Weird Tales

The Unique Magazine

The JEWEL *of* SEVEN STONES

By Seabury Quinn

and stories by
Murray Leinster
Will MacMahon
Royal W. Jimerson
H. Warner Munn
Clyde Criswell
Everil Worrell
Robert S. Carr
and others

25¢
30¢ IN CANADA

APRIL 1928

'Can he really play?" a girl ispered.
'Heavens, no!" Arthur exclaimed. 'e never played a note in his life."

hey Laughed When I Sat Down at the Piano ut When I Started to Play!—

THUR had just played "The Rosary." The room rang with applause. Then to nazement of all my friends, I strode con- ly over to the piano and sat down.

ck is up to his old tricks," somebody led. The crowd laughed. They were all n that I couldn't play a single note.

n he really play?" I heard a girl whisper thur.

eavens, no!" Arthur exclaimed. "He played a note in all his life. . . . . ."

ecided to make the most of the situation. mock dignity I drew out a silk handker- and lightly dusted off the piano keys. I rose and gave the revolving piano stool a r of a turn. The crowd laughed merrily. I started to play. Instantly a tense silence the guests. I played the first few bars of immortal Liebestraume. I heard gasps of ment. My friends sat breathless—spellbound! ed on.

A Complete Triumph!

he last notes of the Liebestraume died away, om resounded with a sudden roar of applause. d myself surrounded by excited faces. Every- was exclaiming with delight—plying me with rapid questions . . . "Jack! Why didn't you tell us you could play like that?" . . . "Where *did* you learn?"—"Who *was* your teacher?"

"I have never even *seen* my teacher," I replied. "And just a short while ago I couldn't play a note."

"Quit your kidding," laughed Arthur. himself an accomplished pianist. "You've been studying for years. I can tell."

"I have been studying only a short while," I insisted. "I kept it a secret so that I could surprise you folks."

ICK YOUR ISTRUMENT

	Clarinet
	Flute
	'Cello
	Harmony and Composition
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or,	Ukulele
rum	Harp
String)	Cornet
olin	Piccolo
hone	Guitar
ian	Trombone
	Piano
r	Accordion
: and Speech Culture	
nastic	Finger Control

No Teacher Needed

Then I told them the whole story.

"It seems just a short while ago that I saw an ad of the U. S. School of Music mentioning a new method of learning to play which only cost a few cents a day! The ad told how a woman mastered the piano in her spare time at home—and *without a teacher!* The method she used required no laborious scales or exercises. It sounded so convincing that I filled out the coupon requesting the Free Demonstration Lesson.

"It arrived promptly and I started in that very night to study it. I was amazed to see how easy it was to play this new way. I sent for the course and found it was just as easy as A. B. C.! Before I knew it I was playing all the pieces I liked best. I could play ballads or classical numbers or jazz with equal ease! And I never did have any special talent for music!"

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You, too, can now learn music—right at home—in half the usual time. You can't go wrong with this simple new method which has already shown almost half a million people how to play their favorite instruments by *note*. Forget that old-fashioned idea that you need special "talent." Just read the list of instruments in the panel, decide which one you want to play, and the U. S. School will do the rest.

Send for our Free Booklet and Demonstration Lesson

Thousands of successful students never dreamed they possessed musical ability until it was revealed to them by a remarkable "Musical Ability Test" which we send entirely without cost with our interesting free booklet and Demonstration Lesson.

Sign and send the convenient coupon *now!* Instruments supplied when needed, cash or credit.

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U. S. School of Music, 464 Brunswick Bldg., New York City

Please send me your free book, "Music Lessons in Your Own Home," with introduction by Dr. Frank Crane, Demonstration Lesson and particulars of your offer. I am interested in the following course.

Have you instrument? _____

Name _____
(Please write plainly)

Address _____

City _____ State _____

Weird Tales

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A MAGAZINE of the BIZARRE and UNUSUAL

VOLUME XI NUMBER 4

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Contents for April, 1928

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THE February WEIRD TALES has called forth a great deal of favorable comment, much of it very helpful in showing us what kinds of stories arouse the most enthusiasm among you, the readers, so that we can continue to keep the magazine in accord with your wishes.

"I have read your magazine for three years, and each and every story is good," writes Marie Graham, of Denver. "*Clarimonde* in the February issue is indeed a masterpiece, also *The Ghost Table;* but Seabury Quinn is my favorite author."

"WEIRD TALES is a bible to me," writes Reino Kentala, of West New Brighton, New York, and adds: "It's the best magazine in the world."

Writes Arlin C. Jones, of St. Louis: "I have just finished reading the February issue of your wonderful magazine, and must say that your story of Jules de Grandin simply jerks the cork under. It is, to my notion, the best story Seabury Quinn has written along this line to date. WEIRD TALES seems just my type of literature, and I never get tired of reading it, as I do other magazines. Its stories are a radical departure from any other type of literature I have ever read."

"A word about *The Call of Cthulhu,* by H. P. Lovecraft," writes F. L. Hilliard, of Davenport, Iowa. "It is the most perfect masterpiece of weird fiction that I have ever read. In my opinion his stories, and those of E. Hoffmann Price, overshadow Edgar Allan Poe's stories."

Writes L. Lindsay, of San Francisco: "I wish to criticize your use of certain styles of covers which are not good enough for the contents of the magazine itself. They might be appropriate for those magazines that contain only conversational chit-chat with no more depth than a bed-chamber or drawing-room, but for such masterpieces of artistic literature as those which are written by H. P. Lovecraft, the vast thought-pictures of Donald Wandrei, the beautiful color symphonies of Frank Owen, and powerful stories such as Eli Colter's *The Dark Chrysalis,* such comic caricatures of covers depicting hideous back-splashes and hellish hieroglyphics and feudalistic folderols and

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How in a Few Hours I Learned The Secret of Sketching

EVEN as a boy, I was fond of drawing. Hundreds of other people feel the same way, I suppose, but I always had an ambition to sometime become a commercial artist.

I don't think it was altogether the big incomes that modern commercial artists receive which attracted me to this profession as much as the fascination and interest of the work itself, and the independence of an artist's life.

Although I had a fondness for drawing, I found it very difficult to sketch anything accurately. For example, I could never get a drawing to look anything like the person it was supposed to represent. I knew just how I wanted the picture to look, but somehow, I never could make my sketches lifelike enough to suit me.

How it All Began

Then one evening, just as I was getting on the car on my way home from the office someone gave me a slap on the back and, turning quickly, I found myself looking into the smiling face of Jack Keating.

We found a seat at the end of the car and began telling what we had been doing in the three years since we had last seen each other.

Suddenly Jack stopped talking.

How can I describe my surprise when he quickly slipped a little book from his pocket and began to sketch an old man with spectacles who was reading a paper at the far end of the car. As I watched, Jack's hand flew rapidly and without a pause over the little sheet before him.

Jack sketching! I couldn't help smiling, for when Jack and I were at school he could hardly draw a straight line.

But my smile faded. I was amazed. For out of his pencil strokes came a vivid little picture with scarcely any detail, yet intensely alive and full of character. I looked up to find Jack smiling at my amazement.

"For the Love of Mike, Jack," I exclaimed, "Since when did you become an artist?"

Jack gave a few more touches to his little sketch, and then turned over the pages. His little book was almost full of clever drawings similar in style to the one he had just completed. They were all sketches of people, alive with character and movement.

"I don't think I ever drew anything in my life until a couple of years ago," he said, "but it is really astonishing how quickly the hand and eye can be developed. There are only a few basic rules which a fellow can get in a few hours of real work—then it is all a matter of practice."

"But how," I asked, "did you happen to find all this out—and who taught you?"

"It all began with an advertisement I saw in a magazine, offering a book about DRAWING. I read every word of that advertisement twice over. Then I sent for the book."

I really couldn't help interrupting Jack here.

"Why, I did just the same thing yesterday," I said. "But, go on, Jack."

"Well," said Jack, "A day or so later I got the book. It convinced me pretty firmly that I could draw if I really determined to do it. I came to the conclusion that the men behind the North American School of Drawing, who issued the book, meant just what they said. So I took up their offer to teach me—or refund the money I paid.

"I had always wanted to draw," continued Jack, "so I stuck to the lessons they sent me."

"And—," I prompted.

"Come down to my studio tomorrow," he grinned as he left the car, "and I will show you the results."

When Jack had left me, I felt convinced that I, too, could do the same. So when the book from the School arrived the following morning, I read it right through with more than casual interest.

I thought of Jack's wonderful success and decided to enroll for a Course there and then.

I was soon studying the lessons in my spare time at home. I found myself carried away by the ease with which I acquired a mastery over my brush and pencil.

My First Attempt

One day I thought of a good idea for a poster. I sat down, sketched it out and worked it up into a finished drawing. When I commenced the sketch I had no idea of attempting to sell it, but when it was finished I liked it so well that I sent it to the Art Director of an Advertising Agency. Imagine my surprise when, a few days later, a check arrived, together with a letter asking me to call at their offices to make arrangements to do some newspaper drawings.

Then I began sending odd sketches to illustrated papers and other advertising concerns. Of course, they were not all accepted by any means, but a number were, and I soon found myself averaging a substantial weekly income.

When I told Jack Keating what I had done, he was delighted and surprised. "It only proves," he said, "that anyone who likes sketching can be taught to produce the kind of drawings that editors and advertisers want. The work is not as hard as it looks when you have been shown how."

A Simple Home Study Method

Through its simple, methodical home study system the North American School of Drawing teaches you to draw, just as any other school might teach you to write shorthand, or keep books or operate a typewriter or any other everyday subject.

There is no reason why you, too, should not do equally as well, if you have a liking for drawing.

Try it for yourself. You can enroll with the North American School of Drawing without risking a penny. If you can draw at all you will astonish yourself by your progress, and you will find modern Commercial Art one of the most fascinating occupations that could be imagined. The opportunities in this growing profession are simply wonderful. The tremendous increase in advertising and illustrated publications has created such a demand for competent artists that the field of Commercial Art and Illustrating is a real gold mine for the man or woman who likes to draw.

Get this Free Book

"Drawing for Pleasure and Profit"

This book has a message for you. It is unique and inspiring. It brings you news that no matter where you live, or what you are doing, your talent for drawing can be developed in the privacy of your own home surely and simply and without drudgery. It contains deeply interesting literature dealing with Commercial Art and Illustrating and discusses various kinds of drawings, the prices paid for them, and the opportunities which are open to you. You need this book. You can have it for the asking. A request for it does not place you under any obligation whatever.

But act AT ONCE. Learn to draw—whether or not you want to be a commercial artist. To be able to draw is a big asset socially or in any line of business. Fill in the coupon below and mail it today.

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Address .....

.....

.....

ILLUSTRATED BOOK NOW FREE

SEND FOR IT TODAY

(Continued from page 436)

medieval mummeries are a downright insult. The present (February) cover is a slight improvement on your general run."

N. S. Van, of Jamestown, New York, writes to The Eyrie: "Mr. Quinn's story in the February issue struck me as exceedingly clever and mystifying. There is no more inspiring, pleasant, amusing character in fiction than this little French criminologist, always courteous, civil, active, yet with a hard line of viciousness and heartlessness in him. But H. P. Lovecraft's story took the cake. For Mr. Lovecraft I have a respect which amounts to awe. He instills into the reader a groping terror which increases every second. His *The Unnamable* was a masterpiece of horror. Poe is nothing compared to him."

Here is a complaint from Al. Schaefer, of South Omaha, Nebraska. He writes to The Eyrie: "I have been reading WEIRD TALES regularly for the past year, and I've liked them all, particularly *The Devils of Po Sung,* which was weird and uncanny yet has a concrete basis. However, this insane pipe-dream of E. Hoffmann Price, *The Infidel's Daughter,* got clear off the track allegorically and entered into politics and ran a lot of propaganda that was just as big a lie as the rest of his story, for when he accuses the Klan of murder and arson he is not telling the truth. So I am not going to read another one of your magazines because I do not care to pay 25 cents per copy to read Catholic propaganda."

This letter of Mr. Schaefer's calls for a word in answer. If he will read Mr. Price's story again he will see that there is no mention of the Klan, even by suggestion. Mr. Price has invented for the purposes of his story a purely mythical secret organization called "The Knights of the Saffron Mask." There have been secret hooded organizations from time immemorial, some good, some bad, some indifferent. Mr. Price has not been hitting at any existing secret society in his story. WEIRD TALES is a magazine of fiction, and chooses its stories solely on their value *as stories.* Propaganda, either for a good cause or a bad cause, would bar a story from our pages. We do not use, and will not use, stories that either attack or defend the Klan, or any other organization.

"I received my copy of *The Moon Terror,*" writes Artman Hall, "and I am glad I bought it, for it is a wow." (This is the WEIRD TALES serial by A. G. Birch, which has now been printed in book form.)

"I can't omit a boost for *The Infidel's Daughter,* which appeared two months ago," writes Wilford Allen, of Santa Rosa, California. "It is the best story W. T. has printed since Lovecraft's *The White Ship,* last spring."

"WEIRD TALES is a ripping good magazine," writes W. E. Hardell, of Atlanta, Georgia, "and I am unable to lay it down once I pick it up. One trouble I find with some of your authors is that they picture a thing of horror but never sufficiently describe it in detail. I like Seabury Quinn's stories of

(Continued on page 572)

From the Tombs of Ancient Egypt the ORACLE OF HERMES WILL ANSWER YOUR PERSONAL QUESTIONS

—with answers often so startling, so surprising, astounding, logical and so much to the point that you feel almost persuaded to believe that there must be something weird, uncanny and perhaps supernatural about this remarkable work and the chart of curious hieroglyphics from which the answers are derived.

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The Book of FATE

Will Guide You as it Guided the Great Napoleon

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- —if you will inherit property?
- —if you will ever travel?
- —facts about the girl you shall marry?
- —if you will live to old age?
- —if the one you love loves you?
- —if you will marry soon?
- —will you make or mar your fortune by gambling?
- —if you will ever recover from your present troubles?
- —facts about the man you shall marry?
- —if your beloved or friends will prove true?
- —if you will ever find treasure?

These and many, many other questions of the greatest importance to you and your dear ones can be decided for you by the Oracle of Hermes, speaking through the "Book of Fate."

NAPOLEON, the greatest figure in all history, once asked: "Will my name be immortalized and will posterity applaud it?" The Oracle answered: "Thy name will be handed down, with memory of thy deeds, to the most distant posterity."

Another question was: "Shall I be eminent, and meet with preferment in my pursuits?" The answer was quick and sure: "Thou shalt meet with many obstacles but at length obtain the highest earthly power and honor."

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Name .....

Address .....

The HAUNTED CASTLE

Lilla Price Savino

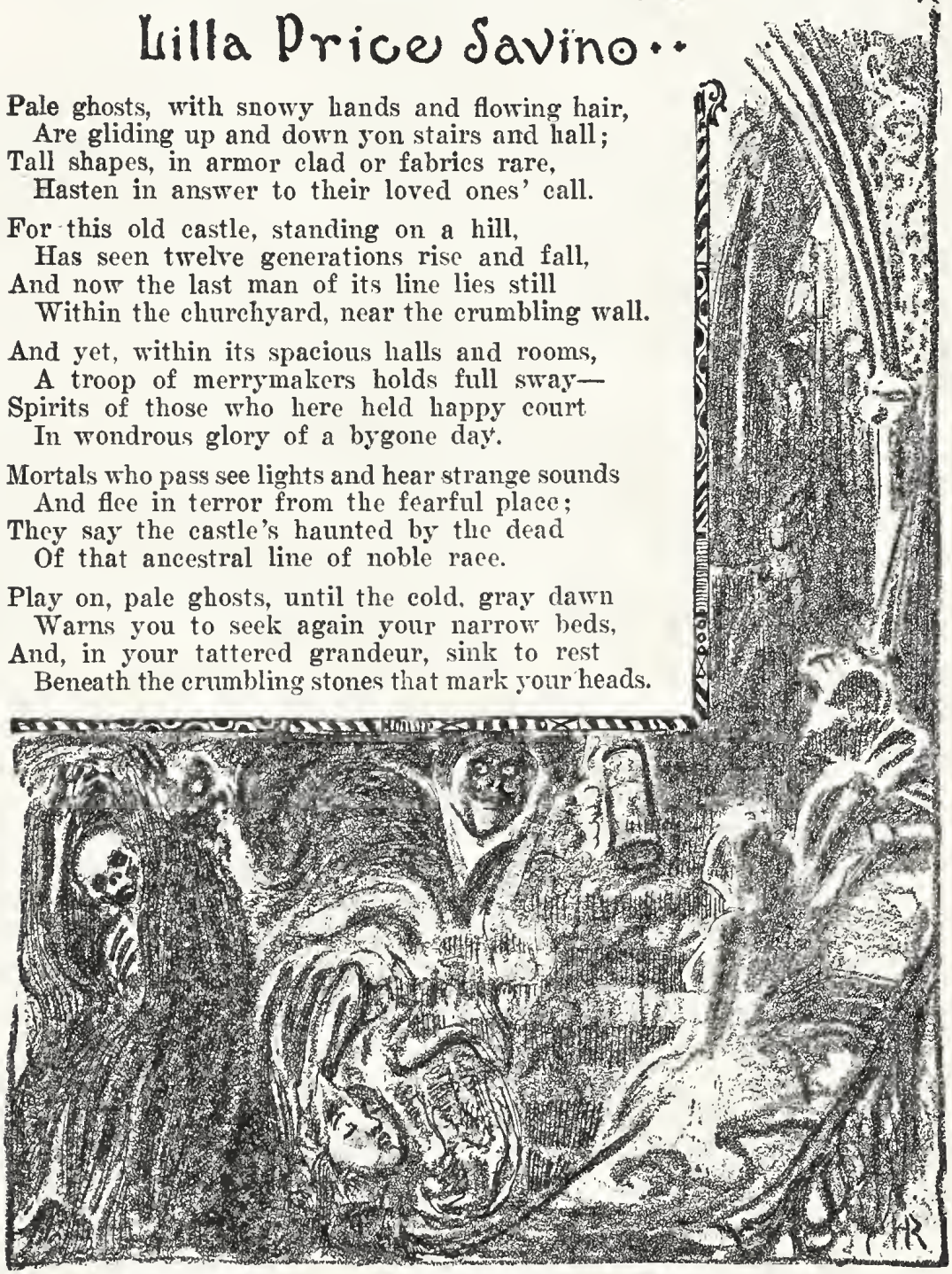
Pale ghosts, with snowy hands and flowing hair,
  Are gliding up and down yon stairs and hall;
Tall shapes, in armor clad or fabrics rare,
  Hasten in answer to their loved ones' call.

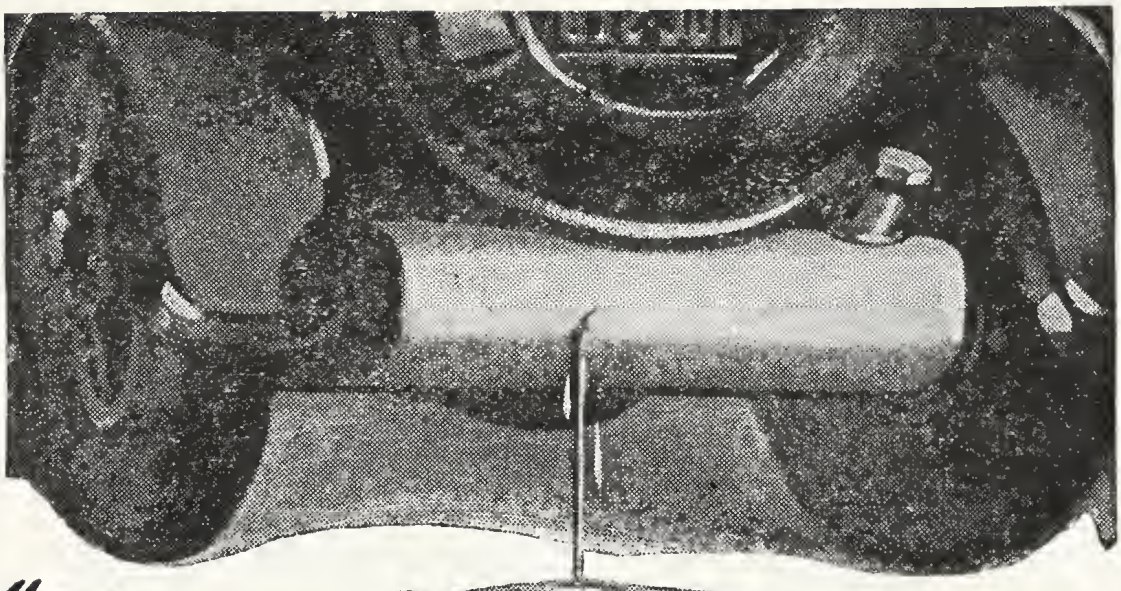
For this old castle, standing on a hill,
  Has seen twelve generations rise and fall,
And now the last man of its line lies still
  Within the churchyard, near the crumbling wall.

And yet, within its spacious halls and rooms,
  A troop of merrymakers holds full sway—
Spirits of those who here held happy court
  In wondrous glory of a bygone day.

Mortals who pass see lights and hear strange sounds
  And flee in terror from the fearful place;
They say the castle's haunted by the dead
  Of that ancestral line of noble race.

Play on, pale ghosts, until the cold, gray dawn
  Warns you to seek again your narrow beds,
And, in your tattered grandeur, sink to rest
  Beneath the crumbling stones that mark your heads.





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M. E. Miller of Kansas City: "You people claim a saving of 25% to 50% of gasoline. After installing one on a Chevrolet I obtained 40.8 miles to a gallon where before I got only 19.5. So you see the actual test surpasses your claim."

Send no money now. Simply fill in your name and address in coupon below for full description, and free sample offer to car owners and distributors. You can't lose! So tear out the coupon now before you forget. J. A. Stransky Mfg. Co., D-1550 Stransky Block, Pukwana, S. D.

Make $75 in a Week

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Yes, send me full description of the Stransky Vaporizer. Also tell me about your free sample offer to car owners. This coupon is not an order and does not obligate me in any way.

Name _____

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City _____ State _____

( ) Check here if you want to receive our money-making plan for full or spare time work as a Stransky representative.

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Of course, it was impossible to sell this remarkable pen through the stores. Their profit alone on a $7.00 or $8.75 pen ***is more than what you actually pay for the POSTAL RESERVOIR PEN.*** And so we decided to let Uncle Sam do the selling for us—through the United States mails.

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How to Get the Postal Pen

SEND NO MONEY

Simply fill in and mail the coupon. Do not send a penny! When you get your Postal Pen, you will also receive 5 post cards, each worth 50c on the purchase price of another pen. Every Postal Pen owner finds that his friends admire his remarkable pen and ask where they can get others like it. You can easily sell your premium post cards for 50c each and earn back the full price of your pen. You do ***not*** have to sell the cards—dispose of them any way you wish—whatever you make on them is yours to keep.

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Send for your POSTAL pen NOW. State whether you want men's or women's model. Use it five days and if you are not delighted with it return it and your money will be promptly refunded. You are to be the sole judge. Compare it with any pen at any price. **Remember the price is low only because our sales policy of manufacturer-to-user eliminates all in between profits, commissions and handling.** Send the coupon NOW and learn what real fountain pen satisfaction is.

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Greatest Advance in Restoring Youthful, Schoolday, Clear, Beautiful, Velvety Skin and Complexion Ever Made.

READ FREE OFFER BELOW

Write for This Amazing Free Treatise,—"Beautiful New Skin in 3 Days," and Marvel at the Progress of Science—It's Wonderful!

How old saying that "Beauty Is Only Skin Deep" has been made to come true for thousands of both sexes, young and old, easily!

WHY not have a new, clear skin and look your best, now that it is so easy! You occasionally get a new hat and outfit—yet "fine feathers" don't always make "fine birds." But if you had a new, fresh outer skin on your face, neck, arms and hands, you would look years younger and more beautiful—even in rags!

Now you need worry no more over your disfigured skin and complexion! Forget your failures with lotions, clays, creams, powders, massage, steaming pots and "cover-ups." Throw away your rubber masks, plasters, and beauty makeshifts. Because—here's where you get a new, fresh outer skin!

Most astonishing discovery in the history of beauty culture. All explained in an amazing free treatise called "Beautiful New Skin In 3 Days." Tells how to do what foreign skin specialists have charged enormous prices for, how to make your blackheads, pimples, large pores, freckles, tan, sallow complexion, surface wrinkles, blemishes, and signs of approaching age, go, definitely, GONE—"because they're OFF!"

Make your own skin and complexion the envy of all who behold it, THIS NEW WAY!

Hundreds of men and women are now doing it themselves—in the quiet of their own homes—without danger or inconvenience.

They surprise and astonish with a new, soft, velvety, clear, spotless, youth-like skin on face, neck, arms, hands or any part of body where new skin is desired. The method is absolutely harmless and easy. It's astonishing—almost beyond belief. Send name and address only—This amazing new Treatise is mailed absolutely free to readers of this magazine. But those who wish, may enclose ten cents in any form to help pay distribution expenses.

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NOW IS THE TIME TO GET YOUR TYPEWRITER!

Be up-to-date—know the pleasure and convenience of having one in your home. You'll be amazed at the uses everyone in your household will find for this real Underwood typewriter. Every member of the family will use and enjoy it! Don't send a cent—but do get our big special offer—our valuable book on typewriters and typewriting—FREE.

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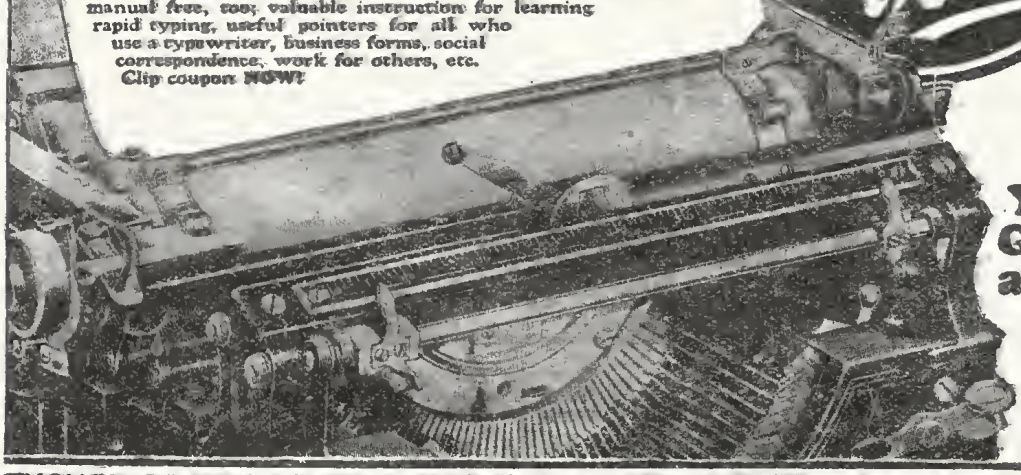

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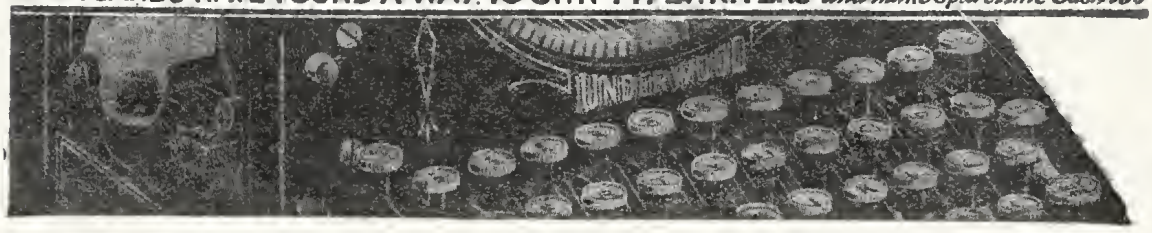
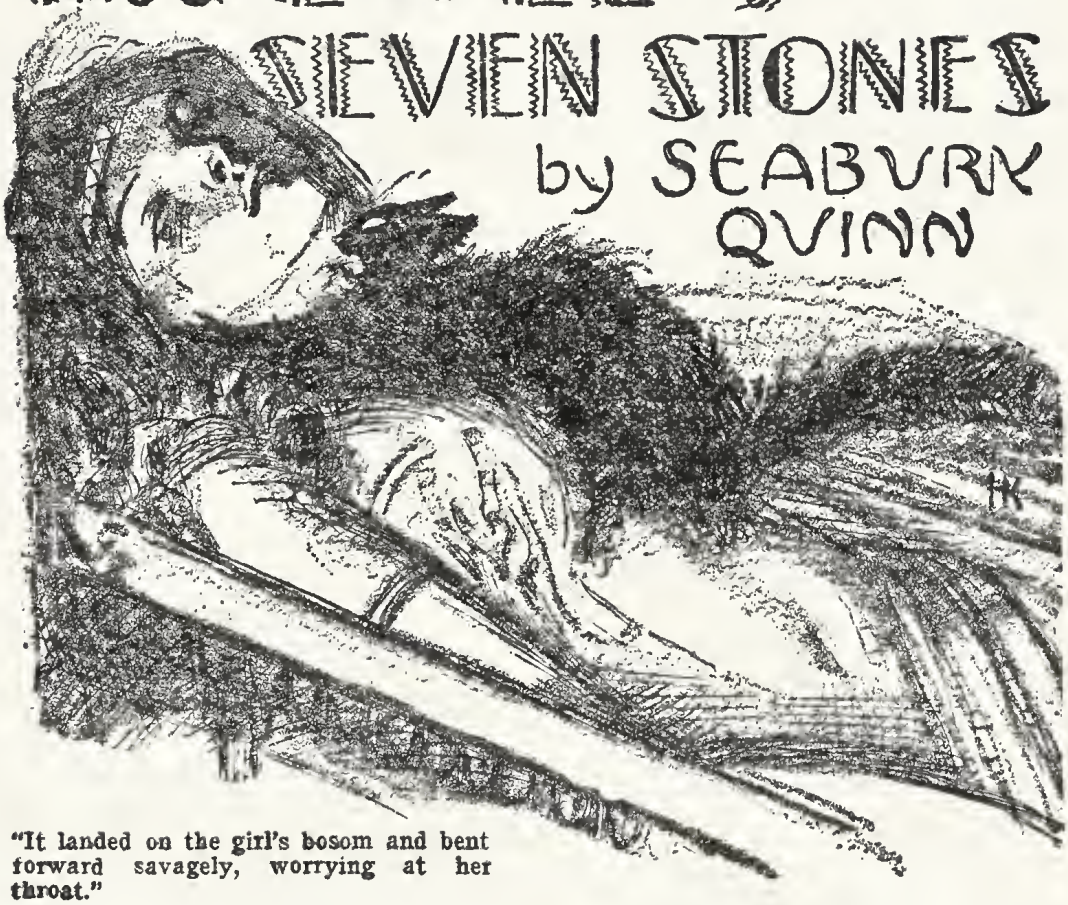


The JEWEL of SEVEN STONES

by SEABURY QUINN



"It landed on the girl's bosom and bent forward savagely, worrying at her throat."

1. The Coffins from Alexandria

"HELLO, Dr. Trowbridge," a cheerful hail accosted me as I turned the corner, hastening on my round of afternoon calls, "I've been meaning to look you up for the last two months, but never got 'round to it. Good thing I met you now; I'm figuring on pulling off a show this evening, and maybe you'd like a ringside seat."

"Oh? How do you do?" I responded somewhat doubtfully, for the grinning young man in the shabby little red roadster at the curb was unknown to me. "I'm afraid you've the advantage of me; I——"

"Oh, yes, you do," he replied with an infectious smile. "I'm Ellsworth Bennett, you know. You used to come out to our house a lot when Father was living, and——"

"Why," I broke in, "Ellsworth, boy, I never would have known you. You've grown so——"

"Quite right," he agreed. "It's a habit we all have during early life. Now, what do you say to coming out to my little diggings tonight? I'm parked in the old Van Drub cottage for the season, and I've really got something worth looking at."

"Well," I temporized, "I'd be delighted to have you in to my place to dinner, but I'm so tied up with night calls these times that I fear I'll not be able to accept your invitation."

"Oh, rats!" he returned. "Try to come, won't you? You know, I've been connected with the Museum of Ethnology ever since I got my degree, and this spring I ran across the trail of something really big while traveling in Egypt. I think I can show you something brand-new if you'll drop out my way tonight or tomorrow. I seem to recall that you and Father used to spend no end of time talking about Rameses and Ptolemy and the rest of those antique gentlemen when I was too small to know what it was all about."

I regarded the lad speculatively. He was his father's own son, no mistake about it. Those honest, humorous blue eyes beneath the sandy brows, that wide, mobile mouth and square chin cleft with the slightest suggestion of a dimple, even the flecks of russet freckles across the bridge of his aquiline nose reminded me of my dear old classmate whose house had been a second home to me in the days before the influenza pandemic took him off. "I'll come," I decided, clasping the youngster's hand in mine. "You may expect me sometime after 8 this evening — office hours have to be observed, you know —and, if you don't mind, I'll bring a friend with me, a Dr. de Grandin, from Paris, who's stopping with me."

"Not Jules de Grandin?" he demanded incredulously.

"Yes; do you know him?"

"No, but I'd like to. Jules de Grandin! Why, Dr. Trowbridge, I'd no idea you traveled in such highbrow company."

"I'd hardly call him highbrow," I replied, smiling at his enthusiasm.

"Oh, Lord!" he threw up his hands in mock despair. "You fellows who have all the luck never do appreciate it. Why, man, de Grandin's one of the foremost ethnologists of the age; his studies in evolution and anthropometry are classics. I'll say you can bring him. I'll be hanging out the window waiting for you tonight. G'bye." With a warning double toot of his horn he set his decrepit motor going and dashed down the street at a speed bound to bring him afoul of the first crossing policeman who spied him.

THE Van Drub cottage where young Bennett had his "diggings" was a relic of the days when Swede and Dutchman contended for mastery of the country between the Delaware and the Hudson. Like all houses of its day, it was of the story-and-a-half type, built of stone to the edge of the overhanging roof and of hand-split chestnut shingles above. The ground floor was entirely occupied by a single large combination living-room and kitchen paved with brick and walled with roughly split planks, and small cubby-holes of storerooms flanked it at each end. Bennett's living arrangements were as typical of himself as a photograph. Bookshelves lined the walls and displayed a most improbable array of volumes—de Morgan's *Les Premières Civilisations* and Munzinger's *Ostafrikanische Studien* huddled cheek by jowl with a much-worn copy of Thomas à Kempis' *Imitation of Christ*. A once fine but now badly worn Sarouk rug covered the major portion of the brick floor, and the furniture was a hodgepodge of second-hand mahogany and new, cheap pine. In the middle of the room, as though on exhibition, were two long covered objects, roughly resembling a pair of mummy-cases, raised some three feet above the floor on rough saw-horses. Two kerosene-burning student lamps of the sort used in the late nineties, their green shades removed for greater radiation of light, illuminated the room's center with an almost theatric glare, leaving the corners in shadow all the deeper from the contrast.

"Welcome to the humble student's cave, gentlemen," Bennett greeted as we stepped through the wide, low doorway. "Tonight's the fateful

hour; I either uncover something to set 'em all talking for the next ten years, or get myself a free ticket to the booby-hatch."

With sudden soberness he turned directly to de Grandin and added: "I'm on special leave from the Museum to work out a theory that's been haunting me for the last year or so. It'll be an important contribution to science, if I'm right. Here"—he waved his hand toward the sheeted objects on the trestles—"is the evidence. Shall we begin?"

"U'm." Jules de Grandin gave his little blond mustache a vicious tweak as he regarded our host with his direct, challenging stare. "What is it that you wish to prove by the evidence, *mon brave?*"

"Just this" — Bennett's frank, boyish eyes lost something of their humorous gleam and took on the earnest, enthusiastic expression of the fanatic's—"that not all the traces of the Greek civilization were obliterated when the Moslems sacked and burned Alexandria."

"Ah? And you will prove it by——?" De Grandin's delicately arched brows lifted slightly as he glanced significantly at the sheeted things.

"By these," Bennett returned. "This spring, while I was over in Africa, I got in with a scoundrelly old Arab who rejoiced in the name of Abd-el-Berkr, and, in return for several liberal applications of *bakshish*, he agreed to turn over two ancient Greek coffins he had found in an old native cemetery in the desert. The old villain knew enough to distinguish between Christian coffins and Egyptian mummy-cases—there aren't any of the latter left in the neighborhood of Alexandria, anyhow—and he was too good a Moslem to disturb the tombs of his coreligionists, even if they had used substantial coffins for burial, which they hadn't.

"I took the old beggar on, for if he were telling the truth his find was worth a lot more than it cost me, and if he were lying—which he probably was—I'd not be so very much out of pocket. As you know, the Mohammedans took about everything that wasn't nailed down when they captured the city, and their descendants have been keeping the good work up. The few Christian cemeteries which survived the first onslaught of Islam were gradually uprooted and their inmates ruthlessly ripped from their tombs and despoiled of such trifling ornaments as happened to be buried with them. So, even if we don't find anything of great importance in these two cases, the chances are we may recover a few old coins or some antique jewelry—enough to take back to the Museum and prove my time hasn't been entirely wasted."

He paused, eyes shining, lips parted as he surveyed us each in turn, almost pathetically anxious for a word of encouragement.

"I fear we have come on a chase of the wild goose, my friend," de Grandin replied a trifle wearily. "Me, I have unearthed coffins of the olden days from the vicinity of Alexandria, of Tunis and of Sidon, but nothing save the most abominable evidence that all flesh is subject to decay have I ever found. For your sake I hope your hopes are justified. Speaking from experience, I should say the Arab gentleman has driven a most advantageous bargain, for himself. Undoubtlessly he first despoiled the tombs of such trifles as they contained, then sold you the empty boxes for as much as he could. I fear you are—how do you say it?—holding the sack, *mon enfant.*"

"Well, anyway, here goes," responded Bennett with a shamefaced grin as he whipped the threadbare table-cover from the nearest case and took up mallet and cold-chisel. "We may as well begin on this one, eh?"

The coffin was roughly like a bathtub in shape, perhaps six feet long by two and a half high, and composed of

some sort of hard, brittle pottery, evidently baked in a brick-kiln, and apparently shaped by hand, for traces of the makers' thumb-marks still showed on its exterior. About its upper portion, an inch or so below the junction of lid and body, ran an ornamental molding of the familiar Greek egg-and-dart design, crudely impressed on the clay with a modeling mold before baking. There was no other attempt at decoration and no trace of inscription on the lid.

"Here we are!" Bennett exclaimed as he finished chipping away the sealing of the casket. "Give me a lift with this lid, Dr. Trowbridge?"

I leaned forward to assist him, tugged at the long, convexly curved slab of terra-cotta, and craned my neck to glimpse the coffin's interior.

WHAT I had expected to see I do not quite know. A skeleton, perhaps; possibly a handful of fetid mold; more likely nothing at all. The sight which met my eyes made them fairly start from their sockets, and but for Bennett's warning cry I should have let my end of the casket cover clatter to the brick floor.

Cushioned on a mattress of royal purple cloth, a diminutive pillow beneath her head and another supporting her feet, lay a woman—a girl, rather—of such surpassing beauty as might have formed the theme of an Oriental romance. Slender she was, yet possessing the softly rounded curves of budding womanhood, not the angular, boyish thinness of our modern girls. Her skin, a deep, sun-kissed olive, showed every violet vein through its veil of lustrous, velvet tan. Across her breast, folded reposefully, lay hands as softly dimpled as a child's, their long, pointed nails overlaid with gold leaf or bright gilt paint, so that they shone like ten tiny almond-shaped mirrors in the rays of the hissing student lamps. Her little bare feet, as they dimpled the purple cushion on which they lay, were pinked about sole and toe like those of a baby, and so soft, so free from callouses or roughening of any sort, that it seemed they must have trodden nothing harder than velvet carpets in life, even as they rested on pillows of velvet in death. About ankles, wrists and arms hung bangles of beaten rose-gold studded with topaz, garnet and lapis-lazuli, while a diadem of the same precious composition encircled her brow, binding back the curling black locks which lay about her small face in thick clusters. A robe or shroud of thinnest gauze enveloped her from throat to knees, and about her lower limbs from knee to ankle was wrapped a shawl of brilliant orange silk embroidered with wreaths of shells and roses. Black antimony had been rubbed on her lids to give added size and depth to her eyes, and her full, voluptuous lips, half parted, as though in the gentle respiration of peaceful sleep, were stained vivid vermilion with powdered cinnabar. There was nothing of death, nothing of the charnel-house, about the vision. Indeed, it required a conscious effort to convince me her bosom did not rise and fall with the softly-drawn breath of slumber, and the faint, subtle perfume of violets and orange blossoms which wafted to us from her raiment and hair was no delusion, but a veritable scent imprisoned in the baked-clay tomb for fifteen centuries.

"Ah!" I exclaimed in mingled surprize and admiration.

"Good Lord!" Ellsworth Bennett murmured, staring incredulously at the lovely corpse, his breath rasping sharply between his teeth.

"*Nom d'un chat de nom d'un chat!*" Jules de Grandin almost shouted, standing on tiptoe to gaze over my shoulder. "It is the Sleeping Beauty *en personne!*"

With a quick movement he turned to young Bennett, and before the other was aware of his intention had kissed him soundly on each cheek.

"*Embrasse moi, mon vieux!*" he cried. "Me, I am one great fool of a doubly-damned doubting Thomas! In all my head there is not the sense with which the good God had endowed a goose! *Parbleu,* we have here the find of the age; our reputation is assured; we shall have fame comparable to that of Boussard. *Mordieu,* but we are already famous!"

Characteristically, he had assumed charge of the entire proceeding. "We shall take her to the Museum!" he continued, elatedly; "she shall display her so marvelous beauty for all to see our handiwork. She shall—*misère de Dieu,* behold, my friends, she vanishes!"

It was true. Before our eyes, like a shadowgraph fading on the screen, the lovely being in the ancient coffin was dissolving. Where the full-rounded beauty of feminine perfection had lain a moment before, there stretched a withering, shriveling thing, puckering and wrinkling like a body long immersed in chilled water. The eyeballs had already fallen in, leaving cavernous, unfilled sockets in a face from which every semblance of the bloom of youth had vanished and which showed pinched and desiccated like that of a mummy. The symmetrical, full-fleshed limbs were no more than skin-covered bones as we bent our gaze on the rapidly spreading desolation, and within a space of ten minutes even the skeleton lost its articulation, and nothing but a pile of dust, gray-white and fine as the ashes of cremation, lay upon the purple fabric. While we stared, horrified, even the pillows and mattress which had supported that once-beautiful body, the ethereal, transparent gauze and the heavy, broidered silk of the shawl crumbled like a gaslight filament crushed between thumb and forefinger. Sealed away from contact with the atmosphere for centuries, every vestige of perishable matter, both animal and vegetable, had shuddered into ashes in our oxygen-laden air almost as quickly as if brought in contact with living flame. Only the hard, glittering facets of the gems and the duller gleam of the gold composing her ornaments assured us that the body of a lovely girl had lain before us a short quarter-hour ago.

Ellsworth Bennett was the first to recover his self-possession. "*Sic transit gloria mundi!*" he remarked with a half-hysterical laugh. "Shall we open the other one?"

De Grandin was shaking like a leaf with emotion. Like all his countrymen, he was as susceptible to the appeal of beauty as a sensitive-plant's fronds are to the touch, and the spectacle he had witnessed had shocked him almost past endurance. Taking his narrow chin between his forefinger and thumb, he gazed abstractedly at the floor a moment, then turned to our host with a shrug and one of his quick, elfin smiles. "Regard not my foolishness, I beseech you," he implored. "Me, I would not suffer such another sight for the wealth of the Indies, but—so great is my curiosity—I would not forego the experience of beholding the contents of that other casket for ten times the Indies' wealth!"

Together he and Bennett broke the clay sealing of the coffin, and within five minutes the lid was loosened and ready to be lifted from its place.

"Careful, careful, Trowbridge, my friend!" de Grandin besought as the three of us gently raised the slab of brittle clay. "Who knows what we may discover this time? Beneath this cover there may be—*quoi diable!*"

Instead of the open coffin we had expected to find beneath the earthen lid, a second covering, curved and molded to conform to the outer lid's shape, met our gaze.

Bennett, intent on seeing what lay beneath, was about to strike the opaque white substance with his hammer, but a quick cry from de Grandin halted him. "*Non, non!*" the Frenchman warned. "Can not you see there

is an inscription on it? Stand back, my friends, approach, do not crowd, lean forward"—his sharp, contradictory orders rang out in quick succession like military commands. "Lights, lights for the love of heaven! Bring forward the lamps that I may decipher these words before I die from curiosity!"

Bennett and I each seized a lamp and we held them above the coffin's inner sealing while the little Frenchman leaned forward, eagerly scanning the inscription.

The curving cover seemed to be made of some softer, less brittle substance than the outer lid—wax, I decided after a hasty inspection—and on it, from top to bottom, in small Greek unicals some sort of message had been etched with a stylus.

De Grandin studied the legend through intently narrowed eyes a few moments, then turned to Bennett with a gesture of impatience. "It is no good," he announced petulantly. "My brain, he has too much burden on him this night; I can not translate the Greek into English with the readiness I should. Paper, paper and pencil, if you please. I shall make a copy of this writing and translate him at my leisure this evening. Tomorrow we shall read him aloud and see what we shall see. Meantime, swear as you hope for heaven, that you will make no move to open this coffin until I shall return. You agree? *Bon!* To work, then; the writing is long and of an unfamiliar hand. It will take much time to transcribe it on my tablets."

2. *A Portent from the Past*

GOLDEN waffles and rich, steaming coffee were waiting on the table when I descended the stairs next morning, for Nora McGinnis, my household factotum, maintained a soft spot in her Celtic heart for de Grandin and his gallant manners, and delays which would have made her nearly snap my head off brought only an indulgent smile when occasioned by the little Frenchman's tardiness. "Sure, Doctor darlin'," she greeted as I seated myself and looked about for my companion, "Dr. de Grandin wuz doin' th' divil's own bit o' studyin' last night, an' 'twould be unfair ter call 'um from his rist, so ut would."

"Fear not, my excellent one," a cheerful voice hailed from the stairs, "already I am here," and de Grandin stepped quickly into the sunlit dining-room, his face glowing from the recent application of razor-blade and cold water, his little blond mustache waxed to twin needle-points at the corners of his small, sensitive mouth, and every blond hair on his head lying as perfectly in place as though numbered and arranged according to plan.

"*Mordieu,* what a night!" he exclaimed with a sigh as he drained a preliminary draft of well-creamed coffee and passed the cup back for replenishment. "*Cordieu,* even yet I doubt me that I saw what I beheld at Monsieur Bennett's cottage last night, and I am yet in doubt that I translated what I did from the notes I made from the second coffin!"

"Was it so remarkable?" I began, but he cut me short with an upraised hand.

"Remarkable?" he echoed. "*Parbleu,* my friend, it is amazing, nothing less. Come, let us first discuss this so excellent food, then discuss the message from the past.

"Attend me, if you please," he ordered, picking up a sheaf of manuscript from the study table when we had finished breakfast. "Give careful ear to what I read, my friend, for I shall show you that which makes even our vision of yesternight fade to insignificance by comparison. Listen:

Kaku, servant and priest of Sebek, dread God of Nilus, son of Amathel the son of Kepher, servants and priests of Sebek, to whoso looks hereon, greeting and admonition:

Not of the creed and belief of Christians am I, neither of the bastard cult of the Greek usurpers. Flesh of the flesh and blood of the mighty blood of the race which ruled Upper and Lower Egypt in the days when Ra held sway is Kaku, servant and priest of Sebek. Learned in the laws and magic of the olden priesthood am I, and by the lore and cunning of my forebears have I sealed the virgin Peligia in unwaking sleep beneath this shield of time-defying cerus, even the wax which sets at naught the father of acids.

Greek and Christian though she be, and daughter of the race which trod upon my ancestors, my heart inclined to her and I would have taken her to wife, but she would not. Wherefore, I, being minded that she should take no other man to husband, devised a plan to slay her and bury her with the ancient rites and ceremonies of my people, that her body should not know corruption, but lie in the tomb until the Seven Ages were passed, and I might take her to myself and dwell with her in Aalu. Nathless, when I had taken her beyond the city gates, and all was ready for her death, my heart turned water within me, and I could not strike the blow. Therefore, by my magic, and by the magic of my priesthood, have I caused a deep sleep to fall on her, even a sleep which knows no waking until the Seven ages be past and she and I shall dwell together in Amenaand.

For the Seven Ages shall she sleep within this coffin, obedient to the mystic spell I have put on her, and if no man openeth the tomb and waken her before the Seven Ages be past, then she shall become as the dust of Egypt, and be mine forever and forever in the land beyond the setting sun. But if a man of later days shall lift the covering from off this coffin and take her hand in his and call on her by name, and in the name of love, then shall my magic be valueless, and she shall waken and cleave unto her deliverer, and be his own in that land and generation yet unborn. This is the sum of all my spells and learning unable to withstand.

Yet, ye who look hereon, be warned in time or ever ye seek to open this tomb of the living-in-death. I, Kaku, priest and servant of Mighty Sebek, have sealed this virgin within this tomb that she may be mine and not another's. My shadow, and the shadow of Sebek which is my god, is upon her. Yea, were it seventy times seventy ages instead of seven, and were the earth to perish under our feet, yet would I pursue her until her heart inclines to me.

I, Kaku, servant and priest of Sebek, have sealed this tomb with clay and wax and with my curse, and with the curse of Sebek, my god and master, and the curse of Kaku, and of Kaku's god, shall smite with terror him who openeth this tomb. And on him in ages yet to come who looks upon this coffin with presumptuous eyes and makes bold to open it, I do pronounce my curse and the curse of Sebek, and I do set myself against him in wager of battle, that his days be not long in the land; neither his nor hers to whom life returns and youth and love for the duration of the seven stones upon the jewel, according to the obedience of the eternal gods of Egypt whose kingdom shall have no end.

I have said.

De Grandin laid the manuscript on the desk and looked at me, his little blue eyes round and shining with excitement.

"Well?" I asked.

"Well?" he mimicked. "*Parbleu*, I shall say it is well! Many remarkable things have I beheld, my friend, but never such as this. Come, let us hasten, let us fly to the cottage of Monsieur Bennett and see what lies beneath that shield of wax. *Mort d'un Chinois*, though she subsist but for five little minutes, I must gaze, I must feast my eyes upon that paragon of womanhood whose beauty was so great that even the hand of jealousy forbore to strike!"

3. *The Jewel of Seven Stones*

DIFFERING from her companion in death as dawnlight differs from midnight, the virgin Peligia lay in her terra-cotta coffin when Bennett, de Grandin and I had lifted off the curving shield of wax. She was some five and twenty years of age, apparently; slightly above middle height, golden-haired and fair-skinned as any Nordic blonde, and as exquisitely proportioned as a Grecian statue of Aphrodite. From tapering white throat to blue-veined, high-arched insteps she was draped in a simple Ionic robe of snowy linen cut in that austerely modest and graceful fashion of ancient Attica in which the upper part of the dress falls downward again from neck to waist in a sort of cape, hiding the outline of the breast while leaving the entire arms and the point

of the shoulders bare. Except for two tiny studs of hand-beaten gold which held the robe together over the shoulders and the narrow double border of horizontal purple lines at the bottom of the cape, marking her status as a Roman citizen, her gown was without ornament of any sort, and no jewelry adorned her chaste loveliness save the golden threads with which her white-kid sandals were embroidered and a single strand of small gold disks, joined by minute links and having seven tiny pendants of polished carnelians, which encircled her throat and lay lightly against the gentle swell of her white bosom.

To me there seemed something of the cold finality of death about her pose and figure. After the glowing beauty and barbaric splendor of her unnamed companion, she seemed almost meanly dressed, but de Grandin and Bennett were mute with admiration as they gazed on her.

"*Mordieu,* she is the spirit of Greece, undebased by evil times, brought down to us within a shell of clay," the little Frenchman murmured, bending over her and studying her calm, finely molded features like a connoisseur inspecting a bit of priceless statuary.

Young Bennett was almost speechless with mingled excitement and homage. "What—what did you say her name was?" he asked thickly, swallowing between words, as though the pressure of his breath forced them back into his throat.

"Peligia," de Grandin returned, bending closer to study the texture of her robe.

"Peligia," Bennett repeated softly. "Peligia——" Scarce aware of what he did, he reached downward and took one of the shapely hands crossed above her quiet breast in his.

Jules de Grandin and I stood fascinated, scarce daring to breathe, for at the whispered name and the pressure of the boy's fingers on hers, the woman in the coffin stirred, the slender, girlish bosom heaved as if with respiration, and the smooth, wax-white lids fluttered upward from a pair of long gray eyes as gentle as the summer and as glowing as the stars. A wave of upward-rising color flooded her throat, her cheeks; the hue of healthy, buoyant youth showed in her face, and her calmly set lips parted in the faintest suggestion of a smile.

"My lord," she murmured softly, meeting young Bennett's gaze with a look of gentle trust. "My lord and my love, at last you have come for me."

And she spoke in English.

"*Morbleu,* Friend Trowbridge, look to me, assist me hence to some asylum for lunatics," de Grandin implored. "I am *caduc*—mad like a hare of March. I see that which is not and hear words unspoken!"

"Then I'm crazy too," I rejoined, leaning forward to assist Bennett in his task of lifting the girl from her coffin-bed. "We're all mad—mad as hatters, but——"

"Yes, *parbleu,*" he agreed, fairly dancing before us to toss back the covers of the camp bed and ease the girl upon it, "mad we are, of a surety, but who would own sanity if madness brings visions such as this?"

In another moment the blankets had been drawn about the girl's shoulders, and with Bennett seated at her left, de Grandin at her right, and me standing at the bedstead's foot, she held her little levee like some spoiled beauty of the Louis' court at her salon.

"How comes it you speak English, *Mademoiselle?*" de Grandin demanded, putting in blunt words the question which burned in all our brains.

The girl turned her agate eyes on him with a puzzled little frown. "English?" she repeated. "What is English?"

"*Nom d'un nom!* What is"—de Grandin gasped, looking as if he were in momentary danger of explod-

ing—" 'What is it?' you do ask. It is the language we use. The barbarous tongue of the Saxon savages!"

"Why"—still her smooth brow wrinkled with noncomprehension—"is not the tongue we use that of the Empire? Are we not in Alexandria?"

"In Alexandria!" Again the little Frenchman seemed on the point of bursting; then, with a mighty effort, he restrained himself and demanded, "*Parlez vous Français?*"

She shook her head in silent negation.

"But—but," he began; then he stopped short with a look of bewilderment, almost of dismay.

"I understand," she broke in while he waited her explanation. "A moment ago I ceased to hold my lord's hand, and the words you used seemed suddenly meaningless, though before I understood perfectly. See, while his hand is clasped in mine I talk as you do and understand your speech, but the moment I release his fingers my mind becomes a blank, and all about me seems strange. I know the answer to your question. He"—she cast another melting glance on the boy sitting beside her—"he is my love through all the ages, the man who waked me into life from death. While he touches me or I touch him I speak with his tongue and hear with his ears; the moment our contact is broken I am an alien and a stranger in a strange land and time."

"*Cordieu,* yes, it is possible," de Grandin agreed with a short nod. "I have known such cases where patients suffered with amentia, but——

"Scat!" The interruption came with dramatic suddenness as he chanced to glance toward the open door. Upon the threshold, one forefoot raised tentatively, its big, green eyes fixed on the reclining girl with a baleful gleam, stood a huge black cat.

"Out, beast of evil omen!" the little Frenchman cried, striding toward the brute with upraised hand.

S-s-s-sh! Venomous as the hiss of a poisonous reptile, the thing's furious spit greeted his advance, and every sable hair along its spine reared upward belligerently.

"Out, I say!" de Grandin repeated, aiming a devastating kick at the brute.

It did not dodge. Rather, it seemed to writhe from under his foot, evading the blow with perfect ease. With a lithe, bounding spring it launched itself into the air, landed fairly on the covers protecting the girl's bosom and bent forward savagely, worrying at her throat.

Bennett leaped to his feet, flailing at the thing with ineffectual blows, fearing to strike directly downward lest he hit the girl, and missing the writhing brute each time he swung his impotent fists at it.

Then, suddenly as it had appeared, the creature vanished. Snarling once, defiantly, it turned and leaped to the window-sill. As it paused for a final baleful glare at us, we saw a tiny red fleck against its lips. Was it blood? I wondered. Had the beast fleshed its fangs in the girl's throat? De Grandin had seized a piece of crockery from the dresser and raised his hand to hurl it at the beast, but the missile was never thrown. Abruptly, like a light snuffed out in a gust of wind, the thing was gone. None of us saw it leap from the sill; there was no sound of its feet against the heaped-up dry leaves outside. It was gone, nor could we say how or where.

On the bed, Peligia wept despairingly, drawing her breath with deep, laboring sobs and expelling it with low, quavering moans. "My lord," she cried, seizing Bennett's hand in hers that she might express herself, "I understand it all. That was no cat, but the *ka* of Kaku, the priest of Sebek. Long years ago he put me in a magic sleep with his unclean sor-

ceries, but before he did so he told me that if ever I awakened and loved another man his double would pursue me from the dungeons of Amenti and ravish me from out my lover's arms. And in token of his threat he hung this about my neck"—she pointed hysterically to the chaplet of golden disks and ruddy beads—"and warned me that my life in the days to be would last only so long as the seven pendants of this jewel. One at a time, he vowed, his *ka* would take the stones from me, and as each one fell, so would my stay in the land of my new-found lover be shortened. Behold, my darling, already he has wrested one of the stones from me!"

Baring her breast of the shrouding blankets, she indicated the necklace.

One of the tiny carnelian pendants was gone. The jewel of seven stones retained but six.

4. *The Accident*

Two months had passed. Peligia's naive assumption that the man whose voice and touch wakened her from her sesquimillenial trance was her foreordained mate found ready echo in Ellsworth Bennett's heart. Three days after her release from the Alexandrian coffin he and she were wed at the sole Greek Catholic church our little city boasted, Bennett's innate thoughtfulness dictating the choice, since the service and language of the liturgy employed by the modern *papa* were essentially the same as those to which his bride was accustomed in the days of the Patriarch Cyril.

De Grandin and I attended them at the ceremony and helped them procure their license, and the little Frenchman was near to bursting with laughter when the solemn-visaged clerk of court demanded of Bennett whether his bride was of full age. "*Par la barbe de Saint Gris,*" he chuckled delightedly in my ear, "Friend Trowbridge, I am half minded to tell him her true age!" and he stepped forward as though to carry out his threat.

"Come back, you little fool," I admonished, seizing his elbow and dragging him away; "he'll have us all committed to an asylum!" At which he laughed all the harder, to the very evident scandal of the serious-minded attachés of the clerk's office.

The earthenware coffin in which the dead girl had lain, together with her splendidly barbaric ornaments, had been taken to the Museum as trophies of Bennett's researches, and, backed by de Grandin's statement, his story of the find was duly accredited. Of the manner of Peligia's coming nothing had been said, and since Ellsworth was an orphan without near relatives, there was little curiosity shown in his charming wife's antecedents. Their brief honeymoon had been a dream of happiness, and their life together in the cheerful little suburban villa bade fair to continue their joy uninterruptedly. Since the first sinister manifestation on the afternoon of her awakening, Peligia and her husband had received no further visitations, and I, for one, had become convinced that the black cat was really a feline rogue which happened into the cottage by uncanny coincidence, rather than a visitant from beyond the grave.

De Grandin and I faced each other across my study table. In the dining-room the candlelight gleamed on china and silver and cut glass, and from the kitchen emanated odors of gumbo soup, roast chicken and fresh-baked apple pies. Also imprecations as Nora McGinnis strode to and fro across her domain, breathing uncomplimentary remarks about "folks who kape a body's dinner waitin' an' sp'ilin' on th' sthove half an hour afther ut's due ter be served."

The Frenchman consulted the silver dial of the tiny watch strapped to the under side of his wrist for the tenth time in as many minutes.

"They are late, Trowbridge, my friend," he announced unnecessarily. "I do not like it. It is not well."

"Nonsense!" I scoffed. "Ellsworth's probably had a blowout or something of the sort, and is holding us up while he puts on a new tire."

"Perhaps, possibly," de Grandin admitted, "but I have the *malaise*, notwithstanding. Go to the telephone, I beseech, and assure yourself they are on the way."

"Stuff!" I retorted, but reached for the receiver as I spoke, for it was plain my friend's apprehension was mounting like a thermometer's mercury on an August afternoon.

"Give me——" I began, preparing to name Bennett's number, but the voice of central cut me off.

"Here's your party," she announced, speaking to someone on the other end of the line.

"Is this Dr. Trowbridge?" the cool, impersonal voice of one used to discussing tragedies over the telephone demanded.

"Yes," I admitted, "but I was just attempting to get another party on the wire——"

"I think this is important," the other interrupted. "Do you know a Mr. Ellsworth Bennett?"

"Yes! What about him?"

"This is the Casualty Hospital. Mr. and Mrs. Bennett and their taxi-driver were brought here twenty minutes ago. He regained consciousness for only a moment, and begged us to call you, then fainted again, and——"

"I'll be right over!" I shouted, clashing the receiver back into its hook and springing from my chair.

"Trowbridge, *mon vieux*—it is the bad news?" de Grandin asked, leaping to his feet and regarding me with a wide-eyed stare.

"They've just had an accident—motor collision—at the Casualty Hospital now—unconscious," I jerked out as I ran through the dining-room, notified Nora of the cause of delay, and rushed into the hall for my hat and topcoat.

De Grandin was ahead of me, already seated in the car when I ran down the front steps. "Stand on it; hasten; fly!" he urged as I shot the self-starter and turned toward the hospital at furious speed. "*Sang du diable*, I knew it; in each bone of my body I felt it coming! Oh, hurry, hurry, my friend, or we may be too late!"

"Too late? For what?" I asked crossly. "The nurse didn't say they were seriously hurt."

"Haste, more haste!" was his only reply as he leaned forward like a jockey bending across the neck of his mount to urge it to greater speed.

Rounding corners on two wheels, even cutting across sidewalks in our effort to clip a few feet from our course, our siren shrilling continuously, we dashed through the winter night, finally drew up beneath the hospital's porte-cochère, our motor panting like a winded polo pony after a furious chukker.

"Where are they—*plumes d'un canard!*—where are Monsieur and Madame Bennett, if you please?" cried de Grandin, fairly bouncing through the hospital door.

"Mrs. Bennett's in the operating-room, now," the night supervisor replied, not at all impressed with his urgency. "She was rather badly——"

"And that operating-room, it is where?" he demanded impatiently. "Be quick, if you please. It is of the importance, and I am Dr. de Grandin."

"The operating-room's on the fourth floor, but no one is permitted there while the surgeons are——"

"*Ah bah!*" he interrupted, for once forgetting his customary courtesy, and starting down the corridor at a run. "Come with me, Friend Trowbridge!" he flung back over his shoulder, pressing his finger to the elevator bell button and continuing

the pressure uninterruptedly. "We may not be too late, though I greatly fear——"

"Say, whatsa big idea?" demanded the elevator conductor, slamming open his door and glowering at the little Frenchman.

"The idea, my friend, is that I shall give you one five-dollar bill in case you take us to the fourth floor immediately," returned de Grandin, extracting a crisp green Treasury note from his wallet.

The car shot upward like a captive balloon suddenly released from its cable and came to a stop at the top floor with a suddenness which set the circuit breakers in the basement to clattering like a battery of field guns. "First door to your right at the end o' the corridor," directed the conductor with a wave of his left hand while with his right he stowed de Grandin's gratuity in his trousers pocket.

We ran at breakneck speed down the wide, solemn hall, paused not a moment at the ominous green-painted door with its gold-lettered sign of "Silence" and "No Admission," but rushed into the brilliantly lighted room where two nurses and a young and plainly worried surgeon stood above the sheeted form of Peligia Bennett.

"Ah—*hèlas*—it is as I thought!" de Grandin almost shrieked as he bounded forward. Even as we entered the room one of the nurses leaned over and grasped some shining object from the unconscious patient's throat, detaching it with a quick jerk. It was the necklace from which a pendant had been lost the day we raised Peligia from the coffin.

"Quick, replace it—put it back! *Barbe de Saint Pierre*—PUT IT BACK!" the Frenchman cried, leaping across the white-tiled floor and snatching at the jewel dangling from the nurse's fingers.

The girl turned on him with an exclamation of surprize, clutched frantically at the golden strand he reached for, and let it fall to the terazzo floor.

There was a miniature explosion, like that of an electric light bulb bursting, only softer, and two of the carnelian pendants winked out like suddenly extinguished lights. Contact with the floor's hard tiles had cracked them, and each seemed in need of only so slight a concussion to dissolve into a little pile of garnet dust which quickly turned to vapor and disappeared, leaving no trace.

Fairly shoving the nurse from his path, de Grandin seized the mutilated necklace and laid it against the unconscious girl's throat.

"Sir, this is an outrage! What do you mean by forcing yourself in here?" demanded the astonished young surgeon. "This patient is in a desperate condition, and——"

"Desperate? *You* tell *me* that?" de Grandin rasped. "*Parbleu,* you know not how desperate her plight is, *Monsieur!*" As he spoke he flung aside his dinner coat and rolled back his cuffs.

"I am Dr. Jules de Grandin, of Paris," he continued, reaching methodically for an operating-smock. "I hold degrees from Vienna and the Sorbonne, as my friend, Dr. Trowbridge, whom you doubtless know, can certify. With your permission—or without it—I shall assume charge here." He turned imperiously to the nurses, motioning them to bring a pair of sterile rubber gloves.

"I'm afraid you're too late," the other responded coldly. "If you'll trouble to look, you'll see——"

"*Grand ciel,* I do!" the Frenchman gasped, staring with horrified eyes at the pallid form on the table.

Peligia Bennett's face had gone a sickly, deathlike gray, her eyeballs seemed fallen in their sockets and her nostrils had the chilled, pinched look

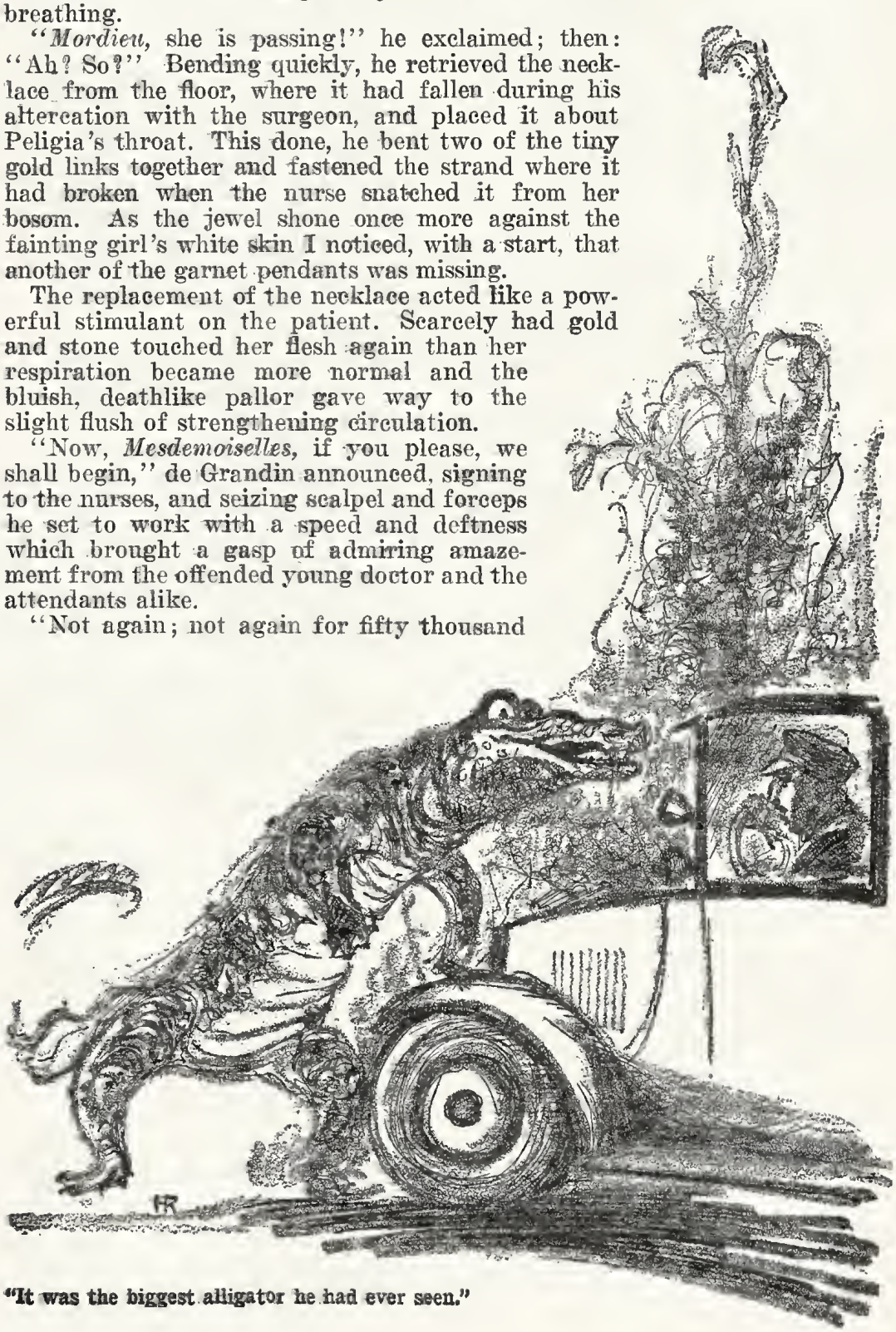
of one in extremity. From between her parted lips sounded the harsh irregularity of Chanes-Stokes breathing.

"*Mordieu,* she is passing!" he exclaimed; then: "Ah? So?" Bending quickly, he retrieved the necklace from the floor, where it had fallen during his altercation with the surgeon, and placed it about Peligia's throat. This done, he bent two of the tiny gold links together and fastened the strand where it had broken when the nurse snatched it from her bosom. As the jewel shone once more against the fainting girl's white skin I noticed, with a start, that another of the garnet pendants was missing.

The replacement of the necklace acted like a powerful stimulant on the patient. Scarcely had gold and stone touched her flesh again than her respiration became more normal and the bluish, deathlike pallor gave way to the slight flush of strengthening circulation.

"Now, *Mesdemoiselles,* if you please, we shall begin," de Grandin announced, signing to the nurses, and seizing scalpel and forceps he set to work with a speed and deftness which brought a gasp of admiring amazement from the offended young doctor and the attendants alike.

"Not again; not again for fifty thousand



"It was the biggest alligator he had ever seen."

francs would I perform such an operation," he murmured as he turned his gloves inside out and shrugged out of his gown. To the nurse he ordered: "Attend her constantly, *Mademoiselle;* on your life, see that the necklace is kept constantly in place. Already you have observed the effect of its loss on her; it is not necessary to say more, *hein?*"

"Yes, sir," responded the nurse, gazing at him with mingled wonder and respect. Surgical nurses soon recognize a master craftsman, and the exhibition he had given that night would remain history forever in the operating-room of Casualty Hospital.

"I feared something like this," he confided as we walked slowly down the corridor. "All evening I have been ill at ease; the moment I heard of the accident I made sure the hospital authorities in their ignorance would remove the jewel from *Madame's* throat—*grâce à Dieu* we were in time to replace it before the worst occurred. As it is——" He broke off with a shrug of his narrow shoulders. "Come," he added, "let us interview Monsieur Bennett. I doubt not he has something of interest to tell."

5. *The Shadow of Sebek*

"MR. BENNETT is still under the anesthetic," the nurse informed us when we inquired at my friend's room. "He had a Colles' fracture of the lower right epiphysis, and Dr. Grosnal gave him a whiff of ether while he was repositioning the fragments."

"U'm," commented de Grandin. "The treatment was correct, *Mademoiselle.* The chauffeur who drove them, where is he? I am told he, also, was hurt."

"Yes, you'll find him in Ward D," the girl replied. "He wasn't hurt much, but he was taking on quite a bit when I came through."

"U'm," de Grandin remarked again, and turned toward the room where the Bennetts' taxi-driver lay.

"*Mon vieux,*" the Frenchman bent above the patient's cot and laid a friendly hand on his shoulder, "we are come to interview you. You will please tell us what occurred?"

"If you're from th' insurance comp'ny," the chauffeur answered, "I want you to git me, and git me right; I wasn't drunk, no matter what these here folks tell you. I'm off'n that stuff, an' have been ever since th' kid wuz born."

"But of course," de Grandin agreed with a nod. "That much is understood, and you will please describe the accident."

"Well, you can take it or leave it," the other replied truculently. "I wuz drivin' south through Minot Avenoo, makin' pretty good time, 'cause th' young gentleman told me he had a dinner date, an' just as I was turnin' into Tecumseh Street I seen what I thought wuz a piece o' timber or sumpin layin' across th' road, an' turned out to avoid it. Blow me if th' thing didn't move right across th' pa'ment ahead o' me, keepin' in me path all th' time. You can believe me or not—I'm tellin' you the gospel truth, though—it wuz a alligator. I know a alligator when I see one, too, for I drove a taxi down to Miami durin' th' boom, an' I seen plenty o' them animated satchels down there in th' 'gator farms. Yes, sir, it was a 'gator, an' nothin' else, an' th' biggest 'gator I ever seen, too. Must a' been sixteen or eighteen foot long, if it wuz a inch, an' a lot sprier on its feet than any 'gator I ever seen before, for I wuz goin' at a right fair clip, as I told you, an' Minot Avenoo ain' more'n fifty foot wide from curb to curb, but fast as I wuz goin', I couldn't turn out fast enough to keep that cussed thing fr'm crawlin' right smack in front o' me. I ain't partic'lar 'bout runnin' over a lizard, d'ye see, an' if this here thing hadn't been th' granddaddy of all th' 'ga-

tors that ever got turned into suitcases an' pocketbooks, I'd a' run 'im down an' gone on me way; but runnin' over a thing like that wuz as much as me axles wuz worth—he wuzn't a inch less'n three foot high fr'm belly to back, not countin' th' extra height o' his legs—an' me cab ain't paid for yet, so I turns out like there wuz a ten-foot hole in th' pa'ment ahead o' me, an' dam' if that thing didn't keep right ahead o' me till I lost control o' me wheel, an' th' nex' thing I knowed—zowie! I wuz parked up agin a tree wid me radiator leakin' like a cake o' ice lef' out in th' sun on Fourt' o' July, an' me wid me head half-way t'rough th' windshield, an' me two fares knocked right outa th' cab where th' door'd give way in th' smash-up. That's th' Gawd's truth, an' you can take it or leave it."

"*Cordieu,* my excellent one," de Grandin assured him, "we do take it, nor do we require salt upon it, either. This alligator, now, this so abominable saurian who did cause you to collide with the roadside tree, was he in the locality when the ambulance arrived?"

"Sa-ay, you tryin' to kid me?" demanded the injured man.

"By no means. We believe all you have told us. Can you not be equally frank with us and reply to our queries?"

"Well," returned the patient, mollified by de Grandin's evident credence, "that's th' funny part o' th' joke, sir. When th' ding-dong came for me an' me fares, I told th' sawbones about th' 'gator, an' he ups an' says to th' murderer 'at runs th' business end o' th' rattler, 'This here guy's been drinkin more hootch 'an Ol' Man Volstead ever prohibited.' That's what he says, sir, an' me as sober as a court-house full o' judges, too!"

"Infamous!" de Grandin pronounced. "But the *sine qua non* of your accident, this monster alligator, where was he?"

"Say," the driver confided, "you know what? He wuzn't no place. If I hadn't seen 'im wid me own eyes I'd a' believed th' sawbones when he said I had th' heebie-jeebies; but I tell you I hadn't had nuttin' to drink, an' I ain't so nutty as to mistake a shadder for a real, live 'gator, 'specially a baby th' size o' that one. It'd be different if I wuz a bozo 'at hadn't been around much; but I been to Florida, an' I knows a 'gator when I sees one—git me?"

"*Mais oui,* my friend," the Frenchman nodded, "your story has the veritable ring of verisimilitude."

"It *has,* has it? It's th' truth, an' nuttin' else but!" the offended chauffeur exclaimed as de Grandin rose and with another friendly nod tiptoed from the room.

"That explains it," I jubilated as we walked slowly down the corridor. The uncanniness of the night's happenings had gotten on my nerves, and I had been on the point of believing my friend's mishap might be traceable to the ancient curse, but here was a perfectly natural explanation of the whole affair. "If that man wasn't drunk or half insane with cocain I'm much mistaken. Of course, he imagined he saw an alligator crossing his path! I'm only surprized that he didn't insist it was pink or baby blue instead of the conventional shade. These taxi-drivers——"

"This particular one told the truth," de Grandin cut in, speaking softly, as though more to himself than to me. "When he assured me he was no longer drinking there was the indubitable ring of truth in his words. Moreover——"

"Yes? Moreover?" I prompted, as he strode a dozen or so paces in thoughtful silence.

"*Tiens,* it is most strange, but not impossible," he replied. "This Sebek, I know him."

"You know him? Sebek? What in the world——" I stammered incredulously.

"Perfectly, my friend. Sebek, the god whom the priest Kaku worshiped, was the typification of the sun's harmful powers. To him the waters of the Nile, when at their lowest ebb, were parceled off as his particular domain. He was represented as a crocodile-headed deity, even as Anubis possessed the head of a jackal, and in all his phases he was evil—very evil, indeed. Granted that the priest's powers were effective—and did he not so hypnotize Madame Bennett that she slept like one dead for more than a thousand years?—what would be more natural than that this god should appear in his traditional form to aid his votary? Bethink you of the wording of the curse, my friend: *'My shadow, and the shadow of Sebek which is my god, is upon her.'*"

"Nonsense!" I scoffed.

"Perhaps," he conceded, as though the point were scarcely worth debating. "You may be right, but then, again——"

"Right? Of course I'm right! The old priest might have been able to suspend Peligia's vital processes by some sort of super-hypnosis unknown to us, but how could he call down on her the curse of a god that never existed? You'll scarcely assert that the heathen gods of ancient Egypt had actual existence, I suppose?"

"There is a difference between an individual entity and an abstract force, whether it be for good or evil," he began, but ceased abruptly at the sudden sound which tore the hospital's sepulchral quiet into shreds.

It was not the wail of tortured flesh giving tongue to unsupportable pain as the blessed unconsciousness of the anesthetic waned. No surgeon whose apprenticeship was served at the rear end of an ambulance can fail to recognize the cry of returning consciousness from an etherized patient. This was the horrified, piercing scream of a woman in deadly terror, long-drawn, breathless, the reflex outcry of normal nerves suddenly strained past their limit of endurance. And it came from the room where Peligia Bennett lay, still immersed in anesthesia.

"*Mon Dieu,*" de Grandin gasped, "the *garde-malade!*" Grasping my arm, he rushed pell-mell down the hall.

The buxom young woman to whose care Peligia had been entrusted when de Grandin finished mending her broken body crouched at the far corner of the room, and her normally florid face was chalky-white under the shaded bedside lamp. "It came out of the wall!" she gasped as we swung the door back. "Out of the wall, I tell you; and there was no body to it!"

"Eh, what do you say?" de Grandid snapped. "What came out of the wall, *Mademoiselle?* What had no body, if you please?"

"The hand — the hand that snatched at her throat!" The nurse groveled closer in the angle of the wall, as though to shield herself from attack from side and rear.

"The hand? Her throat? *Grand Dieu!*" de Grandin leaped across the little room like a cat pouncing on a luckless sparrow and turned back the chaste white sheet enshrouding Peligia's supine body.

"Trowbridge, Trowbridge, my friend," he commanded, and his voice was hoarse as a croaking frog's, "behold!"

I joined him at the bedside and cast my glance where his shaking forefinger pointed.

A fifth pendant had disappeared from the necklace round Peligia's throat. Of the seven stones there remained but two.

6. *Catastrophe*

A FLURRY of snowflakes, wind-driven by the January tempest, assaulted de Grandin and me as we

alighted from the late New York train. "*Cordieu,*" the Frenchman laughed as he snuggled into the farther corner of the station taxicab, "to attend the play in the metropolis is good, Friend Trowbridge, but we pay a heavy price in chilled feet and frosted noses when we return in such a storm as this!"

"Yes, getting chilblains is one of the favorite winter sports among us suburbanites," I replied, lighting a cigar and puffing mingled smoke and vaporized breath from my nostrils.

"U'm," he remarked thoughtfully, "your mention of winter sports reminds me that our friends the Bennetts are at Lake Placid. I wonder much how it is with them?"

"They're not there now," I answered. "Ellsworth wrote me that both he and Peligia are completely recovered and he expects to reopen his home this week. We'll have to look in on them later. I wonder if they've had any more visitations from —what was his name?—the old Egyptian priest, you know." I could not forbear the sly dig at my friend, for his stubborn insistence that the series of mishaps befalling Ellsworth Bennett and his wife were due to the malign influence of a man dead and buried more than a thousand years struck me as droll.

"*Prie Dieu* they have not," he responded seriously. "As you have been at great pains to assure me many times, my friend, all has seemed well with them since the night of their motor accident, but"—he paused a moment—"as yet I am unconvinced we have heard the last of that so wicked Kaku and his abominable god."

"We certainly have not, if you insist on raving about them," I returned rather testily as the taxi swung into our block. "If I were you, I'd——"

Clang! Clang! clang-clang-a-lang! Rushing like the wind, its siren shrieking like the tempest, and its bells sounding clamorous warning, a fire-engine swept past us, its uproar cutting short my utterance.

"*Mordieu,* what a night for a fire!" the Frenchman murmured as we ascended my front steps.

The office telephone was shrilling wildly as I fitted my latchkey to the door.

"Hello—hello, Dr. Trowbridge?" an agonized voice hailed as I lifted the receiver.

"Yes."

"Bennett, Ellsworth Bennett, talking. Our house is on fire, and Peligia is—I'm bringing her right over to your place!" The sharp click of his receiver smashed into its hook and closed his announcement like an exclamation point.

"The Bennetts are still pursued by Kaku, it seems," I remarked sarcastically, turning to de Grandin. "That was Ellsworth on the 'phone. It was his house the engines were going to. He wasn't very coherent, but I gathered that Peligia is injured, and he's bringing her here."

"Eh, do you say so?" the little Frenchman replied, his small eyes widening with sudden concern. "Perhaps, my friend, you will now believe——" He lapsed into silence, striding nervously up and down the office, lighting one cigarette from the glowing stump of another, answering my attempts at conversation with short, monosyllabic grunts.

Ten minutes later when I answered the insistent clatter of the front doorbell, Ellsworth Bennett stood in the vestibule, a long bundle, swathed in rugs and blankets, in his arms. A wave of sudden pity swept over me as I noted his appearance.

The light-hearted, easy-going boy who had taken his strange bride's hand in his before the altar of the Greek Orthodox church a short four months ago was gone, and in his place stood a man prematurely aged. Lines, deep-etched by care and trouble, showed about his mouth and at the

corners of his eyes, and his long, loosely articulated frame bent beneath something more than the weight of the object he clasped to his breast.

"Ellsworth, boy, whatever is the matter?" I exclaimed sympathetically as I seized his shoulder and fairly dragged him across the threshold.

"God knows," he answered wearily, laying his inert burden on the surgery table and turning a miserable countenance to us. "I brought her here because"—he seemed to struggle with himself a moment, then continued—"I brought her here because I didn't know where else to take her. I thought she'd be safer here—with you, sir," he turned directly to de Grandin with an imploring look.

"*Ohé la pauvre*——" the Frenchman leaned forward and put back the coverings from Peligia's pale face tenderly. "Tell me, *mon enfant,*" he glanced up at the distracted husband, "what was it this time?"

"God knows," the wretched youngster repeated. "We got back from the lake on Tuesday, and Peligia seemed so well and so"—a sob choked him, but he went bravely on—"and so happy, and we thought we'd managed to escape from the nemesis which pursues us.

"We went to bed early this evening, and I don't know how long we'd slept when we awakened together, smelling smoke in the room.

"Flames were darting and creeping under the door like so many serpents when we realized what was happening, and I grabbed the bedside 'phone to call the fire department, but the wires must have burned already, for I couldn't get any response from central.

"When I opened the door the whole hallway was a mass of flames, and there was no possibility of anything human going through; so I made a rope by tearing the bed sheets in strips and prepared to escape by the window. After I'd knotted the sheets together I tossed the other bedclothes out to act as a cushion when we landed, and slid down, then stood waiting to catch Peligia in my arms. I'd managed to slip on some clothes, but her things had been lying on a chair near the door, and had caught fire before she could put 'em on, so there was nothing for her to do but brave the storm in her nightclothes.

"I was standing, waiting to catch her in my arms, and she had already begun to slide down the knotted sheets when——" He paused, and a shudder ran through him, as though the chill of his midnight escape still clung to him, despite my surgery's warmth.

"Yes, what then?" de Grandin prompted.

"I saw him! I tell you, *I saw him!*" the boy blazed out, as though we had already denied his word.

"*Dieu de tous les poissons!*" de Grandin almost screamed. "Proceed. What, or whom, did you see?"

"I don't know who it was, but I suspect," the other responded. "Just as Peligia was slipping down the sheets, *a man looked out of the window above her and tried to choke her!*

"Mind you, not forty seconds before, we'd been driven from that bedroom by the fire which was raging in the hall, and there was no chance for anything living to pass through that flaming hell, and no one in the room when we quit it, but there was a man at our window as my wife began her descent. He leaned over the sill and snatched at her throat, as if trying to strangle her. I heard her scream above the hiss of the fire as he missed his clutch at her throat and drew back a moment; then he whipped out a knife and slashed the sheet in two, six inches below the level of the sill.

"I couldn't have been mistaken, gentlemen," he turned a challenging glance from one of us to the other. "I tell you, *I saw him;* saw him as plainly as I see you now. The fire was

at his back and he stood out like a silhouette against its light.

"God!" he shuddered. "I'll never forget the look of hellish hate and triumph on his face as he hacked that sheet in two and my poor darling came crashing down—he was a tall, cadaverous fellow, dressed in a sort of smock of gray-green linen, and his head was shaven—not bald, but shaven—and so was his entire face, except for a narrow, six-inch beard on his chin. That was waxed to a point and turned up like a fish-hook."

"*A-a-ah?*" de Grandin remarked on a rising note. His level, unwinking gaze caught and held Bennett's, and horrified understanding and agreement showed in the eyes of each.

De Grandin shook his narrow shoulders in a quick, impatient shrug. "We must not let him terrify us, or all is lost," he declared. "Meantime, let us look to *Madame*, your wife." He cast back the covers from Peligia and ran deft, skilful fingers over her form from neck to feet.

"Here it is," he announced, pausing in his examination to finger her rounded left ankle. "A dislocation; no more, let us give thanks. It will be painful, but not serious, I think.

"Come, Friend Trowbridge, the bandages, if you please," he turned peremptorily to me, raising the girl's small, uncovered foot in his hand and gently kneading the displaced bones back into position. "Ah, that is better," he announced, as he completed fastening the gauze about the injured member.

"Now, Bennett, my friend, if you will bear *Madame* your lady upstairs and put her in my bed, I think we can promise—*nom de Dieu de nom de Dieu*—look!" he broke off, pointing a trembling finger at the open throat of Peligia's flimsy muslin nightdress.

Against the white bosom where the ancient necklace reposed, a single ruddy pendant glowed. Six of the seven stones were missing.

7. *Wager of Battle*

JULES DE GRANDIN stared at Ellsworth Bennett, and Ellsworth Bennett stared at Jules de Grandin, and in the eyes of each was gathering terror, hopelessness, defeat.

"What to do—*Mon Dieu!*—what to do?" muttered the little Frenchman, and his voice was almost a wail.

"My friend," he stared fixedly at Ellsworth, "did you do as I suggested?"

"Go to the priest?" the other replied. "Yes. He gave us some sort of little charm—I suppose you'd call it an *ikon*. See, here it is." Reaching inside his wife's gown he drew out a fine silken cord to the end of which was attached a tiny scapular of painted silk showing the device of a mailed champion encountering a dragon. "It's supposed to be a relic of St. George," he explained, "and Father Demitri assured us no harm could come to her while she wore it. God in heaven—if there is one!" he burst into a peal of chattering laughter. "He told us it would protect her! See how it worked!" With another laugh he pointed to the necklace and at its single remaining stone which seemed to wink sardonically at us as it rose and fell with the regular movement of Peligia's breast.

"*Non, non,*" the Frenchman muttered, "new charms are valueless against ancient evils. We must combat that which is old and bad by that which is equally old, but good. But how—*nom d'un canard!*—how?

"Take her upstairs, my friend," he motioned almost frantically to Bennett. "Take her upstairs and lay her in my bed. Watch beside her, and, if you have not forgotten how, pray; pray as you did when a lad beside your mother's knee. Meanwhile I—*Grand Dieu,* I shall do what I can!"

As Bennett bore his swooning bride up the stairs the little Frenchman seated himself beside the surgery desk, put both elbows down upon its

polished surface and cupped his pointed chin in his palms, staring straight before him with a fixed, unseeing stare of utter abstraction.

At last: "*Parbleu*, it is desperate, but so are we. We shall try it!" he announced. For a moment his gaze wandered wildly about the room, passing rapidly over the floor, walls and ceiling. At last it came to rest on a sepia print of Rembrandt's *Study in Anatomy*.

"I know not whether it will serve," he muttered, rising quickly and detaching the picture from its hook, "but, *parbleu*, it *must!*

"Go, Friend Trowbridge," he ordered over his shoulder while he worked feverishly at the screw-eyes to which the picture's wire was attached. "Do you go upstairs and see how it is with our friends. Me, I shall follow anon."

"Everything all right?" I asked as cheerfully as I could as I entered the room where Peligia lay as silent as though in a trance.

"I—don't know," Bennett faltered. "I put her to bed, as you ordered, and before I could even begin to pray I fell asleep. I just woke up a moment ago. I don't think she's —oh; *o-o-oh!*" The exclamation was wrung from him as a scream might come from a culprit undergoing the torture. His wife's head, pillowed against the bed linen, was white as the snowy cloth itself, and already there was a look of impending death upon her features. Too often I had seen that look on a patient's face as the clock hands neared the hour of 2. Unless I was much mistaken, Peligia Bennet would never see the morning's sun.

"*Ha*, it seems I come none too soon," de Grandin's voice came in a strident whisper from the door behind us.

"My friends," he announced, facing each of us in turn, his little eyes dilated with excitement, "this night I enter the lists against a foe whose strength I know not, and I do greatly fear my own weapons are but feeble things. Trowbridge, dear old friend" —his slender, strong hand clasped mine in a quick pressure—"should it so happen that I return no more, see that they write upon my tomb, 'He died serving his friends.'"

"But, my dear chap, surely you're not going to leave us now," I began, only to have my protest drowned by his shout:

"Priest Kaku, server of false gods, persecutor of women, I charge thee, come forth; manifest thyself, if thou darest. I, Jules de Grandin, challenge thee!"

I shook my head and rubbed my eyes in amazement. Was it the swirl of snowflakes, driven through the partly opened window by the howling January blast, or the fluttering of the scrim curtain, that patch of white at the farther end of the room? Again I looked, and amazement gave way to something akin to incredulity, and that, in turn, to horror. In the empty air beside the window-place there was taking form, like a motion-picture projected on a darkened screen, *the shadowy form of a man.* Tall, cadaverous, as though long dead and buried, he was clothed in a straight-hanging one-piece garment of grayish-green linen, with shaven head and face, protruding, curling beard, and eyes the like of which I had never seen in human face, eyes which glowed and smoldered with a fiery glint like the red reflection of the glory-hole of lowest hell.

For an instant he seemed to waver, half-way between floor and ceiling, regarding the little Frenchman with a look of incomparable fury, then his burning, glowing orbs fixed themselves intently on the sleeping woman on the bed.

Peligia gave a short, stifled gasp, her lids fluttered open, but her eyes stared straight before her sightlessly. Her slender, blue-veined hands rose slowly from the counter-

pane, stretched out toward the hovering phantom in the corner of the room, and slowly, laboriously, like a woman in a hypnotic trance, she rose, put forth one foot from the bed, and made as if to walk to the beckoning, compelling eyes burning in the livid face of the—there was no doubt about it—*priest of Sebek* who stood, now fully materialized, beside the window of my bedroom.

"Back!" de Grandin screamed, thrusting out one hand and forcing her once more into the bed.

He wheeled about, facing the green-robed priest of Egypt with a smile more fierce than any frown. "*Monsieur* from hell," he challenged, "long years ago you did make wager of battle against him who should lift thy spell, and the spell of Sebek, thy unclean god, from off this woman. He who submits to ordeal by battle may fight for himself or engage a champion. Behold in me the champion of this man and this woman. Say, wilt thou battle against me for their lives and happiness, or art thou the filthy coward which I do believe thee?"

It was monstrous, it was impossible, it could not be; my reason told me that flesh and blood could not enter the lists against intangible phantoms and hope to win; yet there, in the quiet of my bedroom, Jules de Grandin flung aside jacket and waistcoat, bent his supple body nearly double, and charged headlong into the twining embrace of a thing which had materialized out of the air.

As he leaped across the room the Frenchman snatched something from his pocket and whirled it about his head like a whiplash. With a gasp of amazement I recognized it for a four-foot strand of soft-iron picture wire—the wire he had taken from the print in my surgery.

The phantom arms swept forward to engulf my little friend, the phantom face lit up with a smile as diabolical as that of Satan at the arrival of a newly damned soul, yet it was but a moment ere I realized the battle was not hopelessly to the ghost-thing and against his mortal opponent.

De Grandin seemed to make no attempt to grapple with the priest of Sebek or to snare him in the loop of wire. Rather, his sole attention seemed directed to avoiding the long-bladed copper knife with which the priest was armed.

Again and again the wraith stabbed savagely at de Grandin's face, throat or chest. Each time the Frenchman avoided the lunging knife and brought his loop of woven iron down upon the ghost-thing's arms, shoulders or shaven pate, and I noticed with elation that the specter writhed at each contact with the iron as though it had been white-hot.

How long the struggle lasted I do not know. De Grandin was panting like a spent runner, and great streams of perspiration ran down his pale face. The other made no sound of breathing, nor did his sandaled feet scuff against the carpet as he struggled with the Frenchman. Bennett and I stood as silent as two graven images, and only the short, labored breathing of the little Frenchman broke the stillness of the room as the combat waxed and waned.

At last it seemed the phantom foeman was growing lighter, thinner, less solid. Where formerly he had seemed as much a thing of flesh and bone as his antagonist, I could now distinctly descry the outlines of pieces of furniture when he stood between them and me. He was once more assuming his ghostly transparence.

Time and again he sought to strike through de Grandin's guard. Time and again the Frenchman flailed him with the iron scourge, avoiding his knife by the barest fraction of an inch.

At length: "*In nomine Domini!*" de Grandin shrieked, leaping forward and showering a perfect hailstorm of whip-lashes on his opponent.

The green-clad priest of Sebek seemed to wilt like a wisp of grass thrown into the fire, to trail upward like a puff of smoke, to vanish and dissolve in the encircling air.

"*Triomphe,* it is finished!" sobbed de Grandin, stumbling across the room and half falling across the bed where Peligia Bennett lay. "It is finished, and—*mon Dieu*—I am broken!" Burying his face in the coverlet, he fell to sobbing like a child tired past the point of endurance.

"IT WAS magnificent," I told him as we sat in my study, a box of cigars and one of my few remaining bottles of cognac between us. "You fought that ghost bare-handed, and conquered him, but I don't understand any of it. Do you feel up to explaining?"

He stretched luxuriously, lighted a fresh cigar and flashed one of his quick, impish smiles at me through the smoke wreaths. "Have you studied much of ancient Egypt?" he asked irrelevantly.

"Mighty little," I confessed.

"Then you are, perhaps, not aware of the absence of iron in their ruins? You do not know their mummy-cases are put together with glue and wooden dowels, and such instruments of metal as are found in their temples are of copper or bronze, never of iron or steel?"

"I've heard something like that," I replied, "but I don't quite get the significance of it. It's a fact that they didn't understand the art of making steel, isn't it, and used tempered copper, instead?"

"I doubt it," he answered. "The arts of old Egypt were highly developed, and they most assuredly had means of acquiring iron, or even steel, had they so desired. No, my friend, the absence of iron is due to a cause other than ignorance. Iron, you must know, is the most earthly of all metals. Spirits, even of the good, find it repugnant, and as for the evil ones, they abhor it. Do you begin to see?"

"No, I can't say I do. You mean——"

"I mean that, more than any other country, Egypt was absorbed with the spiritual side of life. Men's days there were passed in communing with the souls of the departed or spirits of another sort, elemental spirits, which had never worn the clothing of the flesh.

"The mummification of their dead was not due to any horror of putrefaction, but to their belief that a physical resurrection would take place at the end of seven ages—roughly, seven thousand years. During that time, according to their religion, the body would lie in its tomb, and at the end of the period the soul, or *ka*, would return and reanimate it. Meantime, the *ka* kept watch beside the mummy. Do you now see why no iron entered into their coffins?"

"Because the spirit, watching beside the body, would find the iron's proximity uncomfortable?"

"Precisely, my friend, you have said it. There have been authenticated instances of ghosts being barred from haunted houses by no greater barrier than an iron wire stretched across the door. In Ireland the little people are ofttimes kept from a cottage by nothing more than a pair of steel shears opened with their points toward the entrance. So it was that I determined to put it to a test and attack that shade of Kaku with naught but a scourge of iron. *Eh bien,* it was a desperate chance, but it was successful."

The flame of his match flared flickeringly as he set fire to a fresh cigar and continued: "Now, as to that jewel of seven stones with which Madame Bennett's fate is interwoven. That, my friend, is a talisman—an outward and visible sign of an invisible and spiritiual force. In his hypnotic command to her to sleep until awakened by someone in a later age,

(Continued on page 575)

The MAGIC of CHAC-MOOL

BY CLYDE · CRISWELL

"He was dead when he left the plane."

1. *The Valet From the Jungle*

I HAD about outstayed my welcome in Merida, down in the toe of Mexico. For a time the gilded youth had gone mad over flying, like all the rich youngsters and sport-lovers in the principal towns clear back to Tia Juana, where I had started months before. But, as on each previous occasion, the local enthusiasm had suddenly evaporated—a racial trait. So after a week or two of poor business I was ready to continue my flight after *pesos* down farther into the Latin Americas.

Where I would end I didn't know, but Belize, I had decided, over in British Honduras, would be my next port o' call, ninety miles across the vegetable ocean of Yucatan. There was only one small sierra to go over, and I'd make the journey in a couple of easy hops.

If it hadn't been for this situation I might not have fallen in so quickly with the little valet's mad scheme. But then again, I'd always been curious about the buried temples of the country, but had never visited any, and the prospect of seeing a ruin unknown to the world at large was irresistible—discounting the other features of his tale. All in all, I guess I'd have taken him up anyway.

He appeared on a fine afternoon for flying, but one entirely lacking in patrons. I saw staggering toward me over my flying-field the only disreputable Indian I had ever observed in those parts, where they're an amazingly clean lot—unlike most of the beggars west and north.

He wore a wrecked *serape* and a shredded *sombrero* and some tattered rags, and wasn't much bigger than a gnome. When he drew nearer I saw he wasn't an Indian at all, but what was left of a white man suffering from a complicated and lamentable sunburn.

Of course when you're in odd corners of the world you can't be entirely upstage with another white man down on his luck, but as I waited and watched this visitor's erratic gait I resolved he should get only one *peso* from me, together with short shrift.

He tottered up, sagged against a wing, and made bleating noises.

"I've come," was my interpretation, "about a million miles of the worst traveling in the whole world, to find you, and take you back with me." Just that, instead of the expected touch.

"Me?" I laughed off my surprize. "You must think I like bad traveling too."

Feebly he flapped a hand against the wing.

"It won't be bad going—in this. It'll be the prettiest sight you'd want, from above. It was on foot *I* come. But will you 'ear me out?"

"Sure!" I humored him, for though his voice was getting stronger he looked ready to break. "But first take this—go get yourself a flock of *frijoles* or *tamales*. Not *pulques!*" I added as an afterthought.

"I never drinks," he surprized me again, "and I've just had tiffin, but I've come a long ways, and I'd like to sit down."

So I boosted him into the passenger's seat, hopped into the pilot's, and told him to shoot.

"My name's Cleaver," he started off, "and though you mightn't think it from these here, I'm a valet. And I've been gentleman to some queer birds in my time, too, but nothing to what I been valeting last—a *magician*, he is!"

"Magician?" I echoed politely. "What's his name? Maybe I've seen him perform somewhere."

"Impossible, if you'll excuse me. My gent's no music-'all bloke. He's in private life—a *real* magician!"

"You mean he's a rich amateur? Does tricks as a hobby?"

"No tricks, I'm telling you; he's the kind of magician Moses was, as turned walking-sticks to snykes—only my gent's no saint. He's a *black* magician—a *bad* 'un."

"Well, get on," I snapped at him.

"Oh, I know you think I'm barmy, but wait——"

And on he went to tell me how, for some vague reason "out" of valeting, he had drifted about as a ship's steward, finally taking a berth on a fruit-boat from which his last master had rescued him, restoring him "to the practise of his profession." The new employer's name was odd enough: Sarazon; and Cleaver couldn't place him racially. He was some sort of foreigner, but spoke perfect English.

The little cockney had quit the boat with his new gentleman at Belize, from which city they immediately made their way north and west to take up residence at an inland plantation located on the River Hondo. Here the mysterious Sarazon outfitted for a protracted stay in the interior, and hired a half-dozen Indians as guides and boatmen.

Cleaver was hazy as to their wanderings after leaving the pleasant *hacienda*, of which he spoke with great regret, but I gathered that after much river travel northward they had followed small streams to the west, till they had won to a region where the Indians began showing great unwillingness to proceed. Eventually they were dismissed by Sarazon, who seemed to know where he was by means of an old chart he kept very much to himself.

THE spot where the two white men were thus left alone with their supplies was marked, he told me, by a sudden widening of the previously almost unnavigable stream, and by a huge, bare, black sand-bar, which he described as a perfect landing-field for a plane.

Their stuff had been put off on the bar, which was separated from the nearer bank only by a shallow ford. Their first camp was on the bar, but Sarazon had plunged directly into the jungle with his map, and after some search picked up a faintly defined trail that he told Cleaver had once been a stone causeway. This they cleared with machetes during several days, pushing always farther into the brush.

At this point in his narrative the little man asked for a fag, and lighted it with suppressed excitement.

"That Sarazon would never say a word abaht what he was after," he hurried on, "so it fair gave me a turn when we comes bingo on the first of the rooms. A big low barracks it was, with a wide stair going nowhere, all hidden under weeds, and having the steepest, narrowest steps I ever see. And all abaht us was more of 'em—fine 'ouses and palaces they'd been in their day. Right off he found us a regular suite of rooms up on a terrace like, and one of 'em I cleaned out, where with what was left of a roof, we had quite a plyce.

"We spent several days packing our luggage up from the sand-bar, and then settled down for what seemed keeps, though the old boy told me the Indians would come back for us before the rains. I wished I had never come, I did, what with the bats and all."

It was only too apparent that his memories were painful, as he described how day after day they had hacked their way about the ruins, Sarazon apparently in search of some certain temple.

"I knew when we found the house with the snykes it was the one he was after, he was that pleased. And right off we must begin hacking our way inside between a couple of big columns carved with scales, with snyke-heads on the ground and the tails strite up. All one morning we cut through that door, which was chocked with little roots no bigger'n peneils, and full of scorpions that swarmed at us with their tails strite up like the snykes beside the door.

"We finally got through, and there was a big hall, fairish clean, with a closed stone door right opposite us. Sarazon runs to it and turns round larfing, which I'd never seen him do before.

"'This is the Temple of the Boas!' he shouts to me; 'and behind this door——' He taps on it—all carved it was, and looked to weigh a ton—he taps on it with his big knife, and then stops.

"'Go on outside,' he says, 'and make tea; it's too dusty in here to eat lunch. I'll look around; you won't need to call me.'

"I went out glad enough, for I'd already a headache, and makes up our tea on the terrace, for as usual, we'd come up a stair to a sort of second floor.

"He comes out just as I'm ready for him, and can't eat quick enough. Then back we both go into that 'ole, and blarst me if he hadn't got the door open all by himself.

"There it swings, a foot thick, and the opening full of a yellow tangle like a lot of sponges—more roots, of course, and more scorpions.

"We cuts away again, and as the mess clears I know where my headache had come from, for an orful gas comes out gradual, worse than the stink of the bats when we cleaned our first rooms. I had to stop, and he made me go out and have more tea, and when I come back he was inside

with his big lantern, and after a bit I sees what's there.

"A dusty floor with some broken pots lying abaht, and a litter of bones in a corner. Some big green beads was scattered in the dust. He was stooped down by his lamp, looking at a big bright plate with a silly round face in the middle of it and what-nots around the edge.

"Well, sir, I've lived in some great houses in my time, and I knows a gold dinner service when I sees it. And solid gold it *was*, as anyone could have seen! My head was still going round, and when I see that it fair spun orf. I had been that simple, what with the bats and bugs and living like a bloomin' gipsy and all, I'd given up guessing what we was after. Now I reelized it was *loot*, and that we'd *found* it!

"But I didn't see any more plates, and at first I didn't see what else there was. Then I made out that what I'd taken to be a back wall of largish bricks was reelly *stacked bullion*—yellow ingots, sir, if I drops dead—arf to the ceiling, and all raw gold, as I could see with one eye!

"I goes over to them, and after standing like a stick for a bit, I reaches up to get one orf the top, when ole Sarazon looks up.

" 'Don't touch 'em!' he yells.

" 'I just wanted to have a closer look,' I says a bit stiff, for I thought as we found the stuff together he'd have to do the right thing by me, even though I was only his man.

" 'If you touch that gold you die,' he says cold as ice. 'This is what I'm after, this only'—and he taps the big plate.

" 'What do you mean with your dying?' I asks, for I didn't need no threats to know my plyce, if he was going to be narsty.

" 'Oh, *I* won't kill you for it,' he says, 'but there's death in the stuff itself, make no mistyke; those who put it there had a way to protect it.'

" 'How abaht that, then?' I asks, pointing to the plate in his hands. His face chynged, till I went cold all over.

" 'This,' he says, 'is the breastplate of a high priest, and I've a certain right to it. It is all that we shall touch.' Then he waves me out, and tells me to go back to camp and start supper, and I leaves him there.

"THAT night I finally asked him if he reely don't mean to take that gold, and he tells me he's already forgotten it, and for me to do the same! Meant it, too! Well, I couldn't forget it, as you wouldn't neither, and after a few days I put it to him strite that since he had no use for the gold, how abaht me having a bit of it—not all, perhaps, but enough to give me a little something for my age.

"It was no use, and that's why I'm here. There's a cool million or more in English pounds waiting there to be taken away. It belongs to me as well as anybody; I was one of the two what found it, and since he won't have it, it's mine. But it's got to be taken out, and the air route is the only safe way. We can sail down there, take a load, bring it up north and hide it somewheres safe till we've moved it all, then sell a bit for capital to ship the lot out of this bleedin' country to the Stytes, where we can have protection."

"It sounds like a large order all round," I remarked after a breathless silence. Strangely enough, I never doubted his fantastic yarn for a moment, or questioned the fact of the gold. I was already addressed heart and soul to the adventure.

"But how did you get here, and why pick on me?" I wanted to know.

"Once I'd made up my mind to have the loot in spite of Sarazon, and after thinking up a hunderd plans, I suddenly got the idear of flying it out. It's the only way it could be done without the natives knowing.

"Ole Sarazon had got the habit of disappearing for days at a time, and I decided to start off soon as he left again. That'd give me several days, and after he'd get back he'd be expecting me to turn up for several more. Then if he starts down the river again by himself, thinking something has happened to me, so much the better; he'll never guess I'm coming back to the temple. He'll think the secret's safe, and so it will be—wiv us. We can take our sweet time. There may be more gold abaht the plyce, even."

"If what you saw is only still there, it'll be enough," I grinned. "But what will Sarazon do if *he's* still there? Or, rather, what do *we* do?"

"We holds him up wiv a pistol! He's got a gun, the only one we had between us, but it's only a light rifle for gyme; he don't lug it abaht, though he'd always hide it from me. But you gets the drop on him——"

"Oh, *I* do, do I?"

"——we gets the drop on him if he tries to stop us, and goes on wiv our plans. But I tell you he don't give a rap for the gold; if he sees we're set to take it, he won't say a word."

"How long since you left the camp?"

He groaned. "Oh, an eternity. Maybe ten days. I lost count—thought I was done for a score of times. I had to go north, since to show myself on the East Coast wivout him would have looked queer. I figured there must be a government flyer somewhere north that I could get the confidence of, and take a chance; I 'ad nothing to lose and we'd both have all to gain. I never 'oped to have the luck of finding a white man with a machine. I just kept going somewhere till I struck the railroad at a plyce called Taxicab; soon as I hit Merida I heard of you and legged it out 'ere. Now what do *you* say?"

That was his wild story, his crazy plan. But somehow it all seemed plausible. And he was so eager that he trembled. I put him out of his misery at once.

"I'm with you, Cleaver," I assured him. "Your temple can't be more than fifty miles south, if that, judging by your hitting the Yucatan line at Tzucacab. It must be somewhere along the border of Campeche and Quintant Roo. We'll get a map, figure it out, and hop off *pronto*—tomorrow at dawn. We'll hardly pick up your sand-bar the first shot, but we ought to find it eventually. Come along to my hotel."

I vaulted to the ground, but he remained seated. His trembling had ceased. Slowly a smile cracked through the appalling sunburn of his face.

"A million pounds!" he cackled happily. "Oh, my eye!" And standing up, he fell out into my astonished arms.

2. *The City That Forgot Time*

CLEAVER was almost jerking himself out of the safety straps, jabbing the air with one hand and punching out his eyes with my binoculars, held in the other. I knew what it meant—at last he had spotted his sand-bar. A sand-bar in an unmapped river, in the unknown interior of Yucatan! Like finding a needle in a haystack, but we had flown to it, that last day, as if drawn by a magnet.

I was almost as excited as the little cockney blighter himself; I shoved the stick smartly, and though we had then about five thousand feet—in order to command the vast territory we had been combing—we lost a lot of it in the next few seconds. Then, moderating my transports, I leveled out a trifle and we swooped down on the strangest landing I ever made.

Well, I made it nicely, and nothing to complain of in the field, either:

hard and firm and smooth as glass, and the right dimensions with enough to spare.

When we stopped rolling, neither of us moved for a while. It was all strange to me and a little queer, what with the story that had brought me there and the odd feeling I now had of having sailed that old boat of mine not only into the most mysterious jungle on earth but into a dim, past time as well.

Our course had lain over a terrain just saved from being flat—a veritable sea of softly rolling billows of foliage in greens and blues. Now, dropped into it, it was a different matter. The near bank was overhung with large trees, covered with orchids that, I reflected, would make a fortune in New York. Then I laughed: piker, thinking of peddling orchids!

Acrid odors welled round us in a soft, hot haze, and the chill of the upper air was so quickly dissipated that suddenly we both started shedding our straps and heavy togs. Parrots screamed and flung their bright wings obliquely across the bar, and against the brilliant green of leaves I saw the dead-black nest of an oriole, made of Spanish moss, and the gold coat of its owner.

Gold! A good omen! I leapt out.

"Can we make it today, Cleaver?"

He hopped down like a sparrow. "Why not? We should be there by sundown. And we'll take everything along."

In five minutes I was snapping my tarpaulins over the cockpits, and with one full and one flat pack apiece, and the one automatic strapped on my thigh, we dived into the brush.

We followed first a smooth-worn but faint jaguar trail, through vegetation not high, but most confoundedly prolific. Little Cleaver knew his way well, for he brought us without a pause to the more obvious clue of the ruined causeway, where a narrow path had been sliced through the overgrowth, following the hummocky, grass-grown traces of hewn stone.

Just as the emerald dusk was blotting out the last faint blue haze of the afternoon, we came to the first of the ruins. We ascended to the terrace, dropped our packs, and Cleaver sent out a raucous halloo, which fell dead against the walls of darkening green, and remained unanswered, leaving a throbbing silence.

From a big tree near which I stood, that thrust itself half through a crumbling Cyclopean wall, the cloying scent of a hundred parasite flowers floated about me, and the petals of some unknown blossom, shattered by a frightened thing above, sifted slowly down through the gloom. Little dark-red lizards still darted over the loose-held bark, from which I fancied they took their coloring, for I noted that on a second near-by tree, silver-gray in tone, frisked others, ashen-hued like their background. I could see nothing of the buildings I knew lay all about us, but I felt the oppression of the doom that had come upon them, and upon their dwellers.

This had been a fabulous city, a city of temples and palaces and necropolises, a fantastic city of treasure, a tithe of which we were there to claim.

Then I attempted to visualize the figure of the enigmatic Sarazon, who had no desire for the riches he had yet known how to find, and I wondered what it was he sought in that inaccessible place, and whether he still prowled about those rotting piles, and what was to happen if we met. Vague as my evocation of him was, for Cleaver could say only that he was old and tall, it was still sinister, and I was not eager for that meeting. There was something terrifyingly inhuman about a man who had no use for a room full of gold.

I found myself shivering, but it was from the chill of the incontinent tropic night, which was smothering

us in black velvet. Looking up with a start, I saw points of silver winking in the filigree of leaves overhead, and turning at Cleaver's hail, I stumbled toward the ruddy glow of the fire he had built far down the terrace, against the ruined wall.

He was frying bacon in the doorway of the great chamber in which his master had established their camp, and as I entered he looked up with a crestfallen air.

"He's still here, I take it," he observed morosely. "His things is all abaht. He must have been hard put to it to get along wivout me." This last he added with glum professional satisfaction.

"Where do you suppose he is?"

"How can I tell? He was always coming and going, quite like a spook." He peered uneasily into the outer night. "He might show up any minute. We'll just have to be on our guard." He turned the bacon expertly, and I sat down against the wide lintel, rich in the flickering light with ornate carvings in deep relief. In the dim interior I could discern upon the walls the faded remnants of painted decorations.

The outer hall had been well cleaned, but, after coffee, when I made a sketchy inspection of the inner suite in company with my pipe, I was glad I had lit my rank tobacco first. The air was foul with the droppings of bats, and the shaft of my flashlight glinted in myriad evil eyes and rows of teeth. The brutes milled about in swarms, and one of them flapped into my face, with a furious chittering and a puff of rotten breath. Hastily I returned to Cleaver, who was suspending two hammocks in the outermost chamber.

Immediately we turned in, and an occasional cockney snore told me my companion had gone at once to sleep. But though I was dead-tired I remained awake some little time.

The cooking-fire smoldered dully just outside the doorway, but gave no light. A moon had risen, and its shafts pierced the fronds that mantled our terrace. Soft and fragrant little gusts wandered in now and then, happily bringing no mosquitoes, but the traffic of the bats was incessant, and rarely there was a flapping of larger pinions that made me think uncomfortably of vampires. The melancholy pipes of nightjars sounded at intervals, and once I heard the far scream of a jaguar. I felt for my automatic, and fell asleep.

"YOUR coffee's ready, sir!" It was morning, and the sun was pouring into the door. We made a hasty breakfast, both of us eager to be about our business. Outside, the mists were rising, and already all was green and shimmering with heat.

Cleaver fairly scurried ahead of me down the steep, narrow stair into the jungle. Slashed branches and trodden grass showed the paths Sarazon and he had made about the hidden city, and we skirted ruin after ruin till at length we stood before the serpent doorway he had described to me in Merida.

"Here we are," the little man quavered, obviously very nervous, but entering the somewhat awesome portal without more ado.

The long, low, narrow apartment was surprizingly light, the sun flooding into the great door and striking upward from the floor of huge cut stones. A sculptured frieze of serpents undulated about the walls. At one side stood a stone table made of a six-inch slab resting on dwarfish yard-high figures with upturned supporting palms. I jumped a little, for on this table was a sculpture, large as life, of a male human form in a contorted attitude. It reclined on its back and elbows, the knees bent, the heels at the buttocks. It stared at me with a great stupid flat face, and

despite the growing heat of the morning and the sweat I was in from our hasty journey a chill bit into me. The dull malignancy of the thing was disquieting.

I made some exclamation, for Cleaver, who had gone directly to the great closed door opposite the entrance, turned quickly and followed my gaze. Then he dropped the crowbars he carried with a clang, and darted to the side of the figure. He bent over it a moment, and then showed me a troubled face.

"Come 'ere," he whispered; "this 'ere's a puzzler; I don't like it, neither. Look at that!" He pointed to the image's middle, where the navel was hollowed into a saucerlike depression. I saw nothing but the grime of centuries, and said so.

"How abaht this?" He flicked a pinch of dust, and sniffed his fingers. "That's ashes—copal ashes—as they used for incense. This 'ere is Chac-Mool, and they burned it on 'im as a way of worship."

"Marvelous," I said; "to think those ashes have lain there for a thousand years!"

"That's just what I don't like. Once or twice before when I've come 'ere, thinking abaht the gold, I've smelt these strong, and they looked fresh, somehow. I've never caught them 'ot, but you might say they was a bit warm. Now, for instance. See for yourself."

I sifted a little of the silt through my fingers. It was certainly not cool.

"Don't you smell something?"

I did, and the faint scent was giving me a headache.

"Sarazon told me," Cleaver went on uneasily, "that the Indians used to believe Chac-Mool 'ere came alive at night. *That's* all right, but I don't like 'im 'aving fresh incense on 'is belly. It looks like something else was alive around 'ere besides 'im." His slurred speech, as usual, betrayed his excitement.

"How about Sarazon himself? Maybe he burns it to the old gods. You say he believes in all that sort of thing."

"Perhaps; but there were times 'e wasn't out of my sight, and after, I'd come 'ere, and there'd be this smell in the air. I spoke of it to him, and he said it was the old copal, getting stirred up by the winds."

"Well, it's odd enough, but how about tackling that door?" I suggested impatiently.

"Right-o!" he agreed instantly, and we started to work.

We started, and we worked, and we both got headaches—the sort I used to get from dynamite fumes—and we drank quarts of coffee to fight the headaches; and then we fought that door again, but that was all, except that we broke most of our tools. I wished I had brought dynamite, and reproached Cleaver for giving me a wrong impression.

"You say that Sarazon opened this damn safe while you were making tea outside?"

"So he did, and never turned an 'air. And I'm thinking that only he can open it now."

"Rats," I snorted, for my temper was frayed; "what's he got that we haven't, except maybe brains?"

"He's got *magic!*" the cockney solemnly averred. Then we went outside and collapsed on the terrace, and drank more coffee, and cursed. But I had ideas due to that mention of magic, and we wasted the afternoon testing those ideas.

We went over the walls and floor inch by inch looking for some clue to the mechanics of that door. I jumped and bounced on every separate slab of the floor, and hammered every illogical boss of the sculptured reliefs, hoping to start the lever that I am still sure existed somewhere. Sarazon had opened the door, and quickly. There must be a way. We never found it.

The violet dusk crept into the chamber and finally drove us forth. As we went out through the debris of roots still clinging to the door, a lot of big, flat, crablike spiders were beginning to waken for the night, and their bright pin-point eyes glittered in the gloom. I felt that Chac-Mool was sneering behind me, but I didn't look back. I felt hellishly frustrated and tired, and a tick had established himself in my left calf. I didn't enjoy our evening meal and we simply couldn't go any more coffee. So to our hammocks with splitting heads. This gold might take some getting, was my last thought.

THE next morning I went alone, the river trail being well defined, to see if the airplane was safe. It was; snug in its tarps, but looking weirdly incongruous on that sand-bar. Cleaver was making a round of the various ruins to seek traces of Sarazon. We had agreed he was probably necessary to open that door. If he failed to appear, or couldn't be made to oblige us, we'd have to fly out and come back with dynamite. I didn't want to risk any flights not actually resultful of golden cargo, so we pecked away at the treasury now and then in a desultory fashion, and waited for Sarazon.

There was a natural well, or *cenote*, against one ruined temple, similar to smaller ones I'd seen in Merida, and I bathed with delight in its crystal-clear, cold waters. They looked stagnant and roiled, but it was only the perfumed pollen from the thousands of orchids and lilies that smothered the large trees overhanging the pool. Cleaver refused to join me in these revels, insisting that horrible monsters lurked in the dark depths. I never saw anything worse than a snake with large mottles of green and yellow and chocolate.

The real monsters, it seemed to me, were all outside the water; for there were the big armored ants whose sting could produce fever and death; the giant red scorpions; the hideous spiders; and more formidable than all, a ghastly unclassified beetle two inches long at his worst, with a poisonous proboscis. The first one that punctured me I slew, and as there was no irritation I forgot my wound —for twenty-four hours. Then it began to suppurate, and I was glad of our medicine kit. Fortunately these creatures prefaced their attack with a booming noise, and could thus be detected in time. I saw in them a horrible resemblance to a certain long-nosed god sculptured everywhere about the ruins, whose nose was like an elephant's trunk. His appalling visage was set on every side, with its grinning jagged teeth, and eyes of rounded stones tenoned in, but often fallen from their hollow sockets. The beaked beetles seemed made in his very image, loosed upon us to drive us from his dusty houses, and under that bright sun I had often to shake off a thrill of superstitious dread.

So it was I preferred the pool, which I reached by a steep, grassy slope that had once been a stair. I came to suspect in that pool not monsters, but catfish; and having brought tackle, I set about catching some one afternoon. The depths were filled with snags, and I detached several rotted branches. This began to bore me, and I dozed for awhile, to awake at the boom of a warrior beetle. I killed him, and found my hook engaged.

At length I landed a mass of decayed twigs and leaves, tangled about a small, thin-walled skull—unmistakably a girl's. The delicate sutures were almost separate, and the tiny, perfect teeth showed she had died somewhere in her teens. I lost myself in pity and conjecture over that frail tenement of secrets before restoring it gently to the waters, but I fished no more.

Days passed, and I grew to feel at home in that bright-colored world of showy flowers and vines and brilliant-hued birds. We wandered about, almost always together, for Cleaver didn't want to meet Sarazon alone. Anyway, I had the automatic, and we had determined to get the drop on our man at the moment of encounter. And thus it finally befell.

3. *Sarazon*

WE HAD supped, the fateful night, and were in our hammocks, sleepily chatting. Cleaver grew silent, and I lay listening to the insect choir and waiting for a jaguar's howl to break the monotony. Suddenly there was a dull and heavy detonation somewhere in the bowels of the ruin. I tumbled out in my impeding blankets and to my feet. Cleaver ran to my side, draped, I saw by my flash, in his bedding.

"A falling wall!" I whispered.

"Maybe. But put out that light. Wyte!"

In darkness we shivered. I kept my straining eyes on the faintly discernible purple square of the entrance. Minutes passed, and I looked round for the cockney, but saw nothing. Puzzled, I reached out, for I knew he had not moved away from me, and touched him. He jerked, and the pale mask of his face veered to mine. *He had been turned toward the inner door.* And in that moment I turned too, and so remained. For something was moving in the inner chambers—moving on feet. Of course we inspected those noisome lairs each night; had done so that evening as usual, and knew there was nothing there but the bats. Yet thence proceeded, beyond a doubt, the noise, and, a little later, *the light!*

It flickered palely, a gleam against one polished jamb of the far door of the room beyond ours, and waxed jerkily brighter. Cleaver clutched at me, but I shook him aside. To be candid, I was relieved: this light had a human origin, anyhow; the noise, therefore, didn't mean that Chac-Mool was walking about.

"It's Sarazon!" hissed Cleaver. "It can't be nothing else!"

The light was suddenly brighter; it flooded that far door, became a dazzling disk, and over it swam a face.

"It's *him!*" There were relief and apprehension in Cleaver's whisper, but I tapped him for silence, and dropping my blankets, stole quickly to the inner door. This was Sarazon's surprizing homecoming, but it must be he who was most to be surprized.

Hidden behind the door jamb, my automatic waiting, I tried to see what manner of man was approaching. He was inordinately tall, it seemed, and cadaverous; the little light reflected on his face was from below, and threw gaunt shadows on jowl and cheeks and into the eye-sockets. Indeed, if his light hadn't obviously been an electric lantern, I'd have thought him a walking specter, as slowly, deliberately, he shuffled nearer, bats wheeling about his head. I drew back, and waited breathless.

The light began to brighten our chamber. Cleaver scuttled out of sight. A minute later Sarazon entered, and stopped, towering above me.

"Hands up, Sarazon!" I called out at once. With another man I should have stayed where I was, but from all I'd heard I rather expected the reputed wizard to vanish: so I sprang to him and poked my weapon into his side. My free hand I fixed firmly into a rough tweed coat. Over my shoulder I barked, "Come and take this light!"

From his great height the man looked down at my five-feet-ten, his spare frame tensely braced against my grip. But when Cleaver ran forward he relaxed.

"So you've come back," he said casually as he handed the lantern to the little cockney, who stood embar-

rassed before him. "Well, Cleaver, it would have been better for you had you died in the jungle; I'm really sorry you didn't."

"We don't mean you no 'arm, sir," Cleaver said humbly. "All we want is the gold, and you don't want that."

"You were told enough to forget that. If you were to take it we should all of us leave our bones here."

"Sit down, Sarazon," I put in. "We may as well be pleasant about this little affair. How pleasant depends on you. I've yet to see the gold, and there it seems you must help me. But naturally, you must be obliging." I stepped back and waved the gray barrel suggestively. Cleaver had placed the lamp in a corner, and now he deferentially fetched a folding stool, part of their original equipment.

Sarazon seated himself and gave his entire attention to me. I returned the stare. Cadaverous to a degree, he was yet a figure of patent power. In the movements of his emaciated body was a curious youthfulness, though his shock of white hair and wasted features gave an effect of immense age. The cold, faded eyes, set very far apart, gleamed over me in a frozen contempt. Here was plainly no charlatan, but a mystic, perhaps a fanatic. He spoke, judicially.

"I should have given more thought to Cleaver's disappearance, but I was occupied with other matters. Had I considered it sufficiently, you wouldn't have me at this disadvantage. But I never expected to be confronted with firearms, or to be disturbed at all. For the moment your modern methods must prevail. But Cleaver might better have died in the jungle; I'm sorry he didn't."

"Y'are, are ye?" sneered the cockney, beginning to take heart as he saw Sarazon accepting the situation.

"Yes, idiot," snapped his former master, "for it is now quite plain just what form your death will take, and the jungle would have been better."

He spoke with so much conviction that I myself was chilled. Glancing at the valet, I saw he was horribly shaken.

"Puttin' a corse on me, eh?" he snarled. "Well, watch out! My pal 'ere won't see me done in." This last was, I felt with a sense of pity, an abject appeal to me.

"Cleaver must come to no harm," I told the cold gray eyes. "As he says, we mean you none, and if you'll open that door for us we'll leave you in peace. But open the door you shall; you must understand we're utterly determined on that."

"Oh, I'll open it. I realize you can't be persuaded. I shan't waste a word. But it's a stupid business, and will probably be fatal to all of us. Cleaver is already as good as dead."

This was gruesome talk, and affected me almost as badly as its victim. "Make coffee," I directed. "We'll be awake all night, by turns. "I'll take first watch and then nap till morning. Naturally our host, who is now our guest, is entitled to one hammock, and there are only two."

So it was arranged. Sarazon silently accepted his own blankets, and disposed himself in one of the canvas slings without comment or delay. I believe he was instantly asleep. Where he had been, on what errand, and what the manner of his return, were questions never to be put. I drank the coffee, made Cleaver stow himself away, and with a fire to combat the chill and afford light, mounted guard. After some hours I roused Cleaver from his troubled dreams and took my turn at sleep.

MORNING and coffee odors awoke me. The perfumed mists were slowly rising under the sun. Sarazon went on sleeping as we discussed him,

but our plans were simple and all for immediate action, so the three of us breakfasted together, and set out at once for the Temple of the Boas. He was impassively taciturn. When we started he doffed his tweed coat, and it was evident that he wore under his flannel shirt a large disk, no doubt the gold priest's breastplate of which Cleaver had spoken. A very queer business all round, I reflected, as we made our way in single file through the still-damp foliage. I brought up the rear and kept a most wary eye on Sarazon, but we arrived at the portal of the giant serpents without incident.

Silently we passed within. I stopped at the door, but Cleaver danced over to the treasury in mad excitement.

"Open it, sir; open it!" he begged and commanded.

"You will both have to leave me alone," Sarazon replied quietly. "A matter of minutes only." I moved as if to go out, but Cleaver was shrilly indignant. "No, you don't! We don't leave you out of our sight. Go ahead and open 'er. Myke 'im do it!"—to me.

Sarazon glared at the little man, but I slapped the weapon on my thigh. "We must insist," I smiled.

The gaunt man glared at us, then slowly strolled down the room. I'll admit I was never so curious in my life. I watched his every move; so did Cleaver. We had put in a lot of heart-breaking work on the puzzle of that door, and aside from getting at the gold were keen to learn its secret.

Sarazon turned, paced slowly back, and thus went to and fro. Our silly heads wagged after him. After a little of this he raised his arms and began chanting, but so softly that I could scarcely hear. Very slowly, pausing often in his stride, but always chanting, he approached Chac-Mool. Then suddenly he stopped before the figure, and cried out with startling loudness. Our eyes glued to his broad back, we waited breathless.

Straightening up, he turned to us, and his long right arm shot out. We swung round, gasped: the great door stood open, and beyond, the shadows waited! From a litter of hacked roots adhering to the frame a few distracted scorpions scuttled, tails in air.

" 'Ow did you do it?" shrilled Cleaver; "you've got to tell——"

"The door is open; I'll tell you nothing!" Sarazon cut in.

I was piqued at the ease with which he solved what had so baffled us, and at his cleverness in fixing our attention on his abracadabra so that we shouldn't see just when the door opened. But what did it matter? The door gaped, and striding over, I sent my flash boring into the semi-gloom. The headachy fumes we had previously suffered were overpoweringly pungent.

"There they are!" screamed Cleaver at my elbow, and darted inside. I saw the gold was actually there—a solid wall of it, how deep there was no telling. In the beam of my flash Cleaver clawed at the upper tier, but I gave him only half an eye, and waited. Sarazon I watched like a hawk, my hand at my holster. I wasn't going to have that door close as quickly as it had opened, and trap one or both of us. But the tall mystic leant against Chac-Mool's couch, and made no move.

So a couple of minutes passed, and then Cleaver, very red-faced, came staggering out with two huge ingots, which he thudded down at my feet. A glance showed me that save for the dusty faces which had been exposed, they were bright as though fresh from the mint. And a glance was all they got, for the next moment Cleaver sagged heavily against me and crumpled to the floor. I didn't even question if he were dead: it was already awfully evident. If you've ever seen a photographic print black-

en from too much exposure, you'll know what I mean.

"What——" I began, silly from the shock, but Sarazon came forward.

"You see," he said unemotionally; "he had better have died in the jungle. And now you'll leave the rest alone? We'll replace these, and go."

Dazed, I watched him bend down and pick up the heavy bars. I was sick, but I was sicker with hate of this man who had let another go straight to his death.

"Why did you let him kill himself?" I demanded.

He rose, holding the ingots. "Could I have convinced him?" he asked with simple justness. He was right there; he would have wasted his words.

"But how dare you handle them? They killed him fast enough. If you can do it safely you could have told him——"

"I was under no obligation to him," he said harshly now. "I am under none to you. You specified I had only to open the door, and nothing but Cleaver's death could convince you the gold were best left alone."

My headache was maddening me. I remembered the gold plate Sarazon had taken from the trove, and which he still apparently wore.

"You took what you wanted," I rasped, pointing to his midriff, where the disk was plainly outlined. "Now I'm taking mine. But since you know so much you'll show me the trick of handling these, or you'll go to join Cleaver!" I lugged out my automatic. He saw I could not be opposed.

"They're harmless," he said, "once they're taken out. But he who moves them first—any of them—well, look at Cleaver." I had looked once at Cleaver; that was enough. Sarazon went on: "This city, this gold, was known to a Spanish explorer two hundred years ago; I possess his map; he learned these things; thus I know them. Are you convinced?"

"Why didn't the Spaniard take the gold?"

"He sought other things, as I do," Sarazon replied. "Besides, there were still priests of the old cults about the ruins in those days."

"Well," I told him, "since these two bars you have are denatured, I'll trouble you for them. As for the rest, I'm convinced; and I'll leave you to your ruins."

I seized one of the bars, not without qualms, for I couldn't tell how much of truth Sarazon had uttered. He surrendered it without a word. It was amazingly heavy, and I was wondering how I was to manage two of them and my gun, when Sarazon stepped back from me with a cry, his gaze going past me. I spun round, but kept him covered, for this might be the old dodge of "Look out behind!"

There in the doorway, with the sun behind him, around him, radiating from him in a thousand prismatic rays, stood an Indian—but such an Indian!

He was superb—and awesome. A head-dress, tier over tier of jeweled feathers, filled the upper doorway. Under it was a face of wrinkles and blazing ancient eyes and foot-long gold mustachios. There were gold plaques over his ears, and he wore a great gold breastlet on which I saw a round and grinning face. His withered arms were weighted with wide gold bracelets, and he held a great golden baton with an owl's head. He moved, and there was a soft tinkle of gold about his ankles; he raised his arm, and there was a dull rattle and clink. He gestured slowly, and there was no mistaking his meaning.

Sarazon deliberately turned, and swinging his bar of gold twice, loosed it to fall with a crash inside the door of the vault. Then he spread out

his hands, empty, and bowed his head. I clutched my gold and my gun, and waited for the vision to turn to me. But of me it took no notice. It pointed to Sarazon's breast, and made again that gesture of throwing away. Again Sarazon spread out his empty hands. Then somehow the gleaming figure was upon him, and tapped him upon the chest with the baton, and there was a dulled clang like a cracked gong. Then Sarazon, the imperturbable, went mad.

"No!" he cried, with a terrible voice, and sprang past the figure to the door. My impression as I followed him was that the Indian had got between him and me. I know I fired at it as I leapt, but whether my bullet went through it, as I myself seemed to go through it, I don't know. Those gorgeous feathers filled the door, but I was through them, and safely outside with my bar of gold. Ahead of me Sarazon was running obliquely down the steep steps of the terrace. I dropped after him, and we crashed almost together into the home trail.

"Keep going!" I panted at his back; "but stop at the camp. I'll fly you out!" He pounded on.

WE MADE the far ruin after a brisk trot. That Sarazon had seen fit to run shook my nerve. All I had seen was one mummied old Indian, and he might well be dead by now. True, I had looked back hastily at the edge of the terrace, and whether he really stood between the giant serpents or it was the glitter of the sun on the carvings, I wasn't sure. But I suppose where there was one Indian there must be more, and there were only two of us now. I had to halt Sarazon at our camp terrace, or he would have kept going.

"Have to get our flying togs!" I gasped, and took the lead. He followed me up the steep, narrow risers without a word. I dashed ahead, grabbed the outfits, and flung a set to him. We helped each other into the coats and scrambled down the stairs again. We had crammed on the helmets, but I couldn't adjust mine, hampered as I was with gold and gun.

Fatigue and the irregular path of the causeway perforce slowed us down. But with the plane only one lap away I began to feel safer.

"These make fine armor," I wheezed, "against the Indians' arrows!"

Sarazon answered me seriously. "There are no Indians, no arrows. Only the Priest of Ah-Puch!"

I stopped short, and clutching Sarazon, halted him. "If there's only the priest, why are we running? I think I got him anyway." I shifted the ingot to my other shoulder, for it was getting intolerably weighty.

"We can not stay, and we had best *hurry!*" he answered, with such convincingness that I waved him on. I meant to have it all out with him later; he'd have to tell me what it was all about. "Your bullet," added Sarazon over his shoulder, "was wasted."

I gave it up, and we scrambled on, till at last we were on the jaguar trail, and then, in a final spurt, at the sand-bar.

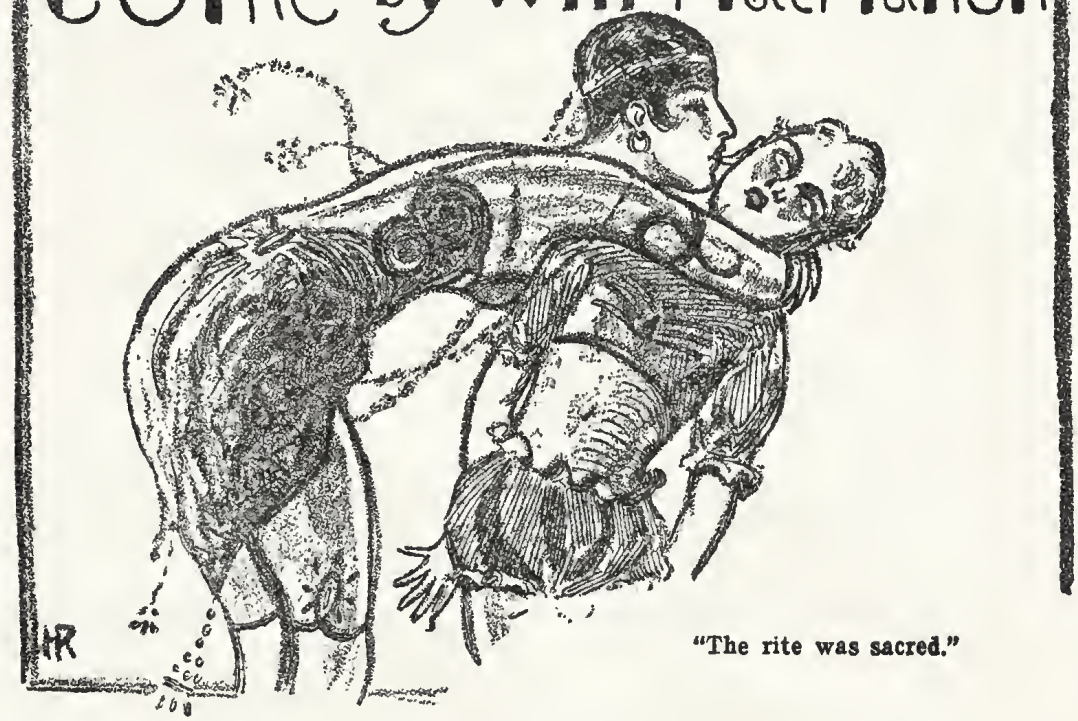
We splashed through the ford, and I drew in a great lungful of relief as I saw the plane was undisturbed. I ripped off the tarps and carefully lowered the ingot into the cockpit. Sarazon I had to heave into the passenger's seat, for he was far spent. Then, making my adjustments, I dashed to the bow and spun the prop. With a miss or so she began singing, as I ducked under the wing and jumped up to my seat.

Gayly we taxied down the hard-packed bar. I pulled back on the stick and lifted the plane off the ground, and up we went, not in a

(Continued on page 573)

The Time Will Come

by Will MacMahon



"The rite was sacred."

DOR-8437-M-18, an outstanding beauty in an aerial age when all young flying women were lovely, was just now in a fierce temper. The savage frown on her hawk-like face only added to her charm.

She swayed across the magnetic floor of her sun parlor, her six feet of willowy height like a reed in the wind. A touch of her long, steely fingers set in operation the much-used teleplane, and immediately a vision of the sunny heavens overhead appeared on a side-wall screen.

A slow-going, ponderous, noisy quadplane was doing its maximum of eighty miles per hour at the 2,000-foot level, apparently a Mid-West farm lad going to the Atlantic Coast general market. He was infringing on the taxi zone, but he knew that the small, brilliantly colored public service planes would not dare to hit him.

At the 6,000-foot level a passenger express whirled westward at high speed, no doubt the third section of the Boston-Pasadena triplane line. The slogan of this cross-continent corporation was: All the flight by daylight.

"Double darn this old telltale!" DOR-8437-M-18 exclaimed fervently. "I never get altitude when I want it."

She angrily twirled the dial of the teleplane. The nearer planes faded out, and stars began to appear in the

sunlit firmament. Between two fixed, twinkling points a dull blue spot grew into strength on the screen.

The girl glared at it, and then seized a pair of calipers with which she made a radial measurement that confirmed her suspicions.

"The unspeakable little beast!" she muttered irately. "He spied on me all day yesterday, and he slept up there last night. I wish to Jehoshaphat he would float into the aerial bombing practise zone and get blown to Halifax and back."

She made a further calculation that revealed by the spectrum test that the hated man was at the 26,000-foot level, far beyond the range of naked eyesight. His high-power glasses, however, made her home easily visible to him, and she was convinced that the steady flashing on the indicator of her upper realm radio telephone was caused by the call that he was vainly trying to put through to her.

She glanced through a window to the white enamel surface of the little landing-field at the rear of the house. Her apple-green monoplane was parked just outside the one-plane hangar, its wings folded demurely.

The girl clashed her glistening, pointed teeth. If it had not been for that despicable male creature afloat in the ether, she could have taken to the air and made that Boston-Pasadena triplane look like a captive balloon.

In San Francisco, at the Chinese tithing take-off field, there was a young man who was not bold, but gentle, modest and self-effacing. And of course it had to be DOR-8437-M-18's bad luck that he was too poor to afford a twin house.

"Some fine day," she murmured whimsically, "I'm going to lose my head and agree to live under the same roof with him."

The girl turned back the dial of the telltale to encompass the heavily traveled air lanes up to 10,000 feet, and then she called her chum, Florence, on the lower realm radiophone. The dialing read: FLO-8441-M-19.

"Hello, Flo," she said. "This is Dorothy. I tried to get you yesterday, but you were out."

"I was in all day, Dot," the other maiden declared. "I'm hardening my face with tannic acid to join the African fortnight flight. That equatorial sun is triple hell on the skin."

"That's queer. I must have dialed you a dozen times, Flo."

"The tape doesn't show it, my dear!"

"Well, anyhow," Dorothy went on hurriedly, "I wanted to tell you that the dentist flew in from his laboratory, and I haven't a natural tooth left in my head. He says that he never did a better job in porcelain; I have needle points on both lowers and uppers."

"Congratulations, my dear," Florence said heartily. "I have two silly old molars left, but as I am not man-crazy it doesn't matter. And you must remember not to bite too hard—if you happen to fly to California!"

A flush mounted to the temples of DOR-8437-M-18. The smoldering light in her dark eyes softened.

"Aha!" FLO-8441-M-19 exclaimed rallyingly. "I can feel you trembling."

Dorothy hastily took her elbow from the 'phone table.

"That's vibration from the ozone motor," she insisted nervously. "Just a moment, my dear."

She turned to look at the screen of the tell-tale. At the 5,000-foot level a plane was hovering, and the girl hurriedly trained her binoculars on its identification marks.

Then she spoke swiftly into the 'phone, her tone urgent.

"My awful Aunt Helen is overhead," she explained. "Slide over at once, and help me to get rid of her. Let's give the old cat our

maiden's creed; she can't stomach it for a minute."

"Gangway!" Florence shouted, and hung up.

DOROTHY walked to the door of the sun parlor and looked out over the treeless, rolling Westchester hills. Everywhere, at spaced intervals, were small houses, each with its little white landing-field that at night was electrically lighted.

This was a residence section owned by unmarried young people. Farther north, the roofs just visible over the horizon, were the double houses of the wedding folk, each with a two-plane hangar. Their children were housed in huge dormitories, since privacy and the bliss of solitude were not appreciated by the young of the species.

Dorothy now could see quite plainly the insignia on her aunt's plane: HEL-10166-W-59. And up the cement state road the figure of her rescuer appeared, and rapidly approached.

Florence was standing on the central moving platform, and now she stepped to the slower one to her left, thence to a still slower one, and so on to the grass plot in front of her chum's home. She entered the house just as the dreaded Aunt Helen alighted on the small flying-field, as softly as a feather.

"Think up some old ones, Flo," Dorothy whispered. "We'll make her sick."

Florence's eyes were a pitiless blue, like the ice of a glacier. She draped her length, perhaps an inch less than the other girl's, over a lounge, half closed her eyelids and hid her long hands in her sleeves.

"Hello, old top!" the aunt called out boisterously to her nieces as she entered the room, and then she caught sight of the visitor.

"Oh, hello," she added lamely.

The old lady was fifty-nine years of age and a widow, as her flying license indicated. The average span of life for women was one hundred years. They were called "young" up to fifty, which was the marriageable dead-line; thereafter they were "old" and doomed to celibacy.

Men, delicate creatures, were "aged" at forty-five. A widower was so rare a bird that his experience was immortalized in talking-tape, whereon he explained how he miraculously escaped death at the hands of his wife before she was gathered to her mothers.

Aunt Helen had been even taller than her niece, but now she was somewhat stooped. Her features were those of the eagle, rapacious and cruel.

"I was just saying to Dot," Flo remarked, "that virtue is its own reward."

"And I agree with her," Dorothy said, "that to be good is to be happy."

HEL-10166-W-59 started as if she had been stung by a hornet. A dull red overswept her lean cheeks and settled in her beak of a nose.

"You unmarried females give me a pain in the neck!" she declared bitterly. "I think your innocent pose is only a rotten trick. In my day, young women shot off their mouths with original thoughts, particularly on sex. And here are you two flannel-mouthed hussies dealing in platitudes that were old when China conquered the world a hundred years ago."

"A pure heart and a clean mind——" Dot began.

"Stop!" Aunt Helen groaned.

"A loyal love, each to its kind," Flo finished.

"Love? Hell!" the old lady gritted as she casually tuned up the telltale. When the blue spot appeared, she turned triumphantly to the two girls.

"Now I know you're play-acting!" she announced grimly. "Up there is the man for my niece, and

there isn't an atom of sentiment in his make-up. Marry him, Dot, and you'll have a twin-house career and a fortune that is absolutely tithe-free. There's condor blood in his plane's veins; what other male do you know who can go up 25,000 feet and sleep there?"

"I never could endure a man who pursues a woman," Dorothy objected, shuddering delicately, and Florence shook with her.

"No!" HEL-10166-W-59 exclaimed scathingly. "You want a little milksop with a schoolgirl complexion who will shriek bloody murder when you nibble his right ear."

"Oh, auntie, how could you?" her niece gasped, with a sly wink at her chum.

"To the pure, all things are pure," Florence asserted glibly.

"I didn't mention the *left* ear," the old lady pointed out in self-defense.

Both girls at once screamed in well-simulated dismay and hid their faces.

"Hell's bells!" HEL-10166-W-59 moaned. "You young minxes are too good to be true. I'm going to get out of here before I lose my temper."

"Oh, must you go?" Dorothy murmured.

"If I stay, I'll go cuckoo," her aunt declared. "But, remember this, Dorothy: If you marry a one-house man, the time will come when you will wish to kill him for disturbing your meditations—and if you do that, you have to prove that he snored."

"You had trouble over the death of your fourth husband, didn't you?" Florence asked meanly.

"Yes; the prosecution tried to prove that I faked the dictaphone that I put in his bedroom," HEL-10166-W-59 replied coolly. "But I countered with testimony that he cracked his knuckles, so that was that!"

"For the right man," her niece remarked dreamily, "I believe I even could live with the poor people of Park Avenue or Riverside Drive, in one of those dreadful elevator apartments, and fly with him each day to his labors in the Berkshire dairies."

"Love is everything," Florence agreed.

THE old lady's retort can not be given here, but she was still swearing to herself when she took off from the little flying-field to go back to her Adirondack home. From her 5,000-foot level she saw above her a small biplane of a disgusting type, and idly wondered what it was doing in a speed lane. Those Drof flyers had no shame; their rattlety-bang machines took them there and back, and they thought this was flying.

The flivver made a really creditable landing on the spot where HEL-10166-W-59's fine monoplane courser had stood, and only slightly bent a tin wing against the hangar. The flyer who alighted was a youth not quite five feet tall.

He had an infantile face, with a complexion so clear that his beauty was luminous. There was not a disfiguring muscle in his limbs; he was as smooth and rounded as a baby.

Expertly, he touched up his cheeks with a blush puff to remove the slight fatigue of flying, but he did not adorn his lips. They bloomed with natural health, in a veritable Cupid's bow. Over his ears he modestly wore gauze coverings, as was the custom of unmarried males.

Dorothy and Florence had been absorbed in a discussion of the condor flyer that would have astonished the hard-boiled Aunt Helen. These maidens knew their rights; man was to be chased, never the pursuer. That tithe-free individual, who was emulating the sentinel buzzard above them, was nothing less than a horrible throw-back to the sex slavery

days of women in the Twentieth Century.

The gentle, faltering footsteps of the youth at the sun parlor door brought Dorothy dashing to greet him. She stopped at arm's length, fascinated with his manifold charms.

"Precious little man!" she breathed. "Oh, to think that you came to me!"

He stood there, eyes downcast, summoning up courage to speak.

Florence, truly a chum worth while, quietly left the room, crossed the grass plot, and went from a slower platform to a faster until she disappeared up the road.

"I—I——" the young man began, and then found his tongue. "I have been ordered to fly with tithes to Peking," he went on. "But I convinced myself that first I should conquer my manly reserve, and bid you good-bye in person. A dreadful rumor has reached us on the Pacific Coast that the Manchu women are taking white husbands by the awful law of propinquity."

"I shall save you!" the girl asserted fiercely. "Come to my arms!"

The youth stepped back in a panic, and put a shrinking hand to his right ear.

"But I—I can not afford a double house," he half whispered.

Dorothy glanced around at her sacred possessions, with their utter privacy and independence, then bravely faced her destiny.

"My darling boy!" she breathed. "Give me that right ear."

Blushing furiously, he bared it from its covering, and solemnly—for the rite was sacred—she bent gracefully from the waist and sunk her pointed artificial teeth into the pink, shell-like offering.

"Ouch!" he gasped.

"Now, no Manchu female would have the gall to claim you," the girl declared serenely. "I have marked you as mine. When you return from the tithing we shall be married, and go to live in a single house for the connubial poor. Love is everything!"

In their absorption in each other they did not notice that a blue plane had been spiraling down toward them out of the ether. The condor flyer, deciding that there was not room for his landing while the field was polluted by the flivver, swooped off a hundred yards and alighted in a grassy lane.

"Some confounded butcher boy parking against regulations," he muttered. "Well, when he leaves, I'm going to kiss the flirtatious Dot right on the mouth."

No other evidence is needed to prove that this man was an atavistic brute. No girl had been caressed in that disgraceful fashion for generations. The Chinese conquerors of the world had outlawed the Caucasian custom of lip contact, simultaneously with the eradication of all germ diseases, and it was popularly believed that non-kissing meant the salvation of the race.

"I had a sporting flight from San Francisco," the beautiful youth was saying. "You know, my plane has a false recognition mark, and it is powered with a second-hand pursuit plane. I had a bushel of fun with the Chink traffic cops who towered to chase me out of a speed lane, only to find that I had the wings of them."

"My wonderful little man!" the girl exclaimed. "Oh, to think of the days when I shall have your left ear, too!"

"Please, *please*, must you speak of that?" he murmured chidingly, his azure eyes slowly welling with tears.

"Forgive me, Roy!" Dorothy pleaded contritely. "Of course, I should be satisfied with the engagement ear; the married one will come in due time. I shall try to contain myself and not offend you again."

"You are pardoned," the young man said. "The thought of matrimony is terrifying to me, but I know

you'll be gentle and considerate. And now I must go; I wish to reach the Denver tourist hangars before dark. Good-bye, dearest."

"Oh, let me bite you just once more!"

"Must you?"

He submitted to the caress, then fled to his disguised flivver, and went hurtling into the west.

THE condor flyer slowly approached the girl's home. He was a very tall man, at least five feet six, and he walked with what was lamentably close to a vulgar assurance.

His face was strong. There was in the Museum of Antiquities the portrait of a ten-year-old boy of the lusty Twentieth Century whose features resembled this man's.

Yielding to the racial distaste of superfluous hair, he had faithfully employed acids and electricity to remove all such growth from his arms and legs and chest. After marriage, he vowed mentally, he wouldn't give a hoot; he would let himself go and permit nature to take its course.

"Hello, Dot!" he cried out as he entered the room. "Give us a kiss right on the smacker."

"I'll give you a smack right on the kisser!" she retorted furiously.

Her doubled-up fists were eloquent of her meaning, although she naturally hesitated to strike a man.

"Oh, well, I can wait until after the ceremony," the fellow rejoined calmly. "But none of this ear-nibbling for me; that's the trick of cats and dogs and Chinks. I'm a one hundred per cent American; the slant-eyes never conquered us condor guys. If they hadn't made us tithe-free, we would have bombarded Peking from the 25,000-foot level, and put their eagle-blood machines on the blink."

"If you only knew how repellent you are when you boast!" the girl remarked hotly.

"I'm not boasting; I'm admitting," the ruffian replied. "And I've got a two-house joint that's waiting for you. I was to meet your Aunt Helen here to talk it all over, but I saw that she ducked out for some reason. Did you give the old gal the bum's rush?"

"What coarse womanish language you use!" Dorothy exclaimed disgustedly. "Have you no manly refinement at all?"

"I've got something better," the brute asserted, drawing a document from his pocket. "Cast your lamps on this, and sign on the dotted line."

DOR-8437-M-18 gasped at sight of the paper, and her hawklike features blanched. It was the well-known forcible marriage decree of the Chinese Viceroy in America, permitting the holder to have and to hold any unmarried female whom he desired as his legal wife. Here was an ancient idea completely out of tune with the times.

"I claim the olden privilege of the harvest moon," the girl announced definitely. "That gives me six weeks of absolute freedom, you cad!"

"Hell! Who tipped you off?" the man muttered angrily.

She did not explain that Florence had been her adviser. The Chinese law was strict in that a suitor must not only wait for the harvest moon, but entirely absent himself from the scene in the interim.

"I'll fly to an oasis in the Sahara Desert, and grow as fat and round as any girl could demand," this fiend in human form asserted with a grin. And he added to himself: "I'll grow hair to my heart's content, too! I hope my chest looks like a mattress."

MEANWHILE, two groups of school children had approached the condor airplane. In one party were the girls—slender, tall creatures with sharp faces that promised to become adorably hawklike. The boys were cherubic, and bashfully kept to themselves.

"Let's play school," the largest girl suggested, "or shall we chase the gizzards out of those confounded little sissies? I simply can't endure their curls!"

"It's a hot day," another lassie pointed out, "and of late I haven't had the urge to tease the plump darlings."

The first girl gave her colleague a hard look, but the latter was greedily eyeing one of the smaller lads. He caught her gaze, and blushingly turned his pretty head.

"All right, school it is," the tallest maiden decided. "Now, children, the lesson will be on the art of flying."

"Oh, that bores me to tears," the youngest girl of all protested. "We know it by heart."

"Do you, you little slob?" the volunteer teacher remarked. "Let's hear you give the first lesson."

" 'In the glorious days of the machine-gun age,' " the littlest girl intoned, " 'Li Fung Fat, a charlatan of Ho-pang-ho, conceived the idea of transfusing the blood of a hawk into the veins of a chicken in order to make the latter fowl a scion of the skies. The charlatan was beheaded when his game rooster, so treated, pursued the Emperor's hunting-falcon into the clouds and struck it dead with his spurs.' "

She paused for breath.

"That'll do out of you," the tallest girl announced. "Next pupil."

Another child took up the time-worn tale.

" 'Yrneh Drof, the tenth of his industrial line, having partly lived down the stigma of a fortune won in the manufacture of a sickening type of automobile, which crawled over the earth's surface at less than forty miles per hour, dedicated his life to the study of bird blood. He discovered in this magic fluid the secret of gravitation, and was enabled to apply it to airplanes so that an accidental fall became impossible. The inventor thereupon marketed a cheap flying-machine that today disgraces the air as his ancestor's automobile polluted the earth.' "

"You flunked the name of the secret," the pretended teacher said severely.

"I know! I know! I know!" several girls shouted in unison.

"Well, Flossie, you give it," was the command.

"Trypanosomamaniacal hermionitis," the answer promptly came. "And Yrneh Drof, the tenth, made his out of blackbirds' blood because they were cheap."

"My mother's plane is a sharp-shinned hawk," one little girl explained proudly, "but my father says it must have owl blood in it; she stays out a lot at night."

All the girls laughed loudly at this, and the little boys near by looked self-conscious in their pretense at not understanding. At that moment a welcome diversion occurred.

A missile out of the sky struck the center of a pond alongside the lane. The boys shrieked in terror, but the girls dashed to see the treasure trove.

It was a chicken, still much alive, but entirely denuded of feathers. The largest girl rescued the fowl from the water, and held it head down with the cruelty of her sex.

"Oh, let the poor thing go!" a small boy cried out in anguish as he buried his pretty face in his hands to shut out the pitiable sight.

"Isn't that just like a boy?" the girl demanded of her companions. "Now, how in ——! How did it get here in this boudoir condition?"

At the sound of that frank word "boudoir," all the boys promptly left, with their heads in the air. Of course they knew that girls will be girls, but this was going too far.

"I'm betting the bird escaped from a coop on a kosher chicken truck flying down the Harlem valley," a girl suggested. "It jumped out into a hundred-mile air-pressure and lost its

feathers, and then was blown a mile over here."

"Sounds reasonable," their leader agreed, "unless this is Li Fung Fat's famous game rooster, and he tackled a condor!"

The girls chuckled heartily at this bizarre thought while they poked their long, wiry fingers into the chicken's plump body. It squawked feebly and struggled to escape from the torture.

Girl-like, the little savages looked about for something to focus the cruelty that swayed them. They yearned to sacrifice this windfall from the heavens in a fitting manner.

"Condor?" one tall child remarked thoughtfully. "There stands a machine of that blood. Let's put a transfusion of this rooster into its veins."

"Yes, let's!" another reckless miss cried excitedly.

They swarmed into the cockpit and opened the equilibration chamber, and then the tallest girl tore open the fowl's neck with her steely hands and guided the crimson flow into the receptacle.

The flying man would not have objected had he known; it was an interesting experiment, and he had an affinity with roosters, and bulls, and rams. The insignia on his plane was: BUK-UM-27. It meant that he was Buck, an unmarried man, aged 27, a rogue if ever there was one.

"What if it's a hen?" a girl inquired, eagerly watching the flow of blood.

"If it is, this plane ought to lay eggs," the chief experimenter replied. "But who gives a hoot?"

She tossed the still struggling fowl to the ground and, with shrieks of laughter, the rowdy crowd kicked it along the lane in an impromptu football game.

The condor flyer stepped out onto the sun porch and stared at the noisy girls.

"Little savages!" he exclaimed. "Thank God, I was born a man."

"I'm only sorry you weren't endowed with fewer womanly traits," Dorothy retorted. "Come in here, and sign over to me the usual forfeit of fifty-one per cent of your property, in the event that a fat woman of the oasis proves alluring to your he-man tastes."

She said the word "fat" as if it meant "unclean."

"All right, my predaceous beauty," he agreed. "But I'll be back on time to tame you, kid, or bust a lung trying."

As he mounted his blue machine to tower into the azure sky he observed blood-splashes in the cockpit.

"Some ruffian of a girl got a good sock on the snout," he told himself amusedly.

Then he took off to the south, intending to make a vast, high circle out over the Atlantic Ocean and to sleep five miles above the home of his betrothed before setting out for the Sahara Desert. With no riding-lights showing, Dorothy could not see him, and thus the letter of the Chinese archaic law would be obeyed.

IT WAS midnight when DOR-8437-M-18 suddenly awakened, a roaring in her ears and a flashing light on her eyelids. The crash that followed on the cement road near by advertised an aerial disaster such as had not occurred for a generation.

An airplane actually had fallen out of the sky!

Lights sprang up on many flying-fields in the neighborhood, and soon a dozen airplanes were clustered about the smoking ruins of the crashed machine.

Dorothy and Florence identified the charred form of the aviator. They were apologetic when they did so, because the one means of identification was a gold tooth, and this marked the dead man as a vulgarian.

"You're sitting pretty now, Dot," Flo remarked. "You've got the guy's tithe-free bankroll, and you can marry

the beautiful boy you love and stake him to a twin house."

"Can—and will," the fortunate girl announced. "I'll make a night flight and catch him at Denver. I can easily bribe the Chinese tithers to put a substitute in his place. Chinky-Chinky-Chinaman eats dead rats!"

"Don't be hysterical, my dear!"

"Oh, but just think, Flo! Tomorrow night I'll have Roy by the *left* ear!"

"Some girls have all the luck," FLO-8441-M-19 remarked enviously. "And I hope you'll settle down now, girlie."

"Who wouldn't?" Dorothy demanded happily. "With a sweet little man like mine!"

THE little schoolgirls held a secret conference over their responsibility in the matter of the featherless fowl. Some of them argued that it was a game rooster whose blood overcame the gravitation of the condor fluid. Others asserted that it was a hen that weakened the floating element. At any rate, the mixture had proved defective, and the condor flyer was dead.

And Dorothy bit her shy young man on the left ear, and they are living happily ever after.

THE PHANTOM

By CRISTEL HASTINGS

Last night the wind blew fitfully against
  Wet window-panes, and tapped a pallid hand
In sudden bravery upon my door,
  Seeking admittance with a shrill demand.

My candles flickered in a sudden draft
  As from the opening of a hidden door
Silent upon its hinges, and I felt
  The cold, wet touch of winds from down the moor.

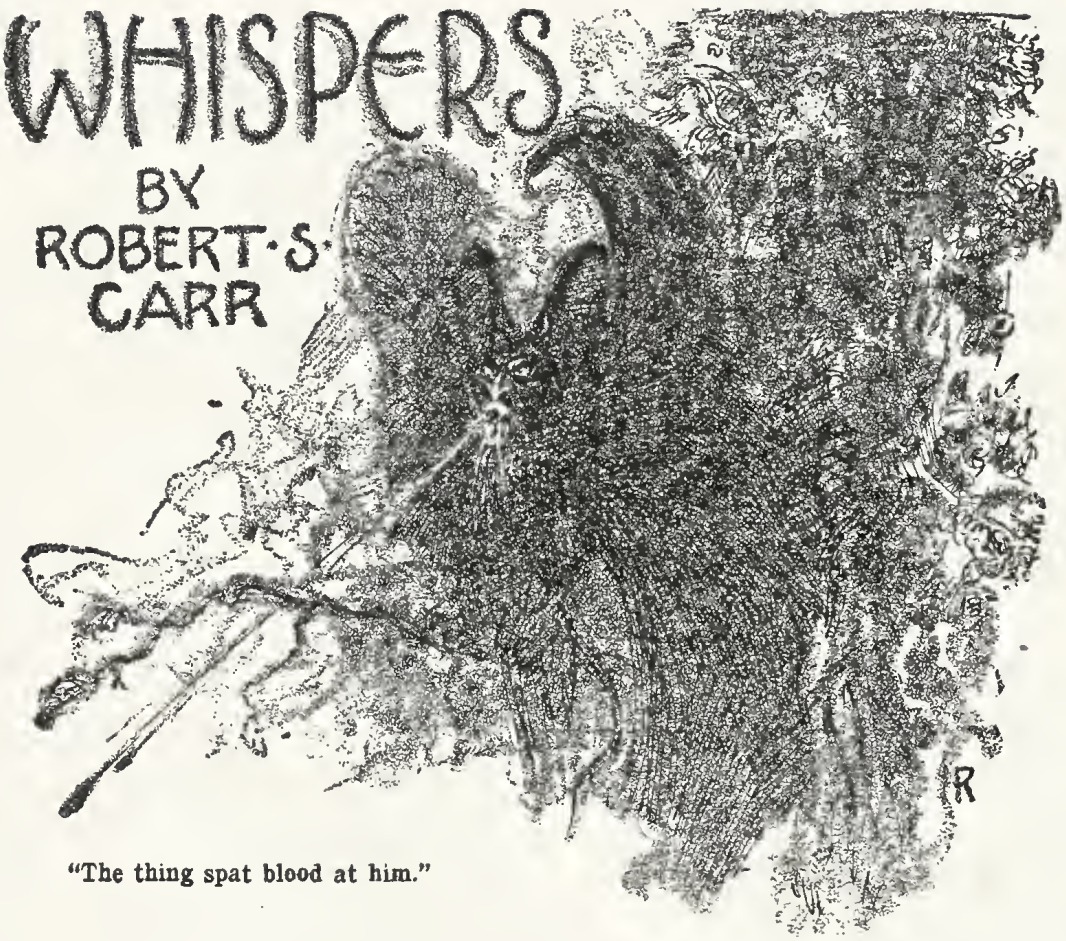
Somewhere a dog howled dismally and long
  To midnight skies, and branches brushed my roof
Like groping fingers seeking entrance where
  Something once lived and held itself aloof.

The long night through, dead leaves tapped here and there,
  Seeking for entrance long denied their kin
Save in the logs that blazed upon my grate,
  Old driftwood bits the raging tide brought in.

It must be these old things from out the brine
  And kelp of oceans have their bluish souls
That wail at night in winds that haunt the marsh
  When driftwood logs are burned to dying coals.

WHISPERS

BY ROBERT·S· CARR



"The thing spat blood at him."

TAGGARDSVILLE stirred sleepily as the wheezy dinky-line train puffed into town and paused to get its breath; then sank back into its habitual state of coma as the train lumbered on through the rank swamp-lands.

The one passenger stood on the dilapidated depot platform and viewed the isolated little village with the amused, condescending air that the bred-in-the-bone New Yorker shows toward the rest of the world. His clean-shaven young lips twisted themselves into an expression of scorn. He would never have believed that a civilized nation could harbor such a down-at-the-heels lump of concentrated inertia as Taggardsville.

Gordon Hall laughed loudly, contemptuously. He leaped down off the platform, walked briskly up the street and noisily entered the shabby general store. The inner gloom of the low, windowless building made him stop abruptly till his eyes became accustomed to the darkness. Presently, as he stood blinking and inhaling the mingled odors of pipe smoke and coal-oil, he became dimly aware of his surroundings.

A half-dozen old men were seated in a semicircle. Several gazed at him reproachfully for interrupting their dozing, while the rest eyed him in mild surprize. For a minute he stood there, his eyes taking in the coils of rope, the bags of feed and the fly-specked shelves of canned goods. The circle remained as if carved from wood, chairs tilted far back, battered straw hats on heads, pipes in mouths.

At last Gordon spoke, his words grating harshly on the tranquil silence.

"Anyone around here who can drive me out to the Muller place?"

Stillness reigned for a moment more; then one of the men drawled: "You mean th' swamp-land Mullers out to th' south?"

"I mean the Mullers that own the big cypress plantation."

"Them's th' swamp-land Mullers. You see, there's another tribe of Mullers up to th' hill-lands, so we call one th' swamp Mullers an' th' others the hill Mullers so's we ken tell 'em apart."

"Yes, but as I said before, is there a rig or an auto I can hire to take me out there?" he demanded shortly. The unhurried, monotonous drawl of the old man's voice irritated him.

"I dunno," was the laconic response.

"How far is it? Maybe I could walk."

"Couldn't make it afore dark. An' there's sink-holes to watch for."

"I can keep out of the sink-holes if you'll show me which road to take."

"You couldn't make it afore night." The old man's tone sounded like a foreboding.

"And what if I didn't?" snapped the young man. "I'm not afraid of the dark!"

The grizzled old villager regarded him curiously for some little time, then made the rather cryptic remark: "You would be, though, afore you got there."

Gordon snorted indignantly. Then: "Has anybody got a machine?"

"Jake has."

"Where's Jake?"

"In th' back there." He lifted his voice. "Hey, Jake! Come in here!"

The callow youth that appeared sulkily consented, after some deliberation, to drive him out to the Muller place in his decrepit old flivver. As they left the store, Gordon was conscious that the group was eyeing him queerly.

Winding interminably and tortuously over the soggy wagon-trail, the city man could not help wondering at the tropical luxuriance of the unbroken wall of vegetation that rose sheer on each side. The fantastic shapes of the monster cypress trees, hung with long gray beards of Spanish moss, together with the rank greenery on the islands of solid ground, made a ghostly shadowland even in the sunlight.

Later, as they penetrated farther into the gloomy solitudes of the great swamp, the black waters of deep lagoons on each side became more and more frequent, the air became more humid and even the narrow strip of cleared land they traveled became dangerously swampy at times. A huge, bloated water-moccasin slid off a gnarled cypress "knee" and disappeared in the thick water below with an oily splash. A whippoorwill's funeral notes echoed down the dim aisles of the spectral swamp like a weird cry of warning.

For hours they drove steadily onward. Lower and lower sank the sun, slower and slower crawled the puffing auto. Long, velvet-black shadow-fingers lay across the road as if to stay their path. The fetid breath of the swamp-land rose lazily about them in wispy spirals of yellow-green steam from the carpet of matted vegetation and foul muck beneath the cypresses. It seemed to Gordon that they must have traveled many miles. At last, finding the cathedral hush unbearable, he made a conversational sally.

"How much farther is it?" he asked.

A grunt and a non-committal shrug of the shoulders was his answer. He gazed out into the gloomy swamp once more. It was not yet 6 o'clock, but back there in the shade of the twisted old cypress trees it was quite dark. He fancied he saw weird shapes flitting about.

The car came to a halt. Gordon looked at the driver interrogatively.

"'Tain't safe to go no farther," growled the villager, avoiding the other's eyes.

Gordon looked ahead. The road seemed to be slightly better, if anything, than that which they had traversed thus far.

"Fifty cents more?" he inquired hopefully.

A negative grunt. Jake started to back the car preparatory to turning around.

"How come?"

"Gotta get back afore dark."

"What's the matter? You've got lights."

The auto continued its backward arc.

"Come now; listen to reason. I've got to get there tonight. I'll give you a dollar extra."

"I'm a-goin' back."

Gordon swore under his breath.

"All right then," he snapped; "have it your own way. How far will I have to walk?"

A long streamer of Spanish moss overhanging the roadway began to swing violently, although there was not a breath of wind stirring. The village boy eyed the swaying moss fearfully.

"How much farther?" repeated Gordon. Jake recovered himself with a start.

"I dunno, a mile or so." He lurched the machine up onto the road, headed townward, and extended his hand.

Gordon paid him. Sullenly the youth pocketed his money, then slowly started the auto. A moment later he leaned out and looked back. The city man was plodding along the muddy road in the opposite direction.

"Hey!"

Gordon halted and turned, scowling. "What do you want?"

Jake appeared to be confused.

"I was just a-goin' to say—you'd better kinda—hurry up. You wanta get there afore it gets real dark, you know." With that he was gone.

For some time the other man stared after him, mystified, then laughed nervously and continued on his way.

The shadows lengthened and the way grew dim. The sticky black mud clung to his feet, making rapid progress impossible. An inexplicable uneasiness grew upon him with the increasing darkness. Several times the lone walker heard uncanny little sounds near by, and once he wheeled about very suddenly as if to catch sight of the Something he was certain was following him.

His walk grew furtive, his eyes darted from side to side in fearful apprehension. The road narrowed, bringing the terrifying darkness on each side closer about him. He could almost have sworn that something brushed against him as he passed through a blotch of misty blackness beneath a giant sypress.

At last, with the suddenness peculiar to the South, the sun dropped beneath the horizon and the narrow path was cloaked in inky darkness. With the abrupt blotting out of even the faintest illumination, Gordon paused to get his bearings and to make sure he was in no danger of stepping into a hidden sink-hole. Then, as he was about to resume his journey, he froze into rigid alertness at a soft sound behind him. . . . Was that a whisper? No, surely it couldn't be, he told himself. Nevertheless, his heart began to thump loudly within his breast.

He listened intently for a moment, but the sound was not repeated. He took a step forward . . . the thick mud made unpleasant little sucking noises about his feet. . . . What was that before him?—but no, it was gone now. Then he pulled himself erect, thrust out his chest and jaw, and marched resolutely onward. He even started to whistle, but the sound died on his lips at the eery mocking that

floated back out of the mysterious black depths of the swamp.

Several rods farther on his way, he glimpsed the lights of the Muller homestead. He quickened his pace and began to breathe more easily. Funny how the dark could get on your nerves, he thought, and fumbled in his pocket for a cigarette.

And then—It came! A short, sibilant whispering in his ear, the cold breath of an unseen being against his cheek, a faint tap on his shoulder—and It was gone. With a jerk he wheeled, dropping his cigarette, and like a graven image he stood motionless, soundless, peering into the dark. The moon, a gibbous globe of silver that was strangely cold and distant, slid silently from behind a cloud and bathed the dismal scene in an unearthly luminosity.

There was nothing — absolutely nothing—to be seen. The whisper had sounded not an inch from his ear, and he stood in the middle of the road, with ten feet of clearing on each side, but whatever It was had made its escape in a split second. Presently Gordon shrugged, cursed his imagination, and plodded stolidly onward.

The welcome gleam of the house ahead grew brighter as he approached. He walked rapidly, scarcely heeding his path, and keeping his eyes stedfastly fixed on the lights before him. Suddenly his foot caught under the loop of an exposed root and he pitched headlong to the ground. For a moment he lay there, half stunned, but in that brief time the Thing came out of the blackness once more, whispered its inarticulate and horrible message in the prostrate man's ear, breathed its icy breath upon his cheek, brushed his shoulder with the touch of a grave-cloth, and was off again.

With a piercing scream of terror he rolled over, scrambled to his feet and plunged madly through the dark toward the house. Frantically he beat upon the door and shouted. No answer. In desperation he showered heavy blows upon the unyielding oaken panels . . . a soft, smooth Something drew slowly across the back of his neck . . . he shouted frenziedly and kicked at the massive portal. . . . Again came that awful, blood-chilling whisper in his ear; again a puff of cold breath fanned his face; a faint and unearthly stench was wafted to his nostrils.

He put his hand to the side of his neck. It came away wet with warm blood.

After what seemed interminable ages of waiting, a pale, frightened face appeared in the crack of the door.

"What do you want?" came the tremulous query.

"For God's sake let me in!" screamed the terrified Gordon; "they're after me!"

Silently the woman admitted him. She seemed to understand what he meant by "They."

He found himself in a crudely furnished room, bare-floored and dingy. Without ado he was made welcome, and he sat down to supper with the family. He briefly explained to John Muller, the rugged old father, that he represented a New York lumber company and that he had come to have a look at the cypress on his land. Old Muller seemed satisfied and even eager to sell. "Be blamed glad to get away," he remarked once during the conversation.

Strangely enough, not a word was said on either side concerning Gordon's terrible experience. He noticed, however, that the whole household—father, mother, grown son and two girls—seemed to be in a constant state of nervous apprehension; slight and unconscious on their part, but nevertheless apparent.

As they filed from the kitchen back into the front room, Gordon noticed a peculiarly shaped scar on the bare neck of the eldest girl, an anemic child of perhaps twelve.

"How did you hurt your neck, girlie?" he inquired solicitously. But the child only looked at him a moment, wide-eyed, then fled as if in terror. The young man put it down as an adolescent sensitiveness on her part and dismissed it from his mind.

The evening passed uneventfully enough except for one thing—Gordon noticed the exact replica of the little girl's scar on the neck of John Muller!

When the time came to retire, Frank, the son, showed the guest up to the room he was to occupy. As they ascended the broad stairway, Gordon could not help but comment on the exceptional size of the house and the number of rooms it contained. He learned from Frank that they confined their living-quarters to the front of the house, the rear rooms being unused and empty. The dwelling had at one time been a historic Colonial mansion and more recently the property of an old recluse—a retired explorer and adventurer. The building and surrounding estate had been in John Muller's possession some five or six years.

The two young men entered the bedroom. In a glance Gordon took in the simple furnishings and old-fashioned four-poster bed.

"It's kind of stuffy in here," he remarked; "guess I'll raise the window."

He started to cross the room but Frank stopped him with a sharp exclamation. "No, don't open the window," he said.

"Why not?"

"*They* will get in."

"You mean——?" Gordon's eyes grew wide with inarticulate fear.

"Yes." And with that he was gone.

GORDON soon discovered that his room connected with Frank's by means of a door, and he opened it, "just to let the air circulate," as he termed it.

He lay sleepless for a long time. At last the room became so hot and stuffy as to be unbearable, so he got up, tiptoed to the window and raised the sash an inch or two. He wasn't afraid of anything that could get in through so small a crack as *that*, he assured himself, and now he could get a good sleep.

But the harrowing experience he had undergone in the swamp, together with the peculiar creepy atmosphere of the whole dreary place, caused him to sleep but lightly.

About midnight he awoke with a start. His dreams had been a jumbled and distressing fantasmagoria of fantastic shapes. He instinctively turned over and looked toward the window for the comforting sight of the tranquil stars and the cool night sky. To his surprize he saw that the sash was now some five or six inches above the sill! His sleep-bedrugged consciousness was some time in grasping the possible significance of the fact, but when at last the truth dawned on him, he sprang from the bed. Then he got his second shock—his pajama-front was stained darkly with blood!

The faint and spectral moonlight cast a dim illumination about the room. He stood in dumb astonishment for a moment, then galvanized into instant action at the sound of a long-drawn-out gasp from the next room, followed by a low, horrible, gurgling sound. With a leap he crossed the room, to stop short and clutch the door-casing at the sight within.

Slowly every trace of color drained from his fear-chilled cheeks, his eyes dilated with stark, unreasoning fear, and the short hair on the back of his neck prickled as a cold sweat broke out in glassy beads over his horror-distorted face. His fingers gripped the unfeeling wood till his knuckles showed white, and his breath came slowly, heavily, painfully, as if he were in the throes of a blood-curdling nightmare; for there, spread over the

writhing body of the young man, was a huge, misshapen, coal-black Something—a Something that made sucking sounds on the mangled and bleeding throat beneath it. The bed-clothing was splotched and dripping, and the room was permeated with the fearful odor of fresh human blood, with which was mingled a subtle scent infinitely more terrible—the peculiar stench of the whispering Thing that had attacked Gordon!

The Horror stirred and ejected a stream of blood from a hidden mouth. The warm crimson liquid spattered to the floor . . . the terror-stricken watcher at the door felt a drop fall on his bare foot . . . felt it trickle . . . and suddenly the room spun before his fear-glazed eyes. He staggered, his overwrought nerves snapped, and with a single despairing shriek he fell forward in a dead faint.

His last impression was a rapid whispering in his ear and a clammy exhalation on his cheek.

As the last clinging mists of oblivion lifted from Gordon's brain, he found that he was lying on his bed, a bandage on his neck where the ghastly thing had attacked him. He lay quietly for a time, endeavoring to collect his thoughts. Presently Mrs. Muller appeared at his doorway, her eyes red from weeping. She looked at Gordon in fierce accusation.

"You left the window open and—They came in—and killed Frank!" She lapsed into agonized sobs.

The rest of the day was a torment for Gordon Hall. He had been the direct cause of the young man's death. The family felt bitterly against him; only the father seemed able to understand.

In a clumsy, futile way, he helped the heartbroken people complete the simple funeral preparations. When he had seen the grave dug and the rude coffin carried out of the house for the interment, he asked, brokenly:

"Are—you going to get a—minister to preach the funeral sermon?"

"I reckon not," said old Muller sorrowfully. "There's not much way to get hold of one, 'cause Frank was the only one who run the auto and nobody could get out of here on foot inside of a day."

"Where is the machine? Maybe I could drive it."

Silently the old man led the way out to the barn, where Gordon carefully inspected the old car that Muller showed him. It was of some obsolete make and evidently out of repair.

"Frank allus had a lot of trouble with it," remarked Muller.

Gordon climbed into the driver's seat and experimented with the gears. After a great deal of sputtering, the motor started. Gordon was puzzled with the gear shift; all his slight experience had been with a lighter car of a different type. At last he selected what he believed to be low speed, but it was in reality reverse. He intended to let the clutch in very slowly and cautiously, but his inexperience, together with the sudden taking hold of the warped, old-fashioned cone clutch, caused the auto to lurch backward with sudden violence. The thin, protruding shell of the gasoline tank crashed into a heavy wooden beam, and, with a crackling of metal, burst wide open. The precious gasoline poured out in a colorless flood and was quickly absorbed by the loose soil of the barn floor.

Gordon was aghast. "Is there any more gasoline?" he inquired anxiously.

"No, our big tank is empty."

Then his remorse doubled as he realized that he had not only caused a death in this family, but had now completely marooned them from the outside world by his stupid blunder with the car. Why on earth hadn't he had sense enough to wheel the machine out into the open before investigating its method of operation?

He grew desperate in his efforts to atone for the great unhappiness he had brought these people. Again he questioned old Muller concerning the possibility of making the town on foot.

" 'Taint no use," replied the old swamp-man resignedly. "It's not that it's so far in a straight line, but the road's so crooked and such hard walkin' that if you got up early an' walked fast all day long, you couldn't get out of the swamp by evening. You know what would happen then. . . . There ain't no short cut at all through this swamp to town."

He spoke as calmly as if he were stating the price of pork. Gordon shuddered at the dread insinuation.

"Doesn't anyone know what this awful Thing is that lives in the swamp?" he demanded. "Why doesn't somebody shoot it or get rid of it in some way?"

"Nobody ken be sure about anything back here in these old swamps. An' you can't shoot a ghost."

"Ghost? There isn't any such thing!" But somehow his tone did not carry conviction.

Muller shook his head.

"I dunno. Something or other has got in the house twice since we been livin' here. See that scar there?" He indicated the gruesome mark on his neck. "That's what it done to me, an' it done the same thing to little Alice onct. It even gets after the pigs if it can ketch 'em. Look at the marks on the poor critters; we've got to pen 'em up tight as a drum every day at sundown."

Gordon looked at the inclosure where a score or so of the scrawny little razor-back hogs, common in the South, rooted and grunted. Nearly every one of the wretched animals bore the grisly brand of the invisible terror of the swamp.

"Somebody ought to clear this up. It's terrible!" he exclaimed.

Muller was resigned. "Yep," he agreed, "but who's goin' to do it? It's easier to keep the house locked up tight at night than to go a-gunnin' for some danged thing you can't even see. An' it never bothers us in the daytime. We've got kinda used to it, in a way."

A sudden inspiratioin flashed into the mind of the young man. Here was a way to make at least partial amends—apprehend the murderer! For there must be a tangible explanation, he told himself over and over; a mere fancy couldn't kill a person. Something of flesh and blood and bone had killed Frank Muller; that was undeniable. No vaporous specter would fasten itself to the throat of a sleeping person and suck the life-blood out of his body. And anything of flesh and blood and bone could be killed, too, with a good load of lead slugs in John Muller's immense shot-gun.

But in the days to come, Gordon Hall found that it was no easy matter to track a phantom to its lair, especially a phantom which was both invisible and silent and from which one's innermost nature shrank as being of the supernatural and terrible.

DURING the brightest hours of midday he explored the nearer portions of the cypress swamp and found the timber to be far better than his employer, back in New York, could have dreamed. Gordon was eager to close the deal, for he knew that it would bring as a reward a substantial raise in salary, but—the cruel reality struck him a crushing blow—he could not get to a telegraph office, or even to a train! To attempt to make the journey on foot would inevitably result in death, possibly some hideous death such as Frank had died. With this, his determination to clear up the mystery of the whispering thing crystallized from a nebulous ambition to an absolute, concrete necessity. He had to get away, but he couldn't do so without first disposing of the unseen danger in the swamp. And so, with

a methodical thoroughness, he began to investigate the matter from every possible angle.

First, he questioned the entire Muller household and learned that the Thing was noticed only at night, never earlier than dusk; that no one had ever got a good look at it—it always seemed just to escape their glance; that its attacks were always accompanied by the cold breath and whispering which he himself knew so well; and that it invariably struck for the neck.

Opinion seemed divided as to the bite of the creature. That it caused no pain was evident, and as the very mention of the subject was painful to the family, Gordon at last desisted from questioning.

The household had long since got into the hard and fast habit of retiring to the security of the house at dusk, keeping all apertures tightly closed and never venturing out after nightfall; so within the last three years attacks had been rare, and always at night, but they often heard the Thing at the windows.

The most baffling aspect of the mystery was the whispering. No one had ever distinguished even a single word: "It just whispered, that's all," as Muller himself had said.

And the uncanny wounds. It struck silently from the rear and opened the skin on the back of the neck without any sensation of pain on the part of the victim. That in itself was enough to make a supernatural agency seem plausible, but Gordon Hall would accept no disembodied spirit. He meant business and he was after results, preferably a dead result lying at his feet with a bloody gunshot wound in it.

A week passed and he was beside himself. Not only had he investigated and analyzed every clue he could find, but he had even dared the Unknown one night with a shotgun and a lantern. However, when he heard the same rapid whispering, shuddered at the same icy breath and felt warm blood—his own blood—trickle slowly down his back, he retreated hastily into the welcome safety of the house. No more of that for him! He would rather stay here in the swamp and hunt frogs the rest of his life than gain the outside world by battling a demon of the dark in its native element.

ON THE morning of the tenth day he stood, hands in pockets, and subjected every object in the range of his vision to the most exhaustive scrutiny in hope of finding some key to the mystery that he might have overlooked in his previous clue-hunts.

Trees, wood-pile, barn, pigpen and smoke-house were perfectly conventional and commonplace. His gaze wandered over the long lines of the house, up over the eaves, along the high roof-ridge, in every window. All as usual. But wait!—something was strange there; those two windows ought to be closer together than that. Both were in the rearmost rooms where the Mullers seldom ventured.

He pondered. The first window there was in the outside corner of the room, close up against the left wall. The second opened out of the next room and was by the right wall, as near the other window as the architecture of the house would permit. Allowing generously for partitions, there surely ought not to be more than two feet between the casings, and yet there was fully five.

As a drowning man seizes upon a floating spar, so Gordon Hall seized upon this incongruity. He rushed into the house and upstairs. Fifteen minutes later he was sure he had discovered a secret room in the old house. Now to find a door!

Painstakingly he went over every inch of the adjoining walls in both rooms. At last he found it—a clever little spring-door in a wall panel that opened to the touch of a concealed button.

As the door swung silently back, he stooped and looked inside. It was pitch-dark; he would need a light. In a moment he was back at the opening with his flashlight. A sudden fear of the darkness swept over him as he knelt and directed the circle of white light over the interior, revealing a desk littered with papers, a battered old strong-box and a few chairs, with dust—thick, velvety dust—over all.

He banished his fears and crawled inside. He stood up and was examining the papers on the desk when, with the click of an automatic lock, the little door swung shut behind him as if propelled by an unseen hand. He started violently at the sound—so violently that he dropped his flashlight. The fragile instrument struck the floor with a crash, the delicate lens and bulb shattering into a thousand pieces.

For a moment the utter blackness stunned him; then he quickly recovered himself, knelt by the door and endeavored to open it. His trembling fingers scurried over the smooth surface again and again before the truth came to him. There was absolutely no knob, handle or other projection on the inside of the door! Then surely, he reasoned, there must be another secret spring.

Stilling the tiny, mocking voice within his breast that told him that he was trapped, that no one knew he had discovered the room, and that the thick partitions would muffle any outcry, he patiently began to go over every inch of the walls.

Suddenly his very blood froze in his veins and the icy fingers of a dread premonition closed slowly about his madly thumping heart, for he had heard, somewhere in the blackest recesses of that sinister vault, a soft rustling that sounded strangely like a whisper—the incoherent whisper of the Thing!

At first his terror-numbed brain refused to grasp the unspeakable enormity of his situation, but at last, like the chill of an ice-cold plunge, came the full realization of his awful predicament. He was trapped in a hidden vault with the whispering swamp-fiend! The fast-crumbling throne of reason within his brain tottered and nearly fell beneath the impact of the terrific mental blow.

And then something snapped far back in the thought-chambers of the doomed man. With the strength of a desperate man he hurled himself headlong against the baffling panel. There was the sickening impact of flesh against wood simultaneous with the crash of splintering timber, and Gordon Hall plunged out into the bright shaft of a golden sunbeam—the blessed light of day!

After a moment he got up, brushed off his clothes and started in search of John Muller and a lantern so that they might clear up the mystery then and there. He paused in the doorway and looked back at the gaping hole he had made in the wooden panel. The Thing might escape while he was gone, he reflected, so he blocked the passage effectually with chairs.

Old Muller was visibly excited as together with Gordon he entered the room leading to the hidden chamber in which lurked the monstrous and blood-sucking Thing. In his right hand he carried his shotgun, loaded to the muzzle with murderous lead slugs and a triple charge of powder, while in his left he swung a heavy, two-bitted ax. "Be ye man, beast or devil," he muttered under his breath, "ye'll not get past John Muller in one piece!" Gordon carried a bull's-eye lantern and a keen pitchfork.

In breathless excitement the two men removed the blockade, piece by piece. For a long time they stood poised for instant action, gun leveled, pitchfork upraised. Absolute silence brooded within and without. At length Gordon lighted the lantern and thrust it into the aperture, brightly illuminating the interior of the little

cell. Still no swamp-demon put in its horrible appearance.

After some minutes of strained waiting, they threw caution to the four winds and, dropping to their hands and knees, crawled into the hole, dragging their sinister weapons after them. Once inside, however, their fear of the unknown returned, for they knew the Thing to be invisible. As they stood in rigidly heroic attitudes of offense, there suddenly came to their affrighted ears the uncanny whispering that they knew so well. Two pairs of eyes were instantly focused on the desk, whence the awful sound had come. . . .

A tiny, brown, bewhiskered mouse stopped his scampering among the papers on the desk and eyed the two men curiously. Sensing possible danger, he plunged back into the dry litter with a soft rustling that sounded oddly like a whisper—the very noise that had so alarmed Gordon!

John Muller looked at Gordon Hall and Gordon Hall looked at John Muller. Each gravely surveyed the grim weapons of the other. Then, with a stream of oaths, Muller crawled out and stamped angrily away. His last audible remark was a profane description of a "blankety-blank mouse-hunter."

Gordon laughed away the fright that the mouse had given him, then began to examine the papers and documents. As he thumbed through an old diary, he suddenly gave an exclamation of surprize and began to scrutinize it intently, his eyes shining with excitement. At last he had found a key to the mystery of the real whispering Thing!

The next morning Gordon Hall did a number of peculiar things. First, after obtaining permission from Muller, he removed the lower pane of glass from a window and substituted a square board having in the center a hole about the size of a dinner-plate and fitted on the inside with a hinged flap so that anything that pressed inward on the little swinging door would have easy entrance, but once inside could not escape.

Second, at about sundown he killed a shoat and collected a large pan of the warm blood, which he sprinkled freely about the grounds, especially about the window-trap. He even went so far as to paint the outside and inside of the trap-door with blood. The sickening odor of fresh blood pervaded the windless locality for a hundred feet in every direction.

Third, he put two live pigs in the room into which the "ghost trap" opened. Then he asked John Muller a question to which the other made response:

"I've got some sulfur candles; would they do?"

Gordon nodded.

LATE that night the Muller family was aroused to trembling, wet-browed wakefulness by hideous screaming squeals of terror and agony from the imprisoned pigs. Muller was at Gordon's door in an instant, ready for mortal combat with the devil himself if need be.

"Sounds like we had something in our trap, doesn't it?" remarked Gordon nervously.

Peal after peal of the blood-curdling sounds rang out through the stillness of the night. Muller was unnerved.

"Can't we stop that awful noise?" he inquired anxiously. "My wife and the girls are nearly scairt to death."

"All right, then; bring the sulfur candles and come on."

They halted at the door where the swamp-fiend was entrapped. The horrible sounds within were diminishing in volume but growing in their effectiveness. Muller trembled, and even Gordon, who knew exactly what was occurring within that mysterious chamber, grew a little pale.

"Now light the sulfur candles," said Gordon after a moment.

The elder man quickly complied. The acrid fumes burnt the nostrils of the two men before the last candle was lighted.

"Steady now!" exclaimed Gordon. With a deft, quick movement he opened the door a trifle, shoved the burning heap inside, then slammed the door shut. This operation took but a few seconds, yet they distinctly heard the sound of loud, disconnected whispers within.

In two minutes the sounds of agony were stilled by the deadly fumes.

"Can we look in yet?" asked Muller eagerly. He was as excited as a child.

"Not for three hours yet," announced Gorden firmly; "that whispering thing is going to be good and dead before ever I poke my nose in there."

"Tell me what it is, then, before I blow up and bust," demanded the old man.

"Very well. Let's go into the kitchen and sit down."

Old Muller leaned interestedly across the table. Gordon took from the pocket of his dressing-gown an old, yellow-paged diary. Presently he said:

"That old recluse you say lived here some time ago was none other than the illustrious David Dryden, who penetrated the unexplored regions of darkest Africa before any scientific expedition was ever organized. He was a peculiar, wild, romantic man and had a great liking for unusual pets, the stranger the better.

"I believe that the rest of the story can be told by him in his diary. The first is an entry written while he was camping in a still unexplored section of the Uma country. It reads:

" 'I saw one today and the natives certainly were right. I wouldn't believe their weird tales at first, but I do now—every word of them and more too. Lord! but it was a hideous creature! It was fully three feet in wing-spread and its nimbleness on the wing is too marvelous to be expressed in words; it must be seen before one can get an inkling of its amazing agility. Its flight is too rapid for the eye to follow—first it is here, then it is gone.

" 'Its color is a deep jet-black, and the natives tell me that it is the most to be dreaded of all the beasts of the jungle, for it has a superhuman cunning and an insatiable blood-lust. Unlike the other members of the vampire bat family, it goes straight to the neck, usually to the jugular vein for its ghoulish drink, while its blood-brothers are content to draw the blood from a sleeper's big toe or ear-lobe.'

"Two days later:

" 'Did I say blood-brothers? Well, I was wrong. This creature is no more akin to the rest of the bat family than the devil is kin to man! I saw another today, or perhaps the same one, for there surely can't be many such monsters in the world. I was close enough to get a good look at its head, and I am firmly convinced—nor am I a superstitious man—that the native legends, fantastic as they are, stopped far short of the real truth.

" 'Imagine the wrinkled, shrewd face of an old Hindoo magician, multiplied a thousandfold in keenness and evilness of expression; then reduce the mental image to one-third the size of your palm and you have a faint conception of the face on that bat.

" 'Again I am wrong. It is *not* a bat; it is what the natives claim it is —the embodied spirit of a very wicked old man who was in league with the devil in life and whom His Satanic Majesty rewarded after death with a pair of wings and superhuman knowledge. The cunning and understanding which that wrinkled little face showed when I suddenly came upon it, gorging itself with blood from a still-struggling wild hog, might indeed have been that of an old,

old man had it not been for one awful feature, and that is—the *mouth!*

" 'Perhaps the nearest approach to a simile I can give is the way a bloodthirsty little Savu monkey licks its thin black lips after committing murder on one of its fellows. This batfiend did the very same thing in a manner infinitely more horrible, for it *laughed;* laughed in a sort of whispering cackle and then *spit blood* at me!

" 'I am a hardened man of the world and I have witnessed horrible sights in the four corners of the globe, but never was I so completely unnerved as when that grinning little black imp tilted back and squirted a mouthful of warm blood at me.'

"A week later:

" 'I have seen him several times. I say *him* because nothing so absolutely fiendish could be of feminine gender, and I speak of him as a definite creature because I know it has been the same one every time—those red-flecked tiny black eyes of his show almost recognition. Each time he lets me come closer to him. His expressions are incredibly terrible because of the size of that hairy little black face—smaller than the face of the newest-born baby, smaller even than the tiniest of monkey-faces and still almost human—that is, all but the mouth with its thin black leathery lips and minute yellow teeth.'

"Next day:

" 'I have examined carefully the marks made by the teeth of my little black imp on the neck of a baby antelope and they are *precisely the same as those made by human teeth!*'

"Later:

" 'Even if I have to stay here in Africa twenty years to do it, I shall have that little black flying devil for a pet! Today I found him sitting—*sitting,* not hanging, mind you—on a low branch along the trail. I *know* that he was waiting for me to come that way.

" 'He allowed me to come up very close to him. His eyes were on an exact level with my own and we looked straight into each other's souls for a long, long time—possibly an hour, I don't know. He kept opening and closing that horrible little mouth and showing his teeth. I could see bits of clotted blood about his lips, and the creature has a very peculiar odor—an odor that I have smelled only once before and that was when I lifted the battened-down hatch of a vessel whose entire crew had been murdered by pirates and thrown down into the hold to rot. It is the grisly odor of death! . . .'

"Next day:

" 'That queer little evil face haunted me all night. I shall never rest till I have him.'

"Two weeks later:

" 'I have him! But no, this is wrong. Better say that he has me. He came to me of his own free will and in a manner both novel and weird.

" 'I awoke last night to find him *sitting on my chest* in the dark and staring down at me with his tiny inflamed eyes. I fed him fried meat and fruit at breakfast as he sat on my shoulder and made his uncanny whispering sound in my ear, but I have a gruesome fancy that his favorite delicacy is blood . . . fresh, warm life-blood . . . human blood, even.'

"Three days afterward:

" 'He is a queer, interesting little demon. He has acquired a peculiar habit of flying off at a distance, darting in at one with incredible speed, striking at your throat playfully, and is gone like a flash. The wind from his rapidly vibrating wings gives one the impression of cold breath.'

"Again:

" 'My little black fiend is not so playful after all, for today, in doing his familiar trick of darting up from behind and wheeling off, he bit me on

the side of the neck. I did not know it, though, till I felt the blood run down inside my collar . . . it is strange.'

"Later:

" 'That flying black devil's bite is painless—possibly he uses some hellish poison that numbs the nerves. But then, he barely grazes the skin, never making a deep wound. Even so, it is decidedly annoying and he seems to take special delight in tormenting me that way. I like him, though . . . he fascinates me. . . .'

"And then," said Gordon Hall, "for more than two years there are constant entries showing the gradual weakening of this bold adventurer's reason under the constant influence of this horrible little beast. One of the very last, written while he was living in this house and in a scarcely legible hand, is significant:

" 'He sits and looks at me all day long . . . he mimics my speech in his ghostly whispers . . . he's got me . . . he's got me! . . .' And it runs off into an undecipherable scrawl."

THE two men sat silently, each wrapped in his own thoughts. The first ghostly pink fingers of dawn crept in through the kitchen windows and fell upon the motionless figures at the table.

Finally Gordon spoke: "Do you know anything concerning this man's death?"

"Stories . . . only stories."

The two men nodded in mutual understanding. Gordon rose and shook as if to free himself from a spell.

"Well," he said slowly, "let's take a look at the thing. It ought to be pretty well fumigated by now."

When the charnel room had aired out thoroughly, they entered, though somewhat reluctantly.

Dryden had described the whispering Thing well as to general build, but by some odd coincidence (or was it the hand of Fate?) the huge bat had fallen into the burning sulfur in its last convulsive struggle, so that its entire upper half was a charred and formless mass. . . .

REMEMBRANCE

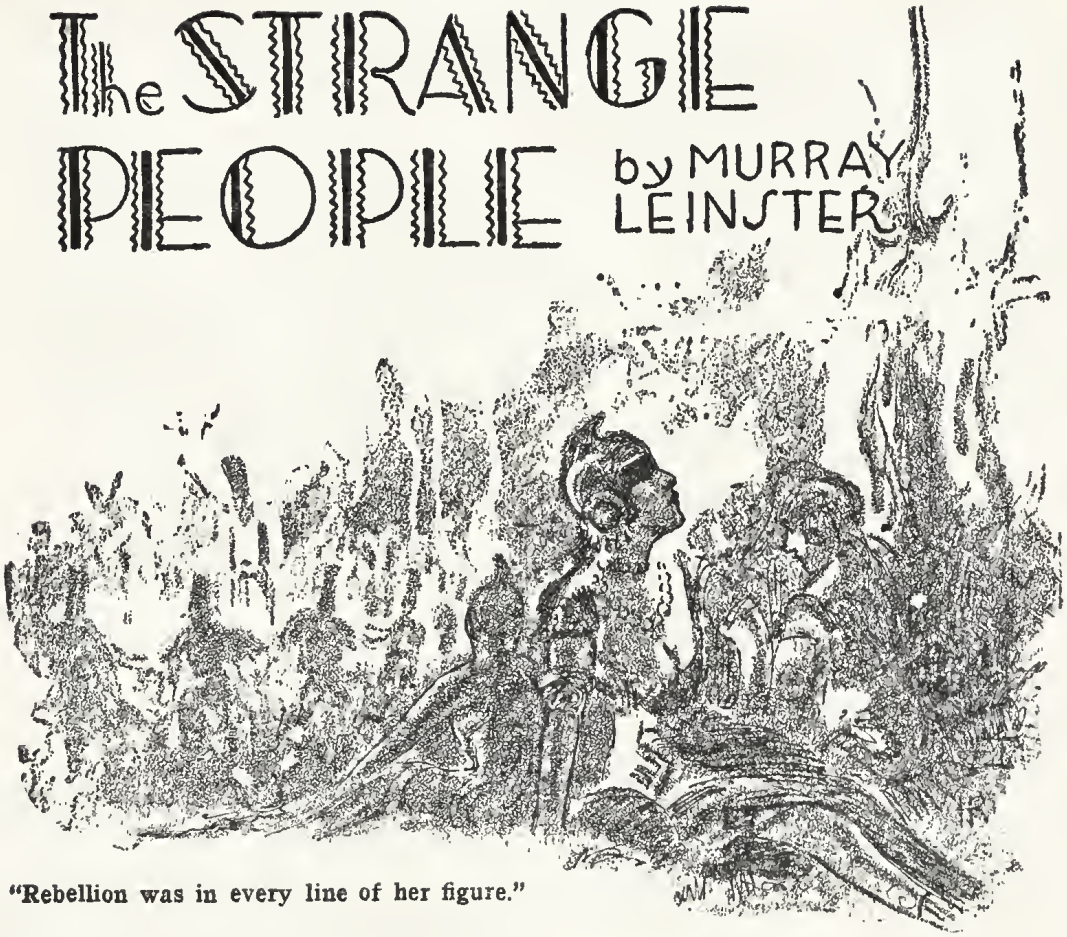
By ROBERT E. HOWARD

Eight thousand years ago a man I slew;
I lay in wait beside a sparkling rill
There in an upland valley green and still.
The white stream gurgled where the rushes grew;
The hills were veiled in dreamy hazes blue.
He came along the trail; with savage skill
My spear leaped like a snake to make my kill—
Leaped like a striking snake and pierced him through.

And still when blue haze dreams along the sky
And breezes bring the murmur of the sea,
A whisper thrills me where at ease I lie
Beneath the branches of some mountain tree;
He comes, fog-dim, the ghost that will not die,
And with accusing finger points at me.

The STRANGE PEOPLE

by MURRAY LEINSTER



"Rebellion was in every line of her figure."

The Story Thus Far

CUNNINGHAM and Gray go to the hills of New Hampshire to investigate a settlement of foreigners living there—a Strange People who have never seen a revolver, who strike from ambush by throwing sharp knives, who use strangely minted gold coins, and who keep aloof from everybody but themselves. A third man, who comes on the train with Cunningham and Gray, is found stabbed to death—the work of the Strange People. His brother, Vladimir, a sinister personage who is hated and regarded with terror by the Strange People, bribes the sheriff to keep Cunningham and Gray away from them. Cunningham, braving the flying knives of the Strange People to find Maria, one of their girls, rescues her from the sheriff. Maria brings her father, Stephan, to Cunningham's hotel room at night, and Stephan offers him a bag of shining gold-pieces in gratitude for his rescue of Maria, and asks him for advice as to what they shall do if the sheriff's men again try to capture men of the Strange People. Maria and her father slip out the window into the night. Cunningham hears a scream from Maria, a shot, and then Vladimir's purring voice gloating: "Ha! I got her!"

9

WITH a face like death Cunningham flung through the door. He sped down the steps with his heart, it seemed, stopped dead. There were sounds behind him and angry voices. Gray roaring at Vladimir, perhaps. But Cunningham could think of nothing but Maria.

The darkness smote his eyes like a blow. He stumbled and fell, then started up, crying out wildly.

A figure flitted up to him and put a soft hand over his mouth.

"Hush! Hush! I am safe," she whispered breathlessly. "He saw us about the sheriff, and fired. When he saw the sheriff fall he thought I was killed. Hush!"

This story began in WEIRD TALES for March

Cunningham's arms were about her and he kissed her in an ecstasy of relief.

"If he'd killed you!" he gasped. "If he'd killed you!"

Feet thundered indoors.

"I must go!" she whispered swiftly. "Please!"

She thrust him away and fled. Figures were waiting for her. She joined them, and all melted into nothingness beneath the trees. Then Gray stumbled outside with his hand in Vladimir's collar.

"Did he get her, Cunningham?" he cried shakenly. "If he did, I swear I'll fling him to them! Did he get her?"

"N-no," said Cunningham unevenly. He wiped the sweat off his forehead. "They're all gone. But——"

He knelt beside a dark bundle on the ground. A groan came to his ears, curiously muffled. He struck a match and found the sheriff securely trussed up and blinking at the match-flame with panic-stricken eyes.

"It's the sheriff," said Cunningham. "Maybe he's hurt."

But a babble of words that began before the gag was completely out of his mouth proved that the sheriff was only scared.

"Scared green, that's all," said Gray curtly. He shook Vladimir as a terrier might shake a rat. "You thought there were burglars?" he roared. "Try to get away with that again! You aimed for that girl!"

He tossed Vladimir to the ground, wrathfully.

"What girl?" purred Vladimir, as he scrambled to his feet. "Was there a girl? Are you in communication with my brother's murderers? And helping them to escape, too? I think you will go to jail, my friend."

But Gray went indoors with Cunningham, laughing.

When day came again Cunningham awoke with the conviction that something very pleasant had happened. He puzzled vaguely over it for a long time. And then he realized that it was a thing that had come to him just before he slept and had made his heart pump faster and more loudly. When he kissed Maria, she had not struggled nor been angry. On the contrary she had lifted her lips to his. And yet it had been no practised gesture, but the response of sheer instinct to one man only.

Cunningham's heart pounded a little and he got up with a serene contentment filling him. The route to romance had led him to happiness, he was sure.

He went downstairs and went out on the porch just to look up at the hills in which he would find her presently.

Vladimir was there, talking to a newcomer whose clothing and air confirmed the guess that he was a servant. But not an ordinary servant. His face was gross and stupid where Vladimir's was keen and cruel, but his features had no less of instinctive arroganee, though veiled by servility at the moment.

Vladimir's lips twitched into a snarl of hatred when he saw Cunningham, and he spoke to his servant. The man looked at Cunningham and scowled.

But Cunningham went indoors and had breakfast joyously. Then he started out to find Maria. Technically, as he reflected, he was compounding a felony in going to the Strange People to advise them how to keep out of the clutches of the law. Some of them had been involved in the killing of Vladimir's brother. But Cunningham beamed as he clambered up the steep hillside toward those mysterious thickets in which the Strange People lurked.

He had gone up perhaps half the way when he heard a faint rustling

behind him. He turned and shouted, thinking it a Stranger who would lead him to Stephan and Maria. But the rustling stopped. After a little while he went on, frowning. Later the rustling began again, somewhat nearer.

And then Cunningham heard whistles far off in the thickets. He heard other rustlings, as if men were moving swiftly through the undergrowth. These last sounds came from both sides of him. And then he came suddenly upon a young Stranger, running headlong toward him with his hand on his knife-hilt. The Stranger lifted his hand, unsmilingly, and ran on.

"Stephan," cried Cunningham; "where is he?"

The runner waved for Cunningham to continue as he was going and disappeared. The mysterious sounds continued, to right and to left. Then everything was abruptly very still.

Cunningham halted uncertainly. There was no trace of a path anywhere. The earth fell away sharply at one side but he had lost all sense of direction and did not know which way to go. Then he heard a thrashing below him as if someone were moving rapidly to cut him off.

Then there was the sound of panting near by and a small boy ran into view. He was a young Stranger, an aquiline-nosed, brown-eyed youngster with the legs of a race-horse.

"Hi, there," shouted Cunningham. "Where's Stephan?"

The boy gasped in relief and flew toward him. He thrust a bit of paper into Cunningham's hand and stood panting. Cunningham unrolled the scrap. On it was written in awkward letters:

"Someone follows to kill you. What will happen if we kill him?"

Cunningham started. Vladimir! He'd sent his servant to bushwhack him.

"They'll hang," he said grimly. "Tell them not to do it."

The boy nodded and started off.

"Wait!" called Cunningham. "Will they stop, since I've said so?"

"No," panted the boy. "They kill him already, I think."

He sped away, down toward the spot where the thrashing in the bushes sounded as if someone were trying to head Cunningham off. Cunningham clenched his fists and ran after him, determined to stop the foolishness.

The boy vanished suddenly. A figure started up.

"Wait! He lives yet! Wait!"

But Cunningham plunged on, not understanding. He only hoped to be in time to keep the Strangers from worse trouble than they were already in.

He burst through a thicket as warning cries sounded suddenly from all sides. And there was Vladimir's servant, staring stupidly about him in sudden fright at the sound of many voices. He was waist-high in brushwood. He swerved in panic at the sound of Cunningham's rush; then his face lighted with ferocity. With lightning quickness he had leveled a weapon and fired.

Cunningham's life was due to the fact that he had just tripped upon one of the innumerable small boulders strewn all over the slopes. He was falling as the bullet left the gun. He felt a searing pain in his left shoulder and crashed to the ground. Maria's voice shrilled in anguish.

"Dead! He is killed!"

The breath was knocked out of Cunningham, but he struggled to shout that he was all right, and was afraid to because the servant might pot at him again.

But then he heard half a dozen little metallic clangings, like the rattle of steel knife-blades on rock. The air was full of minor whirrings. And then he heard a sudden agonized bellow, like the roaring of a

wounded bull. And then a man screaming in horrible terror.

10

THERE was an air of formality, even of solemnity, in the gathering that faced Cunningham several hours later. A full two hundred Strangers were gathered in a little glade with slanting sides that formed a sort of amphitheater. Scouts were hidden in the woods beyond.

And Maria was there, with a white and stricken face which dashed Cunningham's joyous mood. Vladimir's servant was there too, ashen with dread and with a crude bandage about his arm where a throwing-knife had gone through his muscles as he tried to shoot Cunningham a second time. And Stephan, Maria's father, with his features worn and very weary.

Cunningham's shoulder had been dressed with crushed plantain-leaves. It was a tiny wound at best, hardly worth more than adhesive plaster. The bullet had barely nicked the skin, but Maria had wept over it as she bound it up.

Cunningham had felt that this was no time for common sense. He knew.

"I love you," he whispered as she bent down above him.

Brimming eyes met his for an instant.

"And I love you," she said with a queer soft fierceness. "I tell you, because I will never see you again. I love you!"

Cunningham felt a nameless dread. Stephan looked at him with dreary, resolute eyes. Maria's lips were pinched and bloodless. The Strangers regarded him with somber faces which were not unfriendly, but perturbingly sympathetic.

The gathering seemed to be something like a court. The women were gathered around the outer edges. The men stood about a rock on which Stephan had seated himself. Maria stood beside him. Cunningham found himself thrust gently forward.

"My friend," said Stephan wearily, "you find us gathered in council. Men say that you kissed my daughter, Maria."

Cunningham flushed, then stood straight.

"I did," he said evenly. "I ask your permission to marry her. Is it a crime for me to speak to her first and have her answer?"

Stephan shook his head wearily.

"No. No crime. And if you were one of us I would be glad. I think you are a man. I would join your hands myself. But you are not of our people."

"And who are you," demanded Cunningham, "that I am not fit to marry into?"

Stephan's voice was gentle and quaintly sympathetic.

"We have killed one man who knew the answer to that question," he said in the teasing soft unfamiliar accent that all the Strange People had. "We do not wish to kill you. And you are not unfit to marry my daughter. My daughter, or any of us, is not fit to marry you."

Cunningham shook his head.

"Let me be the judge of that."

Again Stephan made a gesture of negation.

"I think you are our friend," he said heavily. "We need a friend of those who are not like us. We may die because we have not such a friend. But you must come here no more. What says the council?"

A murmur went up about the amphitheater—a murmur of agreement. Cunningham whirled with clenched fists, expecting to see hostile faces. Instead, he saw friendly sorry ones.

"He must not come again," ran the murmur all about the crowd, in the faint and fascinating dialect that could not ever be identified. Men gazed at Cunningham with a per-

turbing sympathy while they banished him.

"But why?" demanded Cunningham fiercely. "I am your friend. I came hundreds of miles because the picture of Maria drew me. I refused offers of bribes. That man" —he pointed at Vladimir's servant— "tried to kill me only today, only because I am your friend. And what have I asked of you? If Maria tells me to go, I will go. But otherwise——"

Stephan put his hand on Cunningham's shoulder.

"You must not come again," he said quietly, "because Maria loves you also. Our people know such things quickly. She has said that she loves you. And we dare not let our women marry any man but one of ourselves. It is not that we hate you. We kept that man from killing you today, and we would have killed him if you said so. We will kill him for you now, if you tell us. But we dare not let one of our women marry you. So you must go."

"Will Maria tell me to go?" demanded Cunningham fiercely.

"Yes," said Maria, dry-lipped. "Go! Oh-h-h-h. Go, if you love me!"

She flung herself down upon the grass and sobbed. Some of the women murmured to each other and one or two moved forward and patted her shoulders comfortingly.

"She tells you to go," said Stephan wearily, "because we would have to kill you otherwise."

"But why? Why?" demanded Cunningham desperately.

Stephan rose from his seat and spread out his hands.

"Because no woman can ever keep a secret from the man she loves," he said wearily. "Some day she would tell you who we are. And then you would hate her and hate us. You would turn from her in horror, and you would denounce us. And we would die, swiftly. I am not happy, my son. Maria is my daughter and I would see her happy. But some day she would tell you who we are——"

Cunningham found himself being crowded gently away from Maria. He thrust himself fiercely against the pressure.

"But who are you?" he cried savagely. "Dammit, I don't care who you are! You're making her cry! Let me pass! Let me get——"

Stephan made a gesture. With the quickness of lightning Cunningham was seized by a hundred hands. He fought like a fiend against the innumerable grips that clasped his hands, his arms, his feet. But they were too many. He stopped his struggling, panting, and stared raging at Stephan.

"We give you a gift," said Stephan quietly. "Gold, my son. Much gold. Because if Vladimir tells our secrets we will all be killed, and he threatens to tell."

"I don't want your money," panted Cunningham savagely. "I want this silly mystery ended! I want Maria! I want——"

"Go in peace," said Stephan drearily.

Cunningham was laid upon the ground and tied fast. He struggled with every ounce of his strength, but in vain. The Strange People were too many and too resolute. But they seemed to take pains not to injure him. Indeed, when they put him in a litter and started off with him, there seemed to be a consistent effort by the bearers not to make him even uncomfortable.

Cunningham raged and tore at his bonds. Then he subsided into a savage silence. His lips were set into a grim firmness. Maria sobbing upon the grass . . . this abominable sympathy for him. . . .

The litter stopped. They took him out and cut his bonds. They offered him the bags of hammered gold-pieces again.

"I don't want them," he said with grim politeness. "I warn you, I'm coming back."

The leader of his escort was the young man who had first come out of the woods the first time Cunningham had seen the Strangers. He nodded gravely.

"I know," he said quietly. "I loved a girl not of our people, last year."

The litter-bearers had vanished into the woods. Cunningham snatched at a straw of hope. Perhaps here was a friend, or even a source of help.

"You understand," he said in a hurried, eager undertone. "Perhaps we can——"

"I gave her up," said the young Stranger quietly. "My people would have killed her if I had married her. You see, I might have told her."

He shrugged and pointed off through the woods.

"Coulters is there," he said gravely. "You would not take gold. I am sorry. But we think you are a man."

"I'm coming back," said Cunningham grimly.

The Stranger nodded and touched the hilt of his knife regretfully. He swung away and vanished in the underbrush.

Cunningham started toward Coulters. He knew they would be watching him. But perhaps a quarter of a mile on the way he stopped. He heard nothing and saw nothing. He slipped aside into the woods. And he had gone no more than a dozen paces before there was a little golden glitter in a ray of the dying sun. A knife had flashed past his face not two feet away. He turned back, raging.

Later he tried again. And again a warning knife swept across the path before him.

11

CUNNINGHAM had nearly reached the valley in which the hotel was built when he saw Gray below him, climbing sturdily up into the eyrie of the Strange People. Gray had a rifle slung over his shoulder.

"Gray!" shouted Cunningham.

Gray stared and abruptly sat down and mopped his forehead. He waited for Cunningham to reach him.

"Damn you, Cunningham," he said expressionlessly, "I like you, you know, for all I think we may be working against each other. And word's just gone in to Bendale that you've been killed by the Strangers. I was going up in hopes of getting to you before they wiped you out. And I already had cold chills down my back, thinking of the knife that nearly went into it yesterday."

"I'm safe enough," said Cunningham bitterly, "but I'm run out of the hills."

"Best thing, maybe," said Gray. "I'm hoping, but I think there'll be fighting there tonight. A posse's going to raid the Strangers after dark."

"*I'm* going to raid the hills tonight," said Cunningham fiercely, "and bring Maria away with me. I'll marry her in spite of all the Strangers in creation."

Gray grunted as he heaved to his feet. "You're a fool, Cunningham, and I'm another. If you go, I go too. I might learn something, anyhow."

Cunningham poured out the story of what had happened to him during the day, as they made their way down to the hotel. The sole objection to him lay in the fact that if Maria loved him, some day she would tell him who the Strangers were. And she did love him. Vladimir was the only outsider who knew their secret and he was threatening to disclose it, on what penalty Cunningham did not know.

"Maybe," said Gray quietly, "it would be a good thing if Vladimir did tell what he knows. But I suspect he won't, and for your sake I'd like to see you safely married to that girl you're so keen about before he did start to talk. I'm with you tonight, Cunningham."

"Better stay behind," said Cunningham curtly. "They'll be watching for me."

"No," said Gray quietly. "I sent some wires today and they may not be strong enough. Two of us might get her out where one wouldn't. And I'm thinking that if you do marry her and she does tell you the secret of the Strangers, it might avert a tragedy. I've done all I can without certain knowledge. Now, watch your tongue when we reach the hotel."

CUNNINGHAM ignored the raging astonishment with which Vladimir saw him, and was savagely amused at the worriment the man showed. Vladimir had sent his servant after Cunningham to kill him, and had been so certain of the attainment of that object that he had already broadcast a tale of Cunningham's death which laid it at the Strangers' door.

Cunningham waited for darkness. He was sure he had been watched back to the hotel. But after darkness was complete and before the moon rose he and Gray slipped secretly out of the house. They struck off down the valley, and when the monstrous ball of the full moon floated over the hills to the east, they made their way beneath thick trees, lest the moonlight show them to hidden watchers. They had gone perhaps a mile when Gray pointed suddenly upward.

Far, far up, where a tree-grown peak ended in a bald and rocky knob, fires were burning. Plainly visible in the clear night air, it could be seen that there were many fires and many people about them. Through the stillness, too, there came half-determinate sounds which might have been singing, or chanting, or some long-continued musical wailing.

The moon was shining down upon the valley, with its tidy New England farmhouses—upon Coulters, where uncomfortable rural police officers tried to convince themselves that they would be quite safe in dealing with the Strange People—upon Bendale, with its electric lights and once-a-week motion picture theater. And the same moonlight struck upon a ring of fires high up in the mountains where the Strangers moved and crouched. Old women gave voice to the shrill lament that was floating thinly through the air.

Gray glanced once at Cunningham's face and if he had been about to speak, he refrained. Cunningham was making grimly for the hills.

The woods were dark. The two men crept through long tunnels of blackness, where little speckles of moonlight filtered through unexpectedly and painted the tree-trunks in leopard-spots. The valley had been calm, but as they climbed, the wind began to roar over their heads, rushing among the tree-branches with a growling sound. That noise masked the sound of their movements. Once they saw one of the Strangers cross a patch of clear moonlight before them. He was moving softly, listening as he half trotted, half walked.

"Sentry," whispered Gray.

Cunningham said nothing. They went on, and heard voices murmuring before them in a foreign tongue. They halted and swung to the right. Perhaps two hundred yards on they tried again to continue up toward the heights. A crashing in the underbrush made them freeze. A Stranger trotted within five paces of them, peering about him cautiously.

Only their immobility saved them from detection.

When he had gone they made for the spot from which he had come. It was breathless work because at any instant a liquid little glitter in the moonlight—a throwing-knife—might be the only herald of a silent and desperate attack.

But they made their way on and upward. It seemed as if they had passed through the ring of sentries. The trees grew thinner. The wind roared more loudly above their heads. And suddenly they saw the glow of many fires before them.

If they had gone carefully before, now they moved with infinite pains to make no noise. A single voice was chanting above the wind's screaming. Gray listened and shook his head.

"I thought I knew most languages by the sound of them," he whispered, "or could guess at the family anyhow. I worked on Ellis Island once. But I never heard that one."

They went down on their hands and knees for the last hundred yards. Then they could see. And Cunningham stared with wide eyes, while Gray swore in whispers, shaking with excitement.

There were a dozen huge bonfires placed in a monster circle twenty yards across. They roared fiercely as the flames licked at the great logs they fed upon. And the wind was sweeping up from the valley and roaring through them and around them and among them.

The rushing of the wind and the roaring of the fires made a steady, throbbing note that was queerly hypnotic. The flames cast a lurid light all around, upon the trees, and the rocks, and the Strange People, and the vast empty spaces where the earth fell away precipitously.

A single aged man chanted in the center of the twelve huge beacons. He was clad in a strange, barbaric fashion such as Cunningham had never seen before. And the Strange People had clasped hands in a great circle that went all about the blazes, and as the old man chanted they trotted steadily around and around without a pause or sound.

The old man halted his chant and cried a single sentence in that unknown tongue. From the men in the circle came a booming shout, as they sped with gathering speed about the flames. Again he cried out, and again the booming, resonant shout came from the men.

"The sunwise turn," panted Gray. "*Widdershins!* It's magic, Cunningham, magic! In New Hampshire, in these days!"

But Cunningham was thinking of no such things as magic, white or black. He was searching among the running figures for Maria. But he did not see her. The barbaric garb of the Strangers confused his eyes. That costume was rich and splendid and strange and utterly beyond belief in any group of people only eight miles from a New England mill-town with an accommodation train once a day.

"Magic!" cried Gray again in a whisper. "Cunningham, nobody'll believe it! They won't, they daren't believe it! It's impossible!"

But Cunningham was lifting himself up to search fiercely for a sight of the girl he had found at the end of the route to romance and to high adventure. Here were strange sights that matched any of the imaginative novels on which aforetime he had fed his hunger for romance. Here was a scene such as he had imagined in the midst of posting ledgers and day-books in a stuffy office on Canal Street. And Cunningham did not notice it at all, because he was no longer concerned with adventure. He had found that. He was fiercely resolved now to find the girl who loved him and whose love had been forbidden by the laws of the strange folk of the hills.

He saw her. Not in the circle. She was crouched down on the grass amid a group of women. Rebellion was in every line of her figure. Cunningham loosened his revolver. It was madness, but——

A shout rang out sharply. And the running line of men broke and milled. Cunningham saw a hundred hands flash to as many knife-hilts. He saw the sheriff and four frightened-looking constables come plunging out of the brushwood, shouting something inane about halting in the name of the law. There was a shout and a scream, and then a man's voice raised itself in a wild yell of command and entreaty. Cunningham's own name was blended in a sentence in that unintelligible language.

The Strangers darted for the encircling woods. The women vanished, Maria among them. There was only a blank space in the open lighted by monster flames, and the sheriff and two constables struggling with a single figure of the Strangers.

"Go git 'em!" roared the sheriff, holding fast to the captive. "Git 'em! They're scared. Ketch as many as ye kin!"

Cunningham felt Gray holding him down in an iron grasp.

"Don't be a fool!" rasped Gray in a whisper. "It's too late! The Strangers got away, all but one."

The other men were racing about here and there. They found nothing but a bit of cloth here, and a woman's embroidered cap there, left behind in the sudden flight.

The struggle in the open space ceased abruptly. The sheriff triumphantly called to the others.

"I got one now! Dun't be scared! We got a hostage!" He reared up and yelled to the surrounding forest: "Dun't ye try any o' your knife-throwin' tricks! This feller we got, if we dun't get down safe, he dun't neither! Dun't ye try any rescuin'!"

He bent down to jerk his prisoner upright. And Cunningham heard him gasp. He chattered in sudden stillness and the others huddled about him.

"Dead!" gasped one of them.

"He stabbed hisself, I tell ye," shrilled the sheriff. "He stuck his own knife in hisself!"

The five ungainly figures stared at each other, there amidst the roaring, deserted bonfires. One of them began to whimper suddenly.

"They—they'll be throwin' their knives all the way down to the valley!" he gasped. "They'll be hidin' behind trees an' a-stabbin' at us."

The sheriff's teeth began to chatter. The others clutched their weapons and gazed affrightedly at the woods encircling them.

"We—we got to try it," gulped the sheriff, shivering. "We got to! Else they'll get guns an' kill us here. If—if ye see anything movin', shoot it! Dun't wait! If ye see anything, shoot. . . ."

With staring, panic-stricken eyes, they made for the woods. Cunningham heard them crashing through the undergrowth in the darkness, whimpering and gasping in terror at every fancied sound.

They left behind them nothing but twelve great fires that began slowly to burn low, and a crumpled figure in barbaric finery lying with his face upturned toward the sky. It was the young Stranger who only that afternoon had told Cunningham of the girl he had loved and lost because she was not of the Strange People. He had stabbed himself when captured, rather than be taken out of the hills and forced to tell the secret of the Strangers.

12

BY MORNING the outside valleys were up in arms. One man—the foreigner of the train—had been killed by the Strange People, and

a servant of Vladimir's had disappeared among them. And witchcraft had been believed in not too long ago in those parts. The wild ceremony of the Strangers among their blazing fires was told and retold, and with one known killing to their discredit and the long-smoldering hatred they had inspired, at the end it was related as devil-worship undiluted. Something out of Scripture came to be put in it and men told each other—and firmly believed—that children were being kidnaped and sacrificed to the Moloch out of the Old Testament. The single Stranger who had been killed became another human sacrifice, confusingly intermingled with the other and more horrible tale, and there was no doubt in the mind of any of the local farmers that the Strangers planned unspeakable things to all not of their own kind.

Had any Stranger been seen without the hills, he would have been mobbed by an hysterical populace. Sober, God-fearing men huddled their families together and stood guard over them. Women watched their children with their husbands' shotguns in their hands. Wilder and ever wilder rumors sped with lightning speed from homestead to homestead in the valleys.

And all this was done without malice. The native-born people had distrusted the Strange People because they were strange. They disliked them because they were aloof. And they came to hate them because they were mysterious. It is always dangerous to be a mystery. The story of what the sheriff and his four constables had seen among the fires on the heights became enlarged to a tale of unspeakable things. It would have required no more than a leader with a loud voice to mobilize a mob of farmers who would have invaded the hills with pitchforks and shotguns to wipe out the Strange People entirely.

They did not fear the Strangers as witches, but as human beings. They feared them as possible kidnapers of children to be killed in the inhuman orgies the fire-ceremony had become in the telling. They had no evidence of such crimes committed by the Strangers. But there is no evidence of kidnaping against the gipsies, yet many people suspect them of the same crime. Had any man spoken the truth about the Strangers, he would have been suspected of horrible designs—of being in sympathy with them. And because of the totally false tales that sprang up like magic about their name, to be suspected of sympathy with the Strangers was to court death.

Cunningham's rage grew. Gray shrugged and rode furiously to Bendale to send more telegrams. Vladimir went about softly, purring to himself, and passed out bribes lavishly to those who could be bribed, and told lies to those who preferred to be suborned in that way.

He was holding back the plans of mobbing. The sheriff, acting on his orders, broke up every group of wild-talking men as soon as it formed. But Vladimir held the Strange People in the hollow of his palm. Half a dozen murmured words, and the men who had taken his lavished money would stand aside and let the simmering terror of the countryside burst out into the frenzy of a mob. And then the hills would be invaded by Christian men who would ferret out the Strangers and kill them one by one in the firm belief that they were exterminating the agents of Satan and the killers of innumerable children.

It did not matter that Vladimir's hold was based on lies. The lies were much more exciting than the truth. The truth was dull and bare. The Strangers had been dancing about the fires. The constables had rushed out and they had fled, with-

out attempting to resist or harm their attackers. One of them had stabbed himself when caught. And the truth was mysterious enough, and inexplicable enough, but it did not compare with the highly colored tales of human sacrifice and heathen orgies that had been embroidered upon the original tale.

CUNNINGHAM was inevitably in the thick of all these rumors. Men came rushing with news. A Stranger had been seen lurking about where children were playing. He was instantly suspected of planning to kidnap one of them. He had been shot at and now was being chased by dogs. A Stranger had stopped a doctor in the road and asked for bandaging for an injured arm. He had been shot by one of the constables the night before. Other Strangers guarded him lest the doctor try to arrest him while he dressed the wound.

That was in the morning. As the day went on the reports became more horrible. It became clear that if any Stranger showed his face he would be shot at as if he were a mad dog.

Word came from one place. Two Strangers had been seen and fired on. They vanished, leaving a trail of blood. From another place came another report. An old Strange woman had come out of the hills, to beg for medicines for their wounded. Dogs were set on her as she screamed her errand. She fled, and knives came hurtling from the brushwood, killing or wounding the dogs that were in pursuit.

Gray had promised much. With a drawn and anxious face he had told Cunningham that this day help must come. His telegrams must have produced results. They must have had some effect! He had long since dropped his pretense that his only mission in the hills was the study of the Strange People's dialect. He was off in Bendale, struggling with a telephone, pleading with a long-distance operator to give him a connection to somewhere — anywhere outside.

Noon came and passed. The afternoon waned, with the inhabitants of the valley growing more and more hysterical in their hatred of the Strange People, and more and more detailed and convinced about the horrors they ascribed to them. The wholly imaginary menace of the Strangers was making it more and more difficult to prevent the formation of a mob. Men raved, wanting to protect their children by wiping out the hill folk. Women grew hysterical, demanding their annihilation.

Cunningham went to Vladimir. Vladimir blinked at him and licked his lips.

"Your servant is a prisoner among the Strange People," said Cunningham, coldly. "I'm authorized to say he'll be killed if a mob enters the hills."

Vladimir smiled, and all his cruelty showed when he smiled.

"How are you authorized to speak for them?"

"Let that go," said Cunningham grimly. "He's alive and safe, but he won't be if that mob goes in."

The sheriff came in hurriedly.

"Mr. Vladimir——" he began.

Cunningham cut into his report with some sharpness.

"Sheriff, the Strange People are holding Vladimir's servant prisoner, as a hostage. They'll kill him if you raid the hills again."

Vladimir laughed.

"He is vastly mistaken, sheriff. I had a servant here, it is true. But I sent him to Boston, on a mission. And I had word from him yesterday that he was quite safe and attending to my orders."

He blinked at Cunningham and moved close to him.

"Fool," he murmured gently, so that the sheriff could not hear, "do you think his life counts any more than yours?"

The sheriff glared at Cunningham balefully.

"Tryin' to scare me, eh?" he rumbled. "I got enough on you to arrest you. You're in thick with them Strangers, you are. I reckon jail's the best place for you. You won't get no chance to talk about bribes there."

Cunningham felt himself growing white with fury. His threat to Vladimir had been a bluff, and Vladimir had shown complete indifference to the fate of the man he had sent to murder Cunningham. But there was one thing he would not be indifferent to.

"You try to arrest me," he said softly to the sheriff, "and I'll blow your head off. And as for you, Vladimir"—he made his tone as convincing as he could—"I just tell you that you'd better call that mob off or I'll tell them who the Strangers are and where they came from!"

Vladimir's eyes flamed close to madness, while his cheeks went ashen.

"So they told you!" he purred. "Sheriff, go to the door. I wish to speak to this man privately."

The sheriff, rumbling, moved away.

"My friend," murmured Vladimir softly, "now I shall have to kill you. Not myself, of course, because that would be illegal. And dangerous. But I give you news. Today, while you and Gray were outside, a little note was tossed into your window. I heard the breaking glass and found it. It was from a girl, who signed, 'Maria.' She said that she loved you and would wait for you at a certain spot to flee with you."

Cunningham's heart stopped. Vladimir laughed at his expression.

"Oh, she was met," murmured Vladimir. "She was met—and arrested. She is held fast. And tonight a story will go about and the women of the neighborhood will learn where she is. She is in the hotel here, safely bound. With such a tale as will be spread about, do you not think the women will pull down the whole hotel to tear her in bits? Now do you go and tell the secret of the Strangers! No one will believe you. But you believe me!"

He tossed a scrap of paper to Cunningham. And Cunningham knew that the story was true.

"Now," said Vladimir, purring, "I shall give orders that you be arrested. If you are taken, she will be torn to bits. And that is how I kill you, my friend. That is how I kill you! For I do not want anyone to live who will remember or believe the secret of the Strangers."

13

THEN the news took a definitely dangerous turn. A farmer who was hastening to Coulters was stopped by a band of Strangers. They had taken his shotgun and shells from him, contemptuously tossing him half a dozen of the square lumps of gold. The gold would pay for the gun ten times over, but men raged. Another man came in foaming at the mouth, with a similar tale. He had seen a Stranger and raised his gun to fire as at a wild beast. A knife had flicked at him and gone through the fleshy part of his arm. They took his gun and shells, leaving gold to pay for them.

No one saw anything odd in firing on the Strangers at sight. But everyone grew hysterically excited at the thought of the Strangers taking guns with which to shoot back. Then a man rode up on a lathered horse, shouting hoarsely that twenty Strangers had raided a country store some six miles away. They had appeared suddenly. When they left

they took half a dozen shotguns—the whole stock—three rifles, and all the ammunition in the store. They left gold to pay for the lot.

Cunningham heard all this as one would hear outside sounds during a nightmare. He was like a madman. He would have gone rushing through the place in search of Maria but that it was still broad daylight and there were twenty or more armed men in the place, all mad with excitement and fury. As it was, Cunningham was in a cold, clear-headed rage. He went to his own room and packed his pockets with cartridges.

Vladimir was right in one respect. The natives were in no mood to listen to the truth. They would believe nothing that he told them. He was suspect, in any event. They classed him with the Strangers, and they classed the Strangers with the beasts. Fighting such men was not fighting law and order. The sheriff was bribed. The rest were wild with rage and terror. They did not know they were catspaws for Vladimir. Even the sheriff probably knew but little of Vladimir's plans.

He went into Gray's room and searched for a possible second revolver. As he pawed grimly among Gray's possessions he heard the sheriff speaking, through a partition. Gray's room was next to that occupied by Vladimir, and Cunningham abruptly realized how Gray had obtained much information.

"I'm doin' my best to hold 'em," the sheriff was saying anxiously, "but it's gettin' to be a tough job. I'd better send for militia——"

"Fool!" snarled Vladimir. "What do I give you money for? There will be no fighting! We will march into the hills. We will pen up these folk—surround them. If your mob kills a few, what harm? Afterward you shall pick out your murderers—as many as you choose! They will confess to anything you choose, after I have spoken to them. And then the rest of the Strangers will move away. They will go away forever, with me! I will take them!"

"But it looks bad——"

"They will lick my boots," rasped Vladimir. "They will crawl upon their knees and beg me for mercy. And I will give you four men to hang. They will confess to their crime. And I will take the rest away."

Cunningham nodded grimly. At least this clarified the situation a little. Vladimir was afraid of the Strangers' secret becoming known. He only wanted to get them away. If he could find Maria and she would tell him, and Gray brought the help he had promised——

Cunningham was not thinking for himself, except as his liberty meant safety for Maria, and secondarily for the Strange People. But he would have to go into every room in the hotel filled with armed and suspicious men. It was lucky he had two guns. There would surely be shooting. There would probably be a bullet or two for him.

"Now send your deputies to arrest Cunningham," snapped Vladimir on the other side of the wall. "Tell them to shoot him if he resists. He was teaching the Strangers to shoot and advising them to resist arrest. That is enough."

"I'll send a bunch," whined the sheriff uneasily. "He's a desp'rit character. Talkin' about accusin' me of takin' bribes. . . ."

"You'll be rich for life when this is over," Vladimir purred. "Remember that!"

THE door closed behind the sheriff. Cunningham grinned savagely. He was to have no chance at all. They had been sent to arrest him, after Vladimir had given him news that would ensure his resisting. He would resist, right enough! And then a wild and utterly reckless

scheme sprang full-bodied into Cunningham's head.

He swung the door to—and heard a squeaking on the other side of the partition as if a closet door had been opened. And then Vladimir spoke purringly in that unknown language of the Strangers!

There could be but one person to whom he would be speaking at such a time and in that language. Cunningham's heart leaped violently. He heard voices downstairs—men coming up to arrest him in his own room.

He darted out in the hall and plunged into Vladimir's room, a ready revolver upraised. Vladimir whirled and stared into its muzzle with ashen cheeks. For once there was no purred jibe upon his lips, because Cunningham's face was the face of a killer after he had seen Maria in the clothes-closet, bound hand and foot and with a gag in her mouth. She had been staring at Vladimir in horror, but her eyes flamed at sight of Cunningham.

For the fraction of a second they gazed at each other. Then her eyes signaled frantic warning. Cunningham whirled and dashed his revolver blindly in Vladimir's face as his hand came up with an automatic. Vladimir stumbled and crashed backward to the floor.

Footsteps crashed on the steps outside. Nearly all the men in the hotel, it seemed, were coming up in a body to see to the arrest of Cunningham. But he paid no attention. He was ripping away at the gag and tearing loose the bonds that held Maria fast.

"Vladimir told me you'd been captured," he panted, "and said you'd be mobbed tonight. Now he's sent a gang to arrest me, knowing I'd resist and get myself killed. We've got to make a break for it. All right?"

Maria's eyes were like stars. Cunningham kissed her suddenly.

"My God!" he laughed shakily. "One can think of love-making even at a time like this! Listen!"

The crowd on the stairs had reached the top. They crowded down the hall before Cunningham's own door. There they hesitated, shuffling uneasily. At last a voice called loudly, "Open in the name of the law!"

There was no answer from Cunningham's empty room. They waited breathlessly. A man pounded cautiously on the panel of the door.

"Open in th' name of th' law!"

Still silence.

"M-maybe he j-jumped outer th' window," suggested someone uneasily.

"R-rush him," urged a man safely in the rear.

Cunningham and Maria, two rooms away, heard a hand laid on the other room's door. They heard it fling open with a crash and the scuttling of feet as the mob of hastily deputized men jumped to one side to be out of the way of possible bullets. Dead silence greeted them. And suddenly they crowded into the deserted place.

"Now!" said Cunningham sharply.

He darted out, Maria running with him. She fled to the stairs and down them, Cunningham two steps in the rear. A single straggler of the men who were to have arrested him remained in the hall. He turned his head stupidly at sound of their rush. His mouth dropped open, but before his shout they were half-way to the ground floor.

Cunningham stopped at the foot of the stairs to fire three times up at the ceiling of the second floor. A cloud of smoke filled the hall, and heads that had craned over the balustrade withdrew in a panic. A dozen paces more and the fugitives were out in the roadway. Half a dozen horses were tethered there and Cunningham tore loose the reins and

leaped on one. Maria sprang up lightly behind him and he kicked the animal madly with his heels. It sprang into a panic-stricken gallop and was off down the road.

They were nearly out of sight before the first of their pursuers had run out into the road behind them. Then half a dozen puffs of smoke showed that they were fired on, but an instant later they were out of sight around a bend in the road.

14

CUNNINGHAM laughed a little as the horse's hoofs clattered beneath and the white road shot past. Maria was clinging to his shoulders.

"Safe so far," he told her, "but now we have to take to the woods. The hand of every man is against us, Maria. Do you trust me to get you away?"

"Anywhere," she said softly. "You know I do."

A motorcar came racing toward them over the rough road. It was not fit going for an automobile and the car swayed and lurched from side to side with dangerous abandon. Cunningham swerved his horse out of the road. The car slowed and stopped with a screaming of brakes. Cunningham's hand fell to his weapon.

Gray tumbled out of the cloud of dust that enveloped the machine.

"Cunningham," he panted. "Just found—Vladimir had bribed the telegraph operator. None of my wires got through. Found an amateur radio fan and he sent my message. Relay League. Help's coming. By airplane. Bendale is a town of lunatics. Wild yarns have gone into it and a mob is coming out to wipe out the Strangers. They think they've been burning children. You've got to get up to the Strangers. Tell 'em about planes. Tell them to get going and keep moving or there'll be a massacre. Help's coming as fast as it can get here. But for God's sake keep them away from the mob. They'll be wiped out!"

"I'm going to get Maria away," said Cunningham defiantly. "I'm going to get her out of this state and marry her. The Strangers and anybody else can go to the devil!"

Gray, choking upon the dust he had swallowed, gasped out a raging order.

"Don't be a fool!" he cried. "Look at her clothes! She's in the Strangers' costume! You'll be spotted if you're seen, and three townships are raving crazy! A dog couldn't get away from here like that! You'll be shot at by every damned fool in three counties and arrested anywhere else you go! Get up in the hills and keep the Strangers moving! The planes may not get here until dark, and they can't land in the hills in the darkness. I'm going to meet them at Hatton Junction and guide them here. You get up in the hills and keep the Strangers moving or there'll be a massacre! That mob will even wipe out the children! Everybody's crazy! You've got to save them, Cunningham! You've got to!"

And Cunningham knew that he was telling the truth. The Strange People might not fight, if he begged them not to. To desert them would mean a tragedy in the hills. The people about them were no more accountable than so many lunatics. But to ride among the Strange People with Maria upon his saddle! . . . They would know that she loved him, and they would believe that she had told him their secret. They would never let him leave the hills again alive.

It was death either way, and probably for them both. He looked at Maria and found her eyes misty with tears.

"Let me go," she said suddenly, with a sob in her throat. "You go away. I will go up to my people

and tell them what this man has said. Without me, you can escape. My people will tell me to die, but you will not know who we are and you will never hate me or despise me. . . ."

Cunningham caught her hand and laughed shortly.

"No, my dear," he said grimly. "We won't be separated. It's a choice between being shot like mad dogs or facing your people. We'll ride up into the hills. We'll tell your people that help is coming to hold off the mob. Their lives will be safe and their secret too, for all of me. And if we die, it will be decently. I've two guns for the pair of us."

He found himself laughing as he waved his hand at Gray and drove his horse at the steep slopes that led upward to the tree-clad heights in which the Strangers lurked.

As the trees closed over their heads he smiled again and swung Maria before him. He gave the horse its head and the animal dropped to a plodding walk. And they talked softly. They had but a little while to be alone and they had never talked the tender foolishness that lovers know. Now they were riding at a snail's pace upward to the stern vengeance of the Strangers upon a woman of their number who had loved outside the clan.

They spoke in whispers, not to avoid detection but because there are some things that are too tender to be spoken aloud. And their eyes spoke other things for which nobody has ever found words. Maria's arm was about Cunningham's neck and her lips were never far from his own and it seemed as if all trouble and care were very far away, though they were riding up to death.

The trees rustled above them. Birds sang all about them. And they rode through an age-old forest upon a weary horse, a scarecrow of a man with a bandaged shoulder and a girl in barbaric finery, gazing at him with tear-misted eyes. And as they rode they talked softly, and now and then they smiled, and in every speech and glance and gesture there was an aching happiness and a wistful regret.

All this was very foolish, but it was the proper and authentic conclusion for a man who has followed the route to romance and adventure to its appointed ending.

But there came a little rustling in the undergrowth beside them as they went on climbing up to the heights. Then other rustlings. Far away there was a whistle as if someone signaled. And very suddenly an arm reached out from the thick brushwood and seized the horse's bridle. One of the Strangers stepped into view and gazed steadily up into the muzzle of Cunningham's revolver.

From all about them men materialized as if by magic. No man laid a hand on any weapon. They looked at the pair upon the horse gravely, without rancor but with infinite resolution.

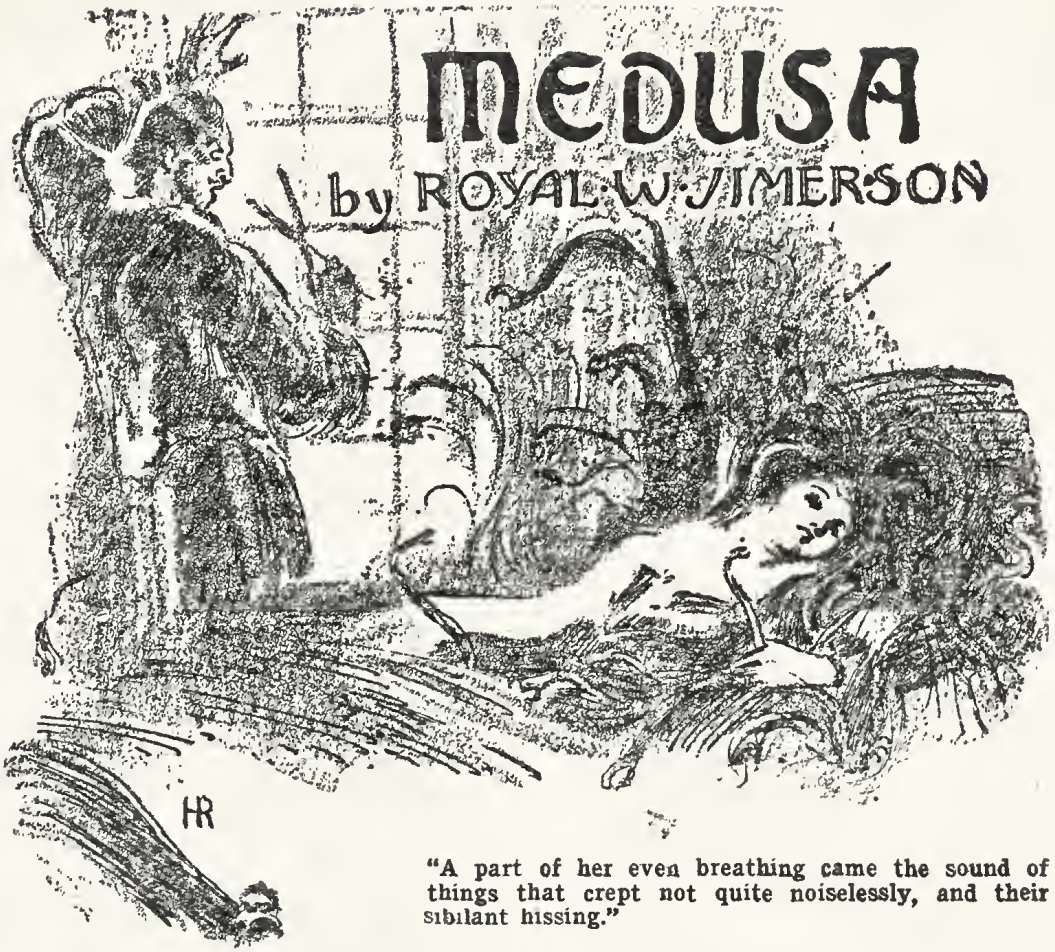
And Stephan, Maria's father, came into view and regarded them with weary, hopeless eyes.

"Why did you come back?" he asked in a queer and resolute despair. "You knew what we would have to do. Why did you come back?"

The dramatic revelation of who the Strangers are and the hideous secret they have guarded with their lives will be narrated in the exciting chapters that bring this story to a conclusion in next month's issue.

MEDUSA

by ROYAL W. JIMERSON



"A part of her even breathing came the sound of things that crept not quite noiselessly, and their sibilant hissing."

IN DEFIANCE of fashion and her husband, Marian Bardwell nursed the yard-long, tropical luxuriance of her blue-black hair, stedfastly refusing to have it bobbed. No coiffeuse ever profaned its twining, serpentine profusion; no hands but her own were equal to the ritual of the 4 o'clock brushing that Marian performed with the dreamy-eyed reverence of a devotee who with mystic, ceremonious pass and gesture invokes the deity of some dusky shrine.

Before the dressing-table of her boudoir she sat, confronted by boxes of powders, pots of rouge, lotions and rarely blended essences; but these she ignored, having selected from a bewildering assortment of brushes her favorite, amber-handled, amber-backed, and cunningly carved in the nude, gracious curves of a Medusa whose serpentine tresses crept about and enclosed the oval that the Gorgon's upraised, slender arms supported.

Bardwell entered through the door connecting his room with Marian's.

"At it again! That damned hair!"

Bardwell shrugged his shoulders, grimaced at the thought of his wife's oblivion to his presence, then with an effort erased the somber frown that lined his lean, handsome features. He turned as if to leave, but paused, fascinated by that ceremonial brushing. The lustrous amber disk and its golden bristles gleamed and stirred like a gigantic beetle as she moved it slowly through the abysmal darkness of her hair. Her movements were rhythmic, supple, richly rounded; in

some unbelievable way her arm glided in a series of convolutions whose sinister grace made Bardwell shudder.

"That damned hair!" he repeated as he wrenched himself from the fascination of the ritual. And then: "Why don't you cut out all this nonsense and be human? Have your hair bobbed, buy up a bunch of new clothes, and we'll take a second honeymoon in Florida next month. We can afford it now, you know. And . . . we both need a change of scene," concluded Bardwell irrelevantly, knowing well that no change of scene could ever veil the aura of age-old evil that clung to the serpentine blackness of Marian's hair.

The chilly, repellent opulence of that somberly gleaming, iridescent coiffure haunted Bardwell, distracting his hours of waking and making his sleep a confusion of reptilian nightmares. The living, creeping coldness of those profuse tresses had in four years frozen an indefinable terror into his soul. An age-old horror nightly twined itself on Marian's pillow, separating them as might a limitless expanse of steaming, evil-haunted jungle.

"I'll never cut my hair," declared Marian with the passionless certitude of one pronouncing a law of nature. "Never again mention such a thing!"

Then she set aside her mirror and, after a final lingering reverent caress with the Medusa-handled brush, turned in her low chair to face Bardwell.

"Win, can't you take me as I am and be content to leave me as I am? You knew when you married me that there was something strange about me. I loved you, Win. Still do. Always shall. But I can't——"

"But you must!" flared Bardwell.

"No, I can not. Please don't be unkind to me," she pleaded. "All my life I've been different from other women. I worried my mother into her grave——"

"And now I'm in line," despaired Bardwell. "Marian——"

But even as she spoke, the animation faded from the exquisite oval of her face; she picked up the amber brush and again languidly stroked the coiling darkness that hung heavily on her white shoulders, spelling the wordless syllable of an everlasting prayer to the deity Bardwell hated and—*feared.*

"We'll take a second honeymoon in Florida," he had said. But he knew that it was no honeymoon but rather the fantastic hope that the warmth and unfailing sunlight of Florida might sear to extinction the living, chilly blackness before whose shrine Marian worshiped with measured, languid passes of an amber brush.

Drawn by a compelling sorcery, attracted in spite of himself, Bardwell drew closer, catching the sound of the brush that caressed Marian's waist-long hair, strands that blended and writhed, curled and intertwined independently of the golden bristles. He gently laid his fingers on a strand, hoping against hope . . . shivered . . . muttered . . . then turned and strode from the room.

Marian's movements became slower, more and more torpid, more languid, until finally, succumbing to the tropical, overheated atmosphere of her Riverside Drive boudoir, she carefully placed the amber brush on the table and, mustering her ebbing vitality, picked her way to bed.

The black, tentacular strands disposed themselves about the pillow, dark serpents basking on silver-white sand. . . .

2

SARASOTA, rather than glittering Miami or Palm Beach, appealed to Bardwell as being the most suitable field on which to make his final play against that which hung over him like the mantle of an oppressive doom.

And there he sought to inveigle Marian into play and festivity, to entice her from the somnolent ritual of everlasting hair-combing, to revive the gayety of their earlier days. He succeeded, for a few days; but on the first morning of the second week he found Marian before her mirror, amber Medusa in hand, and lost in the impenetrable sorcery that had made his life a vortex of madness.

That same afternoon found her asleep at the edge of a steaming lagoon, her hair spread fanwise about her, basking in that fierce damp heat.

"Now, by the Lord, this is too much!" he snarled, as he seized her by the hand, thrust her into their car, and carried her, still dazed and half asleep, back to their hotel. Once in the privacy of their suite, he continued, "This damned nonsense must stop! And I'll stop it, here and now!"

Bardwell seized a pair of scissors and, stifling his repugnance, grasped a handful of that serpentine, black hair. And then he dropped the gleaming steel, recoiling before the chilly flame that came to life in Marian's smoldering eyes.

"Win Bardwell," she began in a calm voice whose deadliness matched the light in her eyes, "this is going too far. Whatever else you may wish to do, at least stop short of mutilating me and killing yourself."

"What?" demanded Bardwell. "*Mutilate* you? *Kill* myself—good Lord, Marian, this is getting worse every day! What's going to become of us?"

The venom faded from her voice, and the fire from her eyes, as she replied: "Win, I've told you a thousand times I can't help being what I am. Can't you remember the old days when my strange ways didn't annoy you?"

And Bardwell recalled the first weeks of their marriage—mad, ecstatic nights and dream-filled days. The chill contact of Marian's hair, even then, had carried the faint suggestion of some ancient evil that always blended in their love-making, adding piquancy to Bardwell's pleasure, suggesting to him that he had found Eve and Lilith in one person. He had loved the dank chill of her hair, cold strands that burned like creeping, living fire; and a curious, pagan fascination lay in that queer gesture, so like an archaic, dimly remembered ritual, with which Marian would toss the great braids about her back and shoulders, where they clung and twined. . . .

"Win," continued Marian, "have you changed, or have I? Leave me if you wish. You needn't stay. I'll play fair with you if you wish to leave me. Only . . . promise me you'll never again attempt to cut my hair. Promise me, and I'll forgive you. And if you can . . . try to remember."

Bardwell remembered, and promised. And that night, and many nights thereafter, Bardwell held stony-eyed communion with bottles branded with three stars and marked with the name of Martel.

Yet hope was not entirely gone; for Bardwell would occasionally vary his routine, emerge from the haze, and in the calmness of evening seek anew the means of overcoming that which oppressed him. And thus it was that wandering at random he met old Dr. Berg, who during the many years previous to his retirement from active practise had attended Marian and Marian's parents.

"Dr. Berg! Strike me blind, but it is good to see you!"

In the pleasure of this unexpected encounter, Win Bardwell for the moment forgot that which the undying sun of Florida had not eradicated.

"And just as good to see you, Win. What in the world brings you to Sarasota?"

The doctor paused, hesitating to inquire as to Bardwell's wife, yet knowing that such inquiry must be

forthcoming from him. Bardwell's next remark bridged the gap.

"I know you've retired, Doctor," he began, "but I want to have a word with you. In private. And at once, if you're not engaged."

Dr. Berg nodded acquiescence. A cab carried them to the doctor's apartment.

"Either I'm utterly loco," declared Bardwell, "or else——"

"No, lad," interrupted the white-haired medico, "you're not loco. *It* killed her mother; and *It* has made me wonder, and pass quite beyond the borders of reason and science. In a word, Win, it's that deadly poison coldness of Marian's hair. . . ."

The doctor shivered.

"Yes," agreed Bardwell. "It's driving me nutty. She won't have it cut. She spends hours brushing it. Like some fakir sitting before a heathen god and thinking himself into the silence. Lord in heaven, but I often wonder if she's human! The touch of a single strand of it drives me wild. And at the same time, I think the world of her. That's the worst of it!"

THE old doctor poured a slug of Bacardi. Bardwell swallowed the amber flame and continued, "Either I'm absolutely bughouse, or something is totally wrong with Marian. One of us should be sewed up in a sack and dropped into the Gulf. If she's okay, then I'm due for a padded cell; or if I'm right, then that girl is a monstrosity . . . oh, hell! What do *you* make of it, Doc?"

"I make exactly nothing of it," replied Dr. Berg. "Nothing that any sane man of science could accept. Her parents told me a similar story, when she was about six years old—told me of the ghastly, snaky coldness and clamminess of Marian's heavy hair. I laughed and called it nerves. But when I touched the kid's unusually long hair, I nearly passed out, used as I was to grotesque and repellent deformities. It was as though I had thrust my hand into a nest of serpents all clinging together for warmth."

Bardwell lifted his face from his hands.

"This madness has to stop. I'll clip that poisonous jungle she nurses day and night. Promised her I wouldn't, but promises be damned!"

"No, Win, don't do that. Her mother tried it, *once*. Leave her if you can't stand it any longer. But don't kill her. Or yourself——"

"What? You, too? What in thunder do you mean—kill her, or myself?" demanded Bardwell, recovering himself, and drawing animation from the incredible words the doctor had just spoken in paraphrase of Marian's outlandish speech. "Are you as nutty as she is, and I shall be? For God's sake——"

"Steady, lad. She isn't, and I'm not, and you're not, yet. Listen. . . ."

The doctor drew from his desk a leather-bound, loose-leaf notebook, turned a few pages, remarking as he did so, "Heredity is a curious thing. Marian's outlandish hair inspired me to study the matter in general and in particular. I've never dared publish my thoughts and findings. Like Rabelais, I prefer to die before I am cremated. But I'll tell you as much as I can. It may help you. For we lose fear of that which we understand, even if but partly."

The doctor paused; pinched the end from a long black cigar; sought, found, but forgot to strike his match. And then he read, intoning solemnly, like a judge pronouncing sentence.

"Atavism is an outcropping of tendencies and characteristics that have skipped two generations or more. Such outcroppings are rare enough, though usually not startling. But what of tendencies that have lain dormant, skipping thousands of generations, reappearing only after hundreds of centuries of extinction?

"Your wife, Win. . . . For twenty years I've studied this matter, ever since at her mother's insistence I touched that living, snaky hair."

"For God's sake, Doctor, what do you mean?"

"Just what I said. One thing at a time. You'll finally grasp what you're up against."

The doctor struck his match, touched light to the lean, dark cigar, then continued: "You've played polo, and witnessed many polo matches. Remember Captain Erich von Ostenburg?"

"Yes. Fierce, heathen sort of fellow. Wonderful player. But what the devil——?"

"One thing at a time, Win. Have patience and let me put it across bit by bit, groping with you even as I myself have groped in the dark. He resembles not one of his relatives, distant or near; nor does he resemble any one of his ancestors for ten generations back, if the private rogues' gallery, as he calls the family portraits, means anything at all. That fellow is a Tartar, pure and simple; a throw-back to some obscure ancestor who rode in the trace of Genghis Khan. Look at him; look at those eyes, those cheek-bones, the contour of his skull, and see the stamp of the Mongol. Look at the way he sits his horse, crouched like some squat demon riding into battle. He might be the Grand Khan himself. That is atavism, *but on a small scale.* Merely a dozen odd generations."

Bardwell was too much puzzled to interrupt.

"Some Tartar of the hordes of Genghis Khan grafted himself onto the family tree of the house of Ostenburg. And now, centuries later, we have Captain Erich. But this," repeated the doctor, "is atavism on a small scale. Listen again:"

And from his notes the doctor read, *"It was Herbert Spencer, greatest of all rationalists, who pointed out that there is a foundation of fact for every legend and superstition of mankind. Was there then a race, back in the mists that shroud the emergence of humanity from prehistoric reptilian slime, whose physical attributes supplied the fact basis for the Medusa myth, the legend of the Gorgons?"*

Bardwell stared, blinked, wondered whether or not he had heard aright the madness which dripped from the white-mustached lips of the old doctor. Then Bardwell remembered all too well the serpentine, clinging coldness of Marian's hair and knew that he had indeed married a Medusa whose type for a thousand centuries had been, and would today, but for some ghastly jest of nature, be extinct.

3

DAY after day the amber brush with its carved Medusa flickered like some monstrous golden beetle as Marian, secure in the shelter of Bardwell's promise, devoted more and more of her time to the now endless caressing of the coiling, midnight madness that crowned her pallid features, enshrouded her shoulders, and reached almost to her knees.

Small, swift boats brought Bardwell solace from Bimini: Martel, and Bacardi, and the deadly, pale green Pernod — wormwood distilled with madness. Substitution: serpents for serpents. And through the haze gleamed a pair of long-bladed coupon shears. Martel and Pernod and promises mingle curiously.

Dr. Berg watched from a distance, resigned himself to the futility of further effort, and confined his pity to a slow, sorrowful shake of his white head. His words were unvarying: "Don't attempt to cut her hair. Her mother tried it, *once.* . . . Grin and bear it, or else leave her. But forget those scissors, and remember your promise. . . ."

Martel and Pernod and promises mingle curiously. Yet through it all

persisted the memory of ancient days, of mad, ecstatic nights and dream-filled days, and of a lovely, pallid girl whose great dark braids of hair clung and twined about his shoulders, adding piquancy to his pleasure; so that one night Bardwell, deciding that while he could not grin, he might at least bear it, thrust aside the pale green madness that turned milky white as the melting ice diluted it, and sought Marian's boudoir.

A shaft of moonlight filtered in through the thinly draped French window and enriched the pale features and argentine shoulders of his sleeping wife. Her long hair somberly enshrouded the loveliness of her face and spread fanwise across both pillows. A faint, acrid odor mingled itself with the perfume of the sleeping Madonna; and apart from, but somehow a part of her even breathing, came the vague sound of things that crept not quite noiselessly, and their sibilant hissing.

As Bardwell stared fixedly, the sable strands moved, stirred, animated by an independent life: black serpents awakening from their slumber on silver-white sands. For the first time he *saw* that which he had suspected, and feared.

From the pocket of his brocaded lounge robe he drew the final solution, the companion of endless nights of grief: a pair of long-bladed coupon shears.

4

"JUST across the hall from 614? Yes, sir, I'll look into it right away," replied the night clerk. And then, slamming the receiver, he addressed the house detective: "Dawson, for the love of Mike see who's got the heebie-jeebies in 640."

Whereat the night clerk yawned and prepared to resume his nap while awaiting Dawson's report as to the cause of that prolonged scream of anguish, the voice of a man and woman mingled in an awful cry of horror and despair, the ghastly disturbance whereof the guest in 614 had complained.

But that nap was interrupted ere it was resumed.

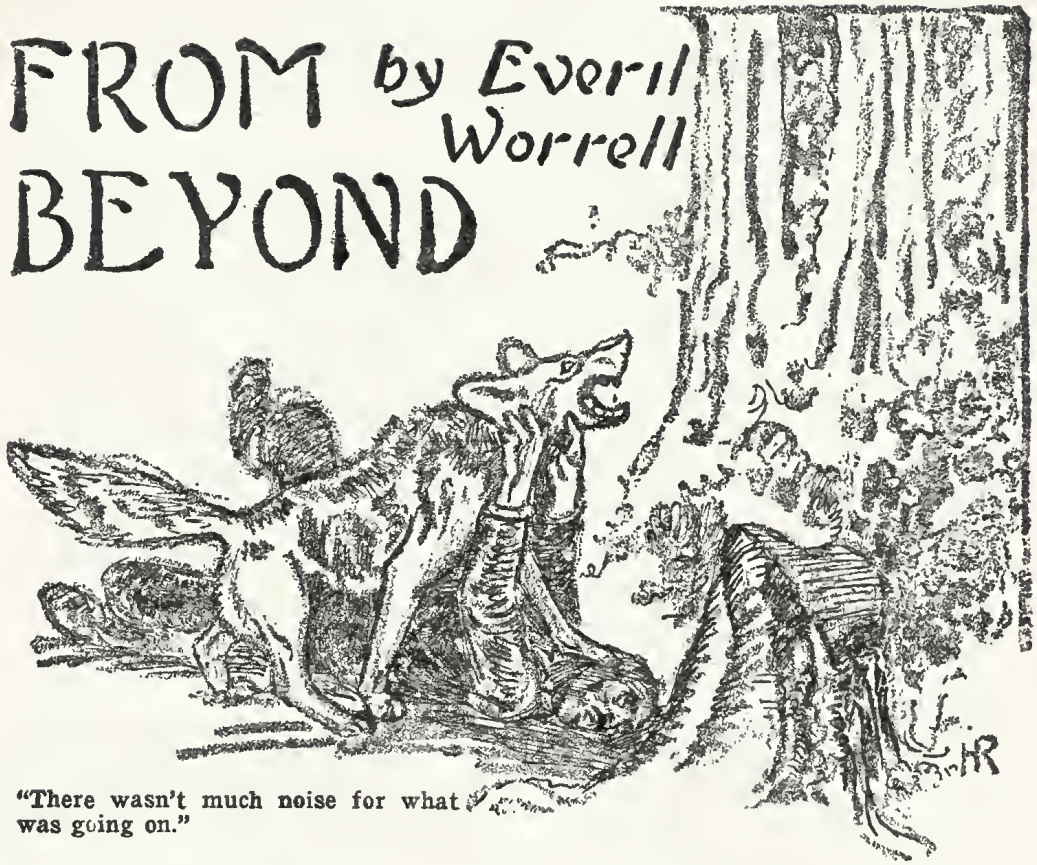
"I'll be eternally damned!" gasped the night clerk, paused a moment, then started in pursuit of the house detective who had in three bounds cleared the lobby and gained the street.

A patrolman on a beat several blocks from the hotel collared the frenzied man and clubbed him into a state of comparative calmness. Investigation verified the house detective's outrageous story, thus keeping him clear of a padded cell; but investigation came to a dead standstill when confronted by the scarlet, excoriated mask of what had once been Win Bardwell's lean, handsome features, and the thousand tiny, livid punctures which had pierced the skin. Nor was it any easier to account for the monstrous black coil, wrist-thick, which encircled Bardwell's body, and stranglingly closed about his throat: frosty cold, midnight black, iridescent hair the like of which came from no man or beast . . . but which must have come from the head of the woman who lay dead on the bed beside Bardwell.

Dr. Berg saw, but wisely refrained from venturing an opinion. On returning to his apartment, he drew from his desk a loose-leaf, indexed notebook, turned to the page ending, *"Was there a race in the mists that shroud the emergence of humanity from prehistoric, reptilian clime, whose physical attributes supplied the fact basis for the Medusa myth?"*, and completed in a few words his commentary on atavism.

FROM BEYOND

by Everil Worrell



"There wasn't much noise for what was going on."

"MARY Ellen," asked Kenneth suddenly, "do you think Sheila is happy?"

A fitful wind drove sleet against the windows. A log in the grate fell apart. The clock chimed slowly six. It had been dark for nearly an hour, the early bitter darkness of December.

Mary Ellen made concrete the misgivings he had not put into words.

"Of course, Kenneth, I think she would be happier if you didn't seem to partly disapprove of her."

"I disapprove of her imaginings. I want my girl to be just solid flesh and blood like me, with five senses like mine—that I can believe in. Don't you understand?"

"I see what you mean, but it's you who do not understand. Sometimes, I think that I'm the only person who does understand her. When—*it*—happened, she talked to me."

"She's talked to you more than she ever has to me, Mary Ellen," Kenneth said unhappily. "Won't you tell me—everything there is to tell?"

Mary Ellen had been fidgeting before the fire. She sank into the depths of a large armchair, so that her face was in shadow.

"The first was the sinking of the *Lusitania*. I was only eight."

"I know about the *Lusitania*. I know that Sheila dreamed of drowning, the night it sank. I think she sees that that is only a coincidence. Hundreds of people probably dream of drowning every night."

If Kenneth's tone was not sarcastic, it suggested that to disageee with him would invite at least a desire to be sarcastic. Mary Ellen flushed; but she was eager now to prove her point, and began again with added energy.

"It wasn't a dream. Father and Mother have each a room, Sheila and I one together. Ours has a door into

Mother's. That night I waked because the covers had been thrown back, and I was chilled. That wasn't like Sheila, and she was gone. In a moment I heard her voice, in Mother's room. She was younger then, about the age I am now, and she had gone to Mother because she was frightened. She was afraid of death—and of deep water. And she was wide awake."

Mary Ellen paused, remembering.

"She said there were too many people dying in the night. And when Mother talked to her, thinking she meant the way people are always dying everywhere, and said she mustn't let the war excite her, and the stories of men in the trenches, she said—I remember the words she used—'I don't mean in the trenches, or in houses and hospitals. I mean under the stars, in the black, deep water. I can't get *them* out of my mind.' Then she said she couldn't get air, she was smothering. After a while she was quiet, and Mother led her back to bed. The next day we read about the *Lusitania*."

"Did she know anyone on board the *Lusitania*?"

"No. But I think her mind reached theirs—like a radio station taking an S. O. S. I think that now. Why, everyone believes in telepathy, Ken!"

"I believe more in coincidence."

"You still say that! Then listen. For I don't believe you ever heard all about—when Vincent died."

"I know she had—some sort of 'visitation.' I know she believes—used to believe—in such things."

Mary Ellen's voice fell almost to a whisper, although the dining-room still was dimly lit, and the kitchen door still closed.

"This was in the night, too. Sheila was twenty-one, and I was thirteen. We had gotten very close together then, and Sheila read me parts of Vincent's letters. He was coming from India to marry her at Christmas time, but this was in the summer before."

Kenneth moved uneasily. When Sheila had been engaged to Vincent, she had been happier than she was now.

"I waked. Sheila was sitting up in bed, hardly breathing. She was *listening*. I moved, and she spoke to me. Something was the matter with Vincent."

"She had had a letter?"

"Oh, no. Just that moment, *she knew*. She had waked from a nightmare. In her dream, her side hurt her badly, and she was laid out on a flat-topped, wooden kitchen table. It was all so clear that she saw a gash in the table top, where a cooking-knife had jabbed. The surgeon and his assistant with the anesthetic wore gauze masks, but the assistant was cross-eyed. He put a cone over her face, and she struggled and waked. But her first thought was not of her dream, but of Vincent. She knew that it had happened to Vincent, because of that."

"That was a queer transition."

"Yes. You'd have thought she would wonder if she might be going to have appendicitis, or something like that, herself, wouldn't you?"

"Most people would."

"She still seemed to feel, or to 'almost feel,' a sensation of *cutting;* far away, like a sound just before you can't hear it at all. It didn't take long to tell me that, and when she finished, she was shaking all over. 'It's going on and on, a long way off. Out there in India. What I can't understand, is—*now, it isn't cutting, it's thudding. Heavy blows.* It is horrible. My God! Doctors don't *pound* a patient. . . .' There was more. About a man coming to with a deep, open wound in his side, and still the blows."

The low voice from the shadow of the big chair no longer sounded like Mary Ellen's.

"Vincent—afterward we heard—"

"I know the rest."

Vincent, in India, had photographed a sacred fountain. Very soon afterward he was taken with acute appendicitis. In the midst of a hurry-up operation, angry natives had dragged away the doctor and his helper, and had stoned the unconscious man to death.

"But did you ever check up on the scarred table and the cross-eyed anesthetist?"

"Oh, Ken! A Psychic Research Society would have done all that. We didn't. Sheila couldn't have stood any more."

The smell of savory cooked things filled the air. The swing door had been blocked open; dinner was being set on the table. Mary Ellen got out of her chair and slipped away. A moment later, Sheila came and led Kenneth in to dinner.

At the table, Mary Ellen looked like a younger reflection of Sheila.

"That kid will be having visions next. But if it were a gift of vision, it would be a great thing—a really wonderful thing. If it were freely accepted, it wouldn't be an unhappy thing. But I can't see it like that—to me it isn't a gift. It is only an abnormality. Hysteria at night; a coincidence, and the two edges of it fitted more closely together afterward; memories colored by a wild theory. Hysterical tendencies encouraged, and more 'visions' and more coincidences. It is no gift to me. It seems to me more like—insanity."

Yes, that was his feeling. That was the word he had hidden in the back of his mind. The ugliest word in the world.

Talk flowed around Kenneth. Mary Ellen brightened and began to resemble her mother instead of Sheila. Sheila herself was sensitive to Kenneth's mood. The shadow deepened in her eyes as she watched his face. Suddenly Kenneth knew that for months it had been deepening when she looked at him. Was *he* beginning to do her harm? A courage born of something like despair rose in him, and his spirits rose with it. Sheila loved him. He would hold to his matter-of-factness like a life-line, and to Sheila. He would dominate her, and save her from the things he feared.

He dominated her now. After dinner, he put on a record and made her dance. He told her jokes and made her laugh. There was a suppressed sparkle about her that made him long to see more of it, to see it released and often in play.

The telephone rang. Mrs. Michaels turned from it to her elder daughter.

"It's your dress, Sheila. If you wear it tomorrow night, Mrs. Walton has to try it on this evening."

"I didn't know you had a new dress." Kenneth's eyes asked an interested question. "Flame chiffon?"

Sheila smiled, understanding him. "Flame!"

The word was a shout of triumph. The only evening dress he had seen Sheila wear was a misty, silver thing, like rain on a mountain top. All her clothes were somber-hued. Flame-colored chiffon was sunrise and victory. After all, perhaps nothing like what was past would ever enter into the future—his and Sheila's future. And, some day, all that was past would be forgotten, and he would be sure in his heart that Sheila was—just a girl like other girls.

Sheila had gone to the telephone. "I guess I'll have to waste an hour on it," she said.

"I'm sorry. I thought it was all finished."

Kenneth expected to go with her.

"I'd rather you didn't," she persuaded him. "It's only 7:30, and I can take the car and be there in five minutes. It embarrasses Mrs. Walton to have a 'gentleman friend' hanging around while she's fitting. You did that once, and she made the hem crooked. The curtains between her two rooms don't fit, and she has them

on her mind. So if you want this to hang, let me go alone."

"I'll take you and come back, and then go back again. Or wait in the car. Or, better—I need exercise. I'd rather walk it once, each way."

"That's silly, Ken. It's a bad night to walk the streets. Let me drive over alone; you stay here, and I'll 'phone you in time to walk over, if you really want to walk it once, and ride back with me."

It was settled. Sheila's matter-of-factness delighted Kenneth as much as the flame-colored dress. She had a competent, efficient way that was always a source of delight to him.

And in a moment, suddenly, like the blowing of an unwholesome wind across the shining surface of a pool, everything was different.

"Ken—Ken—I'm not going . . . I *can't* go. *I'm afraid.*"

Only seconds had elapsed since her last words, but her voice was changed. Her eyes were wide, unhappy, and—yes—terrified. Kenneth had been in the act of helping her with her coat. She leaned slightly against him, her eyes, with that strange look in them, near his own. They held his, desperately, appealingly. Kenneth tried to hide his recoil from her manner.

"I'll go with you."

He had not concealed his feeling. Moreover, it was deepening. He was conscious of something like irritation also, an irritation that was growing. Everything had been all right. There was no reason for Sheila suddenly to alter, to look at him like a stricken animal, bound and helpless and waiting for an expected blow to fall. Whatever the cause of this attack, Sheila had not tried to control herself. She had yielded to a fantastic mood, and had expected Kenneth to yield.

Sheila's eyes became more stricken as she watched him.

"You needn't look like that, Ken. I'm going."

Kenneth weighed his words carefully. "I don't think the road is too slippery. Both you and I have driven hundreds of miles in the rain, at night, too. The sleet turned to rain an hour ago. But if you're afraid to drive——"

"I'm never afraid to drive. It wasn't that. It was—it is—oh, never mind, now. I am ready."

"Moods are to be reckoned with," said Kenneth gently. "Of course, it's better not to give in to them unless you have to. But—are your nerves steady enough to drive?"

"I'm not nervous. I wasn't nervous. You'd never understand. Forget it, Ken. I'm going. Only, don't ever look at me as you did a minute ago. I—didn't like it."

They walked to the unlighted garage in silence. Sheila climbed into the front seat of the touring-car. The motor started quickly, and Kenneth leaned over and kissed the girl lightly on the cheek.

"I'll be ready when you 'phone," he said. He slammed the door.

The big car moved out backward, closely shrouded in its black curtains, a shining black monster trailing glaring, parallel beams. It took the road, swung round and shot away, the bright lights leaping before it, its driver invisible in the gloomy cavern of the interior. Sheila was an expert driver, and misted glass and blurry celluloid never annoyed her seriously. But Kenneth's straining eyes resented their inability to catch a last glimpse of her, and his over-strained nerves made of the trifle a grievance. For the first time in his life it seemed to him that there was something sinister about the appearance of a closely curtained car; something suggestive of a hearse, or of something hateful which he could not name. He turned toward the house with a shiver of disgust at the idea.

IN THE big chair by the fire Mary Ellen rocked silently. She would not look at Kenneth.

Mr. and Mrs. Michaels were ill at ease. They had taken no hand in the incident, but they had been talking it over while Kenneth was out. After a little hesitation, Mrs. Michaels spoke to him.

"I think you did right, Kenneth. She'll have to overcome those spells. It's been a long time since I've seen her——"

The mother's voice trailed into silence. The last time had been the time of Mary Ellen's story. They were all thinking of that.

"If I had been you, Kenneth, she wouldn't have gone without me," said Sheila's father flatly.

"Please——" said Kenneth.

The clock ticked. The wind blew a branch outside the window so that it tapped against the glass. Again, Mary Ellen's story lived in Kenneth's ears. The tapping branch was like a signal, attracting his attention to some uneasy fact.

Sheila should have reached the Walton house. Just this side of it, vacant lots the size of a city block lay along each side of the road. Kenneth pictured the shut-in car passing this point with a recurrence of the shudder of distaste he had felt as he looked after the car. It was early, and the road would not be empty. Cars would be meeting each other and rushing by, each a cavern of darkness carrying its unseen occupants, its bright lights glaring ahead, twin meteors blazing a lonely trail.

Wolf, the collie, went to the door and whined—a long, heart-breaking whine that was almost a howl. Kenneth opened the door for him, forcing himself to speak lightly.

"Sheila got us all nervous, and we've affected the dog."

Fifteen minutes passed, slowly. If the telephone did not ring, he would have to call the Waltons' house himself. He gave it five more minutes. One—two——

It was still sounding in his ear when he caught the voice on the wire: "Is this the Michaels' residence? Is Miss Sheila there? I thought she was coming here to have a fitting."

Visions of accident, of collision and side-swipes rushed through Kenneth's mind. Yet these things did not wear the aspect of his fear. It had to do—he was sure—with the closed-in, prisoned look of the car as it had vanished in the night.

The lamp-lit room seemed changed. He thought swiftly. These people did not know that something had happened to Sheila. Kenneth's shoulders squared. He was responsible for whatever had happened. He would be responsible for more. He would not share his knowledge now, not until he had tried to make it more definite. Before he terrified Sheila's father and mother, he would go over the road she should have gone. A stalled motor might have held her somewhere all this time. . . .

But his fear—his horror—why should he detest the idea of Sheila's being alone in the close-curtained car? Was he subconsciously entertaining a fantastic suspicion that she, in this evening's mood, ought not be alone, shut from the eyes of others? That she needed protection *from herself,* perhaps? Not that—it could not be that! But what nameless, shapeless dread was it that was assailing him in terms he could not define? His doubts colored his fears.

Instinctively he had compressed his reply over the telephone. "In about twenty minutes," had meant to Mrs. Walton that he was bringing Sheila. "You'll find me in bed if you come much later," had meant to him that Mrs. Walton would not bother to call again.

He snatched his hat and overcoat, but dropped the overcoat at once in the darkness outside, and began to run, jamming his hat down to keep the stinging drizzle out of his eyes. He spared breath to call twice to Wolf, but if the dog heard him he made no sign. He thought as he ran

that Mary Ellen and Wolf had both turned against him, and he did not blame them. He had turned against himself. He should have gone with her. In his uncertainty, he knew only that.

He ran until his breath came hard and the perspiration streamed down his body with the rain soaking through his clothes. He did not know how many minutes it was before he came to the lonely stretch of road he had been hurrying to reach. But there was nothing there to see. The road lay straight ahead, a shining canal reflecting the lights of two onrushing cars. Their headlights flared on him and vanished, and the darkness closed down like a falling curtain of wet, black velvet. The light in Mrs. Walton's house was ahead, dim in the rain and mist. This outskirt of the city was as lonely as many spots ten miles from town.

Kenneth walked now, scanning the shadows to left and right. He passed the Walton house, although he knew that the reasonable thing was to go in there and telephone the Michaels the truth. He had passed no wrecked or stalled car. No car was parked here. Sheila would not have come and gone away without him. It was a case, now, for notifying the police.

And yet he walked on indecisively in the rain like a man possessed by an impulse stronger than himself, unable to face the facts, unable to give up and admit that there was no longer a chance that suddenly he would find Sheila and everything would be all right. Also, he could not go in out of the night and put things into other, less eager hands. The idea was like the idea of a desertion. He was not through yet with the black, streaming road that led on past the house toward which Sheila had started.

He never before had gone past Mrs. Walton's house. Beyond were lights in other houses, sparsely scattered. But before the first of these, a lane-like cinder road led off to the right. And far away somewhere to the right, a dog, with a voice that reminded him of Wolf, gave a single distressed bark as he hesitated.

To get the general direction of this road and the lay of the land, or because an impulse stronger than his uncertain will turned his footsteps, Kenneth splashed into the narrow channel of deeper darkness. The rain began to fall more heavily.

IT HAD poured for hours. The windows of the Michaels' house shone like squares of yellow topaz under water. At 11 o'clock their brightness faded to a dusky play of firelight and shadow, slanted over by the pallid gleam from the nearest street lamp.

Mr. and Mrs. Michaels had talked over again the events of the evening in the last hour since Mary Ellen had gone to bed. Sheila must learn to control her moods. Yet Kenneth's policy was questionable. And while no slightest uneasiness over their daughter's whereabouts had touched her parents since the telephone call they thought was from her, they had accused both her and Kenneth of thoughtlessness.

"They must have driven downtown. They wouldn't stay at Mrs. Walton's very long."

"They probably got tickets and went to a show, and maybe they didn't have much time to 'phone. They're usually good about that. Sheila usually lets us know what she's doing."

"There's no reason why she shouldn't *always* let us know. It isn't asking much, to want to know when to expect the children home."

The curtained lights upstairs were darkened too, and blinds and windows raised. With the unsatisfied feeling that follows a spoiled evening, Sheila's father and mother fell asleep.

THE persistent, soaking rain diminished at last. A dense white mist crept slowly out of lower-lying places,

along sheltered slopes and behind hedges. It lay deep and heavy on the road.

In the silent house the clock struck twelve. As if at a signal, soft footsteps crept down the stairs. Mary Ellen could stand her motionless vigil no longer. And in that moment a car glided up the hill.

Mary Ellen had pressed her face against the glass in the door. She would not have heard the car, for the motor made no sound. The wheels were shrouded in the creeping mist, so that the black car seemed floating upward on a cloudy stream. Drifting wisps of vapor undulated, snakelike, before the dimmed lights. Mary Ellen bit her lip and shivered as the car turned slowly into the drive and stopped.

"Dead?"

She repeated the word softly, over and over, shivering more and more.

For Kenneth had gotten awkwardly out, holding in his arms a limp thing dressed in Sheila's clothes. He was coming up the drive. His head was bent, but although his face was hidden, despair spoke in every line of his body. Hair matted, tail, head and ears drooping, the collie slunk behind him. As they reached the porch, Mary Ellen heard a smothered whine.

"Dead!"

She did not realize that she had been repeating the word, that she spoke it now with a different intonation. But Kenneth's voice answered her, low-toned and harsh.

"There's death in the air tonight—but I haven't given up. She was breathing when I started with her; afterward, I wasn't sure. But I haven't given up."

There was no sound from above stairs. With one accord, Kenneth and Mary Ellen moved soundlessly. Kenneth laid Sheila gently on the rug before the fire and knelt beside her. An ugly bruise darkened her temple; all the rest of her face was the color of marble. Her wrists were bruised.

"Kenneth—I'll bring some water."

When Mary Ellen returned, Kenneth was rhythmically chafing Sheila's hands. He took the water and wet her forehead, brushing the fine hair straight back in unaccustomed lines, so that the strangeness which illness or death brings to a familiar face became more marked. Mary Ellen sobbed. Kenneth was holding one wrist now, with a look of listening. He had done this at first. Mary Ellen knew that he was feeling for the pulse, and that he had not found it. A very faint pulse was hard to find, unless you were a doctor or a nurse. It might be only very hard to find—very hard to find.

"I'll tell you what happened, Mary Ellen. And then—if she hasn't come around—we'll have to wake your father and mother, and—tell them. I've already 'phoned for a doctor. I did that on the way. He ought to be here very soon, but we'll have to tell them first. I hoped—she would come to before we had to tell them.

"Anyhow, you knew there was something wrong. We all knew it. But I was too big a fool to admit—until that telephone call. Sheila didn't call; Mrs. Walton called, because Sheila hadn't come. Then I went wild. I felt that I must find her, that I must go directly to her, that no one else could find her in time. So when I went out, I ran over the road she should have gone.

"I had called Wolf, but he didn't answer. So I went alone.

"I passed Mrs. Walton's house, because—I had to. There was a cinder road to the right. I went down it, because—I had to. When I hesitated, I heard a dog bark down that road—a dog with a voice like Wolf's. But—I don't think that decided me. I just had to go.

"I found the car half a mile down that road, where it was woodsy on both sides—tall trees, growing close. There wasn't much noise for what was going on. Wolf and a man were

rolling in the road, and the man had Wolf by the throat—that was why there wasn't more barking: Wolf was too busy trying to get loose, and to slash the man's throat, for any barking. I don't know how it would have come out. It was very dark. But when I came up, the man let go and got to his feet and ran—Wolf after him. I called Wolf off; I didn't know. . . .

"There was Sheila, doubled up on the floor of the tonneau with that bruise in her temple, with her hands tied together with rope—oh, I can't tell you! But there were little things fallen on the floor—things out of a man's pockets, out of a dope-fiend's pockets, Mary Ellen. And I knew the devil had been hiding there, crouched in the tonneau, when she started. When I made her go alone!

"Not that I would have been much protection. He had an iron bar—I think he used it on her. He could have laid me out, just as cold—who ever looks in the back of a car, at night?

"Oh, Sheila! Sheila!"

As though his cry of despair had reached her, Sheila moved. Her eyelids fluttered, and her lips trembled, as at a grievous memory. Her eyes opened suddenly, wide, with a lost look in them. They found Kenneth's, and clung to them. A faint trace of color came back into the white face, as though in that long look she were drawing strength from him—from the steadiness of his eyes, and the love in them. And still she stared, unsatisfied, asking something without a word.

And Kenneth's face slowly whitened until she had the more color of the two, and the relief went out of it, until it was set in anguish—more set and more hopeless than it had been when he brought her in and laid her down, and could not find her pulse.

He had thought that, if only she would open her eyes, the terrors of the night would turn to blessed relief. And now he knew that the questionings which had lain for so long between them must be faced and answered. He had been overwhelmed with pity for Sheila, driven out by him to a horrible experience that might have ended for her in death—or worse.

But, did he believe that her fears of the early evening were in the nature of a presentiment? That, in her danger, she—or *something* from that other world she believed in, veiled thinly from the world of the senses—had drawn him to her, and guided his feet down the narrow road?

Did he believe that she knew things from some source of knowledge that was closed to him, and to others? Did he believe that she had known of the sinking of the *Lusitania* when it happened? Did he believe that her first sweetheart, Vincent, had been anesthetized by a cross-eyed assistant on a wooden kitchen table, before the natives burst in and made an end?

He did not believe any of those things. And he knew that Sheila believed them, that she would always believe them, that things would always be happening to her to confirm her in her belief—things that to him would be coincidences; strange, but nothing more than coincidences, because they could not be proved anything else. Proof, *proof!* He could not believe things for which there was no proof, and, although he would never try again to bully Sheila into believing as he believed, she would see the doubts in his mind, and shrink from them. Only this evening he had feared that her mind—well, in the future, what might he fear, what might he think? And—Sheila would fear his thoughts.

Things of which they dared not speak, because they had no common language of shared experience, would invade their house of life, as tonight's storm and darkness had forced their way into this sheltered room. And

because they had no common language in which they might cry out to each other in their need, the walls of their house would fall.

All the philosophy of his life Kenneth would now have given gladly for one moment in which he and Sheila might see eye to eye. But he had no hope of such a moment, however fleeting. Reality to him was not a thing of feeling, but of fact.

Down the road there sounded an automobile horn.

"The doctor—at last!"

But Sheila, holding on by his arm, raised herself suddenly to a sitting position.

"Then, I want to tell you something before he comes, Kenneth—you must understand. There must be peace and understanding between us."

The excitement in her voice alarmed Kenneth. Now, of all times, this subject must not be taken up. There was enough in it to hurt deeply, at any time. Now Sheila could not stand it.

"My darling — wait," he murmured.

"No! I am going to tell you—quick, before he comes, and the others come. That blow on my head—I was farther away than you think. I have been with Vincent."

Mute with agony, Kenneth raised his eyes from Sheila's face and looked at Mary Ellen. And even in Mary Ellen's trusting face he read a doubt. Would the others come in, the doctor and her parents, and hear such things as this? Would other people, some day——?

It was best to let her talk now, after all, before the doctor's car reached the drive. But his decision did not matter, in any case. There was no stopping Sheila now.

"I was almost dead. Perhaps I *was* dead. And at once, Vincent came to me. I don't remember what he said, or how he said it. But I knew that he understood. He has known that I learned to love you, Kenneth, and that you loved me, and that you—did not believe in me. That you thought I was fanciful, hysterical, maybe a little out of my mind. He has seen this for a long time, and has grieved over it and tried to help. He has seen that awful suffering would grow out of your doubt of me—unless it could be stopped. He saw that long before we felt it, you and I. And he could never reach your mind, and reaching mine would have done no good; it would only have revived old memories.

"And so he tried to touch our lives through another. It is hard to explain, Kenneth; but he made me see again the cross-eyed assistant—the man who was anesthetizing him when —you know.

"I saw him. I knew that Vincent had tried hard to send him to me, to tell his story, to verify my 'dream' to you, so that you would feel differently toward me, so that there would be a *fact* on my side. But something terrible came in, there, and I was afraid —as I was afraid just before I was struck on the head, when I realized that someone was hiding behind me.

"Only, I am sure of this, Kenneth. I came back—I waked—with this in my mind. My fear was like an awful discord breaking in. But, in spite of it, Vincent made me understand this.

"You must go, yourself, at once, and look on the floor of the car, in the tonneau. There are things there that you must see. Perhaps you have seen them, but you must look again. You must go, now, Kenneth, before anyone else can disturb them, before anything can stop you—it means everything—you must go——"

A new note in the hurrying voice warned Kenneth. Sheila must be humored, she must not be allowed to excite herself.

"If you'll quiet down, dear—I hear the doctor coming. I'll leave you with Mary Ellen—and I think I heard your mother speak, upstairs. When they come down they'll be less fright-

ened if you seem calm and like yourself. Yes, I'm going straight out to the car. I'll look at everything."

KENNETH met the doctor at the door, and motioned him inside. He heard Mary Ellen's voice. As he went out, he saw light streaming from the upstairs windows. Mary Ellen would explain. For Sheila's sake, he must know exactly what was on the floor of that car. He had noticed a hypodermic needle, and a "file" of white pills. Besides these, there had been other smallish things, or such was his impression.

Groping on the floor of the car, his fingers closed on a narrow, leather-bound book. He drew it out and climbed into the front seat. He could inspect it briefly by the dash-light. A memorandum book, a dope-fiend's dosage record—he would see just what it was, for he was going to enumerate every object in the car. When he had looked at this, he would feel again, and strike a match. . . .

His thoughts ran on, while he fumbled with a little clasp that closed the book; a surface current of planning, an undercurrent of despair. Here was he, unable to hear what went on in the house, what the doctor said, because he must go through the belongings of a criminal—not in the interest of revenge or justice, which could have waited until his mind was at rest about Sheila's immediate condition, but because he was looking for a message from Vincent—from beyond the grave. And, having found nothing, how would he meet Sheila? What would pass between them when he came to her again, and afterward? His fingers moved slowly, for he did not want to go in too soon.

And suddenly his thoughts stopped. The little book fell open in the circle of yellow light. Something was slipping out—an old picture of Sheila! In this tramp's pocketbook!

Bending forward eagerly now, all but holding his breath, he fingered the pages. They were soiled, some of them stuck together, but all closely written over with ink, nearly to the end of the book. He turned over to the last written page, and held it close to the light:

"She is more beautiful than the picture. I shall hide in the back seat of the car at night, until I get my chance. If too many come, I can slip out. The garage is always dark.

"I look back over the years, and I can see that I have been moving toward this for a long time. First, after the thing happened that started me on the dope, I used to feel as though *he* were sending me to her. I would remember—the kitchen table with the gash in it, *him* lying on it, unconscious, after I had given him the anesthetic; the beginning of the operation, the cut in his side, and then the brown devils pouring in at the doors and windows—I can feel myself running away again, and afterward, the horrors, and then the morphine. It was while thinking of that at first that I used to feel as though he were sending me to the girl. I took her picture from some of his things that I found, and I used to look at it, and wonder what he wanted me to tell her. And that was strange, for I never saw him before the day he died, and his affairs were nothing to me.

"Then the dope got me altogether. And all I knew was, that *I* must take her—any way I could. What chance would there be for me in any decent way? A down-and-out anesthetist without a job; a dope-fiend, who'll never have another chance; a tramp; a homely brute—ugly as hell, and *cross-eyed!*"

A Strange Story of Hypnosis After Death

THE SPECTRAL LOVER

By R. ANTHONY

BARNEY came back to me last night!

Something aroused me from my sleep. And when I opened my eyes I saw Barney at the foot of the bed. I could not see him clearly, but just a vague outline, through which the furniture showed distinctly. He was like a filmy vapor which seemed to grow a trifle denser. Then he disappeared.

I had not slept well. The news of Barney's death had shaken me. Although I did not love him, I think I liked him. Perhaps it was his overbearing mastery which held me. He would command, and I seemed unable to refuse. Time and again I vowed to myself to break with him. I scolded myself for being his slave. But as soon as he appeared, my will-power was gone. It made me afraid of him, terribly afraid.

"You've got to be true to me," he often said. "If anything happens to me I'll come back for you."

That made me shudder. "But, Barney," I would reply, "I don't love you. You know that. I—I—like you, but not—not—like that."

Then he looked at me with those stern and piercing eyes and repeated: "You belong to me, Nell. What I have I hold. And if anything happens to me I'll come for you. Remember that! I'll come back for you!" And when he spoke like that and looked at me so compellingly, my resistance just seemed to evaporate. I'd have no thought of my own, only that he meant what he said and would carry out his promise.

This morning, as I write this, all seems a ridiculous dream. How could there be spirits? Or, if so, how could a spirit have power over flesh and blood? No, I will not think about the matter. Barney's words meant nothing; they are futile. Why should I feel troubled?

Of course, that he was killed makes me feel somewhat sorry for him. But I could not mourn him. I don't feel that I lost someone dear to me. If anything, I feel rather relieved that he is gone.

Wednesday.—He came again last night. What does it mean? This time his image was a trifle more definite.

Thursday.—Barney was more distinct last night. I couldn't sleep after that.

They noticed something at school today. That is, they noticed I didn't feel well. The principal called me in. "Miss Martin," she said kindly, "I'm afraid you're ill. You look very tired. Better go home. I'll manage to have someone take your pupils today and tomorrow. You go home and rest well over the week-end so that you can come back Monday feeling perfectly fit. Perhaps it might be well for you to see a doctor."

I cried a little and could barely thank her. Mother was surprized to see me home in the middle of the

morning. She doesn't understand. I couldn't explain to her. I'm afraid I couldn't explain to anybody.

Friday.—Barney spoke to me last night. "I've come for you, Nellie," he said.

I was terrified and hid myself under the covers. But I could see him right through the blankets and counterpane. He was beckoning me.

I shook my head at him. I shivered all over, but I couldn't say a word. My throat seemed paralyzed.

Oh, what *is* the matter with me? Here I am supposed to rest—that's what the principal excused me for—but I haven't slept a wink the last two nights, and I am restive and nervous. Yet, whenever I lie down for a moment, Barney's image seems to stand before me; I see his threatening—no, commanding—eyes; I seem to feel him urging me, calling, compelling.

Ah! It isn't fair! Barney, could you really have loved me? Then why do you wish to destroy me?

Saturday.—Barney struggled with me in the night. I could nearly feel him, as if he were real. He seemed substantial, although I knew all the while that he was only a disembodied spirit. But how strong! And what terrible will-power! He was all will. And I fought him. Oh, I feel so weak! I seem to lack all strength to live—and I do not want to die!

Ah, Barney! You wanted me to be true to you, though I never promised that! Did you really love me? Is it the way of true love to take the life of that which it cherishes?

Sunday.—I made up my mind that I would say "No!" very definitely to Barney. Today I feel as if an evil spirit has visited me. I have read of vampires—how they steal up on their victims at night, and suck the blood and with it all the life-giving strength. After such an experience the victim must feel somewhat as I feel today—listless, enervated, altogether broken.

Barney spoke to me. "You must come, Nellie. It's better if you come willingly. If you don't it will be the worse for you. My will is greater than yours. You know that."

"No, I will not go," I answered. "I don't want to go. I don't want to go with you, Barney. I never loved you. You—you have—have terrified me."

So I spoke my refusal. But it was all in vain. His eyes seemed to bore into mine, two terrible magnets which pulled and pulled, and against which I fought weakly. It was horrible! I shudder when I think of it. I could feel my strength, the little I had left, oozing out of me. I felt as if I were being dissipated into thin air just as a tenuous vapor disappears under a gentle breeze. I wanted to pray, but had not even will enough to form a single word.

I must have fainted. For when I awoke it was broad day and Mother told me she had been calling me for hours. She chided me. "A regular sleepy goose." If Mother only knew!

2

[*From the Diary of Dr. Burnstrum*]

MONDAY, February 21.—Mrs. Martin called me in this afternoon to see her daughter, a school teacher. The girl was supposed to return to her work today, but her mother had been unable to wake her.

Examination showed a weak and irregular pulse. I gave her an injection of adrenalin. Miss Martin is a very pretty girl, although at the moment her face appeared drawn, with a somewhat haunted look. Her weight seemed normal, skin color rather good. No signs of digestive or other disturbance.

While I made an examination, Mrs. Martin busied herself at Nellie's little writing-desk, and there she found her daughter's memoranda of her experiences. I have copied them into my

diary; they constitute an astonishing record.

The injection seemed to improve the cardiac rhythm, but I was unable to rouse the girl. This fact, together with what I read in her journal, prompted me to have her transferred to the hospital.

Tuesday, February 22.—Brent, the intern, came to me with an astonishing tale. And yet not so astonishing in view of what I already knew.

It seems that the nurse called him to Miss Martin's room during the night to administer a sedative. Miss Martin had sat up and talked wildly, pleading with someone named Barney. "Asked him to let her live, and the like!" said the nurse.

"Darned puzzling case, Doctor," Brent offered. "Nurse nearly climbed out of her boots in fright. Said it wasn't the usual fever talk of patients but something quite different. Well, Number 24 is still asleep. Gave her a big dose." With that he went away, whistling shrilly.

Too bad there is a hiatus in Nellie's account! It would be of interest and help a lot to read in her own words what she experienced Sunday and Monday nights.

The laboratory technician's results were now available and I proceeded to study these. Nothing indicative! If anything, they were the results one might expect from a normal person. Certainly nothing physically wrong. To check up matters once more I went to her room to question her. She was still asleep, her reflexes low and indefinite, altogether lethargic.

After a careful examination I looked for Father Ryan, the venerable hospital chaplain. As usual, I found him surrounded by a number of nurses who were jesting and putting catch-questions to him. I just heard one of them ask, "How long should a woman's skirts be, Father?"

"Above two feet," was his prompt answer.

I drew him away from the laughing group. "Look here, Father Ryan," I said. "I know you're something of a soul specialist. You priests learn a lot more than physicians of the kinks and quirks that make up the human animal."

He gave me a sidelong glance. "All of which means——?"

"I have a peculiar case on hand which puzzles me completely. It's a mental case; of that I am positive! I think you could help me. Only, she's not a Catholic and——"

"If she's a good Protestant," he interrupted, with a twinkle in his eyes, "she's probably a better Catholic than many Catholics I know of. But tell me about her before I see her."

I took him to the office and showed him the memoranda she had written. "That's the sum and substance of it all," I remarked after he had read the lines. "I ought to add that last night she nearly—well, the attending nurse saw nothing herself, but Miss Martin spoke to whatever *she* saw. Nurse said she thought her patient would die. Got a good bit frightened herself."

"Hm! You've examined her?"

"Physically? Yes. Blood count O. K. No fever. Normal in every respect, except strength. Hang it! Looks as if that ghost or spirit or whatever-it-is is trying to absorb her—as if it were trying to suck the life from her body. She's frightfully weak. Little vitality, and virtually no resistance. Yet nothing really the matter with her."

"Ah! This Barney—er—what's-his-name? — Barney Lapecre — how was he killed?"

"Humph! He was killed by—himself. He really committed suicide. Jumped from the top of a building. They kept that part from her."

"And do you happen to know why he ended himself?"

"Not particularly. There was a rumor that it was about a woman."

"Oh! Are you sure about that?"

"No. In fact, I do not recall who told me about the matter. But—hm, let me inquire among the nurses! A hospital, you know, hears all the scandal that never gets into the papers."

"To be sure," he smiled. "The scandal that not even the papers dare to print." He paused thoughtfully. "Will you try to find out all you can about the man, Doctor? Particularly about this—er—scandal you mentioned."

"Oh," I said in surprize. "Do you see some relation——?"

"Not that exactly, Doctor. What I am looking for is some connection I can break. Offhand it looks like an autohypnosis, I should say. If we can break in on that, it may be that we can save her. Well, you try, Doctor. I'll drop in to visit her. But whether you find anything or not, I think I'll spend the night at her bedside."

"Good!" I remarked. "And I think I'll be there also. I'll have Brent, the intern, circulate among the nurses and then see you with the budget he collects. And if I pick up anything myself during the day I'll let you know of it. *Adios!*"

WEDNESDAY, February 23.—An operation and a series of office and outside calls kept me busy till late. So it was near midnight when I returned to the hospital. Immediately I made for Miss Martin's room. Father Ryan sat beside the bed watching the girl; somewhat farther, near the door, sat two nurses.

"How is the——?" I began to ask. But the priest made a warning gesture and placed his finger across his lips.

I tiptoed over to the bed to look at the girl. She was exceedingly pale, the pallor emphasized by the very black hair. Her lips were moving slightly, although she uttered no sound.

A questioning glance at the chaplain. "Her lips started moving just before you dropped in," he whispered. "But see!" He pointed to the girl.

Between faintly moving lips came a very small voice. "You have come for me, Barney?" it breathed, the tones barely audible, yet the words distinct.

A pause. And then, "Must I come?"

I was watching her carefully, yet was conscious that Father Ryan had got up and was now peering intently at her features. As I watched, the face took on a paler shade—a colder hue, one might say.

Again a murmur, "I am coming," and she seemed to rouse herself.

It is difficult to describe that moment. I could swear that she lay there absolutely motionless. Yet I got the impression that she had gathered herself as if to leave the bed. There was no visible movement, yet *I felt action.* I sensed struggle, without being able to perceive any physical evidence of it.

It was then that the priest spoke. "Stop, Nellie!" he cried sharply, his glance fixed on her closed eyes. And with careful syllabification, "*You—must—not—go! Barney—was—not—true—to—you! Barney—killed—himself!*"

Nellie lay motionless, her face quiet, her lips no longer moving. In a quicker cadence, but still stressing every syllable, the priest resumed. "Barney Lapeere demanded your faith, Nellie, but broke his own for another woman. Nellie, do you hear me? *Barney—Lapeere—killed—himself—over—another—woman!*" And then he seized her hands and began to draw her gently but steadily into a seated position. "Come, Nellie!" he said. "You are alive! You are *well!*"

There was a faint sigh, a flush mounted to her cheeks, and her eyes fluttered open. But it was not surprize that showed in her glance—it was *anger!*

"Oh! The coward! The abominable wretch!" she whispered.

"It is true, Nellie," said the chaplain. "He has gone now." This was an assertion, and the girl did not contradict it. "You will live, child. Go to sleep now. You must rest a lot. It was a cruel experience that you have survived, but it is past and you will live. Remember that."

As he spoke she fell back to her pillows and gazed at the priest with surprize, which slowly turned into an expression of childlike trust. She smiled gently, her eyes closed, and she began to breathe deeply and regularly.

"Better give her food," said the chaplain to the nurse. "Lots of food —milk with eggs, and the like. I think she'll take the food, even while asleep."

I nodded my assent to the directions, and the nurses left for the kitchen. Meanwhile I drew the priest aside and asked him, "Look here, Father Ryan, you might tell me exactly what's what. No bed for you till you've explained!"

"Very well. Has it ever occurred to you that people die because they have lost interest in life?"

"Of course. Every physician knows that."

"Well, if people can live because they have an interest in life, why can't a person die because said person has an interest in death?"

"Oh!"

"But Nellie had no real interest in death, you must admit. That was clear from what she wrote. She thought she had; but if I could prove to her that it was not a true interest, then she would not think of dying— at least, not dying as yet. Such thoughts are all very well for an old war-horse like myself, but hardly proper for a lively and healthy young creature."

"You are talking in abstract terms, Father Ryan," I scolded. "Kindly get down to concrete facts."

"Very well, very well. In this case it was a dead person that seemed to compel her interest. So I destroyed that interest and gave her life."

"I see that. But how——?"

"If you please, Doctor! Let me follow my own reasoning. Offhand one might say it was a clear case of autohypnosis. But I am not so sure of that. Whence came her interest in dying? It was not natural with her. For she explicitly states over and over that she did not love the man, that she did not want to follow him, that she did not want to die. Hence that interest did not originate within her, but was supplied by some extraneous source. Her memoranda make clearly evident what that source was: it was Barney Lapeere."

"Of course. Then your method was to overcome Barney's influence by proving that he was unfaithful."

"Not quite that. Let me tell you something about Barney. Your man Brent is something of a genius. He managed to compile quite a bibliography in a few hours. This Lapeere was undoubtedly a hypnotic person. More than one person remarked the influence of his glance, especially on women. For a young man (he was only twenty-three) he had a remarkably long list of escapades, unsavory or savory, as you look at it." Here the chaplain smiled wryly. "The last months, while he was ostensibly courting Nellie, he had an affair which turned out rather bad. Instead of facing things, he committed suicide. Most of these Don Juans have a yellow streak. They have courage to make love, and that is all."

"Quite true. But admitting that," I urged, "what bearing——?"

"Pshaw," the chaplain interrupted. "Don't you see it yet? The man worked on her fear. It's a case where one will supplanted another or at least dominated it completely. Nellie was aware of that much herself. Also, there was post-hypnotic suggestion, only till now I had never thought that it could last after the death of the hypnotist. But here—

well, it was fear that he worked on. She was afraid of him; that's clear from her notes. Men die of fear. What can one expect in a woman who has been half-hypnotized, whose will has been constantly sapped, and into whose mind a pernicious idea has been implanted? Here it was the idea of coming for her; she feared just that. And he seems deliberately to have emphasized that over and over, as if, consciously or unconsciously, he were preparing for a gruesome experiment. It was this dominating influence, strong in life, and just as strong or stronger in death, that I had to break down. That's what I gathered from the data given by Brent and by Nellie herself."

"I see. Given a hypnosis, how can it be broken?"

"Yes. It meant that I had to find some way of attacking *him*. Here is my logic: A decent girl admires two virtues in men, courage and loyalty—loyalty to others and courage to face the consequences of an act. She did not love him. She protested that over and over. Still, she felt his power, but only because she considered him *an honorable man*. Like most of us, she believed that strength of will is based on honor. Hence, show her that the man was dishonorable, and his control over her would be gone. They should have told her the truth when he killed himself. All this would not have happened."

"I agree with you there, Father Ryan," I said. "So your method then was to arouse her jealousy?"

"Her what?" he demanded, as if astonished. "I thought you had seen deeper than that, Doctor. You seem to be thinking of the well-known fact that every woman, even the best of them, likes to believe that she is admired for herself alone, and that the professed admiration is restricted to herself. At any rate, she will feel kindly toward the admirer. That's one of your ideas, isn't it? The second is that of the 'woman scorned.' Oh, I know you men! Someone once got off a sonorous line that 'hell hath no fury like a woman scorned,' and since then this funny humanity believes that it must be true for every woman, first and last. If an admirer turns on a woman she will hate him. Bah! Hence you infer that I called Nellie's attention to Barney's disloyalty in order to arouse the jealousy that supposedly is never very deep beneath the surface of any woman."

"Well, isn't that exactly what you did?"

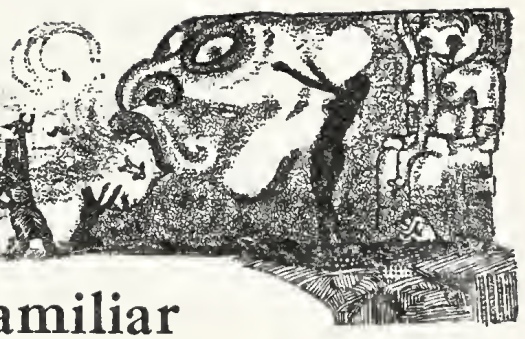
"Oh, the conceit of these men! And you, too, Doctor! There were two things I said to her: that Barney had killed himself and that he was not true to her. The other woman never bothered her. The fact was that she realized that he had been dishonorable, and further that he was a coward, and therefore had neither courage nor loyalty. My words directed her full attention on Barney. She did not think of herself at all, only of Barney; that is, what the truth did to Barney's image. Before then it was a picture of strength, of power, which she *feared*, but *respected*. The other and true image is that of a cowardly weakling, strong only in pursuing women, and in nothing else. An idol deflated; what longer should she fear? The moment that sank into her consciousness, that moment the hypnosis was ended. With the destruction of fear, she was free—and well!"

"Hm, you may be right," I remarked.

"Of course I am right. Think it over. It was the fear of Barney I attacked, of Barney as a powerful but honorable man. Jealousy had nothing to do with it. She feared him, remember that. And there you are!"

With that I left him and went back to the patient. I found her sleeping soundly, her pulse strong and regular, a delicate flush on her cheeks. Hm! Maybe the priest was right. And, in his words, there you are!

Folks Used to Believe



by ALVIN F. HARLOW

The Familiar

BAILEY'S Dictionary, published in 1751, defines a Familiar as "A Spirit or Devil supposed to attend on Witches, Wizards, etc." The belief that every sorcerer or person in league with the Evil One had a familiar spirit prevailed all through the centuries from ancient to modern times. The Jewish King Solomon, because of his wisdom, was for ages reputed to have been a necromancer who had always two demons, one male and one female in attendance, ready to carry out his wishes.

Only occasionally do we hear of the familiar being a good spirit. A man in France in the Sixteenth Century was said to have one which had attended him for thirty-seven years. He never saw it, but it awoke him in the morning, touched him upon the right ear if he did well, upon the left if he did wrong, and gave other evidences of its reality.

The commonest manifestation of the spirit was in the form of an animal which served a witch or wizard, who often received it when they agreed to sell their souls to the Devil, who usually appeared to them as a man in black. When the new witch had signed the agreement or made her mark with her blood, the Devil, according to an old writer, "delivers to her an imp or familiar; which in the shape of a cat or kitten, a mole, miller-fly, or some other insect or animal, at stated times of the day sucks her blood through teats on different parts of her body."

The commonest picture of a witch known to us today shows her with a broom and black cat. It was on the broomstick that she flew through the air to midnight witch meetings, while the black cat was her familiar. The familiar was seen in numerous other forms—dogs, birds, frogs, mice, and strange, hideous animals unlike any others known. If the animal was a small one, it was usually kept in a box or earthen pot on a bed of wool.

A woman at a witch trial in England testified that she called at the home of the alleged witch, but the latter was out. The caller then peeped through the bedroom window, "and espied a spirit to look out of a potsharde from under a cloth, the nose thereof beeing browne like unto a Ferret." Elizabeth Bennet, another Sixteenth Century witch, "acknowledged that shee had two spirits, one called Suckin, beeing blacke like a Dogge, the other called Lierd, beeing red like a Lion. Suckin, the examinant said, is a hee and the other is a shee. Many times they drinke of her milke bowle."

These familiars not only did harm to persons against whom the witch had a grudge, but to religious people whom the Devil ordered her to work evil upon. In 1588 in Essex, England, an old woman confessed that "she had three spirits; one like a cat which she called Lightfoot, one like a toad, which she called Lunch, the third like a Weasill, which she called Makeshift. . . . The Cat

would kill cows, the Weasill would kill horses, the Toad would plague men in their bodies." The familiar of a witch named Margaret Waite was "a deformed thing with many feet, blacke of colour, rough with hair, the bigness of a cat." Another woman had a familiar "in the shape of a bird, yellow in colour, about the bigness of a crow—the name of it is Tewhit." A man witness testified that a witch named Margaret Moone had twelve imps. She told him their names, but he could remember only six of them—Jesus, Jockey, Sandy, Mrit, Elizabeth and Collyn.

A Bizarre Story Is

THE FANTASMAL TERROR

By WILLIS OVERTON

THE fate of that strange book, *Laughter of the Pit*, was a dark and baffling mystery. For almost a year Kaspar Voldune had been writing the story, filling it with the spell of his singular personality. He had discussed it often with his intimate companions and had read to them many passages from its weirdly fascinating pages.

Then, suddenly, he became oddly silent about it. To the questions of his relatives and friends he gave no enlightening answer. "The history of that book is a closed chapter—closed and sealed," he told them, and would say no more on the subject.

Kaspar's cousin, Dwight Prescott, in his judicial manner, voiced his views about the mystery. "You can never tell what Kaspar will do," he said, his rather pale features and thoughtful gray eyes assuming a critical expression. "There's a bit of freakishness, and even of superstition, in him. Take that ivory Buddha on his mantel-shelf; he half believes that it brings him luck. My cousin seems to be an opportunist; but that, I think, is due to a trace of fatalism. When something unusual happens, he feels, in a vague way, that destiny has provided the situation for his particular benefit. You can't solve the secrets of a mind like his."

Even the author's wife, gay, volatile Mona, could not tell what had befallen *Laughter of the Pit*. "My husband is a riddle," she asserted one day. "That's why I love him so much. I adore mysteries, you know. Kaspar is buried half the time in a cloud of dreams. Sometimes he is brooding and silent; sometimes he talks with a strange, wild eloquence, and has, oh, such queer ideas! Maybe that manuscript is locked in his desk; maybe he threw it in the wastebasket; maybe he is writing it over. Nobody knows, and there isn't any way of finding out."

THE spring night was poignantly alluring. The delicious perfume of lilacs mingled with the fresh, exhilarating odor of newly turned earth. Full moon and a myriad of stars shone in the azure dome of heaven. Nature pervaded even the great cities, carrying to the multitudes the message of her yearning, restless spirit.

But Kaspar Voldune, in his study, was too busy to heed the pulse and stir of the season, save as its magic influence mingled subtly with his thoughts. He was in the throes of creative writing—was nearing the end of his masterpiece, *Laughter of the Pit.*

He had been working on the book all day, with the ease and eager swiftness of one approaching the end of a great achievement. Just a few more hours of writing, and Mollis, the hero of the tale, would be free from the demoniacal Gaffon. But Kaspar, impelled though he was by the mighty urge of his art, was not immune to weariness. His right arm ached from incessant use of the pen; his eyes felt tired and inflamed.

Rising from his seat at the desk, he began to pace the room—from the door to the fireplace, where he cast a glance at the ivory Buddha on the mantel, reposing between two Colonial candlesticks of hammered silver; to the door again; and back once more to the fireplace. There was something striking in his appearance. He moved with a gliding, serpentine grace, and his feet made no sound on the soft, thick rug. He was a tall, slender man, with an air of distinction. His cloudy brown eyes were slightly oblique; but so minute was this Oriental characteristic that few had ever noticed it. His features, though very flexible and delicately molded, were usually set in a fixed expression that masked his changing moods and emotions.

His mind was now on the villain of his story, the fiendish Gaffon. "I'd like to turn the tables on that monster," Kaspar thought. "But I see no plausible way to manage it. It is all I can do to get Mollis out of his clutches."

He continued to walk back and forth, his imagination dwelling on this idea. "Ah!" he suddenly murmured to himself; "little Braimer! He can do it! A few slight changes in the book, and little Braimer, the pawn, the character seemingly of the least importance, will be in a position to punish Gaffon."

With the zeal of one who loves his work he plunged into the details of his new idea, still pacing rapidly as he planned. A passage must be deleted here; a few words added there; a number of trifling alterations arranged. His thoughts turned to that final dramatic chapter which was still to be written. He would finish the book tonight, he decided, while he was in the heat of inspiration. Tomorrow he could revise.

Having seated himself at the desk, he got a fresh sheet of paper, picked up his pen, and began to write. But black specks danced before his eyes, while the trembling of his hand and the nervous jerking of his arm made legible writing impossible. He must be terribly tired, he thought, to have reached such a condition as this. Peering into a Venetian mirror that hung on the wall beside his desk, he saw that his features were drawn and pale, and that his eyes were bloodshot. And yet, aside from those symptoms which had checked his work, he felt no fatigue. It seemed that he would have strength enough to walk for hours without weariness, and his brain was abnormally active.

To walk! The thought appealed to him. A moment later, he was in the hall, getting his hat. As he put it on, the living-room door was opened, and Mona entered the hall.

"Where are you going, Kaspar?" she inquired.

"For a walk," he said. "I'm too tired to write, and too excited to sleep."

She went to him, and gazed thoughtfully into his face. "You look tired, dear," she remarked.

"A stroll will do me good," he said. "Don't wait up for me, Mona. I may not get back for a good while." He bent down and kissed her.

"Kaspar," she said coaxingly, clinging to him, after they had exchanged kisses, "promise me that you won't do any more writing tonight."

"Why, darling?" he asked.

"You're working too hard," she answered. "You've been writing furiously all day, without a bit of recreation. So promise to forget about your book until morning, that's a dear."

"Maybe I can't forget it," he said, "but I won't write any more this evening."

She went blithely back to the living-room, humming a little tune, and pausing an instant to the doorway to blow a last kiss to her husband.

When Kaspar stepped out of the house, he realized for the first time the full beauty and charm of the night. He gazed up at the large round moon and the vast network of stars that gleamed in the sky. A light breeze fanned his cheek; and faintly, from afar, came the sounds of gay laughter and the riotous music of a dance orchestra.

Kaspar had been walking about ten minutes, and had passed several people on the quiet street, when he came face to face with his cousin, Dwight Prescott.

"Good evening, Kaspar," Dwight said.

"Good evening, Dwight," was the response. "It's a wonderful night, isn't it?"

"Yes," said Dwight, "it's the proper kind of weather for this season." Presently he added, "Where are you going?"

"Just for a walk," Kaspar replied. "And you?" There was a quality in his cousin's voice that always jarred upon him, and it jarred especially on this night so fraught with the spirit of romance. It was a certain intellectual coldness in Dwight's tone—an indifference toward all things beautiful and poetic.

"Do you mind if I walk along with you?" Dwight asked.

"I'd rather be alone tonight," said Kaspar. "I'm in a mood for silent musing."

"All right," said Prescott, in a tone of tolerant amusement, as he strolled away. "Dream your dreams. I'll go on over and chat with the fellows at Norton's."

Kaspar, too, resumed his walk. But he had taken only a few steps when he felt, by a kind of sixth sense, that his cousin had turned round and was coming up behind him. Facing about, he saw, to his amazement, that Dwight was not there. A glance along the street revealed his cousin in the distance, moving steadily in the direction which he had first taken. Smiling at this trick of his fancy, Kaspar turned again and continued on his way.

He was fitted to enjoy, to a marked degree, the delights of nocturnal roaming, the sense of dreamy detachment, of mystery and vastness and glamorous expectancy. The sounds of the city gradually diminished, until a profound hush filled the streets. Still Kaspar continued his solitary wandering, in rapt communion with the night.

But time and again there came that feeling of being followed, of not being alone. His thoughts wandered to his unfinished book. only to be checked abruptly by the sensation of a presence near by. His mind reverted to the witchery of the night; but once more, in the midst of his musings, he was startled by the consciousness of that other being.

As the moments elapsed, this feeling grew more emphatic, and a vague terror settled upon him. The air was becoming damp; a chilly, depressing

wind arose; and fragments of cloud scurried through the sky.

As Kaspar walked homeward, he was still aware of the silent, invisible entity. He fancied once that the thing was about to touch him, and he thereupon quickened his pace.

On reaching home, he stole quietly into his study, and softly closed its door. Even now, he was not disposed to retire. He hastened to build a fire, for his teeth were chattering.

Soon he was seated in an easy-chair before the fireplace. He had not turned on the lights; for the fire, and the moonlight streaming in through the windows, filled the room with a dim and spectral radiance. Kaspar could hardly believe that this was his own study, so different did it seem in the weird half-light. He glanced about as if to reassure himself, caught a glimpse of his image in the mirror, beheld the manuscript on the desk, and then his gaze came to rest on the ivory Buddha which adorned the mantelpiece.

He had bought the idol years earlier, while traveling in the Orient. And now he prized it as a talisman; for good luck had certainly come to him ever since the date of the purchase. Eastern peoples were absurd, he thought, to worship such inanimate objects. And yet—did not his own experience prove that the little ivory god held some occult power? He wondered if, indeed, these idols might not have a peculiar attribute, quite natural, but too subtle for science to analyze, which could influence human life.

SUDDENLY, as if in agreement with his thought, the Buddha seemed to nod. While Kaspar stared in amazement, the idol's expression and its entire form underwent a gradual change. It was not a Buddha that he gazed at now, but a hideous figure, strangely familiar. He searched his mind, as in a nightmare, to discover where he had seen it before—and all at once he knew. It was Gaffon!

Swiftly the figure grew larger, and acquired the complexion of a human being—the sallow complexion which Kaspar's imagination had given to Gaffon. The creature began to make definite movements, and queer gurgling sounds issued from its mouth. It stepped to the edge of the mantel, turned slightly to the left, and sprang to the floor.

It stood there at Kaspar's side, grinning fiendishly. The diabolical being had grown in the course of a moment to the size of a man.

"So you are planning to have me punished," Gaffon snarled, thrusting his leering face toward Kaspar.

The author shrank back. "But—but—you—can't be Gaffon!" he said hoarsely. "You—he—is only a character in my story."

"Is that so!" The horrible face drew nearer.

"How—how could Gaffon be real," said Kaspar, "when I invented him?"

"Maybe God, who made you in his own image," said Gaffon, "has given you a little of his miraculous creative power. Or it may be that my existence is the cause, and your story the effect." His tone was harsh and menacing.

"Go away," Kaspar implored. "You frighten me!"

"You are planning to have me punished," Gaffon repeated. "You intend to let Little Braimer crush me."

"That's the way I want my book to end," Kaspar admitted.

A bestial growl came from Gaffon's throat. "You shall not!" he said fiercely. "You won't dare!"

"Why not?" said Kaspar, summoning all his courage. "If I have created you, why can't I destroy you?"

"God may grant the power to produce what has not been," said Gaffon,

"and yet He may withhold the power to annihilate."

"If you are in some way the cause of my story," Kaspar declared, "then I'm not responsible for what I write."

"I may cause the story in a general way," Gaffon said, "without determining all its details. My theory is that I and this book about me act and react upon each other. If you end the tale with my defeat, it will ruin me."

A silence fell between them. At length Kaspar spoke. "Was it you who followed me about this evening?" he asked.

"Yes," Gaffon answered.

"Why did you come forth from the Buddha?" said Kaspar, after another pause. "Until now it has always brought me luck, not horror." He was trying vainly to converse in a casual manner—to make the situation seem natural. And he was sparring for time in which to think of some means of escape from this demon.

"Because you were looking at the Buddha," said Gaffon, in answer to his last question. "But enough of this talk!" He went to the desk, and returned with a paper-knife. "Are you afraid?" he inquired raspingly, as he brandished the knife before Kaspar's face.

"Yes," moaned Kaspar, cringing in his chair. He wanted to rise and rush from the room, but he could not stir.

Gaffon tossed the paper-knife back upon the desk. "I have a better weapon than that," was his sinister comment. "I won't hurt your body, Kaspar Voldune. It's your mind that I threaten. Call me a figment of your fancy if you like, but remember that just as surely as you oppose me, I'll drive you mad."

Kaspar called forth his last spark of defiance. "In the morning," he said, "I'll laugh at this delusion, and finish the book I am writing."

"Will you?" Gaffon snarled. "Will you? Then I will wreck your soul!" His gorgonlike face came closer, and slowly his hands, like an eagle's talons, reached for Kaspar's throat.

The author shivered and shrank away. He lifted his hands as if to repel the attack, and then let them drop limply at his sides. He was afraid, not so much of personal violence, as of contact with this loathsome creature. He would postpone the touch of those frightful hands to the ultimate fraction of a second. He closed his eyes to shut out the grisly spectacle. And then, for a moment, he waited.

A sudden release of the tension—a feeling that the suspense was broken—caused him to open his eyes. Gaffon was gone! Kaspar drew a handkerchief from his pocket, and tremulously wiped the cold moisture from his forehead. "I couldn't have stood much more of that," he muttered. Shakily he crossed the room and turned on the lights. A look into the mirror revealed a ghastly reflection of himself.

He must find something to occupy his mind—something on which to anchor his turbulent thoughts. Picking up the manuscript on his desk, he took it to his seat by the fireplace, where he could banish the chill that gripped him.

But he could not read it. His mind was still in a whirl. "I couldn't have stood much more of that," he repeated. He laid the story upon his knees, and sat, for a long time, gazing down at it. His glance wandered to the blazing fire, and then returned to the manuscript. He regarded it wistfully for a moment, raised it from his knees, and tossed it, with a swift, impulsive movement, into the devouring flames.

He glanced at the impassive Buddha resting on the mantel-shelf. Did a sardonic smile pass over its features, or was it his imagination? He could never be sure.

THE CHAIN

by H. WARNER MUNN

"The lurid chain appeared hazily to be the dancing white body of the woman he had loved."

Through a circle that ever returneth in
To the selfsame spot,
And much of Madness, and more of Sin,
And Horror the soul of the plot.
—Poe: *The Conqueror Worm.*

HIS first sensation, when he groaned back to consciousness, was that of bitter and intense cold. Then, becoming fully awake, he was aware of grinding pains in his body, as though each bone and muscle owned a separate ache. He shivered convulsively and opened his eyes.

It was very dark and he could see nothing around him, but high above there gleamed for a second a lurid, ruddy glare, which flickered like leaping flames, then vanished—accompanied by a clang of metal, as though a furnace door had been opened and closed.

Puzzled, he listened but could hear no sounds, except a far, faint crackling like hemlock boughs snapping in a fire. His eyes ached with the strain of watching, and he closed them, too weary to move.

Where was he? Surely he must be dreaming in his bed at the castle of Rutzau, owned by his cousin Franz, and yet he seemed to be awake.

Ah, Franz the blockhead, Franz the cuckold; yet Franz the lucky, for

he was fortunate Franz with the beautiful wife!

What a joke it was on Franz, to be sure, that he should thus entertain his wife's lover so unsuspectingly! Perhaps his wits had been addled as well as his body smashed, when Franz had fallen from the cliff two years before. And the cream of the jest was that Franz had never known how the accident had come about, but still believed that the edge of the cliff had crumbled away beneath him!

How could a man be such a fool and live? No wonder that Olga despised her husband now!

The man chuckled at the thought, and sneezed violently. He must be taking cold; how came it that the bed was so damp and—hard?

He rolled over and his hands came in contact with rock, bare, icy and wet. He was shocked wide awake at once. Where in God's name could he be?

Abruptly, horror surged around in the dark and left him trembling.

Rock! Wet stone! Half-forgotten tales from the black history of Rutzau swarmed through his head.

If ever a castle were haunted by ghosts, it should be Rutzau if even a third of the stories that had been whispered about its torture chambers were true. Rumor spoke, with hushed breath and backward-roving eye, of deep pits and rooms cut in the solid rock that formed the castle's foundation; murmured, too, of men that had entered the castle and never returned—as men; told also of others who were not seen again, and guessed darkly at the reason; mentioned tortures under which men prayed to be placed upon the rack instead, regarding it as a pleasant couch in comparison to the bed of pain they lay upon.

Also there were whispers regarding rooms where dwelt the Iron Maiden, ever ready with insatiable crushing embrace for any victim; other rooms where the strappado, thumbscrews and the boot wrung truth or anything that the master of Rutzau wished to know from lying tongues that would not reply to minor tortures but answered eagerly hoping their reward would be quick death as they underwent the Greater Question.

Too, he had heard of the oubliette, a pit with walls of sheer stone, peopled by the rats, fierce with hunger, to which men were flung living.

Could he be in the dungeons of Rutzau? Did Franz *know?*

He staggered to his feet, swaying with faintness. Again that lurid flare overhead, followed by the ominous clang, as though someone stoked a furnace in the air.

He began to run in the dark, drunkenly weaving from side to side. Almost at once he felt the impact of a tremendous blow upon his entire body and he was hurled backward, striking his head cruelly upon the ground.

Like a dog which has received an unexpected kick, he yelped with the pain and, upon hands and knees, scuttled crabwise backward. Soon he encountered another obstacle with his heels, which resisted further progress, and he stood up, reaching as high as possible with his hands. Nothing projected from the wall, which was smooth and slippery to the touch as his exploring fingers passed over its damp surface.

The wall was gently curved, and keeping his left hand upon it, he set out to follow whither it might lead him. He had taken nine steps when his hand plunged into vacancy and he stumbled.

The recess in the wall was not deep, but it was already occupied by a furry body that squealed and writhed under his hand and squirmed when he gripped it, setting sharp teeth into his thumb. He jerked his hand out of the hole, with the creature hanging from his thumb, holding tight with teeth and claws and a prehensile tail that wound snakily about his wrist.

With his other hand he loosened the claws one at a time, which fastened

elsewhere, while the teeth went on gnawing hungrily. Half crazed, he fought the thing that seemed bent on eating him in small mouthfuls, snarling while it chewed. He screeched like a beast when the teeth met through the fleshy portion of his hand and tore a bit away.

With his free hand he clutched the thing by the back and ripped it loose, battering it on the floor until it wriggled no longer; but his furious rage was not satisfied until he had torn it into ragged halves and hurled them, wet and flapping, from him.

He stood, breathing hard in great gasps, and something began to fight with another something not far away in the dark, squealing little wicked cries.

Something ran across his bare feet and he kicked at it, but struck the wall instead. He cursed vehemently and, limping, resumed his journey along the wall. The wall was at his left, the clamor of a bloody quarrel at his right. Yet as he advanced, the row did not lessen with distance, but continued undiminished so that an ugly worm of fear began to crawl in his brain—a thought which he dared not allow himself to dwell upon.

When his hand again entered an opening in the wall and the squabbling over the dead beast was no farther away, he could no longer deny the fearful fact. He was in the oubliette!

For a third time the heights glowed red from an unseen fire, and again followed that solemn boom like a funeral bell tolling dismally one—a long pause—two and three—and from above a shower of small glittering particles rained down—a sparkling hail.

Many went dark before they reached the floor, but others, larger than the rest, shone like fireflies as they fell, and stretching out his hand he caught one in his palm.

With a cry of pain he dropped it. It was a hot coal, a red ember that stuck to his hand and hissed.

Then through the darkness of the pit, from high in air, floated down a sardonic chuckle. Instantly, without a second's warning, the pit was flooded with light from invisible sources, which revealed to the man, after the first blinding glare had passed, the horror of his prison.

For a hundred feet the walls of the pit rose sheer and smooth, with neither crack nor cranny for a foothold. About four feet from the floor, several openings pierced the rock, and into them were tumbling in a headlong scramble gray shapes as large as cats, round-eared and gaunt, their pointed snouts blood-dabbled from the cannibal feast, and in the center of the floor lay in fragments what had been a huge rat.

High above, a cripple stumped about the edge of the oubliette, and the man below knew it for his cousin, his heart saying gloomily, "Franz knows!"

FRANZ lay down and swung an arm over the pit's edge—an arm that, curiously short, seemed to have been broken in several places and clumsily reset.

Was he shaking his fist? And then the man below saw that Franz was beckoning to him. Faintly fell a word, "Climb," then again, "Climb up the chain," and he saw that from the hidden mysteries above a long beam was swinging out until its end was directly over him.

Upon the metal beam there was fixed a large pulley, over which ran continuously joined links of iron which now were moving and falling down—down.

Slow-dropping, the end of the chain came nearer until his hands could grip it, and still descended. It touched the floor and stopped, swaying there. As he held to the cold links, he could feel the vibration of the engine that had lowered it.

The links were large and heavy, their openings large enough to insert a hand or foot. He fixed himself comfortably as might be and waited to be lifted from the pit.

How Franz would suffer for this when he got out! Let him taste a little of his own pit, perhaps! And then again from above, the word fell, "Climb," interrupting his pleasant vindictive thoughts.

Perceiving that the cripple did not intend to lift him out, he set his teeth and began to climb the hundred feet of chain. Franz would have his little joke, he thought, but when he got out—an ugly grin—someone else might laugh.

Still he might have to beg for help after all: only half-way up now and he did not feel strong.

Why, he had been climbing for hours, it seemed! Strange he was not already at the top toward which he strained!

He glanced below and nearly fell in horror. The floor of the pit, nearly forty feet across, was carpeted with the masses of the fallen chain. The chain was being lowered at the same speed at which he was climbing! While he looked below he dropped ten feet nearer the bottom of the pit.

Furiously he began again to climb, regained his ten feet, five feet more, and the chain at an increased rate dropped down.

Above, Franz laughed, but it was more nearly a cackle, and the man below felt hope die within him, for he knew that Franz the cuckold was fully aware and mad.

"Climb!" he shouted down. "Climb!"

But the man no longer climbed; holding tight instead he watched the floor come near.

Fifteen feet from the bottom, the chain was loosened suddenly, then caught, and he fell from it. Before he could rise, a heavy length of metal lay across his body, pinning him down. His flimsy night-garments tore as he struggled loose.

While he was freeing himself, the chain hung steady without dropping, but when he moved away the swaying thing followed, guided by the patient cunning of the crazed man above.

The rough metal cut his feet as he walked over it, and he wished for shoes. He kneeled down close by the wall, took off his jacket and tore it into strips which he bound about his feet. While he was doing this the chain was coming slowly down, building heaps of metal which overbalanced and fell dangerously near, but not touching him.

Then as he anxiously sought for some retreat from the growing menace, he saw a slight depression in the wall; he *might* fit himself into this and be safe from a direct blow.

He dived for it and as closely as might be he flattened himself into the niche and, scarcely breathing, waited. Perhaps Franz had not seen!

The hope was vain, for the chain swung after him and a broad mound of metal links rose like a titanic mushroom lifting its head before the niche. With the squeal of a trapped animal, he darted from his lair, clawed the chain aside, sprang through the narrowing aperture that was left, and sprawled upon his face.

Before he could scramble erect, something struck his shoulder. The chain was at his side. Already a tremulous pile shook uncertainly above him, about to topple.

He rolled aside as it fell, but not far enough to escape, for an arm was caught. Desperately he pried and struggled to gain away, finally pulling loose at the expense of a torn hand.

While he fought, the chain had withdrawn to the other side of the pit and had filled it high, a terrace like tangled, petrified, disjointed snakes. Now when he stood up, it swung toward him again.

He sprang away; the chain followed as he backed toward the wall. He ran; and then began a strange pursuit, for ever as he fled, at his heels marched like a sentient thing—the Chain!

It poured into the pit, link after link piling upon the others to form vast heaps of metal which would topple and fall. The man wandered helplessly among these metal tentacles that were thrown out, all but crushed by the heavy coils and mounds that swayed erratically all about him.

Again he slunk behind a heap of metal and mouthed and mowed, gibbering at the chain as it sought him out.

To his tortured mind and feverish imagination, the chain, while it swung and created a hill of metal in the center of the pit, took on a new and monstrous shape. It seemed like a metal giant, its blind head above the clouds, swaying rhythmically from side to side and searching for him in the oubliette. Fumbling about with a hundred clanking arms, it stalked him with a dreadful ghastly patience, for the end was sure. And towering mightily before his hiding-place, it drove him forth again and struck him down with a hundredweight of iron links.

He struggled up once more, clinging to life, bruised and hurt, whining and whimpering now, all pride forgotten. Bitterly he cursed the name of the woman whose fair face had brought him here to walk with Death.

From high overhead came down a malignant sound—the low, quiet tittering of the madman, watching, planning, carefully goading his victim round about the pit. The man below looked up, a curse upon his lips in which the name of Franz was mingled—a curse which gave place to a scream of abysmal terror as he realized the inconceivable frightfulness of the approaching doom.

For several yards from the lip of the pit, the chain glowed red with heat, and as he watched, the links that now came, following, shone yellow, then white, flaked with black patches of soot on which ran and twinkled tiny racing crowds of sparks in endless chase.

The chain was passing through the roaring furnace above; white-hot and coming down. . . .

It touched the colder links and made a pile which he avoided. It swung around the pit and laid a circle around him; swinging still it formed a narrowing spiral at whose center he stood shivering with the agony of anticipation. It neared him, hung steady, then swung quickly at him like the leap of a python. He shrieked and darted aside.

His feet came down on the glowing links, and the rags around his feet smoked and burst into flame. Weeping, he tore them away and trod the flaming path with naked feet.

That which followed was a matter of moments, but to him it seemed a foretaste of eternity spent in punishment.

THE chain came slowly down, livid with heat and leprously scaled with oxidized metal, pulsating in ripples along its length from the throbbing engine that lowered it to the floor, building shimmering heaps for his tortured climbing.

Stumbling over scorching ridges, he rounded the pit, limping feebly along over the hideous surface that drove him to his doom. Rest impossible, he tottered on his way, hope as dead within him as in any poor lost soul that crosses with treadmill trot some smoking, horizonless plain of hell.

From the walls, cracking with heat, jetted out white puffs of steam, but above their piping whistle there rumbled in the man's crazed brain strange roaring voices, and sometimes he vacuously smiled as he listened to the ravings of a mind in dissolution—and plodded on his way. And

though his eyes were clouded and dim, he began to see visions, and to him the livid swaying chain appeared hazily to be the dancing white body of the woman he had loved.

He turned to follow instead of fleeing as before, but she tripped away lightly, mocking, and he could come no nearer, for the maniac above managed the chain so that his prisoner should not be touched by it, thinking perhaps that he had not yet paid fully and would find Death too dear a friend.

The man below was growing unconscious of his pain, mercifully believing, with his shattered mind, that he dwelt in happier days, and once he muttered as he stumbled on, "Oh, Olga, Olga! How your kisses burn!"

He thought he had whispered, but the words burst out in a rasping croak and a gush of blood from a half-cooked lung followed and hissed upon the chain.

Nerves have their limits. They can be strained to a certain point, but beyond that they refuse to function, which in a way is merciful. So it was with the man. The breaking-point had been reached and passed, and his suffering was no longer so intense.

Dying on his charred stumps of feet, he hobbled amid the coils of clanking metal that flowed relentlessly down like a slow thread of lava trickling over the lip of the pit. Occasionally the chain swung in an unexpected direction and laid a fiery tentacle across his shoulders, searing anew an earlier burn; or again he heard, through the drumming stutter of the heated blood in his pounding head, the hiss and sharp puff of steam as a white-hot link accidentally pressed against his naked side.

But though he winced and cried out at every motion he was compelled to take, it was more because the cringing seemed by then to be the proper thing, necessary and a part of the torment, than because of any new agony that he experienced.

He had nearly ceased to think. Now and then, while he reeled and staggered over the loosely shifting heaps that illuminated the pit with a ruddy light, a groan of relief hissed through his baked lips as the dull brain told the crackling body that the end must be very near.

Once he thought he heard a cry far away and not repeated. The voice seemed familiar; it was, in fact, the yell of the maniac who was dancing around the rim of the pit, perilously near but wary of his own trap and shrieking down curses at his enemy.

Only the one sound had pierced to the seat of memory, but it was enough to cause the man to hope again. Perhaps Franz, the merciless, had relented!

He summoned his lagging energies and tried to speak, but the sound that issued from his throat was only a gurgle. Again he tried; it was agony even to breathe; a harsh inarticulate croak, in which were only fragments of words, was the only result, and his deafened ears refused to carry the answer.

Hope died and a more bitter despair took its place. The reaction produced an even keener torture, if such were possible. It was almost as though a lost soul who knew himself to be in the deepest chamber of hell felt the floor drop from beneath him and precipitate him still farther down.

He struggled on beneath the iron flails, through a misty haze of smoke, a fog of sooty vapor from his own smoldering body, a stench hanging around him not merely of burned flesh, but, even more repulsive, the repugnant odor of charred bone; and the demon above forgot to yell in his wonder that life could linger so long in such a mutilated being.

And still the dead man walked and stumbled, mechanically complaining

in inhuman querulous moans, glaring straight ahead, though his eyeballs were seared over with the heat.

The horror could not long continue. Inevitably the moment came when he could not avoid the moving pillar of shining metal.

Blind, hands stretched before him, feeling his way forward, one hand and arm passed by the chain and the other arm upon its other side. Just before his face touched the glowing link he realized his mistake, but not in time to dodge the blow, and the link covered his face like a brand.

For a second, he was conscious of a terrible withering heat, an intolerable piercing glare that beat into his brain like jagged arrows—and then, reason fled. With it passed any sense of pain, and a numbness that felt chill in that place of fire, stole around his heart like a caress.

He crept aimlessly for a few feet on hands and knees, stiffened, rolled upon his side and placed his bleeding head upon his charred arm quite naturally as though he had laid him down to sleep upon soft grasses instead of a bed of fire. Yet so indomitable is the will to live that still one fingerless hand dabbed feebly at the chain for a space, although his brain was dead within him.

And, no longer swaying but descending evenly, the chain dropped upon him, and buried him from sight.

UP THROUGH the interstices of the glowing heap of metal, thick smoke seeped, black and heavy, drifting lazily in the currents of heat that danced in the pit.

The chain cooled and shrank, contracting with now and then a jangle of links slipping into new positions, and a hollow commenced to take place upon its surface.

And as the smoke diminished from this trough, coffinlike in shape, gorgeous colors shimmered along the hollow, melting into new forms and shades like the rainbow hues of oil on water—crimson and green and blue.

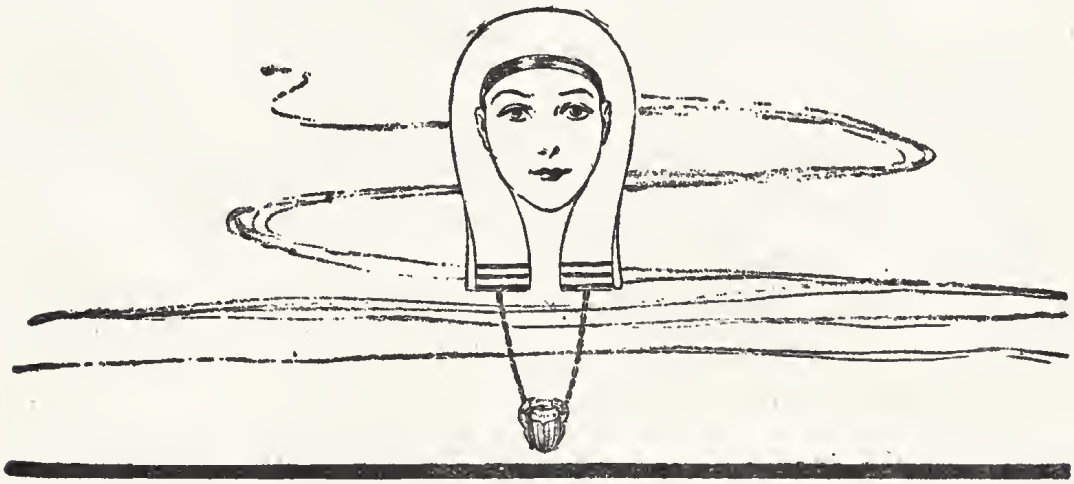
High overhead—beside the roaring furnace—the low nervous tittering of a madman!

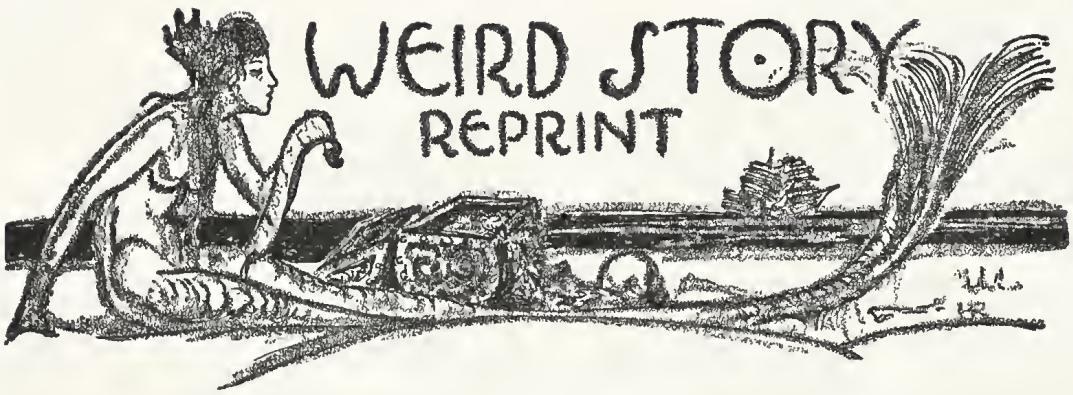
Then in the myriad cells of water-soaked rock the steam expanded until the pressure was irresistible. A rending shock, and a crack, jagged and growing wider, crept up the walls. The castle quivered to its highest spire.

Still the madman tittered his mechanical laugh.

Then the walls caved in, the furnace dropped into the abyss like a live coal falling from a grate, and the ceiling fell.

The Castle of Rutzau would no longer menace the peasants in the valley. It and the pit of torment were no more.





*The Legend of St. Julian the Hospitable**

By GUSTAVE FLAUBERT

IN A castle on a sloping hill, in the midst of a forest, dwelt Julian's father and mother.

The four towers at its corners had pointed roofs, which were covered with leaden tiles, and the base of the walls rested on foundations of rock which descended abruptly to the bottom of the moat.

In the courtyards the pavements were as spotless as the flagged floor of a church. Long spouts, representing dragons with heads downward, conveyed the rain-water in the direction of the cistern; and on the window-sills on every floor of the castle, in pots of painted clay, were sweet basil or heliotrope.

Another enclosure, surrounded by stakes, comprised an orchard, a garden, where flowers were arranged so as to form figures, a trellis, with arbors, where the fresh air might be enjoyed, and a mall, which provided amusement for the pages. On the other side were the kennels, stables, bakery, wine-press, and barns. A meadow surrounded the whole, itself enclosed by a stout fence.

There had been peace for so long that the portcullis was never lowered; the moats were full of water; swallows built their nests in the crevices of the battlements; and when the sun was too hot the archer who paced back and forth on the curtain all day long returned to the watch-tower and slept without fear.

Inside, the ironwork gleamed everywhere; in the bedrooms, tapestry hangings kept out the cold, the closets overflowed with linen, the casks of wine were plentiful in the cellars, the oaken chests groaned beneath the weight of bags of money.

In the armory, between standards and heads of wild beasts, could be seen arms of all ages and of all nations, from the slings of the Amalekites and the javelins of the Garamantes, to the cutlases of the Saracens and the coats of mail of the Normans.

The main spit in the kitchen was large enough to hold an ox; the chapel was as magnificent as a king's oratory. There was even a Roman bath, in a convenient corner; but the good seigneur was not partial to it, considering it to be a heathenish custom.

* Translated from the French.

Always wrapped in a cloak of foxes' skins, he walked about his domain, did justly by his vassals, settled the disputes of his neighbors. During the winter he watched the snowflakes fall, and listened to the reading of histories. But when the first fine days came he would ride his mule along the narrow roads, past the ripening grain, and chat with the peasants, to whom he gave advice. After many adventures he had taken to wife a maiden of high lineage.

She was very fair, rather serious, and disposed to be haughty. The horns of her cap reached the tops of the doors; the train of her dress hung far behind her. She governed her household by rules, as if it were a cloister; each morning she allotted the servants their tasks, overlooked the making of preserves and ointments, sat at the spinning-wheel, or embroidered altar-cloths. After she had prayed much, God gave her a son.

Then there were great rejoicings, and a banquet that lasted three days and four nights, with illuminations and the music of harps. There were the rarest of spices to eat, with chickens as large as sheep; by way of entertainment a dwarf came forth from a pie; and when the bowls were too few—for the crowd grew greater and greater—they were compelled to drink from hunting-horns and helmets.

The new mother was not present at these festivities. She stayed in her bed, resting quietly. One evening she woke and thought she saw beneath a moonbeam that shone in at the window something like a moving shadow. It appeared to be an old man in a sackcloth coat, with a rosary at his side, a wallet over his shoulder, and looking like a hermit. Drawing near her pillow he said, without unclosing his lips:

"Rejoice, O mother! for thy son shall be a saint!"

She was about to cry out; but, gliding along the moonbeam, the old man rose slowly into the air and vanished. The banqueters' songs rang out more loudly. She heard angels' voices, and her head rested back upon her pillow, above which hung a martyr's bone in a frame of carbuncles.

The following morning the servants, being questioned, declared that they had seen no hermit. Dream or reality, it must have been a message from Heaven; but she was careful to say nothing of it, fearing she might be accused of pride.

The guests left at dawn, and Julian's father was standing at the gate, whither he had escorted the last, when suddenly a beggar appeared before him in the mist. He was a Bohemian, with plaited beard, with silver rings on his arms, and burning eyes. He mumbled with a half-inspired air these rambling words:

"Ha! ha! your son! much blood! great glory! always fortunate! an emperor's family!"

And stooping to pick up the alms thrown him, he disappeared in the grass.

The worthy lord looked from right to left and called as loudly as he could. But there was no answer! The wind blew; the morning mist faded away.

He ascribed this vision to the weariness of his brain from having slept too little. "If I mention it, they will laugh at me," he said to himself. But the grandeur that was prophesied for his son dazzled him, although the promise was not clear, and he even doubted that he had heard it.

THE couple kept their secrets hidden from each other. But both dearly loved the child; and thinking of him as one marked of God, they were very careful of his person. His cradle was lined with the finest down: a lamp shaped like a dove burned above it always. Three nurses rocked him night and day, and, lightly

wrapped in his swaddling-clothes, with his rosy face and blue eyes, in his brocade mantle and cap laden with pearls, he looked like a little Jesus. His teeth grew without causing him a single tear.

When he reached seven years his mother taught him to sing. To make him courageous, his father set him upon a great horse. The child smiled with joy and soon knew everything concerning war-horses.

A very ancient and learned monk instructed him in Holy Writ, the Arabic numeration, the Latin letters, and how to make tiny pictures on vellum. They worked together at the top of a tower, away from all noise.

When the lesson was at an end, they would go down into the garden, where, walking slowly along, they studied the flowers.

Sometimes they saw, passing through the valley, a line of beasts of burden, driven by a man on foot dressed after the Eastern fashion. The lord of the estate, recognizing him as a merchant, would send a servant to him. The stranger, taking confidence, would turn aside from his road, and, being welcomed into the castle hall, would take from his chest pieces of silk and velvet, goldsmithry, aromatic herbs and strange things of uses unknown in those parts; and, at last, the good man would go his way, unmolested, and with a handsome profit. At other times a company of pilgrims would knock at the gate. Their rain-soaked garments would be dried before the fire; and when their hunger was satisfied, they would tell of their travels; the wanderings of the ships over the foam-flecked sea, the journeys on foot through burning sands, the ferocity of the pagans, the caverns of Syria, the Manger and the Sepulcher. Then they would present the young heir with shells from their cloaks.

Often the lord of the manor feasted his former comrades in arms. Over the drinks they recalled their battles, the assaults on strongholds, with the crashing of the machines and the shocking wounds. Julian, who listened to them, would cry aloud in exultation; then his father felt sure that one day he would be a conqueror. But in the evening, at the close of the Angelus, when he passed between the rows of poor who bent their heads before him, he would take alms from his purse so modestly and with so noble an air, that his mother was sure he was destined to be an archbishop in due time.

His seat in the chapel was between his parents; and however long the services might last, he remained kneeling on his prie-dieu, his cap on the floor and his hands clasped.

One day, during mass, he saw, as he raised his head, a little white mouse coming out from a hole in the wall. It ran along to the first step of the altar, and after turning twice or thrice to right and left, fled whence it came. On the next Sunday, the thought that he might see it again disturbed him. It returned; and each Sunday he awaited it, was annoyed by it, and at last was seized with such a hatred for it that he determined to rid himself of it.

Having closed the door and strewn the crumbs of a cake on the steps, he placed himself in front of the hole with a stick in his hand.

After a very long time a pink nose appeared, followed by the whole mouse. He struck a light blow and stood thunderstruck before the little body, which was so still. A drop of blood stained the flagstone. He wiped is quickly away with his sleeve, threw the mouse out, and never said a word about it to anybody.

All kinds of little birds picked at the seeds in the garden. It occurred to him to put peas in a hollow reed. When he heard chirping in a tree, he would cautiously draw near, raise his tube, and puffing out his cheeks, blow

the peas at the young birds. When the little creatures would rain down on his shoulders in numbers he could not help laughing, happy in his mischief.

One morning, as he was returning across the curtain, he saw on the crest of the rampart a fat pigeon pluming himself in the sun. Julian stopped to look at him; there was a breach in the wall at that spot, and a piece of stone lay ready to his hand. He raised his arm, and the stone struck the bird, which fell from the rock into the moat.

He sprang to the bottom of the moat, tearing himself in the underbrush, searching everywhere, more eager than a young dog.

The pigeon, with broken wings, fluttered in the branches of a privet.

Its persistence in living irritated the child. He set about strangling it; and the bird's writhings caused his heart to beat fast, filling it with a savage and overpowering delight. At the last struggle the boy felt that his senses were leaving him.

That night, during supper, his father declared that at his age he should learn how to hunt; and he went to fetch an old book of manuscript, containing, in the form of questions and answers, all the art of the hunting-field. In it a teacher explained to an imaginary pupil how to train dogs, tame falcons, set snares: how the stag might be recognized by his droppings, the fox and wolf by their footprints; and the proper way to discover their tracks, how to start them, where their lairs are usually to be found, what winds are the most favorable; with a list of the cries and the rules of the quarry.

When Julian could recite all these things by heart, his father gave him a pack of dogs.

There were twenty-four savage greyhounds, swifter than gazelles, but not to be relied on in the matter of temper; then seventeen couples of Breton dogs, red, with white spots, absolutely faithful, strong-chested, and great howlers. For attacking the wild boar, and for dangerous redoublings, there were forty boar-hounds, hairy as bears. Mastiffs from Tartary, almost as tall as donkeys, flame-colored, with broad backs and straight legs, were to be used for the chase of the wild bull. The black coats of the spaniels gleamed like satin; the yelping of the talbots equaled the singing of the beagles. In an enclosure by themselves, pulling at their chains, and rolling their eyes, growled eight alan dogs, formidable beasts, that leaped at the throats of horsemen, and had no fear of lions.

All ate wheaten bread, drank from stone troughs, and answered to high-sounding names.

The falconry, perhaps, surpassed the pack; the master, by expending much money, had obtained tercelets from the Caucasus, sakers from Babylon, gerfalcons from Germany, and peregrines, captured on the cliffs of distant lands, by the shores of the frozen seas. They lived in a thatch-covered shed, and, chained to the perch in order of height, they had before them a heap of turf on which from time to time they were allowed to take exercise.

Purse-nets, hooks, caltrops, and all kinds of snares were got ready.

Often they took into the country oysel dogs, who would point almost immediately. Then huntsmen, creeping forward step by step, cautiously stretched over their motionless bodies an enormous net. A word of command caused the dogs to bark; quail flew up; and the ladies of the neighborhood, invited to the sport with their husbands, children, and servants —would pounce upon them, and easily capture them.

At other times, the hares would be started by the beating of a drum; foxes fell into ditches; or a spring-trap, being released, would catch a wolf by the foot.

But Julian despised such unsportsmanlike artifices; he preferred to hunt, with his horse and his falcon, far from the crowd. The bird was almost always a large snow-white Scythian tartaret. His leather hood was surmounted by a plume, gold bells quivered on his blue feet, and he stood erect on his master's arm as they galloped on horseback across the fields. Julian, untying his jesses, would suddenly let him fly; the bold creature would rise straight in the air like an arrow; and one might see two dots of unequal size whirl about, come together, then disappear in the azure heights. Then the falcon would descend, rending some bird, and take his place on his master's gauntlet, with quivering wings.

Thus Julian hunted the heron, the kite, the crow, and the vulture.

He loved to sound the hunting-horn, and follow his dogs as they ran along the slopes of the hills, leaped the brooks, and ascended toward the woods; and when the stag began to groan beneath their teeth, he would quickly kill him, and then gloat over the fury of the mastiffs as they devoured the pieces.

On foggy days, he hid himself in the marshes, to watch for geese, otters, and wild duck.

Three equerries awaited him at daybreak at the foot of the steps; and the old monk, leaning from his round window, would try in vain to call him back; Julian would not return. He cared not for the burning sun, the rain, or the tempest; he drank spring-water from his hand, ate wild berries as he rode, rested beneath an oak if he were fatigued, and returned in the middle of the night, covered with blood and mire, with thorns in his hair, and reeking of the odor of wild beasts. He was becoming like them. When his mother embraced him, he received her affection coldly, seeming to muse upon profound things.

He killed bears with a knife, bulls with an ax, boars with a spear; and one time, having nothing but a stick, defended himself against wolves which were devouring dead bodies at the foot of a gibbet.

One winter morning, he left home before dawn, well fitted out, with a crossbow over his shoulder and a quiver of arrows at his saddle-bow.

His Danish jennet, followed by two beagles, could be heard evenly galloping along. Icicles hung from his cloak; a strong wind was blowing. In one direction the horizon began to grow light; and in the white glow of the morning he saw some rabbits leaping about at the mouths of their warrens. The two dogs rushed upon them, and in a moment rapidly broke their backs.

Soon he came to a wood. A heath-cock, benumbed by the cold, was hanging, with its head under its wing, at the end of a branch. Julian, with a backward blow of his sword, cut off its two claws, and went his way without stopping to pick it up.

Three hours later he found himself on the peak of a mountain so high that the sky appeared almost black. Right in front of him a cliff sloped down like a long wall, overhanging an abyss; and on the extreme edge two wild deer were standing. As he had not his arrows (for his horse had remained behind), he determined to climb down to them; with bare feet and doubled-up back, he at last reached the first of the bucks, and buried a dagger in his side. The other animal, terror-stricken, leaped into the abyss. Julian, rushing forward to strike him, slipped, falling upon the body of the first one, his face over the precipice and his arms stretched out.

Having descended again into the plain, he followed a river bordered by willows. Cranes flying low passed over his head from time to time. Ju-

lian killed them with his whip, and never missed one.

Meanwhile the frost had melted, bands of vapor were floating in the air, and the sun appeared. Gleaming in the distance he saw a stagnant lake, which looked like lead. In the middle of the lake was a beast which Julian did not recognize, a beaver with a black muzzle. Despite the distance, an arrow brought him down; and Julian was disappointed because he could not carry away the skin.

Then he made his way along an avenue of tall trees, whose tops formed a sort of triumphal arch, at the entrance to a forest. A kid bounded out of the thicket, a deer appeared at a cross-road, a badger came out of his hole, a peacock spread his tail on the grass; and when he had slain them all, other kids appeared, other deer, other badgers, other peacocks, and blackbirds, jays, polecats, porcupines, lynxes, an endless multitude of beasts, increasing in number every moment. They walked about his feet, trembling, with glances full of meekness and appeal. But Julian did not weary of killing—as he stretched his crossbow, unsheathed his sword, thrust with his cutlas, each in turn—he had no thought for anything else. He knew he had been hunting in some region or other, for an indefinite time, simply by reason of his own existence, doing everything with the ease that one experiences in a dream. Suddenly an extraordinary spectacle attracted his attention. Stags filled a valley beneath, which was shaped like a circus; they crowded together, close to one another, warming one another with their breaths, which rose like smoke in the mist.

The anticipation of such carnage suffocated him with joy for several minutes. Then he dismounted, turned back his sleeves, and began to fire. At the whistling of the first arrow, all the stags turned their heads together. They huddled in a mass; plaintive voices arose, and there was great agitation in the herd.

The slope of the valley was too steep for them to cross. They ran about in the enclosure, trying to escape. Julian continued aiming and firing; and the arrows fell as fast as the drops of a shower of rain. The stags, driven frantic, fought with one another; and their bodies with their mingling antlers made a huge mound, which tumbled to pieces as they changed their position.

At last they were all dead, stretched on the sand, foaming at the nostrils, entrails protruding, and the heaving of their bellies subsiding by degrees. Then everything was still.

Night drew near; and behind the forest, through the spaces between the branches, the sky was as red as a sheet of blood.

Julian leaned against a tree. He gazed with staring eyes at the extent of the slaughter, unable to understand how he had been able to accomplish it.

On the other side of the valley, at the edge of the forest, stood a stag, a doe, and her fawn.

The stag, which was black and unusually tall, bore sixteen antlers and had a white beard. The doe, as light of color as dead leaves, was nibbling the grass; and the spotted fawn, dragging along beside her, tugged at her teats.

Once more the crossbow twanged. The fawn dropped instantly. Thereupon its mother, looking up at the sky, brayed in a deep, heartrending, almost human voice. Julian, exasperated, stretched her on the ground with an arrow sunk fair in the chest.

The huge stag caught sight of him, and gave a leap. Julian discharged his last arrow at him; it struck him in the forehead and remained planted there.

The great stag seemed not to feel it; leaping over the dead bodies, he came steadily forward, seemed about

to leap upon him and rip him open; and Julian retreated in terror. The monstrous beast stopped, and with flaming eyes, as solemn as a patriarch and a judge, repeated three times, while a bell tolled in the distance:

"Accursed! accursed! accursed! Some day, savage soul, thou shalt murder thy father and thy mother!"

Bending his knees, and slowly closing his eyes, he died.

JULIAN was dazed, then overwhelmed by sudden weariness. A feeling of immense disgust and sadness swept over him. With his head in his hands he wept for a long time.

His horse had wandered away; his dogs had abandoned him; the solitude which enveloped him seemed to threaten unknown perils. Impelled by terror, he bent his steps across the country, chose a path at random, and found himself almost immediately at the gate of the castle.

That night he could not sleep. Beneath the flickering light of the hanging lamps, he saw always a vision of the great black stag. Its prophecy haunted him; he struggled against it. "No! no! no! I can not kill them!" Then he thought: "But if I should desire to?" and he feared that the devil might implant the desire within him.

For three months, his anxious mother prayed at his bedside in agony, and his father, groaning bitterly, paced the corridor from morning till night. He summoned the most famous physicians, who ordered quantities of medicine. Julian's disease, they said, was caused by a baleful wind or a desire for love. But the young man, to all their questions, only shook his head.

After a while his strength returned, and he was able to walk in the courtyard, the old monk and his father each holding an arm.

When he was fully recovered, he refused to hunt.

His father, thinking to please him, made him a present of a long Saracen sword. It was hung on the top of a pillar, in a tall stand of arms. To reach it, a ladder was necessary. One day Julian mounted it, but the sword was too heavy and slipped from his fingers, and in falling, grazed his father and cut his coat; Julian, thinking he had killed his father, fainted.

From that time he had a dread of weapons. The sight of a bare sword made him turn pale, and this weakness was a source of great distress to his family.

At last the old monk, in the name of God, of honor, and of his ancestors, ordered him to resume the sports of a gentleman.

The equerries amused themselves every day with the javelins. Julian very soon excelled at that sport. He sent his javelin into the necks of bottles, broke the teeth of the weathercocks, struck the nails in the doors at a hundred paces.

One summer evening, at the hour when dusk makes things indistinct, he was in the arbor in the garden, and fancied he spied at the far end two white wings fluttering at the top of the espalier. Never doubting but that it must be a stork, he hurled his javelin.

A heartrending scream rang out.

It was his mother, whose cap with its long streamers the javelin had nailed against the wall.

Julian fled from the castle and never returned there again.

2

HE CAST his lot in with a band of adventurers who happened to be passing.

He experienced what it was to suffer thirst, hunger, illness, and vermin. He became used to the noise of battle, and to the sight of the dying. The wind bronzed his skin. His limbs became hardened by the constant wearing of armor; and, as he

was strong, fearless, temperate, and shrewd, he soon obtained the command of a company.

At the outset of a battle he would inspire his soldiers with a mighty wave of his sword. With a knotted cord he would climb the walls of citadels at night, swayed by the storm, while sparks of Greek fire clung to his cuirass, and the boiling pitch and melted lead flowed in streams from the battlements. Sometimes a blow from a stone would break his shield. Bridges too heavily weighted with men gave way beneath him. With a twirl of his mace he rid himself of fourteen horsemen. Once in single combat he defied all those who came forward. More than twenty times it was thought he must be killed.

Thanks to the divine care, however, he always escaped; for he was kind to orphans, widows, and particularly to old men. When he saw one walking before him, he would call to him to show his face, as if he were afraid of killing him by mistake.

Fleeing slaves, rebellious peasants, all sorts of dauntless men assembled beneath his flag, and out of these he organized an army which increased in size and became so famous that his aid was often sought.

At different times he succored the Dauphin of France and the King of England, the Templars of Jerusalem, the Surena of the Parthians, the Negus of Abyssinia, and the Emperor of Calicut. He fought Scandinavians covered with fish scales, negroes armed with round shields of hippopotamus-hide and mounted upon little donkeys, gold-colored Indians, who brandished above their heads shining sabers. He conquered the troglodytes and the anthropophagi. He traversed regions so hot that the burning rays of the sun set fire to the hair; and other countries so cold that the arms fell away from the body; and yet other countries where there was so much fog that one seemed to be surrounded by phantoms.

Republics in trouble sought his advice. At interviews of ambassadors he obtained unhoped-for concessions. If a monarch behaved unreasonably, he would suddenly arrive and reprove him. He set nations free. He rescued queens confined in towers. It was he, and no other, who killed the serpent of Milan and the dragon of Oberbirbach.

Now, the Emperor of Occitania, having triumphed over the Spanish Mussulmans, had taken as his concubine the sister of the Calif of Cordova; and he had by her a daughter whom he had brought up in the Christian belief. But the calif, on the pretense of desiring to be converted, came to pay him a visit, attended by a numerous escort; he massacred all his garrison, and confined him in an underground dungeon, where he treated him harshly in order that he might obtain his treasures from him.

Julian hastened to his relief, besieged the city, killed the calif, cut off his head, and hurled it like a cannonball over the fortifications. He then rescued the emperor from prison, and restored him to his throne in the presence of his whole court.

The emperor, wishing to reward such a service, offered him much money in baskets. Julian would not accept it. Thinking that he was not satisfied with the amount, he offered him three-fourths of his wealth; after a second refusal, he asked him to share his kingdom; Julian declined with thanks. The emperor was weeping with vexation, at a loss how to manifest his gratitude, when suddenly he struck his forehead and said a word in the ear of a courtier; the curtains of tapestry parted, and in a few moments a maiden entered.

Her great black eyes gleamed like soft lamps. A charming smile was on her lips. The curls of her hair were

entangled in the jewels of her partly open bodice; and beneath her transparent tunic could be partly seen the youthful beauty of her body. She was plump and small, with a slender waist.

Julian was dazzled with her beauty, especially as he had always led a chaste life.

So he took the emperor's daughter in marriage, receiving a castle which had been bequeathed to her by her mother; and the wedding festivities being at an end, he left with his bride, after many courtesies on both sides.

The castle was of white marble, built in the Moorish fashion, and situated on a promontory, in a forest of orange trees. Terraces of flowers descended to the shores of a bay, where pink shells crackled under the feet. Behind the castle stretched a forest shaped like a fan. The sky was always blue, and the trees were swayed by the sea-breeze and the wind blowing in from the mountains which closed the horizon in the distance.

The rooms were lighted as if by twilight through incrustations on the walls. Tall pillars, slender as reeds, upheld the arches of the cupolas, decorated with reliefs in imitation of the stalactites in caverns.

There were fountains in the rooms, mosaic pavements in the courtyard, festooned partitions, many dainty bits of architecture, and everywhere there was such absolute silence that the rustling of a scarf or the echo of a sigh could be distinctly heard.

JULIAN no longer went to war. He rested, surrounded by a peaceful people; and each day his people passed before him with genuflexions and hand-kissings in the Eastern fashion.

Clad in gorgeous raiment, he would gaze out of a window, recalling his triumphs of former days; and he would have been glad to ride over the desert after gazelles and ostriches, to lie hidden amid the reeds on the watch for leopards, to pass through forests filled with rhinoceroses, to climb to the peaks of the most inaccessible mountains in order to obtain a better aim at the eagles, and to fight the polar bears, on the ice-floes of the northern sea.

Sometimes in dreams he fancied himself like Adam in the midst of Paradise, surrounded by all kinds of animals; by merely stretching out his arms he could kill them; or else they passed before him, two by two, in order of size, from the elephants and lions to the ermines and wild ducks, as on the day when they entered Noah's Ark. From the darkness of the cavern he hurled unerring arrows at them; then others appeared; there was no end; and he would awake, glaring savagely about him.

Princes who were his friends invited him to hunt. He always refused, hoping, by that sort of penance, to avert his evil fate; for it seemed to him that upon the slaughter of animals the fate of his parents depended. But he suffered at not being able to see them, and his other longing became almost unendurable.

His wife, to divert him, sent for jugglers and dancing girls to come to the castle.

She traveled with him, in an open litter, through the country; at other times, reclining in a shallop, they watched the fishes gambol about in the water, which was as transparent as the air; often she threw flowers in his face; seated at his feet, she would play upon a mandolin with three strings; then, placing her clasped hands upon his shoulder, would inquire in a trembling voice: "What aileth thee, my dear lord?"

He would make no reply, or would burst into sobs; but at last, one day, he confessed his terrible fear.

She combated it, reasoning very forcibly: his father and mother were probably dead, or if ever he should

see them again, by what chance, to what purpose, would he perpetrate such an abomination? Therefore, his fear was causeless, and he ought to hunt again.

Julian smiled as he listened to her, but could not determine to gratify her wish.

ONE evening in the month of August, they were in their sleeping-apartment; she had retired and he was kneeling in prayer, when he heard the yelping of a fox, then footsteps under the window; looking out he thought he saw in the darkness what seemed to be the ghosts of animals. The temptation was too strong. He took down his quiver.

His wife expressed surprize.

"I do it to obey thee," he said; "at sunrise I shall return."

However, she dreaded some misadventure.

He reassured her, then went forth, wondering at the inconstancy of her moods.

Not long after his departure, a page appeared and announced that two strangers requested to see her ladyship at once, their lord being absent.

Soon an old man and an old woman entered the room, with bent figures, covered with dust, clad in coarse garments, and each leaning on a stick. Taking courage, they declared that they brought Julian news of his parents.

She leaned from her bed to hear them. But after glancing at each other, they asked her if he still loved them, and if he often spoke of them.

"Oh! yes!" she said.

Then they cried: "Well! We are his parents!" And they sat down, being wearied and fatigued.

But there was nothing to prove to the lady that her husband was their son. They convinced her by describing certain peculiar marks which he had on his body. She jumped out of bed, called a page, and had food set before them.

Although they were very hungry, they could scarcely eat; and she furtively watched the trembling of their bony hands as they raised their goblets.

They asked a hundred questions about Julian. She answered them all, but was careful to say nothing about the ghastly idea that concerned them.

They told her how, when he failed to return home, they had left their castle; wandering about for several years, following vague clues, without losing hope. It had required so much money to pay toll, to cross the rivers, and to live in inns, so much for the privileges of princes and the exactions of thieves, that their purse was empty and they were forced to beg. But what did it matter, since they would soon embrace their son? They extolled his good fortune in having so sweet a wife, and did not tire of gazing upon her and kissing her.

The gorgeousness of the apartment surprized them greatly; and the old man, having examined the walls, asked why the arms of the Emperor of Occitania hung there.

She replied: "He is my father."

Thereupon he started, recalling the prediction of the Bohemian, while the old woman thought of the words of the hermit. Doubtless the glory of her son was but the dawn of eternal splendor; and both sat, open-mouthed, beneath the radiance of the candles which lighted the table.

They had both been very handsome in their youth. The mother still had all her hair, which surrounded her cheeks in smooth bands of snowy whiteness; and the father, with his tall figure and his long beard, resembled a carved image.

The wife urged them not to wait up for Julian. She herself placed them in her own bed, then closed the window. They fell asleep. The day-

light appeared dimly, and outside the window the little birds began to sing.

In the meantime Julian had crossed the park, and was striding through the forest with a nervous step, enjoying the elasticity of the turf and the softness of the air.

The shadows of the trees fell across the grass. Here and there the moonlight made white patches in the clearing, and he feared to go forward, thinking that he saw a sheet of water, or else the placid surface of the ponds blended with the color of the grass. Everywhere a profound silence reigned; none of the beasts were visible which a few minutes before had been prowling about the castle.

The forest grew more dense as he advanced, and the darkness became impenetrable. Puffs of hot wind reached him, full of enervating odors. He buried his feet in the dead leaves, and leaned against an oak to rest a moment.

Suddenly, from behind his back, sprang a blacker mass, a wild boar. Julian had not time to seize his bow, and he grieved over it as a dire calamity.

Then, having left the forest, he saw a wolf slinking along a hedge.

Julian discharged an arrow at him. The wolf stopped, turned his head to look at him, and went on. He trotted along, keeping always at the same distance, stopping from time to time, and, as soon as he was aimed at, continuing his flight.

In this way he crossed an interminable plain, then hills of sand, and found himself at last upon a plateau overlooking a vast extent of country. Flat stones were scattered about among ruined caverns. He stumbled over dead men's bones; and here and there, worm-eaten crosses stood desolate. Strange shapes moved about in the vague shadow of the tombs; hyenas appeared, wild-eyed and panting. They came toward him, and smelt of him, grinning so that they showed their gums. He pulled out his sword, but they darted away at once in all directions, disappearing with their rapid, limping gallop, beneath a cloud of dust.

An hour later he encountered in a ravine a savage bull. With lowered horns, he was digging up the sand with his hoofs. Julian struck him with his lance between his dewlaps. The lance broke as if the animal had been of bronze; he closed his eyes, expecting death. When he opened them the bull had disappeared.

Thereupon he was overcome with shame. A mightier power controlled his strength; and he turned back into the forest, and set out for home. The woods were choked by creeping plants; and he was cutting at them with his sword, when a marten suddenly darted between his legs, a panther leaped over his shoulder, a serpent wound its way around an ash tree. Among its branches was a monstrous jackdaw that stared at Julian; and here and there appeared a vast number of great sparks, as if the firmament had caused all its stars to rain down into the forest. They were the eyes of animals: wildcats, squirrels, owls, parrots, and monkeys.

Julian discharged his arrows at them; but the feathered weapons rested on the leaves like white butterflies. Then he threw stones at them, but they fell to the ground without touching anything. He cursed, uttered imprecations, was suffocated with rage and tried to injure himself.

Then all the animals that he had hunted reappeared, enclosing him within a narrow circle. Some were seated on their haunches, others standing at their full height. He remained in the midst of them, rigid with terror, unable to move. With a supreme effort of will, he stepped forward; those which were perching in the trees opened their wings; those on

the ground moved their limbs; and all went with him.

The hyenas walked ahead of him, the wolf and the wild boar behind. The bull tossed his head at his right, and at his left the serpent glided through the grass; while the panther, arching his back, strode forward with long, velvety strides. Julian walked as slowly as possible in order not to irritate them; while emerging from the dense forest he saw porcupines, foxes, jackals, bears, and vipers.

He began to run; they ran with him. The serpent hissed, the putrid beasts foamed at the mouth. The wild boar touched his heels with his tusks; the wolf rubbed his snout against the palm of his hands. The monkeys pinched him, making horrible grimaces; the marten rolled across his feet. A bear struck off his hat with a blow of his paw, and the panther scornfully dropped an arrow that she was carrying in her mouth.

Their sly maneuvers were instinct with irony. While watching him from the corners of their eyes, they seemed to be planning a scheme of vengeance; and deafened as he was by the buzzing of the insects, beaten by the tails of the birds, suffocated by the breaths of the animals, he walked on with outstretched arms and closed eyes, like a blind man, not having even the strength to cry for mercy.

The crowing of a cock penetrated the air. Others answered; it was daybreak; and he recognized above the orange trees the roof of his home.

Then, on the outskirts of a field, he saw some red partridges fluttering amid the stubble. He unbuckled his cloak and threw it over them like a net. When he raised it, he found but a single bird, and that had been dead a long while and was already decayed.

This disappointment exasperated him beyond control. His thirst for carnage seized him once more; lacking beasts, he desired to slaughter men.

He climbed the three terraces, and burst open the door with a blow of his fist; but at the foot of the staircase the memory of his dear wife softened his heart. She was sleeping, no doubt, and he would go up and surprize her.

Having removed his sandals, he turned the handle softly and entered.

The stained glass of the window dimmed the pale light of dawn. Julian stumbled over clothes upon the floor; a little farther on, he collided with a table on which were dishes.

"Doubtless she has eaten," he said to himself; and he walked toward the bed, which was indistinct in the darkness at the end of the room. When he reached it, intending to kiss his wife, he leaned over the pillow upon which lay the two heads, one beside the other. Then he felt against his lips the touch of a man's beard.

He retreated, thinking that he had gone mad; but he returned to the bed, and with his fingers, feeling about, came in contact with hair which was very long. To convince himself of his mistake he slowly passed his hand over the pillow. But now he was sure it was a beard, and a man! A man in bed beside his wife!

With an outburst of ungovernable fury, he leaped upon them with his dagger, stamping and fuming, roaring like a wild beast. Then he ceased. The dead, pierced to the heart, had not even stirred. He listened attentively to the two almost uniform death-rattles, and as they grew fainter and fainter, another breath, in the distance, seemed to continue them. Indistinct at first, that plaintive, long-drawn voice approached nearer, grew louder, became heartrending, and, terrified beyond measure, he recognized the braying of the great black stag.

As he turned, he fancied that he saw in the doorway the ghost of his wife, with a light in her hand.

The tumult of the murder had awakened her. With one glance she realized everything, and, flying from the room in horror, dropped her torch.

He picked it up.

His father and mother were before him, stretched on their backs, each having a gaping wound in the breast; and their faces, majestic in their gentleness, seemed to guard some eternal secret. Splashes and pools of blood were on their white flesh, on the bedclothes, on the floor and on an ivory Christ hanging in the alcove. The scarlet reflection of the stained glass, just then lit up by the sun, showed up those red spots and scattered others throughout the room. Julian walked toward the corpses, saying to himself, striving to believe, that it was not possible, that he was mistaken, that one sometimes finds incomprehensible resemblances. Finally he stooped to look at the old man more closely, and he saw between his partly closed eyelids a dead eye, which scorched him like fire. Then he went to the other side of the bed, to the other body, whose white hair partly concealed the face. Julian passed his fingers under the hair, raised the head, and gazed at it, holding it at the end of his stiffened arm, while with the other hand he raised the torch. Drops of blood, soaking through the mattress, fell one by one to the floor.

At the close of the day he appeared before his wife, and in a changed voice he bade her, first of all, not to answer him, not to approach him, nor even to look at him, and to follow, under pain of damnation, all his orders, which were irrevocable.

The obsequies were to be carried out in accordance with the instructions which he had left in writing, on a prie-dieu in the death-chamber. He gave to her his palace, his vassals, all his property, not even retaining the clothes that he was wearing, and his sandals, which she would find at the top of the stairs.

She had obeyed the will of God by making his crime possible, and therefore it was her duty to pray for his soul, since thenceforth he ceased to exist.

The old people were buried magnificently in the chapel of a monastery three days' journey from the castle. A monk with lowered hood followed the procession, far from all the rest, and no one dared to speak to him.

During the mass, he lay prostrate in the center of the doorway, with his arms stretched out like a crucifix, and his face in the dust.

After the burial, he was seen to take the road leading to the mountains. He turned his head to look back several times, and at last disappeared.

3

LEAVING the country, he begged his daily bread from place to place. He held forth his hand to horsemen on the roads, humbly accosted the harvest-makers, or stood motionless by the gates of courtyards; and his face was so sad that no one ever refused him alms.

As a penance, he would tell his story to all; then they would fly from him, making the sign of the cross. In villages through which he had once passed, as soon as he was recognized, the people closed their doors, shrieked threats at him, and threw stones. The more charitable placed a bowl on the window-sill, then closed the shutters in order that they might not see him.

Shunned everywhere, he avoided mankind; and fed himself on roots, plants, tainted fruit, and shell-fish, which he found along the shore.

Sometimes at an angle of the coast

he perceived a medley of crowded roofs, with stone, weathercocks, bridges, towers, and a network of dark streets from which rose to his ears a ceaseless humming. The longing to have a share in the life of men tempted him to go down into the town. But the bestial expression of the faces, the tumult of the different trades, the indifference of men's speech froze his blood. On holidays, when the bells of the cathedral rang at dawn and roused the spirits of the people, he watched them come forth from their houses; the dances on the public squares, the fountains of beer at the street corners, the damask draperies in front of the abodes of princes; and when night had come, he would gaze through the windows at the long family tables where grandfathers held little children on their knees; then sobs suffocated him and he returned to the fields.

He contemplated with yearnings of love the colts playing in the grass, the birds in their nests, the insects on the flowers; at his approach one and all fled, concealing themselves in fright, or flew rapidly away.

He sought solitude. But the wind sounded in his ears like a death-rattle; the dew falling to the ground recalled to his mind other, heavier teardrops. The sun every evening suffused the clouds with blood, and every night, in his dreams, he relived his parricide.

He made himself a haircloth shirt, with iron spikes. He ascended on his knees every hill which had a chapel at the top. But that pitiless thought spoiled the splendor of tabernacles, and tortured him despite the agony of his penance.

He did not rebel against God, who had inflicted that deed upon him, and yet he was desperate at the thought that he had been capable of committing it.

He had such a horror of his own person that he plunged recklessly into dangers. He saved paralytics from fire, children from deep ravines. But the abyss spurned him, the flames would have none of him.

Time did not allay his suffering. It became intolerable. He determined to die.

One day as he leaned over a lake to judge the depth of the water, he saw on the opposite side a fleshless old man, with a white beard, and of so piteous an aspect that it moved him to tears. The old man also wept. Without recognizing him, Julian remembered vaguely a face resembling his. He uttered a cry; it was his father; and from that day he ceased to think of killing himself.

Thus, bearing the burden of his memory, he traveled through many countries, and he reached a stream, which it was perilous to cross because of its violence and because of the large tract of miry ground along its banks. For many years no one had dared to attempt it.

An old boat, buried at the stern, raised its bow among the reeds. Julian, on examining it, discovered a pair of oars, and the idea came to him of dedicating his life to the service of others.

He began by constructing on the shore a sort of roadway making it possible to reach the stream; and he broke his nails moving huge stones, which he held against his breast, slipping in the mire, sinking in it, and nearly perishing more than once.

Then he repaired the boat with driftwood, and built himself a hovel with clay and trunks of trees.

When it became known that crossing was possible, travelers appeared. They called him from the other shore by waving flags, and Julian would row over. The boat was very heavy, and they overloaded it with all sorts of baggage and freight, to say nothing of the beasts of burden, which added to the confusion by their terrified plunging. He made no charge

for his labor; some gave him scraps of food which they took from their wallets, or worn-out clothes which they no longer wanted. Brutal men cursed him. Julian gently reproved them and they retorted with insults. He contented himself by blessing them.

A small table, a stool, a bed of dead leaves, and three clay cups constituted his furniture. Two holes in the wall served the purpose of windows. On one side arid plains stretched as far as the eye could see, with stagnant ponds here and there; and before his door rolled the greenish waves of the river. In the spring the damp earth gave forth an odor of corruption. Then a violent wind would raise eddies of dust, which entered everywhere, muddied the water, made the mouth gritty. A little later there were clouds of mosquitoes, whose buzzing and stinging continued day and night. Then came bitter frosts, which gave to everything the rigidity of stone, and aroused a frantic craving for meat.

During months Julian did not see a living soul. Often he closed his eyes, trying to recall his youthful days; and the courtyard of a castle would appear to him, with greyhounds on the porch, footmen in the armory, and beneath an arbor of vines, a fair-haired youth between an old man wrapped in furs and a lady with a huge cap; then of a sudden, the two corpses would appear before him. He would throw himself face downward on his bed, and exclaim, weeping: "Oh! my poor father! my poor mother!" And he would fall into a comatose state, in which the fearful visions continued.

One night, when he was asleep, he thought he heard someone call him. He listened intently and could hear only the moaning of the waves.

Presently the same voice repeated: "Julian!"

It came from the opposite shore, which seemed to him most strange, in view of the breadth of the river.

A third time came the call: "Julian!" And that loud voice sounded like the ring of a church bell.

Having lighted his lantern, he came out of the hut. A fierce tempest raged. The darkness was profound, here and there broken by the foamy tops of the surging waves.

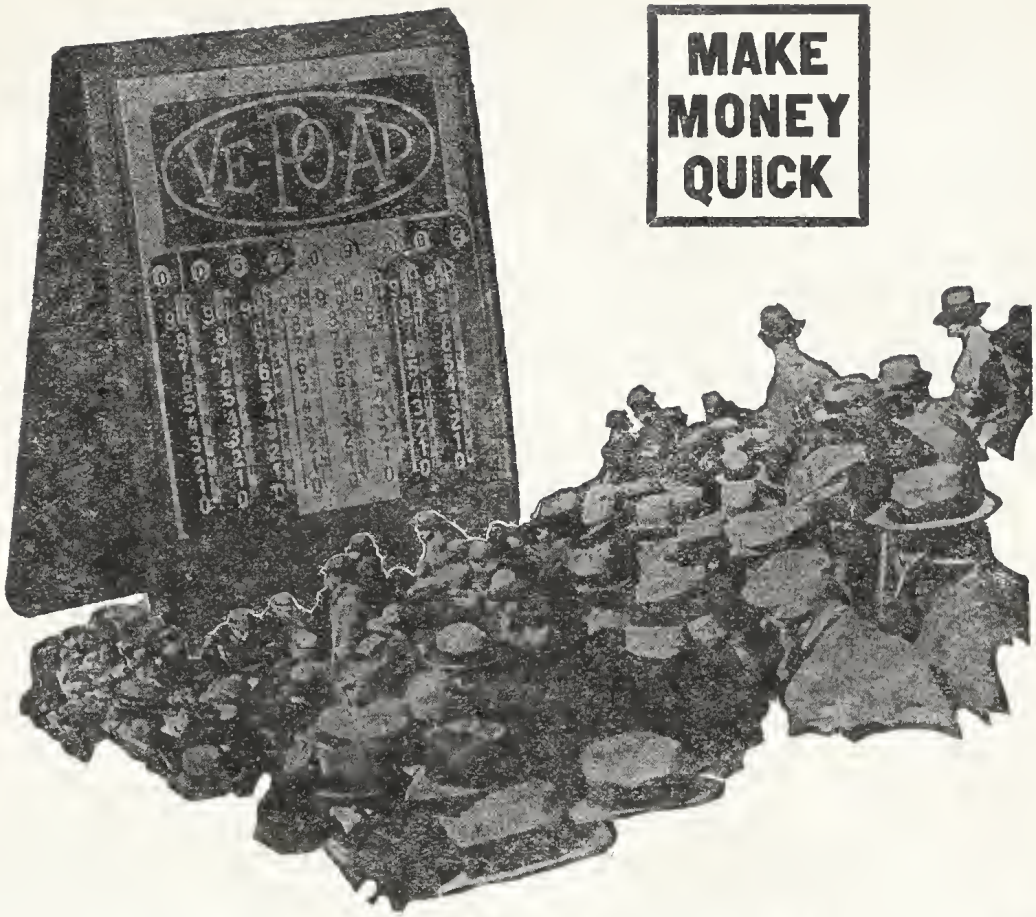
After a moment's hesitation, Julian cast off the cable. Instantly the water became smooth, the boat glided across and reached the other bank, where a man was waiting.

He was wrapped in a tattered cloak, his face was like a mask of plaster, and his eyes gleamed redder than coals. When he raised the lantern to his face, Julian saw that it was covered with a hideous leprosy; and yet there was in his attitude a kingly majesty.

When he entered the boat, it sank deep into the water, borne down by his weight; a wave brought it to the surface again and Julian began to row.

At every stroke of the oars, the surf raised the bow. The water, blacker than ink, raced madly on both sides. It dug abysses, it reared mountains, and the frail bark rose upon them, then plunged down into the depths, where it whirled about, tossed to and fro by the tempest.

Julian bent his body, stretched his arms, and, bracing himself with his feet, threw himself back with a sudden wrench of his frame, in order to gain greater strength. The hail stung his hands, the rain poured down his back, the fierce gusts of wind took his breath away. He stopped, and immediately the boat was carried to leeward. But realizing that he had in hand a matter of importance, an order which must be obeyed, he bent to his oars once more, and the rattling



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of the thole-pins mingled with the howling of the tempest.

The little lantern burned before him. At intervals birds flying by concealed it. But he could always see the eyes of the leper, who stood at the stern, motionless as a statue.

And the journey lasted a long, long time.

When they entered the hut, Julian closed the door, and the man fell on the stool. The sort of shroud which had covered him fell to his hips; and his shoulders, his breast, his thin arms, were covered by a multitude of scaly pustules. Immense wrinkles plowed his forehead. Like a skeleton, he had a hole in the place of his nose, and his bluish lips gave forth a breath as thick as mist, and nauseating.

"I am hungry!" he said.

Julian gave him all that he had, an old piece of pork and a crust of black bread.

After he had devoured these, the table, the plate, and the knife-hilt bore the same marks that covered his body.

Then he said: "I am thirsty!"

Julian went to fetch his pitcher, and as he took it up, there came from it an aroma which delighted his heart and filled his nostrils. It was wine! What a find! But the leper put out his hand, and emptied the pitcher at a draft.

Then he said: "I am cold!"

Julian, with his candle, lighted a bunch of dried heather in the middle of the cabin.

The leper drew near to warm himself; and cowering before it, he trembled in every limb, and sank to the floor; his eyes no longer gleamed, his ulcers began to burst, and in an almost inaudible voice, he murmured: "Thy bed!"

Julian gently helped him over to it, and stretched the sail of his boat to cover him.

The leper groaned, the corners of his mouth drooped and disclosed his teeth; his breast rose and fell with the quickening of his rattling breath, and his belly sank to his spine with every breath that he drew.

Presently he closed his eyes.

"My bones are like ice! Come and lay thyself beside me!"

And Julian, raising the sail, lay down upon the dead leaves, close beside him.

The leper turned his head.

"Undress thyself, so that I may have the warmth of thy body!"

Julian removed his clothes; then, as naked as the day he was born, he took his place again in the bed; and he felt against his flesh the skin of the leper, colder than a serpent and rough as a file.

He tried to hearten him; and the other replied, panting for breath: "Ah! I am dying! Come nearer, and warm me! Not with thy hands! no! with thy whole body!"

Julian stretched himself upon the leper, mouth to mouth, breast to breast.

Then the leper drew him close, and his eyes suddenly shone with the brilliancy of stars; his hair grew long like the rays of the sun; the breath of his nostrils was as the perfume of roses; a cloud of incense rose from the hearth, and the waves of the river sang. Meanwhile, an ecstasy, a superhuman joy descended like a flood into the soul of the enraptured Julian; and he whose arms were about him grew and grew in stature, until his head and his feet touched the opposite walls of the cabin. The roof disappeared, making visible the heavens; and Julian ascended toward the blue expanse, face to face with our Lord Jesus, who bore him upward to Heaven.

This is the story of Saint Julian the Hospitable, as it may be found written on the stained-glass windows of a church in my birthplace.

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The Eyrie

(Continued from page 438)

the doings of de Grandin. His latest in the February issue was good, but he might have devoted more description to the tortures undergone by the victim and raised a few more goose bumps on the reader."

"I have long been a reader of WEIRD TALES and it suits me to a 'T'," writes Don C. Hilsinger, of St. Louis, Michigan. "I get very tired of the common line of love stories with the usual line of mush. I like something to stimulate my imagination, and I have found it in WEIRD TALES."

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Readers, what is your favorite story in this issue? Your favorite in the February issue, as shown by your votes, is *The Call of Cthulhu*, by H. P. Lovecraft. Second and third places go to *The Ghost Table*, by Elliot O'Donnell, and *Mephistopheles and Co., Ltd.*, by Seabury Quinn.

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Story	Remarks
(1)----------	----------
(2)----------	----------
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The Magic of Chac-Mool

(Continued from page 480)

clean climbing turn, but in a series of zooms, with a sharp bank now and then. I had to hop the trees of the far bank the first time round, then I gave her the full gun and made ragged circles around the bar with only a few hundred feet of altitude instead of a decent thousand or so. She hadn't her usual pep, that was plain; and I grabbed the oil can and made a few adjustments, analyzing the distinct components of her deep roar. My eyes on Sarazon ahead of me, I screamed at him to fix his safety belt, but he was hugging the gunwale and peering over so fixedly that I snatched a glance too.

There below us, at the edge of the jaguar trail, stood the Priest of Ah-Puch, dazzling in the sun against the dark greenery. He was looking up at us with arms outstretched.

I grinned down at the tiny helpless creature, leveled off, and then flew level—fairly level, you might say, for at once she began missing, and my grin was wiped off. She bucked along, losing headway, and it was then that Sarazon sprang to his feet and threw out his arms in a wild gesture back toward the figure far down behind us.

I swear it was a full minute before the motor ceased its thunder that he toppled out. And I'll swear that before he fell he was dead—for a ghastly blue tint seemed suddenly to suffuse his face, and then he slumped. We were over the jungle as it happened, and he vanished into the green like a diver into the sea. Then, as I gaped down, the motor went dead.

Frantically though I worked before she lost headway, there was nothing for it but to get back to the bar if I was lucky enough not to lose control entirely. So I dived, dived like a

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vulture on its prey, till the wires howled in a mad crescendo. Then I checked sharply, took one dizzy bank round toward the bar and swooped along with only a foot or two of altitude to try for a landing. Just clearing the big trees again, I made it, a little bumpy, and lurched down along the bar to a full stop right before the Priest of Ah-Puch.

His arms were lowered, now, and somehow I was glad of it. I had the oddest fear that he would point that owl-headed baton at me. Idiotically I felt it had something to do with the blue blight that had stricken Sarazon. But as the High Priest stepped softly into the riffles of the ford and approached the plane, I remembered my automatic, and grasped it stealthily. Then I remembered, too, that I had already shot this creature, and that it hadn't seemed to take. I waited.

He came up to the plane and stood below me, and simply held out his hands, together, palms up. It was the attitude of the squat figures that held up Chac-Mool's table, a posture to sustain a heavy weight.

I looked for a long moment at his gold mustachios, and then I bent down, got the gold bar at my feet, heaved it over the side, and gently lowered it into his hands.

Then suddenly I felt beaten, and lost, and lonely, and I thought of Cleaver and Sarazon, who had bought that gold for me with their lives, but whose lives that gold could not buy back. My head fell for a second; when I looked up, the Priest of Ah-Puch had gone back into the jungle.

Then, incredibly, came the deep-throated normal roar of my motor, and the old crate was sizzling down the bar. Faster and faster she sped, till I had a bare second to lift her off the sands. She leaped into the air like a kid's kite in a sudden squall, and I thundered away—away toward Belize, for that might as well be my next port o' call.

The Jewel of Seven Stones

(Continued from page 466)

or else to die completely at the end of seven thousand years, Kaku the priest had firmly planted in her mind the thought that if the seven stones of that jewel were destroyed, her second life should also wane. The seven stones were to her a constant reminder of the fate which overshadowed her like—like, by example, the string you tie about your finger to remind you to buy fresh razor-blades or tooth-powder next time you go past the drug store." He grinned delightedly at his homely example.

"But how could Kaku know when Peligia had been awakened, and how could he come back to fight for her?" I demanded.

"Kaku, my friend, is dead," he replied seriously, "but like your own Monsieur John Brown, his soul goes—or, at least, went—marching on. And because it was not a good soul, but one which dwelt within its body in constant companionship with the ugly thought of jealousy, it was not permitted to continue its journey toward perfection, but was chained to the earth it had aforetime walked. Always in Kaku's consciousness, even after he had ceased to possess a body, was the thought of his unrequited love for Peligia and the fear that she should be awakened from her trance by a man whom she would love. Not more swiftly does the fireman respond to the alarm than did the restless, earthbound spirit of Kaku answer the knowledge that Peligia had returned to consciousness. In the guise of a cat he came at first, for cats were familiar things in old Egypt. Again, in the form of a crocodile he did all but kill the young Bennett and his bride as they motored to dine with us. Once more—and how he did it we do not know—he appeared and set fire

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to their house, and all but encompassed her death when he caused the rope to part as Peligia escaped the flames.

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"But see here," I persisted, "do you mean to tell me Kaku will never return to plague Peligia and Ellsworth again?"

"Yes," he said, with an elfish grin, "I think I may truthfully say that Kaku will never again return. *Parbleu,* this night the iron literally entered into his soul!

"You saw me contend with him; you saw him vanish like the shadows of night before the rising sun. Draw your own happy conclusions. Meantime"—he reached for the shining green bottle in which the cognac glowed with a ruby iridescence—"to your very good health, my friend, and the equally good health of Monsieur and Madame Bennett."

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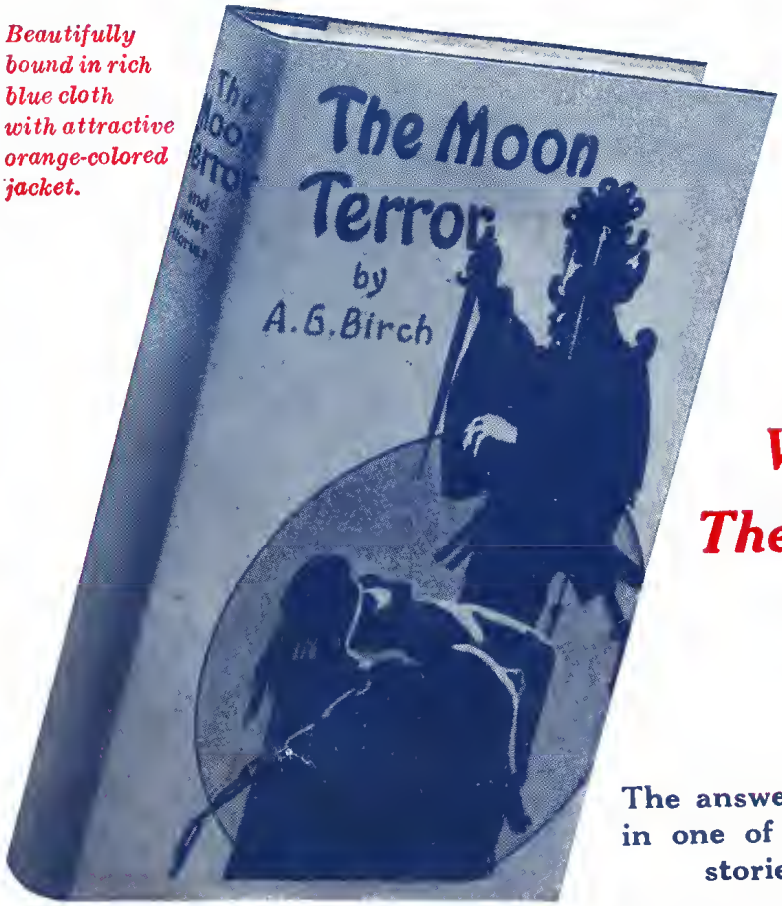

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