side to side as all poured on, out of Ponkert to the country road.

Ivga had just taken away Dmitri's breakfast dish, when gravel crunched in the path and the door crashed open and back against the wall. The room was filled with noise and uproar in a second. A dozen hands seized her and buffeted her about as one pulled her from another, striking and bruising her cruelly.

"Please! What is it? What have I done?" stammered the frightened girl.

So many told her at once, that she did not understand a word and fell silent, giving them stare for stare. Proud, defiant, unbroken, she stood and heard Dmitri bellowing curses against them all.

Loud he lamented his crippled legs, breathing terrible threats against the people if Ivga were hurt and calling for a friend, if one was there, to give him his sword that she might have a defender.

They did not wish to hurt Dmitri. They respected him still, if they had no fear of him now, and well they knew what would befall them if his soldiers should know he had been injured. So it was to silence him as much as any other thought, that a man reached to the wall and flung Gate-Opener down to the floor. near by, but where he could not reach it from his chair.

And all were talking at once, so that, fortunately, Ivga could not understand what they meant to do. They commenced to drag her out. But Dmitri, hearing the words "Fire!" and "Square!" was certain of their plans and raved impotently against them.

And while he, noisy in his frantic wrath, shrieked damnation against them, there came to a listener in the crowd the memory of a long-unavenged wrong, which now would be satisfied as men had promised in the forest that it should be.

6. While the Master Watched

THE idiot tanner lurched forward through the crowd, his eyes shining with a mad, fanatical light, the words "He struck me once!" hissing through his yellow fangs. Men gave him room because of his fierce aspect and the ax which he bore upon his shoulder.

With a sweep of his arm he hurled the cripple from his chair, so that Dmitri lay face down, half-stunned and twitching in his helplessness, close beside his sword that was so impotent to aid him now.

But as the maniac howled in horrible glee, "I have you now!" and swung up his ax to strike, the girl, weak and suffering from her blows, could bear no more and her slight form sagged limp in her captor's arms, as mercifully she fainted.

So it was that she did not see the hands that seized the ax as it began the downward sweep and halted the blow, nor did she hear the men that reasoned with the maniac, counseling patience and a long-drawn-out punishment later for Helgar, secretly fearing the anger of the soldiers. For though they would not interfere in the execution of a witch, the soldiers would most assuredly avenge the cowardly murder of their old and crippled captain.

Neither did she hear the ravings of the maniac, disappointed in his revenge, as he struggled to reach the cripple; ravings that continued until the poor mad brain was soothed by a promise that after the torture of the girl upon the morrow, Dmitri should be given to the mercies of the former tanner—a promise which was never intended or destined to be kept.

Nor did she feel herself being carried roughly out of doors, jostled and

bruised in the press, while the tanner lagged far enough behind to deal one savage kick to the prostrate cripple and was then hustled away by his watchful comrades. All these things she never knew, and to the day of her death, many years after in a strange land, she believed that Dmitri, her foster-father, had met his end beneath the tanner's ax.

As the last of the raiders quitted the house, a somewhat darker shadow than the rest hovered near the cripple where he lay hopelessly sobbing in his pain and anger and fear for the girl. For a little space it hovered as though watching, and then, contrary to the habits of shadows, it moved with no one near and followed the path the crowd had taken.

At the village they were met by another crowd, informed of the capture by those who had run on ahead. These would have taken the girl and torn her piecemeal, had not the raiders advanced a better plan.

So to the square they hustled the fainting girl, and bound her fast with iron chains to the stone post upon the log platform there, an old scaffold built for public punishment, with steps leading up from the ground, and upon it a gallows, a wheel where bones were broken, and this post with an iron floor about it, erected for death by fire. Upon this structure the martyrdom of the innocent now began.

All that sultry afternoon she hung in her chains, the fierce sun beating down upon her unprotected head, a little hammer beating in each temple and strange humming noises in her ears as the day wore to a close. And in all that incredibly long afternoon she had not one moment's rest from torment.

At first she answered the gibes and taunts that were flung at her by the tormentors, but it only excited them to fresh efforts and gained her nothing.

Then they began to throw other things, words alone failing to give

enough amusement. Mud flew, small sods, stones, offal, sticks, and once a dead cat, but her spirit was not to be broken by missiles, though her body was near to that point.

Many times she searched the howling sea of faces for Hugo, but although she noticed several of the gipsy band who gave her pitying glances, but turned away when she caught their eyes, knowing that they could not help, she never saw him and began to fear three things:

"He was ashamed of her.

"He was afraid to speak in her defense, which would prove him a coward.

"He had already spoken rashly and they had killed him as they had Dmitri for being her friend."

But none of these reasons was responsible for Hugo's non-appearance. At that moment he was jogging homeward on a fat and lazy nag and leading by their tethers three horses, the fruits of a little private venture in horse-trading to the west of Ponkert.

Hugo was well pleased with himself, singing merrily as he came. And in the village, others were making merry, but to a different tune.

Still, for all the abuses which they heaped upon her, they could not break her sullen indifference to their torments, until some witty soul was struck by a tremendous idea. Into the church ran several men, pried loose the staple which held the book to the underground wall, and ran back with it to the scaffold. Here they fastened it to a beam, so that it hung beside her, and set it swinging.

The rusty chain squeaked and complained as the book swung, and to her delirious fancy it seemed as though it was the voice of a man, her father, who cried beneath the torturer's knife. Father and daughter together at last, upon the same scaffold—one dead, the other near to dying!

She bowed her head to hide two big tears that formed in her sad eyes, but there were many who saw the evidence that she was hurt at last, and there was no pity in Ponkert.

How they howled then! More than a mile away, Dmitri heard the shout and cursed them, knowing that something new and dreadful had been done to his loved one.

But curses do little harm, and so with fresh and ingenious methods, cunning to bring pain, the people enjoyed themselves in a sadistic happiness until night fell.

This was their day! Who could deny them? The church?

The priest pronounced an exorcism designed to dispel the evil spirit from her and left her to the tender mercies of the mob.

The soldiers? They kept out of the disturbance, neither applauding the mob nor hindering them, for secretly they were in sympathy with the villagers and many looked askance at Helgar's audacity in sheltering the werewolf's daughter. As yet they knew nothing of the indignities that had been inflicted upon their former captain, and the few soldiers that were present looked calmly on the scene.

Cruel as the people were, they were careful not to kill, for a greater entertainment was set for morning, and a pile of wood and brush rose near the scaffold in readiness for the final sport.

The delay was for two purposes. One was to torture by the night chill, which would pain her bruised and stiffened muscles like dull knives before morning. And the second was an even more refined form of torture.

The agony and suspense and waiting would make the dark hours seem like years to her, as she waited for sunrise, which would mean the stake and the flaming death. Well they knew that no one could find ease or sleep while hanging in those iron chains that bound her wrists.

Twilight came and three things happened:

The people left the square, leaving

only a few that were not yet satisfied, and after those had gone, a sentry remained to watch the girl all night, so that she might call no help or vanish away by her diabolical arts.

A small procession of horses turned into the road that followed the river to Ponkert.

And last but most important of the three: A large bird, a carrion-eater, tiptoed through the open door of Dmitri's cottage and inspected the motionless body with a speculative leer.

This story rises in a crescendo of pathos and horror in next month's chapters.

The Temple of Serpents

(Continued from page 468)

surely stealing over him again. His arms! If he could only wrench them loose from his sides he might spring on the demon that was transforming him into a scaly, crawling thing!

He fought and lashed out with his arms.

"Steady, steady," said a voice.

Slowly the great, blue-lighted hall, the grinning stone idol that was half human, half bird, the hair-covered mask of a face with its glaring red eyes—all faded from his sight. But his arms were still helplessly bound to his sides. He flapped them feebly.

"Easy, Wayne. You're all right now," said the voice.

OPENING his eyes he saw Wells Beyerlein bending anxiously over him and holding his thrashing arms. There was another man with him, a spectacled, professional-looking man who was at the moment engaged in shutting a small black bag. Wayne felt the sting in his shoulder of a recent hypodermic injection.

Flooded by a vast, overwhelming content and a sense that somehow

everything was all right, he closed his eyes and relaxed. He heard the door open and close, and felt that the spectacled man had gone out with his little black bag and left him alone with his friend.

"I've had such a ghastly night mare, Wells," he whispered weakly

"Yes, yes," soothed Wells. "And now let me have this infernal thing." Coaxing fingers opened the clenched left hand and removed the stone snake-head.

"Such an awful nightmare!" repeated Wayne drowsily.

"But you're all right now. Everything is all right now. It was only a mirage. Go to sleep and rest your nerves."

With a puzzled frown Wells tried to explain the phenomenon to Wayne after his friend had rested and come to himself again.

"The snake-head was probably saturated, drenched with some one of the devil's brews that those witch doctors can make with their jungle herbs Then it dried, leaving only a residue in the pores of the stone. And the heat of the fire, and the warmth of your hand as you clenched it served to release a vapor that drugged your nerves and produced the hallucination you went through."

"You're sure that's the explanation?" asked Wayne.

"No, I'm not sure. But it's the only thing I can think of."

Wayne turned the stone snake-head over and over in his hand.

"Your theory doesn't explain the change of color," he remarked. "When you gave it to me it was green. Now it's brown!"

"No," admitted Wells uneasily, "my theory doesn't explain the change of color."

And together they stared with somber eyes at the enigmatic bit of stone that had once been a shimmering green and that was now a dull, used-up brown.

Missing page

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