Weird Tales

The Unique Magazine

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Weird Tales

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A MAGAZINE of the BIZARRE and UNUSUAL

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Contents for June, 1928

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THIS magazine has received a vast number of letters from enthusiastic readers who want more weird-scientific stories of the type that Edmond Hamilton writes. We pride ourselves on having printed in WEIRD TALES some of the best weird-scientific stories ever written, and will continue to print the cream of the world's contemporary weird-scientific fiction, but maintaining a proper balance among the various kinds of weird tales and not allowing the pseudo-scientific tales to crowd the other weird stories or lessen the amount of wonderful eery stories that are not on scientific themes. But since Edmond Hamilton's brilliant tales have been mentioned by so many readers, we want to give you a hint of the wonderful treat this author has in store for you in future issues of WEIRD TALES.

The pseudo-science of today is the real science of tomorrow. Many of the conceptions of Jules Verne, called fantastic and chimerical at the time they appeared in that imaginative Frenchman's stories, are sober reality today. Jules Verne's stories attained tremendous popularity, and started the vogue of what were called "pseudo-scientific" tales. He has been surpassed by other writers since, but his stories introduced a new type of fiction, and gained their great popularity because they stimulated the imagination of the readers and gave them flashes into the unknown future of science. All honor to Jules Verne! And we are not trying to take from him any part of the honor that belongs to him as the initiator of that genre of fiction when we say that Edmond Hamilton's imagination begins to work where Jules Verne's left off. *The Atomic Conquerors*, published in WEIRD TALES a year and a half ago, set a new high mark for other writers of weird-scientific fiction to aim at.

In *Crashing Suns*, the next story of Mr. Hamilton's that will appear in WEIRD TALES, he has sent his daring imagination winging out into the unknown spaces between the stars. And what a story that is! Its scene is set 100,000 years in the future, after the human race has spread out and occupied all the planets of our solar system. "They had gone out to planet after planet, had conquered the strange atmospheres and bacteria and gravitations, until now the races of man held sway over all the sun's eight wheeling worlds."

(Continued on page 856)

"Look! Look!"

There in the center of the promontory, seemingly all alone, stood the arch-fiend of all this havoc—the high priest of the sorcerers, Kwo-Sung-tao!

IT IS NOT TOO LATE—

to read one of the most popular stories that has been printed in this magazine to date. But you will have to rush your order in if you want a copy because we are filling a great many orders every day and the edition is limited.

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The Devil's Martyr

BY SIGNE TOKSVIG

"Sathanas, I adjure thee to speak!"

IN THE garden of the episcopal palace only the dragon-flies were stirring. They gleamed and darted over a little fountain pool, iridescent, energetic, careless of the summer heat that weighted the still leaves and the drooping flowers. They skimmed close to the thin silver line spouting from the statue, a small dilapidated faun; they circled in patterns of light around his weather-beaten head, making a vivid but hardly appropriate halo for it.

A boy lay close by the fountain, watching them. He was fifteen, tall for his age, and too slim for the black clothes he was wearing. Except for their color they were those of any noble youth of his time: a doublet, close-fitting hose, a short surcoat, a fall of white lace around the throat. His brown wavy hair had a glint of gold in it, and framed a handsome face with definite features, black brows, dark blue eyes and curving red lips, contrasting oddly with his air of shy sensitiveness, his white thin cheeks, his pallid hands.

At the moment he was smiling as he watched the dance of the dragon-flies. He loved this spot; it was the only brightness in the great stiff garden where even in summer the cathedral aisles of elm and beech were dim and gloomy. His uncle the Bishop, whose ward he had been since his parents died, disliked the frivolity of flowers and advised the solemn ave-

nues for ambulatory meditation. Young Erik of Visby had been sent out for that very purpose; a book of prayers lay forgotten on the moss beside him, but now if he noticed it at all it was only to see that the coruscating wings were more like jewels than the precious stones with which the missal was encrusted.

But a prayer-book will not be forgotten with impunity. Erik had no sooner discovered the living halo around the head of the queer little statue than a tall, thin cleric in a dark cowl appeared at the end of the avenue and looked about. He soon saw the boy and came noiselessly toward him.

"Do you call this devotion?"

At the sound of the metallic voice the boy jumped up and swung around, his hand flying nervously through his hair.

"Father Sebastian—I——" He choked with apprehension.

The monk lifted a long, slender hand and his large, light gray eyes widened.

"What were you sent out for?"

The boy hung his head, saw the missal and hastily picked it up.

"Not to lie here, gaping at a heathen stone! What made you do it?"

The boy rubbed the book with his sleeve but was silent.

"You don't know? Didn't something seem to pluck at you; didn't something draw you away from the avenue where prayers are easy to this place where you forget them?" Father Sebastian's face blazed into sudden anger and he shouted: "That was the Devil!"

Erik cast a terrified glance at the little gray faun, and his bewilderment was so evident that the tense, meager face of the monk relaxed. He laid a pitying hand on the boy's shoulder.

"You didn't mean to let him. You forgot. But *he* is always watching; he took the shape of one of those gaudy flies to lure you away. My fault, too; I should not have left you so long."

Erik, looking down, could not see the watchful tenderness trembling in the thin lips; he only shivered to hear the words, "Come, we must do penance in the chapel, for the Lord is angry with us," and the monk walked toward the trees, bidding the wilting boy precede him, as if unwilling to leave him out of his sight again.

Erik went in a daze. When he passed from the hot, golden sunshine into the chill dark green of the avenue, he felt buried; it was like an endless tomb. It ran straight for nearly half a mile, walled in by ancient elms that branched sideways until they arched impenetrably into each other, high overhead. There was dead silence here, and awe. Had he been alone he would have run breathlessly to the far end where the sun shone. The anger of the Lord was ready to overwhelm him anywhere, but most terribly here and in the chapel. He shed a few unmanly tears. He would never have done that in his father's castle, five long years ago. But he was tired now, and weak with fasting and vigils, and his back still hurt from the last time he had done penance with the whip. It was no consolation that Father Sebastian, too, flagellated himself.

They were half-way up the avenue. Drops of light dappled it here and there. He could see two human specks moving about at the end of it. One had a reddish look, an unfamiliar color. The other was wide and black; that was likely to be Father Laurence, the bishop's thrifty almoner, who had no taste for the whip.

It *was* Father Laurence. But to whom was he bowing?

Erik was dazzled. Dominant against the green leaves stood a

big, broad-shouldered, dark-bearded knight, clad entirely in shimmering vermilion. Soft white plumes drooped from his hat, and a heavy gold chain about his neck glinted fierily. As Erik approached, staring childishly, the stranger watched him smiling; then as the two came into the sun he turned to Father Laurence:

"Is this the Count of Visby?"

Father Sebastian pressed forward and said sharply, "This is a boy entrusted to our care."

"True," the stranger deferred with a slight bow, "but is he not also Count of Visby?"

The almoner waved Father Sebastian aside. "You are quite right, my Lord, of course! What our brother means is simply, as you know, that Count Erik is the ward of his uncle the Bishop until he comes of age."

But the ascetic would not be denied. "This boy was vowed to us by his dying mother, and he should not be reminded of the empty title which he is about to forsake."

"As well as the domain of Visby which so conveniently adjoins the estate of the Order," the knight said, flicking his boot with his riding-crop.

Father Sebastian was about to answer hotly, but folded his arms, bent his head, and said with dignity, "Come with me, Erik, to the chapel."

"Not so fast, not so fast," the knight laughed, stretching out a long arm and gathering the boy to his side; "the reverend Father Laurence here will tell you that I have just come from the Bishop, who has given me permission to take away Count Erik for a month to my castle of Lynas."

The almoner nodded deferentially and drew his colleague aside, hissing at him, "Let him go! It is the Bishop's orders." Father Laurence was plump, but he had a firm jaw and small, practical eyes. Every gooseberry in the kitchen garden was known to him.

Erik stood quiescent within the arm of the red knight, not daring to take his eyes off Father Sebastian's white, pained face, and more than a little afraid of this man who had said he was going to take him away. But when the monks turned their dark backs to them and walked down the corridor of trees, he felt a strong hand press his shoulder.

"They're gone now, Erik. Would you like to come with me? I am Michael of Lynas. I knew your father."

A vague memory stirred in the boy and he looked up, shyly. The bronzed, bearded face was smiling, and the narrow dark eyes were full of kindliness. In a rush of confidence he begged, "Let us go now, before flagellation in the chapel!"

"By a thousand devils we will go!" swore the knight, shaking his gauntlet at the retreating monks. "My horse will carry us both."

They hurried away, the boy half hidden in the swirl of the vermilion mantle, and the clerics, turning back, saw them disappear around a corner.

Father Sebastian doubled his stride and began to mutter rapid prayers.

"What demon are you exorcising now?" sneered Father Laurence. "Surely the fasting and whipping you do is affecting your mind!"

"I see the Prince of the Air, robed in the red of eternal fire, carrying off a soul that was entrusted to me," cried the monk, beginning to run, "and he shall not!"

The other pursued him, clutching his cowl.

"You'll stay here or the Bishop will deal with you! I told you the Earl of Lynas is not known to you because he has been away in the East for ten years or more."

"Is that why you would trust him with a boy whom I have been preparing for the novitiate?"

Father Sebastian was icily scornful, Father Laurence endlessly sweet:

"Because you've prepared him so well he's certain to choose us when the time comes, and besides—but you wouldn't understand—for one month of his young kinsman's company the Earl is willing to drop the lawsuit about the western meadows."

"Sell all thou hast——" murmured the other, then asked bitterly, "Was Lynas right? Does the domain of Visby go to the order if Erik enters it?"

"Or if he dies. It does," said Father Laurence casually and bent down to uproot a presumptuous dandelion. "And what other heir is there, or who will administer it better?"

Father Sebastian stared into the sky, his face contracting. "I shall spend the month in prayer for him."

"If you want work," his colleague smiled, "I hear that witchcraft has broken out in the town again—healing with magic herbs and so on. They say that Dame Agnes and her pretty little daughter Karin——"

But Father Sebastian was walking rapidly away in the direction of the chapel. The almoner smoothed out the hole where the dandelion had been.

TWILIGHT arose from under the trees and veiled the garden. The dragon-flies of the fountain folded their wings, and a serf came out to turn off the tinkling water. The world was still as the hovering moths.

There was quiet, too, between the blossoming hedges where Erik was riding. In the courtyard four men-at-arms had been waiting for them, and Earl Michael had caught him up in front of himself on a black stallion. Through the town it had pirouetted a little, but now it was trotting ahead peacefully enough. The rhythm almost put the boy to sleep, tired and weak with hunger as he was, and he soon found himself gently drawn back against the broad chest of the Earl. There he rested. A soothing warmth came from the firm strong body, and he marveled dreamily at the even, magnificent thud of the heart. Now he remembered this man. Long ago, in the castle of Visby—he must have been very young—he had been brought into the great hall by his father, who had laughed and flung him into the arms of his friend, where he had lain still and heard the same reverberant heart-beat. He wondered would he ever see Visby again. He had given up asking Father Sebastian to let him.

The Earl reined in the horse violently. Erik nearly slid down but he was held in a steady grip. In the diaphanous northern evening, he could see that a body was lying across the road, the slight body of a girl, her kirtle torn and her long light hair tossed about her.

One of the men dismounted and brought her to his master. Thick amber hair fell away from a face as white as the hawthorn flowers. The Earl looked at her. "She's not badly hurt," he said. "Take her to the last house of the town."

Erik's heart sank. Often indeed had he been told that women were the favorite aids of Lucifer, but now he was only hoping that this poor hurt pretty thing would be helped by the powerful arm sustaining himself.

"Wait!" the Earl commanded, and Erik, following his gaze, saw a bundle of plants by the roadside. They were brought to the master, who examined them carefully. The boy waited breathlessly. Never had he seen anything so pitiful as the round white shoulder cut by a red gash.

At last the Earl said something in a foreign tongue; one of the men lifted the inert body in front of him; and the little cavalcade continued in the darkening shadows.

After a while the Earl remarked, as if he had been put in mind of it by the feel of Erik's ribs under the thin clothes, "Your Father Sebastian, what does he do besides starving you? I mean, what is he famous for; does he illuminate beautiful books of hours?"

"Oh, no," Erik answered with some pride, "before he came here he was a great exorcist of devils—four thousand and five hundred and forty-seven he drove out of one person's body once, he told me. And he has got sixty-nine witches burned—but only when they wouldn't renounce the Evil One; he says he doesn't hold with burning them if they confess and repent."

"Was that in the Bishop's town?" The Earl's voice was steely.

"I don't know, I think not; there's been none there for some years. No, now he practises austerities. He can fast longer and sleep less and pull the girdle of spikes tighter than anybody I know, and he hardly feels flagellation," Erik trailed off disconsolately.

"A proud martyr."

"He often tells me about the martyrs and how he envies them that they were let suffer for the love of the Lord—I can't understand——" he broke off, terrified at himself.

"The word 'love' seems strange to you?" the man asked tentatively, at the same time drawing the mantle closer. But Erik only shook his head, not wishing to risk injudicious confessions.

They rode more slowly now. The hoofs were sinking in a sandy road, and Erik could smell the salt tang of the sea and the spicy little shrubs and flowers that crouched near it. The strong air made him drowsy; he wanted to rest and ride forever. But the road turned, and soon there was the sound of sliding summer waves on a long beach. He started up.

"The sea?"

"The sound you'll hear day and night at Lynas. The place where I'll teach you to swim. Look!"

There was a wide bay in front of them, and into the bay a high tongue of land, and on that, dark and formidable against a pale green sky, rose a tall, square, turreted castle. One of the men sounded a horn, and lights gleamed in the deep slits of masonry, and the smoky red of torches flared below. With a grating whine the drawbridge was lowered, and hoofs clattered hollowly over it. Inside the gloomy courtyard forbidding grooms were waiting, men as tanned with another sun as their master himself.

Earl Michael dismounted. Losing his support, overwhelmed by weariness and the sharp air, Erik saw everything whirl about him. He was caught then, in the same strong arms, and carried into the castle like a child.

Darkness slid over his mind in long purling waves like the sea. When he began to rise out of it he heard low voices speaking a foreign language. He was conscious of hands running smoothly along his limbs, rubbing his feet, restoring heat to his body. If it were a dream, he would not wake up. He clenched his eyelids, he would force himself back to sleep, but soon he feared the cold gray matins bell would ring!

They were lifting him now; what a pity! they would see how hideous his back was with the scars from the whip. And then he heard a full round oath in a ringing voice that he knew—Earl Michael's. He was not dreaming! They were caressing his back with velvety oils; something silky descended over him; something pungent was held to his nose. He opened his eyes.

He was in a small but high-vaulted room suffused with marigold light and hung with verdant tapestries. Two women were leaning

over him, but he saw only the anxious face of Earl Michael. He smiled to banish the concern, and the man touched his cheek gently.

"I was afraid they had left only your bones!"

He was given something strong and delicious to drink, and the light feeling in his head vanished. He looked around, first at the loose crimson silk mantle in which he was wrapped. The Earl was stately in a green, wide-sleeved, fur-brimmed tunic. The two women stood attentively in a corner. Their skin was brown; their eyes were black and humid. They were so dark to Erik's wondering glance that he involuntarily thought of a white fairness he had seen, and hair the color of yellow amber.

He tried to sit up. "What happened to her?"

The Earl was puzzled. "To whom? — Oh, the girl we found! I forgot. I must——" He rose. "You'll hear later. To sleep now."

He was gone. The boy sank back to rest.

IN ANOTHER room of the castle, simpler and barer, the young girl of the road sat in half-darkness by an open fire. Shadows flickered on the walls and she did not notice that a door opened. Like a sudden apparition a figure stood before her, a tall man hid in a curious cloak of vivid green, terminating in a hood that was crowned by two small, hornlike plumes and a great emerald shining between them. His face was muffled, showing only the steady, burning eyes. He did not speak nor make any gesture, but the girl had no sooner looked up than her pale passivity changed into joyful awe. She threw herself at his feet.

"Lord!" she sobbed. "You have come back at last!"

"Have you kept the laws?" he asked in a thick, unnatural voice.

"Always," she replied; "my mother taught me what you taught her and the others of our faith. We have helped the good and hurt the cruel. Today I was going home with a bundle of healing herbs when the boys stoned me and called me witch."

"You know that they will always call you 'witch' and the god 'devil'?"

"I ask only to suffer for the god!" There was rapture in her face.

"You must stay at Lynas for a month and serve the young Count Erik, who will be one of us."

She nodded and sank down to adore him again. When she rose he was gone. She showed no surprize.

ERIK woke with a start, his heart palpitating; had he overslept for matins? But slowly he worked forward to reality; thrilled with delight he looked out, not on imprisoning trees, but on an opal sea, calm and brightening into blue. A shining speck moved out beyond the far foamy line of the third reef. It came nearer; it was the Earl. Down on the strip of hard, white, sandy beach, sheltered by dunes that held the sun, Erik went to meet him. Laughing at the boy's fears, the man assured him that soon he, too, would be swimming, if not beyond the third, at least beyond the second reef; while Erik shivered, undressed against his will, pitifully thin and pale beside the other's brown muscularity. But after he had thrust himself into the clear, bracing saltiness, had come out alive, and lay baking in a fragrant nook of the dunes, he began to feel a new strength pulsating in his blood, and saw his skin turn pink in the sun.

There were meals with wines and savory meats, and in the evening they went to a curtained hall lit by many candles held in sparkling flowers of glass. Silk hangings glistened along the walls, and rugs of strange patterns silenced the floor. Other-

wise there was nothing except a divan wide and long, and soft as morning sleep. Here they lay, and musicians came with flutes and citherns while the two Eastern women danced for them. Erik felt he should hide his face, yet he did not, following with big eyes the whirling veils, the glittering bangles, the pliant movements. The Earl watched only him. They salaamed away, and in came the girl of the road with a guitar which she strummed while she sang plaintive songs of the people in a sweet, slender voice. Erik went to sleep.

THE days went by, long days full of satisfied curiosities, the vigor of sea and sun, food and wine, dance and music and sleep. Erik seemed to grow visibly taller, heavier, stronger, and the monkish pallor soon gave way to a hard, clear tan. In the evening now, one or other of the Eastern women remained frankly coiled up by the side of her master. Karin, the girl of the road, stayed, too. Erik was teaching her to read, proud of at least one of his former accomplishments.

One night, the next before last of the end of the month, the Earl saw their lips meet over the big, black-letter book, and he stroked his pointed beard with satisfaction. When they were alone he said, "Now will you forsake the world, the flesh and —the devil?"

The boy ran his fingers gayly over the guitar. "I have a few surprizes for Father Sebastian." At the thought of his former preceptor he pulled his black brows together. "You worship another god?" he dared.

Earl Michael was startled out of his bronze calm.

"What do you know of that?" he asked sharply.

"Nothing—except that Karin has told me that there is another—who loves love."

The Earl gazed at him, the long dark eyes narrowing intensely. Then he drew him down by his side, and while the yellow wax candles guttered in the glass candelabrum, and the night flitted in from the sea, he whispered to the boy.

There was indeed another god. He had many names, but the most unjust of them was the "devil." He was far older than that, and far different, but he had been branded with that name for so long that now even most of his worshipers knew him by no other. Among them there were both simple and gentle, and when they met together the priest of the god had to disguise himself even as a horned devil. He, Earl Michael himself, was now the priest here. Erik's father had been, and his mother must have suspected it. Later, when he was older, he too should be initiated into their community, and he should know the secret of the name of the god.

Suddenly Erik clung to him, half in feverish entreaty to know the god at once, half in panic fear, for a wind sprang up from the bay, puffing out the last of the candles, and they lay in a darkness that seemed to rustle and moan. But he was calmed by the strong steady presence so near him, and passionately he begged again to be let adore the god of the man whom he adored.

The Earl took his hand, and they went through the dark to a little door behind the hangings. Through it they stepped into absolute blackness. They stumbled along damp, dreadful passages where soft things flew past their heads and wet things hopped across their feet. At last a thin wand of light split the moist darkness, as an invisible door opened.

They were in a gleaming white colonnaded room that held, like the

inner calyx of a flower, a golden cell in its center.

Earl Michael clapped his hands, and the light vanished. Only one ray came like a shining path to them from this inner cell, and from there came also, faintly at first but approaching louder, a sobbing, thrilling music of flutes, strange, thin, reedlike flutes, evanescently and plaintively divine. The cell opened, and black polished stone glistened around them from circular walls. A black altar stood before a drawn curtain.

The boy knelt with bent head. The clear, frail music danced about him. Of a sudden it stopped. He looked up.

Doubly bright against the darkness of a deep niche stood a Greek marble statue—a naked god, a tall, young, beautiful, smiling god, with his head turned and his chin tilted a little, as if he were following the last echoes of the air he had been playing on the reed flute in his right hand. Two small, stubborn horns were half concealed by his curls, and his ears were mischievously pointed.

But awe veiled the neophyte's eyes, vivifying the antique god, making him seem to breathe, to be on the point of raising the reed flute to his lips again.

Sonorously the priest vowed a new worshiper to Pan.

"He swears to be thy servant forever, never to reveal thy pact with him, never to renounce thee."

"I swear." Erik bowed his head.

Again the aerial music floated about him, gayer, more lilting, more argent than before. The Earl touched his shoulder, and he rose. The curtain was drawn, the vision gone.

"How can I wait to begin the service of the god?"

"You have begun; in less than a year, when you come of age, you shall know everything."

"How can I go back to them, the torturers!"

"It will not be for long, and every night when you fall asleep you will be brought to me. Look at me! You will come to me!"

The dark eyes grew darker, more burning, boring into him; he felt drowsy. Every night he must come back to Lynas.

A HORN shrilled insistently. It pierced at last even into the semihypnotic sleep of the young Count of Visby, and he sat up. He was in his own room, and a moment later the Earl came in.

"The Bishop's men are here, a day too early. Father Sebastian has had evil dreams and must have you back at once."

The boy whipped up, slim, tanned, lithe, confident.

"Shall I go? And you will stay here, at Lynas?"

The dark face brightened. "Go! I will travel no farther than just beyond the third reef!"

ERIK rode under the Bishop's gate an image of radiant youth. The wind whirled out his short crimson cloak and the sun glittered in gold embroideries. Spurs jingled on the heels of his long, soft doeskin boots as he ran up the carved staircase of the palace, and louder even when he crossed the white oak floor of the Bishop's private room. He had seen his uncle rather seldom; this time he meant to make an impression on him.

The Bishop, a hawklike man, small and withered, sat in a high throne-chair, Father Sebastian on one side and the almoner on the other. They were ominously still, but the Bishop winced.

"You make a military noise, Brother Erik."

Erik scowled. He already felt himself Lord of Visby.

"My uncle," he began, and at the hardy sound of his voice the monks looked quickly at each other, "I will

tell you that if ever I thought I must carry out my mother's wish, I think so no longer. When I come of age I go to Visby Castle. I do not remain here."

Then he strode out, leaving anger and bewilderment behind, yet he was a little anxious at the thought of Father Sebastian's face. The large, light gray eyes had scrutinized him in a new way, not with zeal, not with wounded affection, but with an icy, dangerous sort of interest.

Erik was no sooner back in his white-washed cell than there was a swift step in the corridor and a key turned in the lock. The jailers! He beat and kicked on the door, shouting imperiously that he, the Count of Visby, demanded to be let free. When he had exhausted himself, a chilly voice came from the other side. Father Sebastian bade him go to bed and substitute penitential prayers for supper; then he went away hurriedly lest he should betray the tears he was shedding, bitter tears over the long years of soul-saving whose work had been undone in a month.

To bed! Erik looked at the narrow window high up and tested his climbing skill. Yes, he could perch up there. It was on the third floor; a combination of ledges on the outside wall could support daring feet to the ground. But as he looked down he grew dizzy, nauseated. Impossible!

He threw himself on the pallet. If he could only go to sleep! There had been a promise. The long black lashes would not stay down. He turned and fretted. The bell tolled twelve before the warm weariness of approaching sleep flowed through his body.

Then he thought he was awakened by flutes, and that the little fountain-statue from the garden was alive and sitting near him, but golden, not gray, and with clear laughing features, short stubby horns half hidden in curls, ears mischievously pointed. It beckoned to him, and he followed it without the slightest fear, through the narrow window and down the perilous ledges. Without exactly knowing how, he found himself at Lynas. As if in a lovely haze he saw Earl Michael, and there were dancing and music, food and wine, while Karin hovered over her guitar. Yet all was misty and brief and faded away in a troubled sleep.

He was still asleep when Father Sebastian came into the cell. The monk went whiter at the sight of him, and stepped back into the corridor.

"Is he there?" whispered Father Laurence.

"He is, but he was just as surely gone when I came in the night. He must be watched today. It is best to let him run free and see what the evil spirit will prompt him to do."

The almoner began to smile, then suddenly he looked shrewd.

"Do you suspect him of dealings with——?"

"With Satan! How else would his whole character have changed in a month? Is it natural? And who took him out of the cell to which I alone had the key?"

"Watch him," said Father Laurence eagerly, suppressing the theory that Erik with the sure step of a sleep-walker could easily have got down from the window. "The Bishop will bear no witchcraft, even in his kinsman. And the law will be with him."

"Tomorrow," sighed Father Sebastian, "I will examine and have put to the question this Dame Agnes and her daughter of whom you spoke. Rumor has it that she was at Lynas too, and you say that they are both suspected——?"

"They are!" the other encouraged him. "But remember it is more important to root out the black art in high places!"

ERIK awoke, his clothes soaked with dew, his body stiff, but with the glowing sense that the promise had been kept, and he would be prisoner only in the day. Karin had been there. He closed his eyes again and thought with leaping pulses of what she had told him of the joyous sabbaths. But could he not see her now? She, too, had left the castle.

Later in the day a servant came in with bread and water, and Erik, looking abstractedly at him, flamed with interest when the fellow made a little sign, a little secret sign which he had often seen Karin make. It flashed into his mind that the god had many worshipers, gentle and simple, and he waved the sign back. Instantly the man was changed from surly clay to humble alertness. Yes, he knew where Dame Agnes lived; he knew Karin. He would bring her that very day to a place near the garden, known, he felt sure, to him only. He scurried away.

The door was left open. Erik went out, cautious, watchful, but no one appeared to hinder him. A warm, bright day brooded quietly over the garden. He sauntered down to the fountain. Crimson-edged flowers grew by it, and he laid a few on the head of the chipped, unrecognizable statue. Then he flung himself on the soft moss, lulled by the crystal tinkle of water.

Someone was calling, "Master, master," in a low voice. It was the servant beckoning to him from the shrubbery. He ran after the man, who glided ahead of him along hidden paths that twisted in the thick underbrush surrounding the garden.

A monk, livid and haggard, attended by two big lay brothers, came out from the dark avenue, taking the same paths.

In a high outcropping of limestone, there were several hollows hidden by grass and creepers. Erik entered one to which the servant pointed, but the sun through the foliage made a flickering tracery on the floor of the little cave, and he saw nothing for a few seconds. Then he felt two smooth arms about his neck and heard Karin whispering his name. He held her hard against his body; he kissed her throat, her mouth; he felt himself infinitely removed from boyhood.

Into their bliss a sharp dry voice cut suddenly: "Bind the young witch. Seize Count Erik."

Lamed with surprize, he felt the girl torn from him. He tore out his little dagger, but it was sent spinning by one of the lay brothers and his arms were held behind him. Peering into his face were the terrible gray eyes of Father Sebastian, and the thin mouth was uttering strange words:

"Sathanas, I adjure thee to speak! Your name, tell me your name, and who sent thee into the body of this innocent lad?"

Erik gritted his teeth at him for an answer. The two were brought out. The lay brother with Karin went first, having bound her hand and foot and flung her over his shoulder as if she were dead. Her long, fair hair hung down, shining in the sun against the black cowl. Her eyes were closed, and no sound came from her. Soon she was out of sight.

Erik was locked into his cell, and his day went in wild apprehension for Karin and in vain attempts to dare an escape from the window. But dizziness overcame him whenever he climbed to the sill, and night found him sitting motionless. He did not even look up when the key grated in the lock and Father Sebastian entered.

The monk put a hand under his chin, forcing him to return his gaze.

"I have not lost hope for you. I will save you, the demon shall be cast

out; only confess your sin and then renounce Satan!"

Father Sebastian's emaciated body trembled with suspense, and all the emotion that had not been flagellated out of him welled into his eagerly supplicating eyes.

But Erik was silent, cold. Boy no longer, he knew it would be worse than useless to ask about Karin. He sighed with relief when the monk abruptly quit him and he was left alone to try to sleep, to try to reach Lynas again as he had the night before.

It happened again, the little guiding faun, the bright hall of Lynas, Earl Michael's thrilling voice adjuring him to be stedfast, the sweet embrace of the girl, but all as if in a mist, more dimly seen than the first time. Under his joy there was a heaviness in his mind, a foreboding not clear to him.

He was dragged out of his sleep by Father Sebastian, who violently shook him.

"Unhappy, miserable boy! I came here in the night and found you gone. What choice had I but to tell the Bishop that you were off, unrepentant, with the Evil One? His Lordship's verdict is that even he can not save you from the death of a sorcerer. But confess, confess—renounce the Devil, and I will beseech the Bishop, your good uncle, to forgive you!"

He shook him again, in a passion to save him, but Erik remained silent. Father Sebastian knelt down to pray, and just then the door opened and Father Laurence came quietly in.

"Has he confessed?"

"He has not, but——"

"Then leave us. It is the Bishop's orders. He desires your presence. I have come from the witches."

The other left sorrowfully, reluctantly.

"Kind Father Laurence," Erik asked, "tell me about the—witches."

The almoner smiled calmly.

"They have confessed."

"Karin?" the boy shouted.

"No, not Karin, yet. But the mother has confessed that she knows you have sold yourself to the Devil. And now they are bringing the girl into the torture-chamber where she, too, will confess."

"Never!"

"Never?" Father Laurence brought his smooth face quite close to the boy's and almost purred, "Never? But you don't know what happens. First they will strip her quite naked. Then she can not conceal any devilish charm to keep her from speaking. One can never be sure about that. Such things can be kept even in the hair. So they will cut her hair off, and shave her. Everywhere, do you understand? The hangman and his helpers will touch her fair white skin everywhere."

Erik leaped up. "Where is my dagger? I'll kill you with my hands! Where is Earl Michael?"

The almoner chuckled, "His master the Devil drowned him the day you left when he was swimming out beyond the third reef in his foolhardy pride. But the girl is still alive and you can save her, if you will!"

"I will do anything!"

"Confess then," he suddenly thundered, "that you have made a pact with the Devil!"

Erik sank back on the pallet, exhausted, his head whirling with the half-understood words about Earl Michael, but his voice was firm: "I can not."

Father Laurence was suave again. "And then when the hangman has shaved her body, he will take a long sharp needle and puncture her with it. For where the Devil has put his

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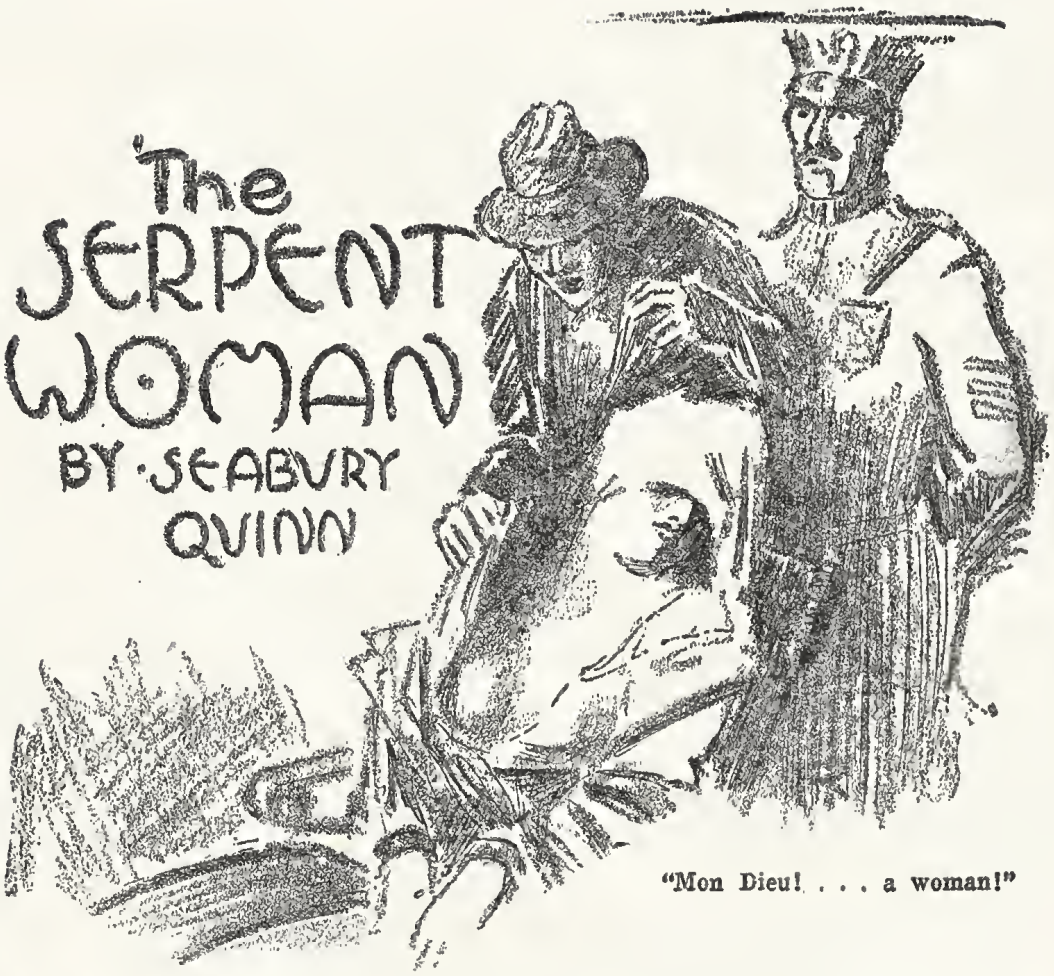
The SERPENT WOMAN

BY SEABURY QUINN



"Mon Dieu! . . . a woman!"

"*GRAND DIEU,* Friend Trowbridge, have a care!" Jules de Grandin clutched excitedly at my elbow with his left hand, while with the other he pointed dramatically toward the figure which suddenly emerged from the shadowy evergreens bordering the road and flitted like a wind-blown leaf through the zone of luminance cast by my headlights. "*Pardieu,* but she will succeed in destroying herself if she does that once too——" he continued; then interrupted himself with a shout as he flung both feet over the side of the car and dashed down the highway to grapple with the woman whose sudden appearance had almost sent us skidding into the wayside ditch.

Nor was his intervention a second too soon, for even as he reached her side the mysterious woman had run to the center of the highway bridge, and was drawing herself up, preparatory to leaping over the parapet into the rushing stream fifty feet below.

"Stop it, *Mademoiselle!* Desist!" he commanded sharply, seizing her shoulders in his small, strong hands and dragging her backward to the dusty planks of the bridge by main force.

She fought like a cornered wildcat. "Let me go!" she raged, struggling in the little Frenchman's embrace; then, finding her efforts unavailing, twisting suddenly round to face him and clawing at his cheeks with desperate, fear-stiffened fingers. "Let me go; I want to die; I must

die; I *will* die, I tell you!" she screamed. "Let me go!"

De Grandin shifted his grasp from her shoulders to her wrists and shook her roughly, as a terrier might shake a rat. "Be still, *Mademoiselle!*" he ordered curtly. "Cease this business of the fool, or, *parbleu*"—he administered another shake—"I shall be forced to tie you!"

I added my efforts to his, grasping the raging woman by the elbows and forcing her into the twin shafts of light thrown by the car's driving-lamps.

Leaning forward, de Grandin retrieved her hat and placed it on her dark head at a decidedly rakish angle; then regarded her meditatively in the headlights' glare. "Will you restrain yourself, if we loose you, *Mademoiselle?*" he asked after a few seconds' silent inspection.

The young woman regarded him sullenly a moment, then broke into a sharp, cachinnating laugh. "You've only postponed the inevitable," she announced with a fatalistic shrug of her shoulders. "I'll kill myself as soon as you leave me, anyway. You might as well have saved yourself the trouble."

"U'm?" the Frenchman murmured. "Precisely, exactly, quite so, *Mademoiselle;* and for that reason we shall take pains not to abandon you. *Nom d'un parapluie,* are we murderers? We shall not leave you to your fate. Tell us where you live, and we shall take you there."

She faced us with quivering nostrils and heaving, tumultuous breast, anger flashing from her eyes, a diatribe of invective seemingly ready to spill from her lips. She had a rather pretty, high-bred face; unnaturally large, dark eyes, seeming larger still because of the deep violet circles under them; death-pale skin contrasting strongly with the little tendrils of dark, curling hair which hung about her cheeks beneath the rim of her wide leghorn hat.

"*Mademoiselle,*" de Grandin announced with a bow, "you are beautiful. There is no reason for you to wish to die. Come with us; Dr. Trowbridge and I shall do ourselves the honor of escorting you to your home."

"I'm Mrs. Candace," she replied simply, as though the name would explain everything.

"*Madame,*" de Grandin assured her, bowing formally from the hips, as though acknowledging an introduction, "the very great honor is ours. I am Jules de Grandin, and this is Dr. Samuel Trowbridge. May we have the honor of your company——"

"But—but," the girl broke in, half-believingly, "you mean you don't know who I am?"

"Until a moment ago we have been denied the happiness of your acquaintance, *Madame,*" rejoined the Frenchman with another bow. "You are now ready to accompany us?" he added, glancing toward the car.

Something like gratitude shone in the young woman's eyes as she answered: "I live in College Grove Park; you may take me there, if you wish, but——"

"*Tiens, Madame,*" he interrupted, "let us but no buts, if you please."

Taking her hand in his he led her to the waiting car and assisted her to a seat.

"IT'S KIND of you to do this for me," our passenger murmured as I turned the motor eastward. "I didn't think there was anyone who'd trouble to keep me from dying."

De Grandin shot her a glance of swift inquiry. "Why?" he demanded with Gallic directness.

"Because everyone—everyone but Iring—wants to see me hanged, and sometimes he looks at me so strangely. I think perhaps he's turning against me, too!"

"Ah?" de Grandin responded. "And why should that be?"

"Because of Baby!" she sobbed. "Everyone thinks I killed him—I, his mother! The neighbors all look at me as though I were a monster—call their children away when they see me coming—and never speak to me when I pass them. Even Iring, my husband, is beginning to suspect, I'm afraid, and so I wanted to die—would have done it, too, if you hadn't stopped me."

Utter, hopeless misery was in her tones as she spoke, and de Grandin bent forward with quick impulsiveness, taking her hand in his. "Tell us the story, *Madame*," he begged. "It will relieve your nerves to talk, and it may easily be that Friend Trowbridge and I can be of help——"

"No, you can't," she negatived sharply. "Nobody can help me. There isn't any help for me this side of the grave, but——"

It was a long, heart-rending story the young mother retailed as we sped over the dusty summer road to the pretty little suburb where she lived. Ten days before, she and her husband had been to a party in New York, and it was nearly 2 o'clock in the morning when they returned to College Grove. Iring Junior, their ten-months-old baby, had been left in charge of the negro maid of all work, and both he and his nurse were fast asleep when his parents gently unlatched the front door and tiptoed down the bungalow hall. Dismissing the maid, Mrs. Candace had crept into the little blue-and-white room where the baby slept, raised the window a few inches—for the maid stedfastly refused to accept the virtues of fresh air—bent down and kissed the sleeping child, then stepped softly to her own room across the hall.

Tired to the point of exhaustion, both parents were soon in bed, but some evil premonition seemed to keep the mother's eyelids open. Sitting up in bed suddenly, she heard a tiny whimper in the nursery, the half-articulate sound of a little boy-baby turning restlessly in his sleep, and without waiting to don either houserobe or slippers, she ran barefooted across the hall, pushed open the nursery door and switched on the bedside lamp.

The boy was gone. In the little white pillow of his crib was the dent where his curly head had rested; the shape of his straight little body could be traced by the rise of the light blanket-sheet, but, save for the brown, woolly Teddy bear and the black patent-leather cat mounting guard at the foot of the crib, the nursery was untenanted.

"I called my husband," she went on between deep, heart-racking sobs, "and we searched the house, then looked everywhere outside, but little son was nowhere to be found. The nursery door was latched, though not locked, but his baby fingers could not have unfastened it, even if he had managed to crawl that far. The nursery window was open about ten inches, and there was no screen in it, but Baby could not have crept through it, for I had the blanket fastened down at the head and foot with clamps to keep him from kicking it off during the night, and he couldn't have gotten out of bed by himself. Yet our baby was nowhere.

"We looked for him all night, and kept our search up most of next day; but there isn't any clue to his whereabouts, no sign to show how he left us, unless——"

She shuddered convulsively.

"Yes?" de Grandin prompted.

"And the rumor got about that I killed him! They say I did away with my own little baby, and they won't come near me, nor let me come near them, and when I walk down the street the mothers run and

snatch their children into the house as though I carried plague germs!"

"*Mordieu,* but this is infamous, this is intolerable, this is not to be borne!" de Grandin exploded. "You have undoubtlessly advised the police of the case, *Madame?*"

"The police?" her voice was thin, high-pitched, like the muted scream of one in pain past bodily endurance. "*It was the police who started the rumor!*"

"*Nom d'un coq!*" de Grandin demanded in incredulous amazement. "You would have us to understand that——"

"I would have you to understand just that!" she mocked. "There is no clue to the manner in which my baby disappeared. No footprints, no fingerprints"—for a moment she hesitated, breathing deeply, then continued — "nothing. When the police could find nothing to go on, no person who would wish us misfortune or have a reason for stealing our baby, they said *I* must have done it. The only reason I'm not locked up this moment, waiting trial for murder, is that they have not been able to find Baby's body—though they've had our cellar floor up and knocked down half the partitions in the house—and our maid's testimony shows that Baby was alive and well fifteen minutes before my screams woke her. They can't figure how I'd had time to kill him and hide his little body in that time—that's the only reason they haven't arrested me! Now you know why I wanted to die, and why I fought you when you saved me," she concluded. "And"—defiantly—"why I'm going to kill myself the first chance I have. There won't *always* be someone to stop me!"

De Grandin's little round eyes were shining like those of a cat in the dark, and on his small, pointed-chinned face was a half-thoughtful, half-dreamy expression, like that worn by a person trying to recall the notes of a long-forgotten tune. Suddenly he leaned forward, staring straight into the tear-stained face of the young mother.

"*Madame,*" he spoke with slow insistence, "there is something you have not told us. Twice did I notice your speech halt and falter like a poorly trained horse before the hurdle. At the back of your brain lies another thought, a thought you have not clothed in words. What is it you have not yet told anyone, *Madame?*"

The girl's large, dark eyes widened suddenly, as though a light had been flashed before them. "No, no!" she almost screamed.

"*Madame,*" de Grandin's tone was low, but his voice was inexorable, "you will please tell me the thing you have not yet spoken of."

"You'd think me crazy!"

"Madame Candace, you will tell me!" Again the low, even tone of command.

"I—I was brought up in the country," the girl stammered, fighting for breath between syllables like a runner nearly spent, or an exhausted swimmer battling with the surf. "I was brought up in the country, and the day after Baby disappeared I noticed something down at the lower end of our garden—something I hadn't seen since we lived on the farm and I used to walk barefoot on the dirt roads."

De Grandin's features contracted sharply, as though a presentiment of what she would say had come to him, but he persisted. "Yes? You saw——"

"A snake track—the track of a snake, fresh and unmistakable in the soft earth of the rose beds—but not the track of any snake I've ever seen, for it was wide as the mark of an automobile tire!"

"Ah?" the little Frenchman's voice was lower than a whisper, but

swift understanding shone in his small blue eyes. "You think, perhaps——"

"God in heaven, don't say it!" she screamed. "It's bad enough to live with the thought; but if you put it into words——"

"Trowbridge, my friend," de Grandin whispered sharply, "yonder is her home. Help me carry her there. She has swooned."

A YOUNG man whose face showed the deep etchings of sleepless nights and tormented days answered our ring at the cottage door. "Stella!" he exclaimed as he caught sight of his wife's white, drawn face; then, to us: "I've been looking all over for her. This terrible trouble has"—he paused as a sob choked back the words—"her mind, you know, gentlemen."

"U'm?" responded de Grandin noncommittally as we bore her to the couch.

"I've been terribly worried about you, dear," her husband told Mrs. Candace as a slow wave of returning color suffused her face. "When I couldn't find you in the house I went outside, and called and called, but——"

"I know, dear," the young wife interrupted wearily. "It was so hot and stuffy here, I thought I'd take a little walk, but it was too much for me, and these kind gentlemen brought me home."

Young Candace looked doubtfully at us a moment, as though debating whether it was safe to speak before us; then, abruptly deciding we were to be trusted, he blurted: "We've news at last, dear. Part of the mystery is cleared up. Baby's alive—if this is to be believed—and we've a chance of finding him."

"Oh!" Mrs. Candace sprang from the couch as though suddenly shocked by an electric current. "What is it, Iring? What is it?"

For answer he extended a sheet of yellow paper, the sort schoolchildren use to figure their sums upon. "I found this tucked under the screen door when I came back from looking for you," he replied.

Without pausing for permission, de Grandin gazed over the mother's shoulder as she perused the missive her husband had handed her. As she finished reading, he took the paper gently from her and passed it to me.

The words were formed of letters cut from a newspaper and pasted irregularly together, making a sort of crazy-quilt of small characters and large. Many words were grotesquely misspelled, but the message as a whole was easily decipherable:

"Mr. & Mrs. Candace, Esq., yUr kid is al right anD well anough and i aM takin gooD care of it but i aint go ing to wait foreVr I'm a poor man an I got to live and you better get me some money mighty dam quik or Ill quit makiNG a bOarding House of myseLf and forgET to feed him but i will hold him in good shape for one week more If you wAnt to see him agan have two thousand $ in cash mOney redy next Tuesday nite at midnite tweLve oclock and throw it from Yur automobil as YOu ride down the piKE between harrisonville an Rupleyville Throw the moneys out where You see a light in the Woods an dont try no triks on me or have the poLice with you or yull never see yur kid no more on account of i bein a desprit man an dont intend no foolin an if they do catch me I wont never tell where he is no matter how much they beat me so yur Kid wIll starv to deth Have the mony redy when I say an no foolin or you wont never see him agan

"Yurs trulie"

By way of signature the note was subscribed with a long, serpentine flourish, like an inverted capital S.

"*Eh bien,* Friend Trowbridge," de Grandin remarked judicially as he took the note back into his hand, "I should say——"

A thunderous knock at the door interrupted his opinion, and a moment later a heavy-set, sandy-haired man in high, mud-spattered boots, corduroy pantaloons and a far from clean blue sweater stalked into the

room. "Evenin', Mr. Candace," he greeted, removing his battered felt hat. "Evenin'," he nodded curtly to Mrs. Candace. Of de Grandin and me he took no more notice than if we had not existed. "Did you say you'd had a note from th' kidnaper? Lemme see it.

"Hum," he commented, inspecting the patchwork piece of blackmail under the glare of the living-room electrolier. "Hum-m. When did you git this?"

"I found it tucked under the screen door a few minutes before I 'phoned you," Candace replied. "Mrs. Candace had gone out without letting me know, and I was looking for her. When I couldn't find her in the house I started out into the garden, and found this note folded under the door when I came back. I——"

"Hum." The big man cleared his throat portentously. "Mis' Candace wuz out, wuz she? An' you found this here note in th' door when you come back from lookin' for her, did you? Hum; hum-m. Yeah. I *see*."

"This is Mr. Perkinson, the assistant county detective," Candace offered a belated introduction, as he indicated de Grandin and me with a wave of his hand. "He's been working on the case, and when I found this ransom letter, I thought it best to get in immediate touch with him."

"Ah," de Grandin murmured softly; then, turning to the detective: "It seems, *Monsieur*, that whoever sent this letter was a cunning miscreant. He has taken most excellent precautions to disguise his handwriting, and the fact that he chose such people as Monsieur and Madame Candace for his victims argues more cleverness. They are neither rich nor poor, but comfortable *bourgeois*. A rich man would have scoured the country with his hired detectives. A poor man could not have paid a ransom. This villain has stolen a child of the middle class and demanded a ransom which the parents can afford to pay. What does it mean? *Parbleu*, I think it indicates he has intimate knowledge of the family's affairs, and——"

"You're damn tootin', Doc," Assistant County Detective Perkinson's agreement interrupted. "I'll say she knows th' family's affairs. Stella Candace," he put a large, freckle-flecked hand on the mother's bowed shoulder, "I arrest ye for the abduction of Iring Candace, Junior, an' it's me duty to warn ye that anything said now may be used agin ye."

"See here——" Iring Candace stepped forward angrily, his face flushed, his eyes flashing dangerously.

"You ignorant, blundering fool!" I exclaimed, thrusting myself between the officer and his prey.

To my amazement, Jules de Grandin remained perfectly calm. "Your perspicacity does you utmost credit, *Monsieur*," he assured the officer with an ironical bow. "By all means, take Madame Candace before the judge. I make me no doubt——"

"I'll be damned if he will!" protested the husband, but Mrs. Candace interposed.

"Don't resist him, Iring," she begged. "He's been aching to arrest me ever since Baby disappeared, and you'll only make matters worse if you try to interfere. Let him take me peaceably, and——"

"And tomorrow, *parbleu*, we shall seek your release on writ of *habeas corpus!*" de Grandin interjected. "After that we shall be free from interference, and may give attention to important matters."

"Good night, dear," Stella Candace turned her lips up to her husband's. "I'll be brave, and you can see a lawyer in the morning, as Dr. de Grandin says. Don't worry.

"Very well, Mr. Perkinson," she said. "I'm ready."

"Oh, my God!" Iring Candace dropped into a chair, propped his elbows on his knees, cupped his face in his hands and shook with retching sobs. "What shall I do; what *shall* I do? I can't think Stella would do such a thing; but Perkinson—there *might* be something in his suspicions, after all. It's strange I should have found that note after she'd gone out, and yet——"

"*Mordieu,* my friend, there is no yet," de Grandin cut in. "That Perkinson, he is one great zany. *Nom d'un nom,* were all his brains secreted in the hollow of a gnat's tooth, they would rattle about like a dried pea in a bass drum!"

"But if Stella's not guilty, how are we going to recover our boy? The police are convinced she did it; we can get no help from them, and the kidnaper will——"

"*Monsieur!*" de Grandin interrupted, offended dignity in his voice. "Have I not said I would undertake the case? *Parbleu,* this kidnaper shall meet his just deserts, be he human or be he—never mind; if I do not apprehend this stealer of little children I am more mistaken than I think I am."

"How will you manage it?" the bereaved father asked with hopeless matter-of-factness. "What can you do that the police haven't already done? The kidnaper will surely suspect if you try to trap him; then our little boy is lost. Oh!"—a fresh burst of sobs broke his words to fragments—"oh, my little son; my little baby boy!"

"*Monsieur,*" the Frenchman assured him, "I am Jules de Grandin. What I undertake, that I accomplish.

"*Allons,* Friend Trowbridge," he turned to me; "there remains much to be done and little time in which to do it before we have this child-stealer by the heels."

NOM d'un moucheron, but it is strange!" Jules de Grandin muttered to himself the following morning as he finished his after-breakfast perusal of the *Journal.* "It is unusual, it is extraordinary, it is ghastly, yet I make no doubt it has some connection with the vanished little one."

"Eh, what's that?" I demanded.

"Read, my friend," he thrust the newspaper into my hand. "Read, and tell me what it is you see."

"JERSEY DEVIL IN NEW GUISE?" queried the headline to which his neatly manicured forefinger directed my attention. Below, couched in facetious journalese, was a short article:

"Has the well-known and justly celebrated Jersey Devil assumed a new form this summer? William Johannes, a farmer living near Rupleyville, thinks so. Little has been heard of this elusive specter this season, and tired newspapermen had about decided he had retired on a much-needed vacation when Johannes sent in a hurry call to inform the world at large and the Journal's city room in particular that he had seen the Devil, and he didn't mean perhaps, either.

"Shortly after 8 o'clock last night William, who vows he hadn't had a thing stronger than his customary cup of Java with his dinner, was startled to hear an unearthly concert of squeals emanating from the direction of his pig-pen. Armed with his trusty bird gun, William set out hot-foot to see who was disturbing the repose of his prize porkers. As he neared the odoriferous confines of the porcine domicile, he was astonished to hear a final despairing squeal invoke high heaven for assistance, and to see a great, brownish-green snake, at least forty feet in length, go sliding through the bars of the pig-coop. He fired at the monster, but apparently his shot had no effect, for it wriggled away among the bushes and was quickly lost to sight.

"Arriving at the pig-sty, William was desolated to discover that three of a litter of six prize Cochin China sucking pigs had completely disappeared, leaving their mother, Madam Hog, in a state bordering on nervous collapse.

"In proof of his story William showed your correspondent the tracks of the marauding monster in the soft loam of the

woodland adjoining his pig-pen. There were two well-defined trails, one coming, the other going, serpentine in course, and about the width of an automobile—not a Ford—tire. Both were plainly visible for a distance of some twenty feet, after which they were lost in the leaf-strewn ground of the woods.

"William says he doesn't mind good clean fun, but when it comes to stealing three valuable piglets the matter ceases to be a joke, and he's going to have the legislature pass a law or something about it."

"Humph!" I grunted, passing the paper back to him. "Some smart-Alec reporter's practising his imagination again. That 'Jersey Devil' is a standing joke in this state, de Grandin, like the annual sea-serpent fable at Cannes, you know. There's always a stack of fool stories like this in the newspapers about this time of year."

"Indeed?" he raised narrow, black eyebrows. "Do you say so? Nevertheless, my friend, I shall interview the so excellent Monsieur Johannes. It is probable that the journalist is a facile liar, but we did not beat back the *boche* by leaving anything to chance. Me, I shall prove each step of this business."

"What business?" I asked as he pushed back his chair and sought his hat and walking-stick.

"*Ah bah*, my friend," he replied, "you do ask too many questions for the sake of listening to your own voice. Expect me when I return."

"TROWBRIDGE, *mon vieux*, behold what it is I have discovered," he ordered, bursting into my study some four hours later. "*Parbleu*, but the young man of the press did us an inestimable favor, though he knows it not, when he wrote his tale of the Devil of New Jersey. Observe, if you please!" With a hand that trembled with excitement he extended a bit of folded paper to me.

Opening the slip I beheld what might have been the paring from a horse's hoof made by a blacksmith when preparing to fit a new shoe to the beast.

"Well?" I asked, turning the thing over curiously. "What is it, and what of it?"

"As to what it is, I did not expect recognition from you," he admitted with one of his quick, elfin smiles. "As to its significance—who shall say? That, my friend, is a chip from the belly-armor of a great snake. I did find it after two hours' search upon my hands and knees beside the tracks left by the serpent which raided the sty of Monsieur Johannes' pigs last night. At present I am not prepared to say definitely what sort of reptile shed it, but my guess is in favor of a Burmese python or an African boa. Also, from this scale's size, I should say that terror and astonishment lent magnifying lenses to Monsieur Johannes' eyes when he beheld the snake, for the thing is more likely twenty than forty feet in length, but the good God knows he would be sufficiently formidable to meet, even so."

"Well?" I queried again.

"Well?" he mocked. "Well, what? What does it mean?"

"As far as I can see, it doesn't mean anything, except——"

"*Dieu de Dieu*," he interrupted impatiently, "except that Madame Candace was stating only the literal truth when she said she recognized snake tracks in her garden, and that there is actually such a monster abroad in the countryside."

"Why," I stammered as the enormity of his statement struck me, "why, you mean the little Candace boy might have been devoured by this monster? That would account for his disappearance without clues; but what about the ransom letter we saw last night? A snake might eat a child, though I've always understood the process of ingestion is rather slow, and I can't quite see

how he could have swallowed the little boy before Mrs. Candace reached the nursery; but even you will admit a snake would hardly have been likely to prepare and send that letter demanding two thousand dollars for the child's return."

"Sometimes, Friend Trowbridge," he assured me solemnly, "I think you a fool. At others I believe you only dull-witted. Can you not reconcile the possibility of a great serpent's having made off with the little one and a ransom letter being sent?"

"No, I'm hanged if I can," I admitted.

"*Morbleu*——" he began furiously, then paused, one of his quick smiles driving the annoyed frown from his face. "Forgive me, good, kind friend," he implored. "I do forget you have not had the benefit of my experience at the *Sûreté*. Attend me: Ten days ago the little lad did vanish. The police have been notified, the news of his disappearance has become public. There is no clue to the manner of his going; as yet the pig-ignorant police have no theory worthy of the name. The snake might well be responsible for all this, *n'est-ce-pas?*"

"I suppose so," I admitted.

"*Très bien.* Now suppose some miscreant desired to trade upon the misery of those bereaved parents; what then? Granting that he knew their circumstances, which I strongly suspect he does, what would be easier than for him to concoct such a letter as the dastardly thing we read last night and transmit it stealthily to Monsieur and Madame Candace, knowing full well they would jump at any chance, and pay any sum within their means, to see their baby boy once more?"

"You mean some fiend would trade on their heartbreak to swindle them out of two thousand dollars—knowing all all the time he was unable to keep his wretched bargain and return their child?" I asked, horrified.

His small, sensitive mouth set in a grim, straight line beneath the trimly waxed ends of his little blond mustache. "*Précisément,*" he nodded. "Such things have been done many times. We of the Paris *Sûreté* are familiar with many such cases."

"But, for the Lord's sake——" I began.

"Exactly," he responded. "For the Lord's sake, and for the sake of those two poor ones whose little man has been stolen away, and for the sake of all other parents who may suffer a similar fate, I shall make it my sworn duty to apprehend this villain, and, by the horns of the Devil, if it turns out he knows not the whereabouts of the little boy, he will pray lustily for death before I have done with him."

"But——"

"*Ah bah,* let us bother with no buts at this time, my friend. Tomorrow night is the appointed time. Me, I hasten, I rush, I fly to New York, where I would consult with certain expert artificers. By the belly of Jonah's whale, but I shall give this kidnaper such a surprize as he does not suspect! *Adieu,* Friend Trowbridge. I return when my business in New York is completed."

"HAVE a care, my friend," de Grandin ordered the following night as I relieved him of a small black satchel while he climbed into the tonneau of the Candace motor car. "Treat the bag with respect; coddle it like an infant, and, whatever you do, touch not its handles, but hold it by the sides."

Consulting the diminutive watch strapped to the under side of his wrist, he nodded shortly to Candace, who sat at the wheel in a perfect fever of excitement and impatience. "Let us go, *Monsieur,*" he ordered, and the powerful motor-car turned

southward toward the little Italian settlement of Ruplcyville, its engine gaining speed with each revolution of the wheels.

"Do you keep sharp watch on your side of the road, Friend Trowbridge," he directed, driving a sharp elbow into my ribs. "Me, I shall glue my eyes to mine.

"More speed, Monsieur Candace," he urged as the car entered a long, narrow stretch of roadway between two segments of dense pine woods. "Never will our fish rise to the bait if we loiter along the highway. Tread on the gas, I beseech you!"

His face set in grim lines, eyes narrowed as he peered intently before him, Iring Candace advanced his spark and pressed his foot on the accelerator. The car shot ahead like a projectile and darted down the tunnel between the ranks of black-boughed pines with a roar like that of an infuriated beast.

"Good, most excellently good," the Frenchman commended. "At this rate we should—*grand Dieu*, there is the light!"

As the car roared round the bend of the road the sudden yellow gleam of a stable lantern suspended from a tree-bough shone out against the black background of the woods. "Continue—carry on—keep going, *pour l'amour de Dieu!*" de Grandin gritted in the driver's ear as Candace involuntarily slackened speed. Next instant he leaned far out of the rushing car, seized the small black satchel from my lap and hurled it toward the flickering lantern like a football player making a lateral pass.

"Gently—gently, my friend," he counseled, nudging Candace between the shoulder blades as the car rounded the bend, "do but slow down sufficiently to permit us to alight, but keep your *moteur* running and your muffler out. We must persuade the despicable one we are still on our way." Next instant he flung open the tonneau door, dropped silently to the hard-surfaced roadway, and motioning me to follow, crept toward the underbrush bordering the highway.

"Have you your gun ready?" I whispered as I crouched beside him in the long weeds fringing the road.

"S-s-sh!" he cautioned sibilantly, reaching under his jacket and bringing out a small, cloth-covered package resembling a folded sheet-music stand. Feverishly he tore the flannel wrappings from the slender steel bars and began jointing the rods together. In a moment's time he held an odd-looking contrivance, something like an eel-spear, except that it possessed only two tines, in his left hand, while from an inside pocket he produced a skein of strong, braided horsehair rope terminating in a slip-noose, and swung it loosely, lasso-wise, from his right fist.

"*Allez vous en!*" he rasped, crawling farther into the undergrowth.

Cautiously, moving so slowly it seemed to us we scarcely moved at all, we approached the swinging lantern. Nothing indicative of human presence showed in the tiny circle of light cast by the swinging lamp; neither form nor shadow stirred among the tall black pines.

"The Devil!" I exclaimed in furious disappointment. "He's got away."

"Quiet!" warned the Frenchman angrily. "Be still; he does but wait to make sure we were not followed by the police. Lie low, my friend, and be ready—*nom d'un bête*, behold him!"

Like the shadow of a shadow, moving furtively as a weasel between the tree trunks, a man, slender as a youth, stoop-shouldered and narrow-chested, but incredibly quick-footed, had slipped forward, seized the black bag de Grandin flung from the car, and darted back among the sheltering pines, even as the Frenchman gave his warning cry.

Next moment the midnight quiet of the woods was broken by a sudden retching sneeze, another and yet another, and a rushing, stumbling figure emerged from the darkness, blundering blindly into bush and shrub and heavy tree bole, clawing frantically at his face and stopping every now and again in his crazy course to emit a tortured, hacking cough or sternutative sneeze.

"Ha, Monsieur Child-stealer, you expected coin of another sort, *n'est-ce-pas?*" de Grandin fairly shrieked, leaping forward to trip the blinded, sneezing fellow with a deft movement of his foot. "On him, Friend Trowbridge!" he shouted. "Sit upon him, grind his face into the earth, seize him, bind him—off to the bastille!"

I rushed forward to comply, then started back, cold horror grasping at my throat. "Look out, de Grandin!" I screamed. "Look out, for God's sake——"

"*Ha?*" The Frenchman's sharp interrogative exclamation was more an expression of satisfied expectancy than of surprize. Almost, it seemed, the monstrous snake which had risen up from the pine needles at our feet was something he had awaited.

"Is it indeed thou, *Monsieur le Serpent?*" he demanded, skipping backward between the trees, advancing his two-pronged fork before him as a practised swordsman might swing his foil. "It would seem we are met, after all," he added, dancing back another step, then, with the speed of forked lightning, stabbing downward with his prong.

"*Sa-ha, Monsieur,* how do you care for that?" he demanded, his voice high and thin with hysterical triumph as the sharp steel tines sank into the soft earth each side of the great snake's neck, pinning his wicked, wedge-shaped head fast to the ground.

"*Eh bien,* it seems I am one too many for you, *mon ami,*" de Grandin remarked calmly as he slipped the noose of his hair rope beneath the squirming head, drew it taut and nonchalantly flung the rope's free end over a low-hanging tree bough. "Up we go," he announced cheerfully, drawing sharply on the rope and hoisting the monster reptile from the earth until it hung suspended from the branch, the tip of its pointed tail and some four feet of brown-mottled body lashing furiously at the scrub pines which grew rank underfoot.

The noisome thing beat the earth futilely with its tail a moment, then drew its glistening body, thick as a man's thigh, upward, wrapping it about the bough to which its neck was pinioned, knotted there a moment in agony, then slid in long, horrifying waves again toward the earth.

"Squirm, my friend," de Grandin ordered, surveying the struggling serpent with a smile of grim amusement. "*Parbleu,* wriggle, writhe and twist, it will do you small good. 'Twas Jules de Grandin tied those knots, and he knows how to deal with your sort, whether they travel on their bellies or their feet. Which reminds me"—he turned toward the struggling man on the ground—"it seems we have you, also, *Monsieur.* Will you be pleased to rise when I can induce my good Friend Trowbridge to cease kneeling on your biceps?"

"Did you get him?" Candace crashed through the undergrowth, brushed me aside and seized the prisoner's shoulder in an iron grip. "Where's my son, you devil? Tell me, or, by God, I'll——"

"Meestair, let me go!" the captive screamed, writhing in Candace's clutch. "I ver' good man, me. I was passing through the woods, and saw where someone had left a lantern—a good, new lantern—out here, and come over to get him. As I try and take him from the tree, somebody come by and throw a satchel at me,

and I think maybe it have money in him, so I pick him up, and then my eyes go all——"

"You lie!" Candace was almost frothing at the mouth as he shook the fellow again. But de Grandin drew him away with a word of caution.

"Softly, my friend," he whispered. "Remember, it is your son we wish to recover. Perhaps we may succeed only in frightening him into silence if we attempt intimidating here. At Harrisonville is a barracks of the state *gendarmerie*. Let us take him there. Undoubtlessly the officers will force a confession from him, and Madame Candace will be cleared before all the world thereby. Let us go."

"All right," Candace agreed grudgingly. "Let's get going. We can get there in half an hour, if we hurry."

THE lights of the troopers' barracks streamed out into the moonless summer night as Candace brought his car to a halt before the building and fairly dragged the prisoner from the vehicle.

"*Bon soir, Messieurs les Gendarmes,*" de Grandin greeted, removing his soft felt hat with a ceremonious flourish as he led the way into the guardroom. "We are this minute arrived from Rupleyville, and"—he paused a moment, then motioned toward the undersized prisoner writhing in Candace's grip—"we have brought with us the kidnaper of the little Candace boy. No less."

"Oh, have you?" the duty sergeant responded unenthusiastically. "Another one? We've been getting all sorts of tips on that case—got a stack o' letters a foot high—and we have about a dozen 'phone calls a day, offering us the lowdown on the——"

"*Monsieur le Sergent*"—de Grandin's amiability vanished like the night's frost before the morning sun—"if you are of opinion that we rush about the countryside at midnight for our own amusement, you are greatly mistaken. Look upon this!" He thrust the ransom letter under the astonished policeman's nose, and as the other concluded his perusal of the missive, launched on a succinct account of the evening's adventures.

"Huh, looks as if you've got something we can sink our teeth in, for a fact," the sergeant complimented.

"Where's the kid?" he turned bruskly to the prisoner. "Speak up, you; it'll be worse for you if you don't."

"Meestair," the captive returned with an expressive elevation of his narrow shoulders, "I not know what you talk of. Me, I am hones' man; ver' poor, but hones'. I not know nothing about this keed you ask for. Tonight I walk through the woods on my way home, and I see where someone have left a good, new lantern hanging up. I go to get him, for I need him at my house, and these gentlemens you see here come by in a fast automobile, and—*whizz!*—they throw something into the woods. I think maybe they are bootleggers running from police, so I go to see what's in the bag, and right away something go off right in my face—*pouf!*—like that. It make me all blind, and while I run around like a fish out of water, these gentlemens here, they come up and say, 'You—you steala da keed; we kill you pretty dam' quick if you no tell us where he is!' I not know why they say so, Meestair. Me poor, hones' man. Not steal no keed, not steal nothing. No, not me!"

"Humph!" the sergeant turned to de Grandin with a shrug. "He's probably a damn liar, most of 'em are; but his story's straight enough. We'll just lock him up for a couple of days and give him time to think

the matter over. He'll be ready to admit something by the time we have him arraigned, I hope."

"But, *Monsieur,*" de Grandin protested, "can not you see how absurd that is? While you have this so villainous miscreant in a cell, the little boy whom we seek may starve to death. Your delay may mean his death!"

"Can't help it," the young officer replied resignedly. "I've had more experience with these fellows than you have, and if we try mauling him he'll call on all the saints in the calendar to witness his innocence and yell bloody murder, but we'll never get an admission from him. Give him time to think it over in a nice, solitary cell—that's the way to crack these wops' shells."

"*Morbleu*"—I thought the little Frenchman would explode with amazed anger—"*you* have more experience than *I*—I, Jules de Grandin of *le Sûreté?* Blood of the Devil; blood of a most ignoble cat! We shall see what we shall see. You admit your inability to force a confession from this one. May I try? *Parbleu,* if I fail to make him talk within ten little minutes I shall turn monk and live upon prayers and detestable turnips for the rest of my life!"

"U'm?" the sergeant regarded the angry little Frenchman speculatively. "Promise not to hurt him?"

De Grandin tiptoed across the room and whispered something in the policeman's ear, waving his slender hands like a windmill in a hurricane the while.

"Okeh," the officer agreed, a broad grin spreading over his features. "I've heard a lot about the way you fellows work. Let's see you strut your stuff."

"*Merci,*" de Grandin acknowledged, crossing the guardroom and pausing before the tall cast-iron stove which heated the place in winter.

Accumulated paper and a few sticks of light wood lay in the heater's cylinder, and de Grandin set them alight with a match, thrusting the long, steel poker into the midst of the leaping flames. "Will you help, Friend Trowbridge?" he asked as he took a skein of stout cord from his pocket and began making the captive fast to his chair with skilful knots.

"What do you want me to do?" I asked wonderingly.

"Stand ready to hand me a bit of ice from the cooler," he whispered softly in my ear; then, as the poker slowly glowed from gray to red, and from red to pale orange in the fire, he seized its handle and advanced with a slow, menacing stride toward the bound and helpless prisoner, his little, round blue eyes hardening to a merciless glare as the eyes of a kindly house-cat flash with fury at sight of a mongrel street dog.

"Kidnaper of little children," he announced in a voice so low as to be hardly audible, but hard and merciless as a scalpel's edge, "I am about to give you one last chance to speak the truth. Say, where is the little one you stole away?"

"*Signor,*" replied the prisoner, twisting and straining at the cords, "me, I have told you only the truth. "*Per l'amore della Madonna*——"

"*Ah bah!*" the Frenchman advanced the glowing steel to within an inch of the fellow's face. "You have told only the truth! What does a child-stealer know of true words? *Nom d'un chat,* what does a duck know of the taste of cognac?"

Advancing another step, he suddenly snatched a towel from above the washstand, looped it into a loose knot and flung it over the prisoner's face, drawing it tightly about his eyes. "Observe him well, my friends," he commanded, reaching out to snatch the bit of ice I had abstracted from the water-cooler at

his nod of silent command, then ripping the bound man's collar open.

Fascinated, we watched the tableau before us. De Grandin seemed as savage and implacable as the allegorical figure of Nemesis in a classic Greek play. Facing him, trembling and shaking as though with a chill, despite the warmth of the night, his swarthy visage gone corpse-pale, sat the fettered prisoner. He was an undersized man, scarcely more than a boy, apparently, and his small, regular features and finely modeled, tiny hands and feet gave him an almost feminine appearance. His terror was so obvious that I was almost moved to protest, but the Frenchman waited no further word.

"Speak, child-stealer, or take the consequences!" he exclaimed sharply, bringing the scorching poker to within a half-inch of the prisoner's quivering throat, then snatching it back and thrusting the bit of ice against the shrinking white skin.

A shriek of hopeless anguish and pain burst from the captive's lips. He writhed and twisted against his bonds like a scotched snake in the flame, biting his lips till bloody froth circled his mouth, digging his long, pointed nails into the palms of his hands. *"Santissima Madonna—caro Dio!"* he screamed as the ice met his flesh.

"Make answer, villain!" de Grandin commanded, boring the ice farther into the prisoner's neck. "Answer me, or, *pardieu*, I shall burn your lying tongue from your throat!"

The bound man twisted again, but only hoarse, inarticulate sounds of fright and pain escaped his bloody lips.

"Nom d'un sacré singe—but he is stubborn, this one," de Grandin muttered. "It seems I must yet burn his heart from his breast."

Dropping the poker into the fire again, he snatched at the prisoner's soiled white shirt with his free hand, ripping the fabric apart and exposing the bosom.

"Mon dieu!" he ejaculated as the garment parted in his grasp.

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed in amazement.

"For Gawd's sake—a woman!" the constabulary sergeant gasped.

"Santa Madonna, Santissima Madre!" the prisoner gave a choking, gurgling cry and slumped against her restraining cords, head hanging, bleeding lips parted, her bared white bosom heaving convulsively.

"Quick, Friend Trowbridge," de Grandin commanded sharply. "Some water, if you please. She is unconscious."

THE woman's eyelids fluttered upward, even as I hastened to obey de Grandin's command. *"Si, si, signori,"* she answered. "I am a woman, and—I took the little one from the Candace house."

For a moment she paused, swallowing convulsively, raising one of her slender hands, from which de Grandin had cut the bonds, to her throat, feeling tentatively at the spot where the Frenchman had pressed the ice, then shuddering with mystified relief as she discovered no brand from what she had thought the red-hot poker.

"I"—she gulped back a sob—"I am Gioconda Vitale. I live in Rupleyville, down by the railroad tracks. The people of College Grove know me as one who works by the day, who scrubs, who tends fires, washes. You, Signor Candace, have seen me in your house more than once, but never have you noticed me more than if I had been a chair or table.

"Last year my man, my Antonio, he die. It was the in-flu-enza, the doctor say, and he went ver' quick, like falling asleep after a hard day's work. In life he had been—how do you call it? snake-charmer?—with the circuses in Italy, then at Coney

Island. We make plenty money while he was living, for he ver' good man with the snakes—they call him 'King of the Serpents' on the bill-boards. But I not like them. All but Beppo, he was ver' good, kind snake. Him I like. That Beppo, the python, my man like best of all, and I like him, too. He has a good, kind heart, like a dog. I not have the heart to sell him like I sell all the others when my 'Tonio die. I keep him, but he ver' hard for to feed, for he eat much every month—chicken, rabbit, anything he can get his hand on. When I not have money for get him what he want, he go out and get it himself.

" 'Beppo,' I tell him, 'you get us in plenty trouble if you keep on,' but he not pay me no 'tention. No.

"*Signori*"—she swept us with her large, dark eyes—"when my man die I was left all alone, yet not alone, for there was another with me, the answer to my man's love and my prayers to *la Madonna*. Yes.

"Without my man, all heavy as I was, I go out and work, work, work till I think the bone come through my finger-ends, and at night I sit up and sew, that the *bambino* who is to come should have everything all nice. Yes.

"Presently he come, that beautiful little boy. His eyes are blue like my man's who are in heaven with the blessed saints, for Antonio was of Florence, and not dark like us Sicilians. *Santo Dio,* how I love him, how I worship him, for he was not only the child of my body; he was my man come back to me again! I christen him Antonio, for his father who is gone to God, and every night when I come home from work he smile on me and seem to say, '*Madre mia,* my father up in heaven with the blessed ones, he see all you do, and love you still as when he held you in his arms on earth. Yes, *signori,* it is so.

"The good God knows His ways, but they are ver' hard for women to understand. My little one, my token of love, he were taken from me. The doctor say it is something he have eat, but me, I know it were because he were too beautiful to stay on earth away from the holy angels and the blessed innocents who died that our Lord might live in the days of King Herod.

"Then I have only Beppo. He were a good snake; but no snake, not even the favorite of my dear man, can take the place of the little one who has gone to God. Beppo, he follow me out the door sometimes when I go out to walk at night—mostly when he are hungry, for it cost so much to feed him—but I say, 'Beppo, go back. What the people say if they see me walking with a snake? They tell me I have the Evil Eye!'

"*Signor*"—she turned directly to Candace—"you know what it mean to have empty arms. Me, I was that way. I was one crazed woman. Each time I see a happy mother with her child something inside me seem to say, 'Gioconda, but for the curse of God, there goes you!'

"Pretty soon I can not stand it no more. In Signor Candace's house is a little boy about the size of my lost one if he had lived till now. I watch him all day when I go there to work. All the time my empty heart cry out for the feel of a baby's head against it. Finally, a week—maybe two—ago, I go clear mad. All night I stand outside the window where the little one sleeps and watch the light. Late, ver' late, his mother come in and lean over and kiss him good-night. My heart burst with the nothing which is inside. I can not stand it. *Santa Madre,* I can not stand it! When she put out the light and raise the window, I take a stepladder from the kitchen porch and climb up the house, take the little one from his bed all quiet, re-

place the ladder, and run to my house.

"Ah, how sweet it are to have a child once more in my arm, to feel the little head against my breast, to kiss back the cries he makes when he wakes up at night! I am wild for joy.

"But how am I, a poor woman, whose husband is with the blessed saints, to bring up this child? I can sell Beppo, but how much money will they give me for him? Not much. A hundred dollar, perhaps. That will not do. No, I can not get enough that way. Then I remember Signor Candace is rich. His wife not have to scrub floors or wash clothes. She is young, too; more children will come to gladden their home, but for me there is only the little *bambino* which I have stole. I shall make the rich father support his child, though he knows it not.

"So I make the letter which ask for money, and threaten to kill the little one if he does not pay. I kill him? *Dio mio,* sooner would I starve myself than have him go without the good red wine, the goat's milk and the fine white bread every day!"

"Good Lord!" exclaimed the horrified father. "Is she feeding *my* child that?"

The woman paid no heed, but hurried on: "*Signori,* I am a wicked woman. I see it now. If I suffer because the good God, who own him, take my little boy to heaven, how much more shall this other poor mother suffer because a mortal, sinful woman, who have no right, steal away her little son from her? Yes.

"You come with me"—she cast big, tear-dimmed eyes pleadingly on each of us in turn—"I take you to my house and show you how nice I keep the little man and how he hold out his baby hands and smile when he see me come in."

Jules de Grandin twisted his mustache furiously and strove manfully to look fierce, but the voice which he tried to make stern had a surprizingly tender tone as he replied: "Take us to your house; we shall get the little one, and if all is as you say, it may be you shall not suffer too greatly for your crime."

"AND now, my friends," de Grandin began when the little boy had been restored to his hysterically happy mother's arms, "you are due an explanation of my cleverness.

"When first I heard of the marks Madame Candace saw in the earth of her garden I knew not what to think. Snakes of the size the marks seemed to indicate are not native to this soil; I thought perchance she might be mistaken, even"—he made a quick, apologetic bow to Mrs. Candace—"that she might be stating something with no greater foundation than her imagination.

"When I did behold the letter asking for ransom I thought, 'Surely, this is the explanation of it all. We shall take this miscreant red-handed, perhaps recover the stolen child, as well; but at any rate, we shall take the kidnaper.

"Next morning I read where the excellent Monsieur Johannes lost a pig to a great snake. *'Parbleu,'* I say to me, 'this must be investigated. It may be the snake whose track Madame Candace saw did thrust his so hideous head into the room where her little one slept as lesser snakes thrust their heads into birds' nests, and made off with the baby.' It was not a pleasant thought, my friends; but we must see what we should see.

"So I interviewed Monsieur Johannes, and sure enough, I found the evidence of a real snake, a large one. 'Now, what to do?' I ask me.

"It may easily be someone who knows nothing of the little man's whereabouts was trying to cheat

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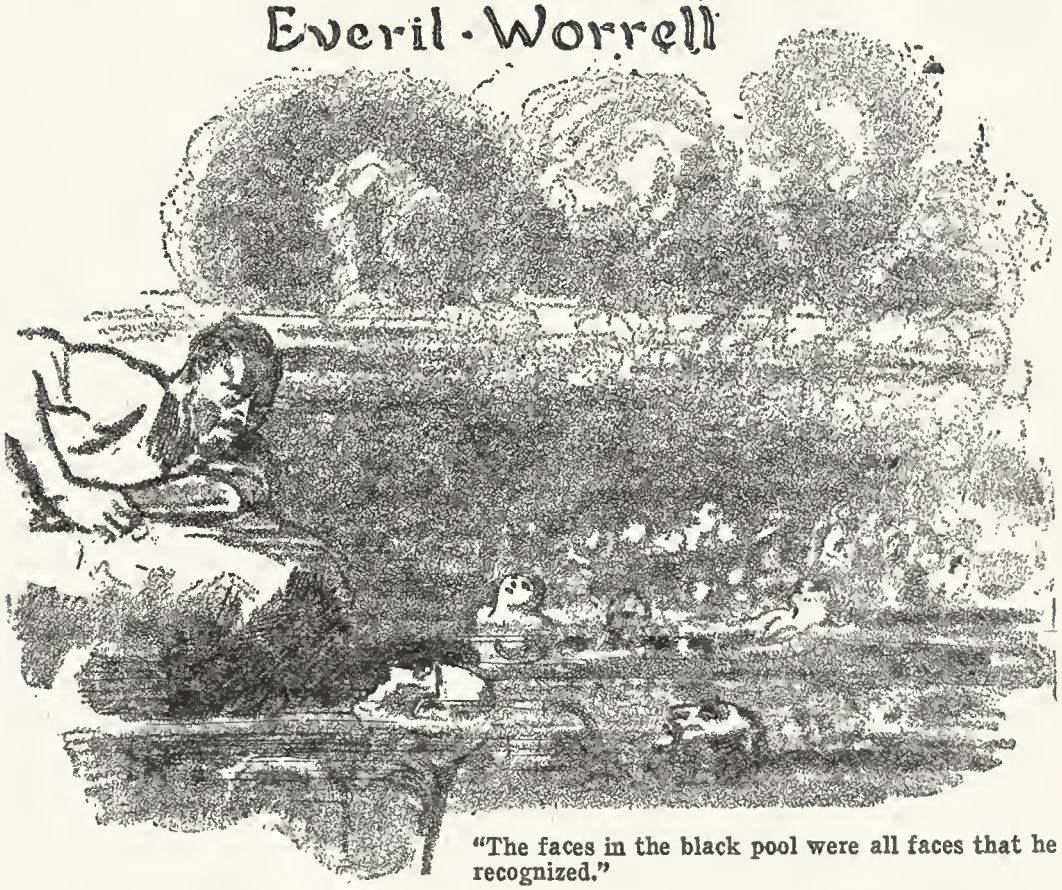
The Elemental Law

Everil Worrell



"The faces in the black pool were all faces that he recognized."

GRAY above, gray beneath, gray ahead and behind—a compass boxed in gray. So it had been for endless hour after endless hour, since the swelter of hail and wind had subsided and fallen behind. Everything seemed to have fallen away behind the two lonely adventurers. It was hard to believe in the possibility of anything lying before them.

"And yet I can't feel we're as alone as we seem. When the lightning was flashing once a second and shooting our shadow ahead of us through the fog, it showed me *something*—once a second shadow on the clouds, and once a line of black against the glare, like an arrow in silhouette. Either my eyes have gone bad, or there's another plane far from home—in this mess!"

Without the head-phones, communication would have been more difficult. The phones lightened the curse of loneliness; there might, at least, be comradeship in the face of death. But in the face of death, Van Ryder's smile retained its superciliousness.

"Good thing you're not a flyer, Wildreth!" he retorted. "You're seeing and imagining things—me, I'm going to die sane, anyway! Your double shadow—why, man, you make me laugh! I've seen six cloud shadows of my own plane at once, with the lightning forking around me. Your tiny line of black—perhaps it was a phantom plane! The ghost of

one of the men who've disappeared on darn fool stunts like this. What chance—what chance under heaven could there be, that two planes would meet up where *we* are—the point of that being that nobody but God Himself could tell us where that is? You make me tired——"

Van Ryder's hoarse yell stopped abruptly. There were no words for the glory that burst upon their straining eyes; there were no words for the emotion that twisted their faces.

Gray above, gray beneath, gray behind—but ahead a flash of blue, a glimmer of white and a streak of yellow—a picture compact and beautiful as a mirage, yet no mirage, as the man with the sardonic smile that did not change and the eyes that were no longer tortured, knew. Already the plane was swooping into a long downward glide. It would cross the line of white, which was foam, and skim over the yellow beach—and then ground anywhere, in a vast expanse of yellow that opened out before them.

It was Wildreth who spoke first: "And so it's life, after all. I hadn't expected it!"

"Not anybody but a fool would have expected it, with no juice to fly an hour longer. But—desert!" Van Ryder muttered, his hands steady on the controls. "Desert! Africa! We haven't missed the continent, of course, though we missed our way. What desert? What desert comes right down to the sea?"

"I know another with an answer we'll have to furnish," his companion offered in a tone wherein relief and anxiety mingled oddly. "How do we get away from an African desert that comes down to the sea, without a boat, and without fuel for your plane?"

They were silent after that, while the landing was accomplished. And then the mere feeling of solid ground beneath the feet was a thing to uplift the heart. Pale yellow was the endless sand, and shining, and the murk out of which they had burst suddenly as though an invisible wall which hemmed them in had melted magically to let them through, was drawing away to seaward.

There were a few birds flying over the sea and along the shore. Wildreth, reconnoitering swiftly, took note of them, and of the apparent absence of all other life. Far away to the southward, the rim of the desert was broken. A cliff was there; not a high cliff, and yet, perhaps, the beginning of something besides the desert. And perhaps, of course, the beginning of nothing except more desert.

He turned his gaze seaward again, watching idly the wheeling of the birds. Instantly he was alert. Among the birds there was an odd one—larger, strangely stiff—a bird that dropped in a swift, coasting fall——

"Van Ryder!" Wildreth caught at the other man's arm. "I was right! There's another—we aren't alone—there's another plane, as I'm alive!"

He pointed, wheeling Van Ryder around then by sheer force. Van Ryder seemed reluctant to look seaward, where already the following plane had come to earth—to water, rather; it was lodged on a shallow reef offshore.

"A monoplane, and out of gas worse than we were," Wildreth said. "Come on—the poor devil may be glad of a little help."

Van Ryder moved slowly after Wildreth. Wildreth turned impatiently to hurry him.

"Wait!" Van Ryder cried imperatively. "Wait!"

WILDRETH stood studying the man he had persuaded to take him as passenger on the flight which might well end nowhere. There was—there had been from the beginning—something about Van Ryder which did not ring true. What it was that added a suggestion of the hang-dog to his over-rugged face now, Wildreth could not guess. Obviously, the flyer who had come to grief out there was a competi-

tor for the prize which would be Van Ryder's—if he could get back alive to claim it. A rival for the glory, too —which might well mean more to Van Ryder than money. But, as obviously, both the prize and the glory were already Van Ryder's. Hadn't he reached the coast of Africa first—hadn't he landed on the mainland, before the other plane plunged down into the surf?

Van Ryder had determined on an explanation.

"I'd as leave let you in on this situation as have you figure it out for yourself," he began slowly, looking the other man in the eye. He was challenging opposition from the start, one would have said.

"It wouldn't be hard for you to figure out—nothing could be hidden or a secret kept long between three castaways looking into the face of a most precarious future. And yet, it's an unusual situation enough!"

Wildreth had to make a gesture of impatience before Van Ryder broke the silence into which he seemed to sink at this point. Easy to figure out, most unusual, and hard to tell, was the situation to which he held the key. And all the time, Wildreth could see a figure plunging about in the shallow water on the reef—struggling with what looked like wreckage about the plane. Van Ryder began again as abruptly as he had left off; in another moment, Wildreth would have left him and his story, and gone to the aid of that appealingly lonely stranger.

"Here's the point," said Van Ryder, quickly. "I hardly know where to begin, Wildreth; but to start my story in the middle—that isn't a man out there on the reef. No, it's a woman!" He made a sign that was half a command, half an entreaty.

"No, wait! I brought you as passenger—I'm the head of our expedition, you know. You owe something to me in the way of allegiance—I won't say obedience. I'm going to see that you pay it—beginning with hearing me out, before you dash off to play the knight errant."

"There's something in what you say, if you don't push it too far." Never had Wildreth felt the depth of distrust of Van Ryder that he knew in this moment. "I'm listening. Please —go on."

"And please make it snappy!" Van Ryder interpreted his thoughts. "I'll try to. To proceed: that woman out there is my affianced—I should say my conditionally affianced—wife. And yet, I shouldn't say that either; I was right the first time. Her falling into the surf, after we had landed under our own power on the mainland, makes my first statement correct. Oh, I'm not trying to be mysterious; I told you, it's a hard thing to make clear. And I suppose you'll want to call me fancy names when it *is* clear.

"The woman whom we are about to help ashore was engaged to me, but engaged rather for material than for sentimental reasons. She wants money —badly. I have it. So far, so good.

"Then the question of this prize money came up. She undertook to win it, after a course of flying instructions so brief that her arriving as far as that line of white surf may be classed among the major miracles. If she won the prize money she wouldn't have to marry me—and she wouldn't. I, being from war times a flyer of some note—I hope I'm blushing?—undertook to see that she didn't win it. To tell you the truth, I hoped she'd give up the flight when she learned that I'd started before her; and I saw to it that she would know. Her monoplane had it on our heavier plane in weight, you see, and she must have thought it worth while to gamble on that—on overtaking and passing us. Then there was the glorious chance that we might end our journey on the floor of the ocean, and she be luckier—I'm sure she wouldn't have favored me with a tear.

"I suspected you were right about your phantom plane, all the time. She

was storm-swept from her course just as we were, no doubt, and she may have sighted us by chance and followed us purposely—raced us rather—taking our course to see fair play for herself—to see I didn't misrepresent my time of landing, and the like. She has no more trust in me than love for me, you may have guessed."

There was a moment of intense silence after Van Ryder's long speech. Even the sea seemed to listen, in an interim of falling breakers. The slight, lonely figure still toiled desperately on the reef, but the distance was sufficient to prevent sound from carrying between the mainland and the reef.

Wildreth could offer no comment on Van Ryder's explanation. Not much use in saying "cad"—Van Ryder knew that he was thinking it. The idea of a man and a woman risking life or death for the woman's continued freedom or self-sale did not appeal to Wildreth's sense of the heroic, or even the picturesque. It seemed rather to pollute the clean air of sea and desert. Sordid—both the combatants in this trial at arms were sordid, and Van Ryder was a brute.

It was in silence that the two men finally started for the reef and the monoplane.

ALTHOUGH several hours had passed since he helped her ashore, Wildreth had not seen the face of the vanquished amazon of the air. She had on aviator togs, of course. She hadn't even taken off her mask. Not much wonder, that—she had had a harrowing experience, and was half dazed with the fall that had broken her plane beyond hope of repair. Add to that that all three of them were little better off than they would have been adrift in mid-ocean, and it was little wonder that she had hardly spoken to or looked at Van Ryder or Wildreth.

Wildreth went on a scouting expedition of one, as soon as they had gotten the woman and some of her portable paraphernalia to their "camp." They called the neighborhood of Van Ryder's plane that, although it bore little resemblance to any camp Wildreth had ever seen, having neither tent, fire, nor water. By some intuition of the sort uncannily attributive to her sex, the new arrival had come well stocked with water. Wildreth and Van Ryder were infinitely the better off in that respect at least, since her coming. Among them, they had an assortment of concentrated foods, as well. They could live for a while—if only there were the slightest hope of getting away. So far as Wildreth could predict they would, however, continue to inhabit the coastal region of a nameless desert until, and for countless centuries after, the end of their lives.

After a gruelling trek toward the low cliffs, he came back to camp in the late afternoon. The airplane cast a shadow eastward which might have proceeded from a monumental structure. The dunes were no longer pale gold, but flushed with a dull orange and shadowed with bluish violet. The sky had become a million miles or so deeper than it had been with the sun blazing in its zenith.

From a distance, Wildreth could see the figure of Van Ryder's adventurous promised wife. From somewhere she had dug up a dress of some light color; it was rumpled, but it gave an alluringly distinctive grace to her slight figure that had not been apparent in man's clothing. Her head was bare, and of the color that Wildreth had always been convinced was the only color for a woman's hair—a soft, not too decided brown.

"If only she won't get hysterical over the fix we're in!" he hoped, desperately.

He was conscious of her, now, as a personality; conscious of a warm flood of sympathy for her. She wasn't the sort of woman he could admire, or could have wanted to know. *His* type

of woman—well, there had been only one woman in the world for him. She had been like this one, physically: slight and graceful, with a dainty head of nut-brown hair. But she had been all girl, all woman—a woman who held herself high, who wouldn't barter herself to save life itself; a girl who was gentle, who wouldn't intrude herself into the hard world of men's striving.

Van Ryder was fussing with the plane, as Wildreth arrived. He looked up in time to see the meeting of the other two, ready with a formal introduction which, under the circumstances, held more than a suggestion of the grotesque. The introduction was never finished; Van Ryder stopped with his mouth open. Obviously, Wildreth and the woman at whom he stared were already acquainted.

"Helen."

The pronouncing of her name was not a cry of surprize, and it was hardly a greeting. Wildreth said it softly, quietly, as one who pronounces aloud a word of incantation long silently rehearsed. At the sound of it, Van Ryder's smile returned.

"So you know Helen Courtenay! Know her well, allow me to guess. Don't tell me you might have been a predecessor of mine—an undesired husband-to-be more easily gotten rid of than I hope to prove myself! But you *must* have been in love with her—you made her name sound as though it still appertained to the original owner of it—the owner of the face that launched a thousand ships. Well, at least this Helen has wrecked one!"

Van Ryder glanced carelessly toward the reef on which reposed the abandoned monoplane. The tide was rising; the monoplane would be washed out to sea during the dark hours of the night—not that it mattered. Van Ryder's real interest, Wildreth knew, was not in the plane—not even, at this moment, in their chances of escape, but in the probing of Wildreth's display of feeling. Van Ryder himself had uncanny intuitions, Wildreth had observed; he gave a demonstration of the working of his sixth sense in his next chance shot:

"Maybe this Helen has at least *two* wrecks to her credit—of sorts. You, Wildreth, are more or less a drifter, I've understood. It's easily seen, too, that you never would have done for Helen—not possessing a requisite amount of the root of all evil which is one of my few claims to attractiveness. Now, there's a new idea! You've been in love with Helen—has Helen perhaps returned the compliment? Oh, please—let's not make fools of ourselves!"

A slow fury was mounting in Wildreth's brain.

"You'd like to challenge me to mortal combat, or something of the sort. Is there any use? We'll all be dried-up mummies soon enough. After all, I'm the only one who's in the dark. I know that, should we get back, Helen would be obliged for some reason, known only to herself, to marry me—for my money. I love Helen, and I know she doesn't love me—she's risked her life, *lost* her life, to get enough money to meet her needs without having to take me with it. That's rather hard on me, but I'm striking as hard a bargain as I can, if I live to strike it. Yes, I'm holding her to it!

"As for you and Helen, I can see that you're in love with her, or have been—all the same with your sort, I think—and I more than half suspect you're not an object of indifference to Helen. Let it go at that; if I'm content, you should be. As I've said, none of it will matter too long. My plane is empty—dead empty. Helen's plane is empty and smashed. And probably there isn't a human being within more miles than will ever matter to us again—and if there is, it's a band of them, and they like white

meat for dinner. Don't be frightened, Helen; it all means, you know, that you won't have to marry me."

There was so much bitter truth in Van Ryder's words that Wildreth heard them out in silence, and went on thinking about them in silence. But after a barely perceptible hesitation, Helen spoke to Van Ryder.

"You say my plane is smashed and empty, Arthur. But—supposing you were wrong?"

Van Ryder wheeled suddenly; he he had been staring out over the paling sands.

"Wrong? What do you mean?" he urged, the veins standing out suddenly on his forehead. "If I were wrong, somebody might get out of this alive—but you know I'm not wrong. We saw you forced down—not gas enough to make the mainland. We saw the plane."

"I wasn't forced down for laek of gas," Helen said, calmly. "I eame down—my engine was bad. You take too many things for granted, Arthur. You failed to notice that my plane is well stocked with gas. I think it still carries enough to take this one of yours somewhere, very lightly loaded—not across the ocean, of course, but up the coast, far enough to reaeh civilization perhaps——"

"Then we've got to be getting it off!" Van Ryder cried urgently. "The tide, you know—it will float your plane sooner or later. Nice time to mention that it's floating three lives away with it."

Helen Courtenay's faee whitened.

"Wait!" she commanded. "That's *my* gas, Arthur. I didn't realize, about the tide. I was waiting—to strike a bargain. You know, if anyone is to get anywhere on a very little gas, one person must go alone, because every pound of weight may count. There's food and water to keep two people alive here for a while. Let *me* go then—my gas in your plane, and send or come for you and Mr. Wildreth. You couldn't get away without my gas—not in a hundred years. But if I save you and your ship, I'm entitled to salvage. Arthur, you don't need prize money, and you already have plenty of glory. You are one of the first flyers in the world, today. If *I* had the money—the prize—it would mean——"

"It would mean that you'd never marry me. No, Helen. I'm not inclined to be chivalrous. Out of date; senseless. I get what I want, if I can—and in this ease I can. I'll share the prize money with my *wife*——"

"Share it—as salvage!" Helen interrupted desperately. "If I save you, using my gas—I don't ask for half, Arthur. A little would be enough."

"Your gas—*my plane!*" Van Ryder could show a touch of fury, too. "That will be enough, Helen. How far could you get with that battered thing out there on the reef? We're wasting time. First, get the gas. I'll take off in the morning. No use flying in the dark—I'm looking for signs of civilization. So long as we get the stuff off before she floats, time hasn't been wasted after all. Might as well have this settled at the start—well, now it *is* settled.

"I'm head of this ship—the vietor ship, and the only ship in sailing condition. To back up my headship, I carry a Colt. My passenger doesn't; neither, probably, do you. I'll start at sunrise."

No unnecessary words passed between the men during a hard hour's work. Only when the precious fluid was safely transferred to the other plane did Wildreth make his attempt at influencing Van Ryder's determination.

"It's wrong, Van Ryder," he ventured, when the two were alone. "You're standing on your rights, I suppose—or on your interpretation of your rights. Just the same,

that gas makes the difference between life and death. And there *is* such a thing as chivalry, you know. Also there's an elemental law—a justice of the primitive—a thing that makes itself felt in lonely places. Plenty of women marry men they don't love because they must have money, or think they must have it, in cities. It seems to me especially horrible, out here. Perhaps because here might does make right, elemental justice is the more imperative. A fair division—some salvage—is due Helen Courtenay; it would make her free—free to do as she pleases; and yet, because your plane is sound and was not completely empty, and because you will command it yourself and head the relief expedition which—we hope—will return for us, I'm not sure that she can force it from you. If it weren't for her own sake, so far as *I* am concerned, I'd be ready to advise her to refuse the gas—to throw it out on the sand; *unless you came to terms.*"

"Well, I listened!" Van Ryder showed the signs of his effort at self-control. "I listened—and that will be about all. I take off in the morning, after the sun is up. One thing I meant to ask you, Wildreth"—the hard and rather shallow eyes searched the dusk to the southward—"those cliffs—how near did you get to them, and how did they look? Coming down in the plane, I seemed to see nothing but desert—but it was all so quick, after the fog broke, and we were flying low."

"There *is* nothing but desert," Wildreth told him. "It isn't so far to the cliffs—a few hours only. I could see beyond, in one place, and the desert continues on the other side. I thought I saw caves in the cliffs—caves of animals, perhaps. I turned back, because I saw no use in going on."

"All right. I may explore in that direction before morning myself," said Van Ryder. "You think I'm cold-blooded and hard-boiled, but my nerves are on edge. I feel as though I'd never sleep—and sometimes I wish I could sleep forever."

He slumped down suddenly upon a sandy hummock, and sat there—still staring moodily southward into the dusk.

Wildreth, now, took to puttering around Van Ryder's plane. He had a project of his own, for propping against it one of the parachutes it carried to improvise a shelter for Helen's use. He saw Van Ryder's eyes upon him, after a while, and half expected that he would object for the sake of making himself disagreeable; but he only acknowledged Wildreth's finished achievement with a brief gleam of white teeth that looked like a snarl in the deepening gloom, and after a moment rose and strolled lazily away.

There would have been silence then, but for the beating of the surf. Even that sound was muted by the desert stillness, as the ocean was checked and its slow-retreating rollers blotted out upon the sandy shore. Late twilight turned to night, and stars hung in the sky like lamps—larger and more brilliant over the desert, softer and more liquidly tremulous toward the rim of the sea. Then, after an hour or so, a false dawn seemed growing in the east, and presently the eastward-turning world swung slowly into view a red-tinged golden shield, and the desert waked again to life.

HELEN came to Wildreth then, at last. They stood side by side for a while without speaking.

"We've watched the moon rise before, together—you and I!" Wildreth spoke suddenly, and something in his voice was like a cry of pain.

"And if Arthur succeeds in getting to where people live, tomorrow, and if he comes back at once—this time is the last."

"But we thought it might be the last time when I went to war; and after I had your letter—the one that ended things—I thought it had been the last time."

Against all reason, there was triumph in Wildreth's last words. Helen Courtenay caught it, and answered it like a challenge: "Do last times matter? Isn't tonight—more than the rest of life?"

The moon, rising clear in the depths of the desert sky, showed them each the truth in the eyes of the other. And, for a little while, nothing else was real.

Wildreth, at last, faced other realities.

"You love me—you have always loved me!" he said, wonderingly. "But you wrote me that letter, telling me it was all over. And all the years between, you never wrote to say it wasn't true. We meet, after—why, it must be ten years!—and, unless a few more days are all there is to life, you will go back and marry Van Ryder for his money. At least and at last—*why*, Helen? Why?"

There, with the shadow of Van Ryder's plane pitching westward into the dark water, and Van Ryder's little figure lost to sight in the swimming distances of silver and black, Wildreth heard the things that Helen's letter of ten years ago had not contained.

"I thought it would be wrecking your life, dear, to have it any other way," she pleaded. "I had a burden to carry, all at once, that was too much to saddle you with, with your way in the world to make. I thought, however much it hurt, that it would be better—that it was the only way—for *you*."

"It made me a drifter," Wildreth said quietly. "I came back from the war with you gone out of my life—with everything gone. I never tried to do the things I had meant to do—the things I would have done."

Helen's voice was blurred with unshed tears.

"I thought," she resumed quietly, "I thought that if I gave you my explanation, you would make it harder for me. I never dreamed how it would break you not to know—only to think that I had changed. Well, at least I can give you the explanation now. Do you remember Cynthia—my roommate of the old days?"

Wildreth nodded.

"There's nothing very new or original about *my story*," Helen said, "except that my story is Cynthia's story, instead of being the story of a girl with a sick mother or a crippled father or a little sister to bring up. Cynthia and I were more than sisters to each other, you remember, Harry. Well, you took with you to the war my promise to marry you when you came back. Right after that, Cynthia *did* marry—a man named Alan Trevor. He didn't go to war; he was in business—speculative business of some kind. He wasn't a good sort; I was sure of it from the beginning. And I think he hurried Cynthia into marrying him, to avoid the draft."

Wildreth was studying Helen, as she talked. Ten years! They hadn't done much to her, after all. Not changed her love, her spirit; he knew that already, without needing to hear the rest. Her hair was short, now, as became the hair of a woman who was ready to risk her life to win a prize that would mean——

He shivered, struck by the sudden realization of what her failure to win that prize would mean to both of them; then fell again to studying her face. It was browner, and a little thinner, but as exquisitely shaped and molded as of old. In her eyes—the clear gray eyes that had always seemed to see to the end of the world and beyond it, and into the deepest depths of his heart—the old, indomitable sparkle of gay courage was as ever in conflict with a haunting, wist-

ful tenderness. Helen! She was the same, and this one hour was theirs.

"Alan Trevor wasn't a good speculator either, for when other firms were making fortunes his firm failed. He blew his brains out, just about the time that Cynthia's baby was born. And Cynthia—her mind went—dark."

The climax had come suddenly. With its coming, everything was clear.

"So you, Helen, have taken care of Cynthia and her baby, and can't go on doing it, unless you marry Van Ryder and his money. Is that it?"

"Yes, Harry, now you understand. I had luck, for a long time. I got a berth as companion to a woman who traveled with her husband, all over the world. Globe-trotting with them developed my adventurous ideas, I suppose. The woman died six months ago, and I had very little to fall back on. They had paid me a salary out of all proportion to the kind of position I held, because I was willing to go with them into strange places where few women would go; I couldn't get another place that would pay as well—that would pay enough.

"I could have learned stenography, and gone into business, but that wouldn't have done it either. I've managed to keep Cynthia in a good sanatorium, a sanatorium where she has special care. They've never given up hope for her. If I should lie down on my job now, I'd feel as though I might be losing her her chance to be herself again. The báby—I called her Cynthia—I've had taken care of all the time, of course. Abandoning her would be like abandoning a child of my own; I always loved children, you know—you can understand how I've come to feel about this one."

Wildreth felt as though he had suddenly come face to face against a stone wall.

"If I hadn't given up—if I'd done the things you hoped I would go on and do without you," he cried passionately, "it wouldn't be too late yet. As it is—I have nothing. I needn't tell you, you've guessed that."

The waves were crashing more heavily, their lines of white showing in the moonlight like teeth. They reminded Wildreth of Van Ryder's smile. They seemed to be mocking his futility.

"I don't know much about the laws of salvage," he ventured. "It seems to me, though, that you were within your rights this afternoon, in demanding a substantial sum for turning over your gas to Van Ryder. If you would take it into the courts, of course I am your witness. I'd urge you to take his plane now and go—he threatened us with his Colt a while ago. But you'd be technically guilty of the theft of his plane, if you did. You can't salvage without consent, as he quite well knew when he left us alone here with his ship."

Helen's face seemed suddenly drained of blood.

"I'd rather have forgotten all that, tonight—it makes what is to come after more definite and real," she said pitifully. "I've thought it over since then, and I'm afraid there's no hope. Van Ryder is better equipped to fight it in the courts than we are. If I claim salvage for the use of my gas, he can perhaps claim more salvage for the use of his plane. The best I could do then, would be to hope to break even. And then, perhaps our bargain—his and mine—would be off. And you see, since I didn't win the prize money, I—don't want it off. I don't see any other way, except to marry Van Ryder."

Wildreth remembered that Helen couldn't bear to have anybody see her cry.

"Perhaps you're tired, and would like to turn in," he said quickly. "I've done the best I could in the way of a tent, you see."

She thanked him with a look and disappeared behind the flapping canvas.

A night wind had sprung up which carried with it little, stinging grains of sand. The night was no longer magical, but menacing and unkind. Wildreth rolled his coat into a ball, and turned his shirt collar up around his neck. Then he burrowed into the sand with his elbow raised between his face and the unpleasant wind. And because every muscle of his body ached with exhaustion, after a while he slept.

YESTERDAY had been a day of sea breeze, and the heat of the desert had been not unpleasant. The desert wind of the night held over until morning, and Wildreth waked tired and cramped, at the impact of the sun's first lances on his head. Today would be a day of blistering heat. He thought uncomfortably of the few water bottles that comprised their pooled supply of drinking water; three people safe from the agony of water starvation might have used it all in half a day baking here.

Helen's shelter had not been blown down as he feared it might be during the night. With the going of Van Ryder's plane there would, however, be no shelter for anyone.

In a moment, Wildreth was on his feet. Van Ryder should be taking off, even now; if there was to be the shadow of a hope for Helen and Wildreth there was no time to waste. Van Ryder had disappeared into the desert before Helen and Wildreth separated for the night. In the hours of Wildreth's exhausted, heavy slumber, he evidently had not returned. It would only serve him right if Helen were to take his plane now and go without the formality of his consent, since his delay imperiled the lives of his companions. But Wildreth knew that Helen would do no such thing, and for Helen's sake it would do no good to antagonize Van Ryder, circumstances being as they were. It might be, besides, that Van Ryder had met with an accident; that all of the precious time and energy of the other two, before lack of water reduced them to things beyond the power of thought or action, would have to be spent in an expedition to those distant cliffs to find out what had happened to him. Wildreth's brain was spinning with half-formed plans for meeting this emergency. And then he sighted a figure moving in the shadow of a dune.

Immediately Wildreth leaped into action.

The water, and the other supplies, must be divided into threes. Van Ryder might be forced down—only too probably would be—in some other forgotten spot of the earth's surface as hard to live in and as easy to die in as this place. His was the quickest chance for safety, but he was entitled to his fair share of what they had. As for the portions of the other two, Wildreth would try a little cheating between himself and Helen. Helen must in some way be made to have the advantage, since no woman could long hold death from hunger and thirst at bay. Wildreth was trying not to think of Helen's lonely anguish, should she survive him. He could try, above all things, to give her her chance at life, and pray that, should he die before help came, her fate might be different.

He called her, a little later, and she came out rubbing her eyes like a sleepy child.

"I've slept!" she cried cheerfully. "I wouldn't have expected it, but I did—and I believe you did too. When is breakfast—or is there any? I won't need to eat for hours, though I'd like just a mouthful of water. It's hot already, isn't it?"

"It is!" Wildreth answered grimly. "Our friend Van Ryder is letting us get a taste of the heat even before he starts. I called you out, so that I could get the parachute out of

the way. Van Ryder has been exploring all night, and is just getting back—he'll not take off till two hours after sunrise. Those two hours may be important, before this is over."

Wildreth had not glanced again in the direction of Van Ryder's approach, since he first sighted him. Helen was looking southward now, watching him as he drew near. Suddenly she gave an exclamation of surprize:

"What is the matter with him—with Arthur? He walks as though—as though he were faint, or ill. How terrible——"

Looking now, Wildreth was struck by Van Ryder's change of carriage, of manner, even of face, for the approaching man was near enough to show a deathly pallor to the two who stood waiting. Wildreth's first thought was even now of Helen. Van Ryder had no right to exhaust himself by an all-night trek through the heavy sand, since his exhaustion still further imperiled Helen. But before Wildreth could put his resentment into words, Van Ryder reached them and slumped heavily down on the sand at their feet. And for a few minutes he sat so, wordless, motionless, a glassy stare in his bold eyes. Finally, at Wildreth's urging, he seemed to make an attempt to draw himself together.

"Those mountains—cliffs, rather, yet shifting mountains of sand—they are the mountains of the dead. Accursed! I—a fool—I must talk, and I can't be coherent. If you had been through hell—if you had *seen the dead*—not only the recent dead, but the dead who have been dead for many centuries! If the dead had all—*all*—accused *you*——"

Wildreth and Helen exchanged looks of the most unspeakable consternation. Van Ryder would, doubtless, be as unyielding as ever. He still carried the only gun in the party. He would insist on flying his plane, and he would wreck it, and with it their hope of rescue. For—Van Ryder was mad!

He seemed, nevertheless, to have retained his uncanny faculty for reading their minds.

"I'm not—I'm not as you think!" he screamed at them, with a sudden return of yesterday's anger against them. "I'm not mad. It happened as I say, I tell you, at the dark pool beyond those cliffs."

Yet, again, Wildreth and Helen stared at each other. Dark pool? Water? Life? At least they could search for it, as soon as Van Ryder had taken off. Wildreth laid his hand on Van Ryder's shoulder.

"The pool—is it close on the other side of the cliffs?" he questioned eagerly. Van Ryder's well-known sneer rested evilly upon his haggard countenance.

"The pool won't be of any use—even to a pair of lovers!" he said. "You won't be able to drink of it, or wash in it, or look at your precious reflections in it. The pool—it's one of those mirage things, you know. I saw that plain enough afterward. Only it was real in the dark hours, the hours when the dead are supposed to show themselves. Paugh! I feel as though I'd been digging in an old, old cemetery!"

Again Wildreth urged him gently. "A good place to get away from, then, Van Ryder," he argued. "If you're unnerved, better let Miss Courtenay fly. If you still insist on flying your plane, better start quickly!"

"Better *not* start quickly!" Van Ryder mocked, his hand moving to touch the revolver with a threat. "You're thinking of your skins—I tell you I've been through a thing bigger than either of your precious lives. A thing I've got to think through, got to talk about. *I'm going to tell you*—yes, I am, and there'll be time to talk about this rescue flight afterward. While I live, no one but

myself flies my plane! And I fly when I get ready."

HELEN had seated herself quietly upon the sand. The sun beat mercilessly down on all of them. But Wildreth sat down too, facing Van Ryder. He must think, he must try to reason with Van Ryder, or to force an issue if necessary. But there was that gun! It wasn't courage to argue with that, unless he could surprize Van Ryder—it was idiocy. Besides, if Van Ryder were humored for a while, later he might see reason. Already Van Ryder was going on.

"The dark pool opened up before me, right at my feet, you know. Just beyond the cliffs. And I leaned down, to drink, but a face was staring up at me. A white face, very white, very dead; I could see that. And so I straightened up, and when I leaned over again to look, I could see the other faces—dozens of them—crowding behind each other, all seeming to stare up at me, *all faces I recognized!* And all forming a pattern, somehow, a pattern I couldn't describe now, and yet a definite pattern as though they were woven together, part of a plan. Lights seemed to play across the surface of the pool, so that sometimes one part of the pattern would stand out bright against the rest as a background, sometimes another. And there was a kind of orderly progression about it. For instance, the faces of you two showed always—but some of the time the faces belonged to a period long, long gone by, and some of the time to other times. Some of the time you were—but I'll tell you the first."

His listeners were silent now, when he paused. They were listening not only to humor him; they were listening, absorbed, for Van Ryder's low, husky tones cast a spell over them. He seemed seeing again the horrors of which he spoke.

"First, I saw the three of us as we were long centuries ago. God! How dead, how steeped in death, our three faces looked!

"I was one of a conquering horde. Before us fell the walls of a city, a city we had borne down by our might, yet whose culture we could not own because we could not understand it.

"You, Wildreth, I slew, and you were Helen's lover. She would have preferred death to my arms—death, and reunion with you. She paused, though, before the leap out of an upper window she was about to take, because a little child cried out to her in terror. She turned to save it, to conceal it—a little stranger child, you know, not her own. In that moment, I made her mine."

The husky voice stopped. The last words had been all but inaudible. Van Ryder seemed to sway beneath the blazing sun. Helen's arm was up, a fragile shield. Yet now neither Helen nor Wildreth could have interrupted; neither could have gone away.

"No need making a long story of it," Van Ryder said with a last attempt at his old manner. Then, "God! I can't tell you the horror—the horror of it. But few words are best, since I must tell it.

"I won't even go over all of it. You, Wildreth, and Helen, and I, we were together more than once as the centuries of death were told. Once in a spot like this, and we were desert-dwellers, the three of us, and dusky with the life-long kiss of daily suns. That was perhaps the most horrid and the most vivid; for it took place in a spot not unlike this part of the desert, and it was among cliffs like those awful cliffs yonder, and by a pool that was real enough, then—could a pool have been once, and have disappeared?—an oasis sand-quenched centuries ago? Well, it was by such a pool, and not in battle but in cold-hearted murder, that I slew you both, choking the breath from *her* throat with my bare hands, because she loved you!"

A terror seemed growing in the broad, clear light of day. It was a relief to hear Van Ryder's next words:

"*That* was the worst—the worst of all."

He kicked restlessly with his toe in the sand.

"You know there's this to be said for me—I've just taken what I wanted when I could get it, at any price, in this life and—before. But what was your wheeze, last night, Wildreth, about an elemental justice—an elemental law? Seeing how things die never, never lose themselves utterly, crowd back on you—it makes me feel you may be right. It makes me feel I've been judged somewhere, sentenced somewhere. And after those mute witnesses rose up against me last night, I'm half expecting sentence.

"There was another crime—another recurrent crime, woven through the plan of past and present. Wildreth, you remember I laughed, telling you how the shadows of my plane have often followed me through the cloud-blotted sky? Perhaps they were all real, and never shadows—as real as Helen's plane was yesterday—as real, though they were piloted by dead hands. One more thing I have to tell—then I am through.

"There was another progression of faces, always the same yet always different, that followed me down the ages. The faces of men I have slain. In the Great War, you know, I had won honors for the men I killed in the air—shot down, rammed. Well, I saw the faces of a few of them, and those faces too were in that pool of death, leering at me. But I didn't fear them—not those faces. I felt my soul absolved, for it was war. There *was* a face, though—the face of a comrade.

"When we took the gates of the city I told you of, this comrade came upon me as I was concealing about me a jeweled bracelet. We were to divide the spoils, but one of the gems in this was worth a king's ransom. Just how it was safest hidden, I seemed uncertain. In my uncertainty he came upon me, and I stabbed him, as I had stabbed so many of the foemen.

"In the Great War, the war we all know of, this man was a brother ace. Each of us had brought down planes—exactly the same number, by a malicious chance! It rankled in my heart, day and night. On any expedition I might die not *first* but *second.* If Wentworth would only make his fatal last flight the first, leaving me with no rival, first in glory!

"We came down together in a desolate lonely field in No Man's Land. Wentworth had run out of gas; his was a forced landing. I followed him down. At first I think I meant to help him. But he got out of his plane, and stood looking up at me. Something—took control of me—an idea—horrible—irresistible! What would they have done to me, instead of decorating me, if they had seen what happened then? Risking my own plane, I flew toward his plane and *him.* I missed the plane by a hair's breadth, but—at the last instant, did I try to hit him, or miss him? Who can solve the mysteries of the soul? I *grazed* him—he fell dead, the top of his scalp beneath his helmet red—his skull *nicked* as neatly as you might nick off the top of an egg.

"And he was there in that awful pool, with the top of his head like a broken egg. And he alone seemed to frame with his lips a word—one word: '*Revenge!*' "

"Oh, Arthur, please—no more!"

To Wildreth, it seemed the smell of death was in the air. He, too, had his memories of the war; his career had been honorable but inglorious. He had gone with the others, stood by the others, neither fallen behind nor succeeded in doing anything wonderful. Certainly there was no stain of misconduct of even the slightest on his soul; and yet the suggestion of detail Van Ryder had given was hard

listening to. In the trenches, he had seen more blood and mud and broken heads than Van Ryder. And Van Ryder's story—was it to be regarded as a sane confession? He could not have touched him now. But seeing Helen's trembling, he was moved with a sudden imperative need to prevail upon Van Ryder to hasten at last, that there might be an end of this daylight horror.

"For God's sake, Van Ryder, will you fly?" he cried impetuously.

"No one but me shall fly my plane; and I—I'd as leave fly it into the ocean and leave it there. There might be peace. Yes, I will fly."

He got unsteadily to his feet. Even seeing him sway blindly, Wildreth could not have touched him. He seemed a man accursed, a man apart. And even though his doing anything in the way of rescuing the victims of his selfishness was doubtful, it would be a relief to have him gone, since any attempt to take over the control of that plane would be met with a bullet. Yes, it would be a relief to have him gone, even though death came soon after. Death would be more possible without Van Ryder's presence, without the horrible aroma of death that seemed to cling to him. Wildreth raised Helen to her feet, that together they might watch his going.

Slowly Van Ryder staggered across the blazing sand toward the plane. They were to the east of the plane, and its shadow lay on the opposite side. Aside from Van Ryder's own short shadow moving before him, there was nothing anywhere but glare and heat. Then——

"*What was that?*" Wildreth cried sharply. And Helen answered in a high tone of rapture:

"Rescue! A plane flew over!"

Truly something had blotted out the glare of the sand, something swift-moving, a solid shadow flying swifter than any cloud before a hurricane, yet something small and solid-edged—like the shadow of a plane upon the desert. It had passed directly over Van Ryder.

Wildreth turned eager eyes into the blazing sky. Nothing! But perhaps against that glare he could not see. A strange thing, though—a moment ago he had *heard* nothing, and now he heard nothing.

Only for the briefest of seconds had his gaze been withdrawn from Van Ryder. It sought him now hastily, in the natural conjecture as to whether or not his attention had been arrested. Van Ryder stood swaying! not so had he swayed a brief moment ago—not so helplessly. Then, before Wildreth could take one forward step toward the man, he collapsed—toppled, a strengthless, lifeless heap upon the sand.

No airplane is noiseless. So there had been no plane. It was of no use, then, to look for its return. Wildreth and Helen, of the same mind without words, dismissed their momentary thrill of hope as a hallucination, and hurried to Van Ryder. He must have fainted.

But no faint ever covered the top of a man's head with blood, or nicked off the top of his skull neatly, as the top of an egg-shell may be nicked off. spilling blood and brains. . . .

It was Helen who fainted.

BETWEEN burying Van Ryder and restoring Helen sufficiently so that she might dare to take the air in Van Ryder's plane, Wildreth had not much time immediately for conjecture. But in after years there was much time. The prize money which came to Helen was all put into a trust for her friend and her friend's child. Together, Wildreth and Helen could make their own way in the world, once that burden was lifted from Helen's shoulders. But even together, they could arrive at no certainty as to the manner of Van Ryder's death,

(Continued on page 859)

A Grim Little Story Is

THE HATE

By WILFORD ALLEN

THE thing began far back in time, while the great Frank, Charles, claimed dominion over the rude western world. Deep in the mountain mass of northern Spain, a pair of youths loitered laughingly up a rocky path under the spotted shade of scrubby trees. A clatter and rattle of stones came suddenly from above, and they looked up to see a burly figure, accoutered in the skins and half-armor of the time, striding down the trail. Automatically, both lads stepped aside to let the petty noble pass; for who were they, common peasants and unarmed, to crowd such as he?

And then it happened, without reason or excuse. As he came abreast of the two, the stocky stranger suddenly whipped his short sword out, and in one quick motion ran it through the body of the nearer youth.

The other could have turned and run; indeed it was the expectation of the Killer that he would. If he had done so, the Killer would have roared and howled at his terrified flight, then have gone on his way, well pleased. But the other's reaction to the situation was not what the Killer's would have been, had the situation been reversed. Instead, he sprang full at the Killer's throat, unarmed though he was, but his frail strength was no match for the stouter man, who with a single hand brought the youngster into submission.

For a long moment the Killer looked gloatingly into the horrified eyes of the helpless boy; then, deliberately and shaking with fiendish laughter, he began to press the blade into the slender body. Not quickly, as he had with the other, but slowly, pausing after each advancement of the stinging point to feast on the anguish of the dying lad, and, when that anguish did not seem of the ultimate degree, to twist the blade in the squirming body.

Whole minutes it lasted, and the end did not come until another Thing was born to take the place of the life which was ebbing into oblivion—a thing of which the Killer was unconscious then, but which was to live a thousand years; a Thing so contrary to the experience of human senses that it can not be described as one can describe a picture; a Hate too great ever to die until it had brought its maker and an adequate vengeance together. This hate can not be pictured: it was composed of that act which gave it birth, caught and frozen into invisible existence as if it were a four-dimensional thing, and also of its mission of Vengeance. Together they made up the Hate and gave it life and being, if not existence in time and space as we know them.

* * * * * * * * *

THE day had been nasty. A thunderstorm of unparalleled violence had lasted from 3 o'clock until after dark, and the ground was still littered with the melting hailstones. A bedraggled figure in horizon-blue slogged from the trench into the officers' dugout and jerked painfully to a salute as it faced the lieutenant.

"Corporal," the officer said after a perfunctory acknowledgment of the salute, "it is not often that I beg a

man's pardon, but I do for sending you out into this night of hell. But it must be done, for the colonel orders that we obtain information from in front of our sector. So it is you I am sending, for it is you who can do well what must be done well. Take two men, and tonight at fifteen minutes after 11 make patrol into the front and get the necessary information."

A night of hell it was. Caught by a flare, his two men were riddled at the very outset, leaving the corporal alone in his hole a bare stone's toss from the hostile trench. Ahead of him a machine-gun at the apex of a salient swept the ground about him with its humming death at each stir upon his part. The pain from his knee, which had been torn by a bullet that had mushroomed and cut the flesh into strips, throbbed in rhythm with the ever-pounding pulse. Pain was soon reinforced by fever and thirst, but, although the ground in the depression was yet moist from the recent deluge, no water had collected there, for it drained deeper into some dank cavern below, and he licked the steaming earth in the futile effort to stop the maddening thirst.

At last, in desperation, he drew himself chokingly over the edge of the hole. A burst of fire spurted toward him at the movement, and he tumbled back with blood streaming from a face marked with three parallel furrows. Another hour of torment passed; then, knowing that death was only a matter of time, the bullet-riddled Frenchman again stumbled over the edge of the shell-hole, but toward, not from, the enemy.

At the first appearance of his head over the earthen parapet the machine-gun began to stutter, and the impact of heavy blows told the half-delirious man that he was being struck, though there was no sensation of pain from the fresh wounds. Grimly he staggered on, while the thud of bullets against his flesh kept time with the rapid put-put of the gun.

As the man still moved doggedly ahead, the stocky gunner in the salient began to wonder, and then to fear. Surely he could not be missing, but with equal certainty no human being could come on against that hail of death. Yet on the dimly visioned figure came. On, and on, and at last it was so close that in the weird light of the flares the gunner could see the shots shake their target. A leg was dragging awfully, but still the figure advanced in a series of hops.

A change came over the gunner. Fear vanished, and puzzlement, and there remained only a gloating joy as each tearing bullet struck. The gunner counted each burst of shots with a brutish grunt of satisfaction, as it tore through the approaching figure. But on the other came, a musket which it had picked up held out stiffly, with bayonet fixed. Right up to the brink of the trench it came out of reach of the gun at last, and the gunner saw that the man was cut to pieces.

And then the gloating died and turned to fear. Fear and visions. Before him there lived the vision which had flamed in the consciousness of the other during that terrible march up to the spitting muzzle of the gun. In a distant twilight he saw the skin-clad figure of a lad, whom he was piercing with a stubby two-edged sword, his gloating smile met by a look of horror which gradually became transformed into one of unutterable hatred. The young figure sank lifeless, but on its face the hate still lived.

Outside, in the darkness following the death of a flare, the dead man lowered the point of the bayonet till it was level with the throat of the Killer; then he sprang. There was a burst of many-colored flame which lighted the world in the consciousness of both. Then they were gone. Only the sulfurous odor of the lines hung over the ground, which steamed in the darkness like a fetid thing.

The DIMENSION TERROR

by EDMOND HAMILTON

"Graham plunged about in mad conflict with one of the beetle-men."

ONE man. . . .

From the very first, the story is his story. We see that, now. The inspiration, the work, the catastrophe—we can follow the thing, step by step, up to its flaming climax, and from the beginning it is centered around that single figure. In his hands lay the fate of worlds, the destiny of universes.

One man. . . .

It is with that man that one begins, with Dr. Harlan Graham, of the scientific faculty of the great America University, in New York City. For two years Graham had held the chair in astro-physics at that institution. It was a much-coveted position, in academic circles; so much so, in fact, that there had been a number of unofficial protests when it was awarded to so young a man as Graham, he being a year under thirty at the time.

The most critical, though, had been silenced for a time by the succession of brilliant achievements with which Graham had followed his assumption of the position. Such accomplishments as his famous "light-drift" experiments, and his final proof of the Selsner-Braun theory, had made his name honored among physicists, and had even extended his fame into the wider world. It seemed, indeed, that Graham was only at the start of an exceptionally brilliant career.

Even by that time, though, there

had been more than one protest against the sensationalism which marred his record. The worth of his concrete achievements none could question, but there were not a few who deprecated the occasional statements which he gave out, statements in which he was not afraid to put forth some extremely radical, not to say revolutionary, theories. These were, in fact, the imaginative fancies of a scientific mind, and should have been regarded as such, but unfortunately for Graham they were heralded to the world by the more sensational newspapers as newly discovered truths. There followed, invariably, a storm of corrections and denials from Graham, and it was felt that the name of the university was cheapened by the whole process.

Yet for all the rising tide of disapproval among Graham's colleagues, none had ever ventured to speak to him about it, for they knew something of his hot temper. In this unsatisfactory condition matters had remained for several months, until at last Graham put forth his famous "dimensional" theory, and set off an open explosion of angry controversy.

It was in a short article in a scientific journal that Graham first advanced his theory. Reading that article now, we find it hard to see in it the cause of such a monumental row as followed. It is true that Graham's idea was radical, startling even; but in itself it hardly seems sufficient cause for the uproar which it created. One can not escape the suspicion that the article was seized upon by Graham's enemies as a pretext for a general condemnation of him. That suspicion is strengthened by the fact that while the hypothesis advanced by Graham was radical enough, yet it was far from impossible, or even improbable.

In that article, indeed, he began by pointing out an obvious fact: that man's age-old conception of the cosmos as a three-dimensional universe is no longer acceptable. The work of De Sitter, and Einstein, and a multitude of others, has made it clear to us that our universe has at least four dimensions: length, breadth, thickness, and time. Within the last two decades this has come to be accepted by physicists as scientific fact.

But Graham had now boldly advanced another step. "To a savage," he wrote, "there seem to be but three dimensions only. Your savage can not conceive of the existence of a fourth, but we, with our advanced knowledge and science, know that matter has, indeed, a fourth dimension, which is time. Is it not possible, then, that there may exist still another dimension of which we know nothing, a fifth dimension which some day, with the aid of greater science, we may discover? And if this fifth dimension actually exists, then there may exist also, beside us but unseen by us, another world, a world that occupies the same length and breadth and thickness and time as our world, but lying next to us along the fifth dimension, and separated from us by it.

"Impossible? Not so. Take a stone —a solid, three-dimensional stone— and place it on a pedestal. Then remove it and place a book on the pedestal. There you have seen two three-dimensional objects occupying the same space. You will say, 'But not at the same time!' Then it is time that has separated those two objects—time, the fourth dimension. As far as the three dimensions of length and breadth and thickness are concerned, they have occupied the same space, but have occupied different places on the fourth dimension, time; have lain next to each other along that fourth dimension.

"And in the same way, granted the existence of a fifth dimension, two worlds might occupy the same

space, four-dimensionally, but lie at different places along the fifth dimension; lie next to each other along that dimension—two worlds, both occupying the same space at the same time, but each separated from the other by the unknown fifth dimension, if that dimension exists.

"If that dimension exists! But it does exist. Of that much, at least, I have experimental proof. It is not my purpose to relate here the technicalities of the experiment on which I have been working, but it is possible for me to give a hint as to its nature. We all know that the earth's magnetic currents, those vast tides of magnetic force that race between the poles, are subject to strange distortions and perturbations which have never been satisfactorily explained. Now, if we go on the assumption that another world lies next to us on the fifth dimension, it seems reasonable to suppose that the two worlds—our own and that unknown one—would affect each other's fields of magnetic force, across the gap that separates them on the fifth dimension. In this way the perturbations mentioned would be accounted for.

"Now it stands to reason that when two worlds, two universes, thus lie side by side on this fifth dimension, there will be some one spot where they will touch, or almost touch, just as two spheres lying side by side will touch at a single point. And it would be at this point, this contact with the other world, that the perturbation of earth's magnetic currents would be greatest. In other words, if one definitely located the spot where the perturbations centered, one would know that spot to be the contact between the two contiguous worlds.

"And that is what I have done. I have located that spot, that center of magnetic disturbance, and I am convinced that there is the contact with that other world, that world that lies next to us on the fifth dimension. I am not going to say where that spot is, for I desire to work there in the future, undisturbed. But I repeat that there is such a spot, such a contact, and that if that contact could be opened, if we could pass through it, we would be able to leap the gulf that separates us, along the fifth dimension, and enter an unknown world."

THUS far Graham's article. There can be no profit now in reviewing the bitter controversy that followed. It is probable that had Graham merely advanced the idea as an interesting hypothesis, there would have been few objections. But when he stated that he had in his possession experimental proof of the existence of such a fifth dimension, his critics opened the flood-gates of their wrath upon him.

It was demanded, not unreasonably, that he produce or at least explain the experiment to which he referred, or that he give the location of the spot which he called the "contact." But Graham refused to do this, stating, in strong language, that he would continue to work on the thing in his own way, and would give out no further information on it until his work had met with complete success.

His attitude was thus very much open to criticism, and his enemies took full advantage of the opportunity. They ridiculed Graham's theory to the utmost of their powers, and in the general condemnation there were those who did not hesitate to belittle his former achievements. The discussion, in fact, grew so extraordinarily bitter that it penetrated into the newspapers, which amused their readers with satirical accounts of Graham's fifth dimension and its possibilities.

Even among his own colleagues at the university there was some sharp criticism of Graham and his theory. That criticism, no doubt, was en-

hanced by the fact that there had always been more or less friction between Graham and his fellow-professors. Except for his own laboratory assistant, young Stephen Harron, he was almost without defenders at the university. And Harron, though entirely devoted to his superior, had had no part whatever in the disputed experiments, and so could offer no effective objections to Graham's critics.

One can not help feeling some sympathy for Graham under this ordeal. Undoubtedly he regretted, by that time, the impulse which had caused him to publish his theory to the world; but, holding back the rage he must have felt, he refused to enter into any discussion of the subject. Once or twice, though, his temper burst from his control and his anger blazed out against his detractors. And after each such outburst the condemnation and derision of him seemed redoubled.

It was not to be expected that the university heads would long endure such a situation. Before they could take any action on it, however, the entire matter was brought to a sudden climax by that stormy faculty meeting which marked the end of Graham's academic career.

Just what happened at that meeting is not, even now, well known. Most of the facts were suppressed, at the time, doubtless because it was felt that such a brawl among its professors detracted from the university's dignity. But some news of what had happened leaked out and found its way into the newspapers—enough, at least, to enable us to understand Graham's subsequent actions.

It would seem that the immediate cause of the uproar at the meeting was a short speech made by one of Graham's fellow-professors, in which the speaker took occasion to make some biting remarks concerning charlatans in general and "yellow-journal scientists" in particular. He had long been chafing beneath the fire of criticism, and these words were enough to touch off Graham's fury. He made for the platform and attempted violence upon the speaker. An undignified brawl ensued which made a bedlam of the room for several minutes. By that time some of the calmer heads had managed to quiet Graham, and a few moments later he left the building. His resignation from the university's faculty was announced in the next morning's newspapers.

And there the matter ended. The reporters who called at Graham's lodgings for interviews, the next morning, found that he had hastily packed and departed on the night before, his destination unknown. It was ascertained, also, that he had visited the university during the night and had evidently removed all of his notes and personal effects from the laboratory there. But from that point onward his movements could not be traced. Even his assistant, young Harron, who had been perhaps as close a friend as the fiery-tempered scientist possessed, knew nothing of his departure or his destination. And Harron, who was probably the one person to feel any real anxiety regarding the missing man, could find no more clue to his whereabouts than the reporters.

For a few days, Graham's disappearance was something of a minor mystery. It was believed by many that he had gone into hiding, for a time, to escape the storm of condemnation which had been raised by his own conduct. Not a few, however, asserted that the scientist's once-brilliant mind had become unhinged, accounting for his impossible theories and his strange disappearance. And this assertion was given credit, by a large section of the public, at least.

With the passing days, interest faded. A few weeks later Graham's

chair at the university was again filled, this time by a gray-bearded scientist who was belligerently conservative, and this action seemed to put a period to the entire matter. Other and greater sensations had crowded it from the public mind, by that time. Other and greater mysteries had taken its place in the limelight.

So Graham passed, and was forgotten. It seems a strange thing, now, that he could have been so forgotten. It seems a strange thing, to us, that the man could have been so forgotten who was to hold in his hands the destiny of planets, who was to change the course of universes, and who was to loose upon our world confusion, and horror, and death . . . and death . . . and death. . . .

2

It was on the first day of September, just three months after Graham's disappearance, that there descended upon the world—the terror. One sees, now, the impossibility of presenting any complete account of that gigantic catastrophe. The thing struck earth, struck all of earth, in a single moment, and in that moment there crashed down the civilization of the last five thousand years. In that moment men died by millions. It was panic; it was horror; it was doom. We who passed under that terror and survived it, we who have seen our own fairer cities rise up to replace those that vanished on that day of dread, need no description of the thing. And to those who did not experience it, no description would be adequate.

Yet even so, it is necessary to present here some impression, however feeble, of the catastrophe. With this purpose in mind, we turn to the account of young Harron, who not only witnessed the catastrophe at the one point where it struck most terribly, but was destined also to be the one witness of the final, tremendous climax, when the fate of a universe trembled in the balance. It is from the narrative of this laboratory assistant, indeed, that we have learned all that we shall ever know concerning that far-flung machination of dark purposes in which the cataclysm itself was but an incident.

Harron has given over the first section of his narrative to a recountal of the events leading up to Graham's disappearance—events which have already been summarized in this record. From Harron himself we learn nothing new concerning the case. As he points out, the whole "dimensional" business was outside of the university laboratory's regular routine, and as such, he had had no part in it. He admits, also, that the matter was never discussed between Graham and himself, in spite of their friendship, and attributes this silence on Graham's part to the latter's unwillingness to drag his assistant into the controversy.

But if Harron was thus without first-hand knowledge of Graham's disputed experiment and theory, he was none the less his superior's warm defender in the row that followed the publication of that theory. And after Graham's mysterious disappearance, Harron was apparently one of the few who retained any faith in the missing man.

He seems to have made some effort, indeed, through private detective agencies and the like, to discover Graham's whereabouts, and only desisted after all such efforts had proved futile. It seemed that nothing could be done, then, except to wait for some word from Graham himself. And as the days passed into weeks, and then into months, and that word did not come, Harron became convinced that his former superior had met with some misadventure, since nothing else explained, to him, this protracted silence on Graham's part.

So, through the long summer days, Harron went about his work at the university with that conviction and that fear growing in his mind. It was a summer of almost unprecedented heat at New York, he says, a summer of sultry days and brilliant nights. June had passed, and July, and August was passing, and so the long days, one by one, were drawing down toward September, and the first day of September.

The first day of September. . . .

HARRON has given us a detailed account of his own movements on that fateful September first. He had worked through all the morning, he says, in the university laboratories, but was free for the rest of the day and had spent the afternoon in a long, solitary tramp over Staten Island. The afternoon was fast waning when he boarded a ferry for the return to the city, and by the time he landed at the Battery it was sunset—a sunset that hung over Manhattan's up-flung towers like a settling golden haze. Walking across the little park north of the Battery, Harron was so caught by the sunset's beauty that he paused for a moment to view it, seating himself on a convenient bench.

At that time, he tells us, there were exceptionally few people in the little park. Only one or two idlers sprawled on near-by benches, and a few chance pedestrians. In the waters west of the park, though, there was more activity, with a dozen small boats darting to and fro on indeterminate errands, and a large and rusty freighter that was being escorted toward its dock by hooting tugs. High overhead a single airplane dipped and circled.

Harron turned his attention, in a few moments, to the city north of him. Directly beyond the little park its first great buildings loomed, and beyond them there extended away into the distance mile upon mile of towers and terraced pyramids, a great, man-made range of steel and stone and glass. From where he sat he could gaze up along the canyoned length of Broadway, cutting slantwise across the city, arrowing through a huddled mass of towering buildings. Its highest pinnacles still aspired into the light of the setting sun, but the street itself lay in shadow. In a moment the sun would dip behind the horizon, and down upon the city would steal the darkening dusk. With a sigh, Harron rose to go.

He paused a moment, glancing at his watch, then took a step forward. And in the next moment there came —the terror.

It was the sound that came first. Concerning that sound there has been considerable dispute. Some characterize it as a single clanging note, others as a humming of a few seconds' duration. Not a few assert that it was more like a short, shrill whistle than anything else. But to Harron it seemed exactly like a single tap of metal on metal, not loud, but with singular carrying power.

"It was very much like the sound of a hammer striking a nail," he writes. "A short, staccato metallic note, something like a loud click."

For a single moment he halted, listening. Then——

A terrific, thunderous roar broke from the air around him, a shattering, immense detonation like the shock of colliding worlds. At the same moment, while Harron gazed northward, a multitude of events registered themselves swiftly upon his vision. He had a single glimpse of the massed towers of the great city quivering violently, wavering and trembling like a scene in a shaken cinema-film; then, abruptly, they collapsed, disintegrated, crashed down to the ground in a titanic avalanche of brick and stone and glass. For an instant their thunder was

like the thunder of doom; then it lessened, and ceased. Where the mighty city had towered a moment before there lay now only mountainous heaps of broken brick and stone, a vast waste of wreckage that stretched far to the north and from which great dust-clouds were rising.

Harron stared, transfixed, his brain reeling. Slowly, mechanically, he turned to his left. Where the shipping had thronged in the waters a few seconds before there were now only some floating bits of wreckage. Beyond, where Jersey City had stood, there lay now only another dust-shrouded desert of wreckage. The airplane which had been circling above had suddenly collapsed and was plunging toward the ground, a limp, frameless thing of flapping cloth. And over all there reigned a deathlike, soul-shaking silence.

For a time, by his own account, Harron seems to have been a little insane. "I seem to remember staggering toward the wreckage of the city," he writes, "screaming, and with my hands raised toward the sky. There are other things, too, that come back to me dimly, like the misty scenes of some half-remembered dream. One of these memories is of the few people who had been in the park, like myself, at the moment of the catastrophe. The aquarium and other buildings at the south end of the park had collapsed, like the city, into shapeless heaps of ruins, but there remained perhaps a half-dozen people, altogether, in the open park. They were shouting hoarsely and running aimlessly about, and I saw one man throw himself into the water, in sheer insane terror. The rest, I think, wandered into the wrecked city north of us, in search of their own families or friends, no doubt. I was glad enough, then, that I was without family myself! I know, at least, that when I finally came back to my senses there remained but one man in the park besides myself."

It was this other, as Harron tells us, who finally brought him back to a realization of his surroundings, by tugging persistently at his arm. He was a rotund, pink-faced person of middle age, whose eyes were wide with non-understanding terror and who was bleeding from a long cut on his forehead. Clutching Harron's wrist, he pointed into the street a few yards away, where there lay an odd collection of miscellaneous fragments.

"I was driving," he said, his voice thin and quavering, "driving there, and my car—I fell—just pieces——"

Harron glanced for a moment at the fragments in the street, then bent closer to examine them. And as he did so the explanation of all that had happened seared across his mind. For what lay in the street was the remains of an automobile—an automobile from which every bit of iron and steel had vanished. The tires, the upholstery, the steering-wheel's wooden rim, even the bits of copper and nickel here and there—all these were undamaged, but every trace of iron and steel had disappeared. It was apparent that the car had collapsed instantly into that heap of fragments when its frame, motor, axles and most of its body had vanished.

Harron straightened, felt swiftly in his pockets. He drew forth a miscellaneous collection of small articles and stared at them wonderingly. For every bit of iron and steel in his pockets had vanished likewise. The blades of his penknife, most of the works of his watch, the clasp of a little note-book—down to the tiniest bit, all iron and steel was gone. He turned to the bench on which he had been sitting a moment before. In its place there lay on the ground a little heap of wooden slats, the steel framework having vanished.

"Steel!"

Harron cried the word aloud. He turned to the dazed man beside him.

"It's the steel—the iron and steel!" he cried. "Don't you see? The iron and steel's all gone, out of your car, out of everything!"

The other looked at him with blank, uncomprehending gaze.

"My car," he quavered; "it just seemed to fall and break up—I was driving to the ferry, to get home." He raised his dazed eyes toward the dust-veiled ruins across the river. "Home. I must get home, now."

Harron saw then that the man's brain had been turned a little by the shock, and by the wound on his head. He grasped his shoulders and strove to shake him into realization of his situation.

"You can't get home now!" he told him. "The ferry's wrecked—everything's wrecked. The city—everything——"

The other's eyes turned toward the colossal heaps of wreckage north of them.

"Earthquake?" he asked, mildly.

"No!" shouted Harron. "It's the steel—all the iron and steel disappearing—that's why the buildings all fell, when their steel frames and supports disappeared. All the iron and steel gone, God knows how!"

"Steel," whispered the other, staring northward with blank, uncomprehending gaze. In a moment he turned back to Harron. "I've got to get home," he repeated, with dull insistence. He glanced toward the north again, then abruptly started off across the park in that direction, with uncertain steps.

Harron ran after him, clutched his arm. "You can't go that way!" he cried.

The other wrested free from his grasp, with sudden anger. "Let me go!" he shouted, pushing the younger man away and continuing on his way across the park.

STANDING there motionless, Harron watched him go, watched him plod on until he had reached the mighty heaps of ruins at the park's edge. He stared at these for a few seconds, confusedly; then clambered up and over them, and in a moment was lost to sight behind them. Harron found himself alone in the little park—alone in the whole world, almost, it seemed to him at that moment.

Around him there held sway an utter silence, an utter lack of movement. Over the vast heaps of wreckage north of him, and the other mounds of ruin that stood out back against the yellow sunset west of him, over these there hung a tremendous, smothering silence. In that spot, where for decades all the currents of earth's life had swirled together into the roaring whirlpool of the metropolis, there was now but silence—silence and a little wind that whispered furtively of coming night. Already the sky above was graying, darkening. Vague shadows were creeping out from the ruins, across the little park.

Standing there in that place of death, Harron felt his soul bowing beneath the awful silence. He flung out his arms in a grotesque gesture of sudden panic.

"No!" he shouted hoarsely, glancing around him with wild eyes. Then, with abrupt determination, he ran toward the waste of wreckage north of him, clawed his way up its sides, over slopes of broken brick and stone that were starred with shivered glass, until he stood at the summit of the first great mound, panting, gazing ahead with strained eyes through the failing light of dusk. Beyond lay only a vast expanse of miniature hills and gullies, formed from the wreckage of the collapsed city. On that desert of devastation there moved no sign of life, and north and south and east and west no spark of light pierced the deepening night.

It was only then that there came home to Harron some realization of the magnitude of that cataclysm which had riven the world of man. The city beneath him had collapsed into shapeless ruins, he knew, when all iron and steel in it had vanished. Had it been so on all earth? Had all the cities on the globe crashed down to ruin in that same moment of doom? And why? What had caused the vanishing of iron and steel? Had the earth passed through some interstellar nebula or cloud of gas that dissolved all iron like sugar in water? Harron could think of no other explanation. He strove for the moment to dismiss the matter from his dazed thoughts, to concentrate on the idea of escaping from the island, of leaving that place of silence and death.

It was quite dark, by then; the darkness was intensified by the gathering clouds which belted the firmament overhead. For a moment, though, the moon emerged from behind those clouds, and its light, pouring down on the ruins ahead, gave to Harron a rough idea of the path he must follow northward. It would be impossible to cross the rivers on either side, he knew, without a boat or raft, but northward it might be managed. He glanced around once more, then struck out toward the north, across the hills of tangled ruins which covered almost all the island.

Always afterward that journey northward over the island remained in Harron's memory as a confused, vaguely remembered time in which he toiled for a period that seemed eternal over the mighty wreckage-heaps which were all that remained of the great city. His hands torn and bleeding, his body bruised from a score of falls, he struggled on through the unchanging darkness and silence, feeling his way blindly forward.

Twice he heard the sound of wailing voices from somewhere in the darkness ahead, and once a cry of mortal agony whispered through the night to his ears. Once, too, he saw, far to the south, a great reflection of red light against the sky, a red glare that quivered in the heavens as though reflected from a great fire. For minutes Harron watched it, then turned and struggled on.

For more than a mile he toiled north across that desert of devastation, groping forward in deepest night, his only illumination that of the moon when it peeped occasionally through crevices in the clouds. Most of the time, though, he could but plunge blindly forward through the darkness.

He had struggled thus over a steep little ridge, and was making a sliding, scrambling progress down its other slope, when he blundered without warning into something warm and moving. It was a man, a man who clutched Harron's arm and uttered a hoarse cry.

With sudden panicky surprize Harron struck out at the other, strove to wrest himself free. For a single moment they struggled thus, in the dense darkness, and then the moon drifted again from behind its screen of clouds and poured down a flood of white, revealing light upon the face of the man with whom Harron struggled.

It was Graham.

3

For a moment the two men stared wildly into each other's eyes, without speaking, and then a choking cry burst from Harron.

"Graham!" he cried. "Graham!"

Graham was grasping his arm with fierce intensity, but for the moment he did not speak. When he did so it was in a hushed voice.

"Harron!" he whispered. "You escaped, Harron! You escaped—this——" and he flung an arm out toward the waste of wreckage that encircled them.

Abruptly he sprawled to the ground and lay there, his body shaken by great sobs. Harron dropped beside him, his brain whirling, and in a moment Graham raised his tear-stained face.

"My fault, Harron!" he cried. "This terror that has shattered the world of men to fragments, that has slain millions upon millions—and that greater terror that waits to spring upon a riven world—all my fault, Harron, from the first!"

Harron grasped the other's shoulders with sudden fierceness.

"Graham!" he exclaimed. "What happened? What have you done? My God, man, it's the end of everything! The iron and steel vanishing, cities collapsing like this one—and God knows how far this disaster has extended!"

Graham's eyes became fixed, staring, and when he spoke his voice was deadened. "It is over all earth," he said dully. "The iron—the steel—gone over all earth, at the same moment. I know."

Harron shrank back, appalled. "Over all earth!" he repeated. "Over all earth—like this!"

Graham bent his head. "Yes. Cities and ships and trains and airplanes and bridges, all gone, now; all collapsed in that one moment, when the iron and steel in them vanished; all crashed to the ground in that one moment. Civilization itself crashing to the earth in that moment—and the fault all mine!"

Harron was silent, stunned. It was Graham who spoke first. "Yet there is a chance yet for man," he said slowly. "A chance, if he can escape that greater horror that waits to spring upon our world. And that chance lies in our hands, Harron.

"It was I who loosed this doom upon the world," he said, his voice low and vibrant, "but maybe yet, together, we can stay that doom. You know nothing of what has happened, Harron, not even what has caused this city here, what has caused all our civilization, to crash to fragments. But I know."

He was silent for a moment before speaking again.

"You remember the dimensional experiment and the uproar over it," he continued. "After that uproar, and after my temper had got the best of me at that faculty meeting, I determined to go on with the experiment and attain complete proof of my theory, and to return and ram that proof down the throats of my enemies. I was confident that I could do so. Already I had incontrovertible proof of the existence of the fifth dimension, and already I had located the contact between our world and that other world that lies next to us along the fifth dimension.

"I had located that contact, as I stated at the time, by charting the currents of magnetic disturbance on the earth's surface and finding the spot where that disturbance was most intense. Strangely enough, I found that spot to be hardly more than a score of miles from New York City itself, and that spot I knew to be the contact between earth and its unseen neighbor world. The spot itself was situated deep in a large marsh that lay at the edge of the east Long Island coast, in that strange region of swamps and sand-dunes which stretches north for some miles beyond the resorts on the lower coast.

"This marsh, called Devil's Marsh in the near-by villages, was fully deserving of its lurid title. It was a nearly impenetrable place, with great beds of man-high reeds and stagnant, swampy pools, and with here and there a knoll of solid ground. There were paths through the marsh, precarious paths that led from knoll to knoll, but few knew them well enough to venture inside, for there were legends of more than one person who had met death in the quicksands which abounded there. It seemed almost incredible that there

could be a place of such wildness within so short a distance of the world's greatest city, but the very solitude of the place suited my plans well.

"It was on one of the knolls of ground, lying far in toward the marsh's center, that I had definitely located the point of greatest magnetic disturbance, and there, I knew, lay the contact which I sought, and which I meant to open. I had shared my knowledge with no one, for I wished to work there undisturbed. So when I left the university I was able to take the equipment which I had prepared and go straight to the place, without leaving any trace of my movements, since I had told no one—not even you, Harron!—what my intentions were. I had bought a small motor-boat in which was loaded the equipment I needed; so after leaving the university I was able to set out at once for the marsh.

"It was my plan to enter the marsh from the ocean side, by means of my boat, and thus avoid any news of my activities there becoming known in the villages that lay on the marsh's shore side. So I went there, alone, in my boat, mooring the boat itself to one of the outer knolls and transporting my equipment to the contact knoll by means of a rude scow which I had prepared. A tent which I set up sufficed me for a dwelling, and it was not long before I had the equipment I had brought set up also, and ready for my attempt to open the contact. That equipment included a small gasoline motor-generator, or dynamo, and a number of step-up transformers which would supply me with the high-frequency currents I needed. At last all my preparations were complete, and at once I began work on the great problem.

"The next six weeks were weeks of uninterrupted work, and they were, too, weeks of unchanging failure. It is useless to review to you all the different methods I used in my effort to open the contact, or even to learn something as to its nature. All my methods proved quite futile, and after weeks of such failure it began to seem to me that perhaps even my own theory of the fifth dimension's existence was baseless, and that I was following a blind lead.

"At last, though, discouraged as I was, it occurred to me to try a different tack. I knew that magnetic force or waves could pass through the contact, for they did pass through, causing the disturbance of magnetic currents on our side which had led me to my discovery. Therefore, I reasoned, it should be possible to send sound-waves also through the contact, if their wave-length were changed to that of the magnetic vibrations. Following this theory, I constructed a crude sender and receiver for sound signals, one which stepped up their frequency in sending and stepped it down again in receiving. The apparatus itself was actuated by a clicking sound-bar, much like that of a telegraph-sounder, and it was my plan to catch these sounds and hurl them out after increasing their wave-length, then use a circle of recording microphones to ascertain whether or not this sound was markedly weaker in one spot than another. If it were, it meant that in that spot some of the force of the sound-waves was decreased by penetrating through the contact itself, into that other world.

"So I set the apparatus into operation, and for a few days was at it almost constantly. So far as I could judge, at the end of that time, the sounds received by the microphones at the north edge of the knoll were somewhat weaker, and if my theory were correct it was there that the contact must be located. Before going farther, though, it occurred to me to set the receiving apparatus also in operation. It might be that some occasional sounds could come through

the contact that were high enough in frequency to register on my receiver. So I switched on the receiving apparatus and then, the next moment, fell back, stunned. For coming through it—coming, I knew, through the contact itself—were signals, clear and definite clicking signals, signals that repeated, over and over, the ones which I had sent out during the past few days. Signals that could come only from conscious, intelligent beings on the other side!

"It was the last thing I had looked for, this presence of intelligent, living creatures in that other, neighbor world. It had never occurred to me, somehow, that that world might be inhabited, the same as our own, but now I saw that this must be the case. They had caught the test-signals which I had sent through the contact and had sent them back to me, had repeated them, to show me that they had heard. At once I threw aside my first interest in opening the contact, and applied myself wholly to this communication with the beings on the other side.

"THE next few weeks were weeks of wonder, to me. I spent the greater part of both day and night at my apparatus, in constant communication with the enigmatic creatures beyond the contact. And gradually, in those weeks, my communication with them became more and more intelligent, understandable, as more and more I came to learn their language, their clicking signals. I could never have learned it, perhaps, by signals alone, but any sound could be sent through the contact if its wavelength were changed enough; and by sending through the sound of an object, such as the splash of water or the tap of metal, and then giving its name, I soon got the rudiments of a vocabulary and in a short time could converse with them with some proficiency. Of course I understood only the clicking signals that passed between us, and their written or spoken language would have been incomprehensible to me, but the signals were all that I needed to know.

"During that time, and after I had learned to read their signals, those on the other side were constantly questioning me, asking about this world, its resources, the strength of its peoples, the limits of their science. They told me little enough about themselves, though I gathered that they were not human in our sense of the word, and that their own science was a far-advanced one, as, indeed, it must have been to receive and understand my signals. But their own questions concerning our earth never ceased, questions the purpose of which I did not divine, then.

"During all that time, indeed, I had given hardly any thought whatever to what I was doing. The sheer intoxication of my success, the sheer glory of the stupendous thing I had accomplished—these filled my mind to the exclusion of all else. I saw myself returning with what I had learned, to fling my achievement into the faces of those who had criticized me. There remained but one thing to be done, first, and that was to open the contact itself. Were this to be done, were one or two of those people on the other side to come through, there could be no further doubts as to my success. If the contact could be opened!

"It was that problem which I put up to those on the other side, through our signals, and they assured me that the thing was quite possible. For long, they told me, they had been aware of the existence of the fifth dimension and of the contact between the two worlds, but alone they could not open the contact. It could be opened, they said, only by means of a special, powerful repulsion ray, of which they had the secret, and that ray must be directed onto the contact

from both sides, from both worlds, at exactly the same moment. If they were to apply it from their own side the only result would be that the powerful ray would drive through the contact and blast a great crater or pit from the earth's surface, on this side. But if I were to prepare a ray-projector, and apply the ray to the contact from this side at the same moment they did so from the other side, the two rays would meet at the contact and would oppose and equalize each other, and the effect of their equalization at the contact would be to open that contact so that any matter could pass through it, from one world to the other.

"At once I agreed to follow their instructions and operate a similar ray from my side; and so, following the instructions which I received from them, I built up a ray-projector that would direct the powerful repulsion ray against the contact. Parts of what I built were clear to me and parts of it I never understood, so complicated was the work, but the detailed instructions signaled to me from the other side kept me on the right track. In hardly more than a week the projector was finished. In appearance it was something like a small, thick mortar or trench-cannon, mounted on a square case which held the actuating chamber of the ray. Switches for its control were mounted on the side of this case, and the tube-projector itself I carefully sighted so that it seemed to be pointing into the open air at the north edge of the knoll; though in reality, as I knew, it was aimed at the unseen contact between the two worlds. At last all was finished, and I stood ready for the attempt.

"It was at dawn that I waited there for their signal, for then was the time agreed on. Dawn of the first day of September, less than twenty-four hours ago! The ray was to be turned on, on both sides, at the exact moment when there sounded the tenth of a series of ten great bell-notes; for, as I have explained, it was vitally important that the ray be turned on from both sides at the same moment. So at dawn I stood beside the projector, my hands on its switches, and with the sound-receiving apparatus beside me, waiting for the signal.

"AT LAST the signal came—a great, clanging bell-note, which arose from the receiving apparatus beside me and rolled out across the misty marsh, echoing away. Another note clanged, and another, and another, until nine such had sounded, and my hand trembled on the switch. Then—the tenth note. I snapped over the switch.

"Instantly a broad ray of brilliant blue light shot from the stubby nose of the projector into the air beside the knoll; then seemed to halt, at its edge, and spread and broaden into an oval screen of misty blue luminescence, like a single great upright oval of misty blue light, which seemed to rest upon the ground at the very northern edge of the knoll and which was all of thirty feet in height, with half that width. Through that area of curdled light I glimpsed, dimly, distance upon unfathomable distance, receding back and back, and knew that I was gazing into another world, gazing through the contact across the fifth dimension gap, into earth's neighbor world. The contact had been opened!

"For a moment there was nothing but that oval of azure light, and then something dark appeared behind it, seemed to swim through it, emerge upon this side. It was a dark shape that passed swiftly through the contact and stepped upon the knoll, followed by another, and another, until perhaps a dozen had passed through. Then another

great bell-note clanged out, and as agreed, I snapped back the switch of the projector. Instantly the ray died, and the oval of light at the knoll's edge vanished. And there, confronting me, stood a half-score or more of the inhabitants of the other side.

"For a moment, dazzled as my eyes yet were by the oval's blue brilliance, I could only dimly make out their forms, and in that moment they seemed not unhuman, to me, with dark bodies carried erect, and of much the same size and shape as human bodies. But as my eyes cleared and took in the details of the appearance, I sickened with sudden, alien horror. They were beetle-men!

"I can describe them only by that term. They were great, manlike forms, a little over the average man in height, but their bodies were dark and hard and shiny, like the bodies of insects, and the heads, or faces, were completely blank except for two eyes that protruded on short, waving stalks. The two legs and the two arms, placed much as on the human body, were slender and white, and stiff-jointed like the limbs of an insect. In all my communication with these beings, through the contact, I had never dreamed their appearance to be such as it was. I had assumed, with unconscious anthropomorphism, that they must necessarily be manlike, or human, and now that they stood before me in all the strange horror of their actual being, I shrank back in utter terror.

"Only an instant we stood thus, staring at each other, and then one of the things took a step toward me, uttering some strange, twittering sounds, like chirping and squeaking noises. He held out toward me one of the stiff spider-arms, and that was the final touch on my terror. I shouted something incoherent and staggered back, toward the knoll's edge. Before ever I reached it, though, there was a rustling rush behind me, a chorus of excited twitterings, and then I was gripped from behind by a dozen of the slender limbs, fettered swiftly with tough thongs, and then let fall to the ground. I was their prisoner.

"For a time, though, after securing me, they took no further notice of me, concentrating all their attention on the ray-projector which I had built, under their instructions, and carrying on a twittering conversation as they examined it. Next I saw one of them enter my tent and emerge, in a moment, with most of the articles inside in his grasp. After examining these, also, they held a conversation of minutes and then laid my rifle, the only weapon on the knoll, upon the ground. Then all stepped back and one held forth a small metal disk and pointed it toward the rifle. There was a tiny click, and as I watched I saw the barrel and the trigger and hammer mechanism of the rifle suddenly vanish, leaving only its wooden stock on the ground. They crowded around that stock, examining it, and seemed to discuss it for a few seconds; then they returned to the projector and to my sound-sending and receiving apparatus. In a moment one of them began to operate the latter, speaking through the contact with those on the other side by means of the clicking signals. And as I lay there, listening to those signals which I knew and understood, I comprehended at last what doom I had loosed upon the world.

"These beetle-people, inhabitants of earth's neighbor world for ages, had long been aware of the existence of the fifth dimension and had been aware that another world—our world—lay next to them on that dimension. Crowded, cramped, in their own world, they longed to enter and conquer ours, but such a course was impossible, for them. The contact,

as they had told me, could only be opened from both sides at once, and so they had been forced to forego their cherished dream of sweeping through it to take possession of our world.

"At last, however, there had come through the contact my signals, which had been heard by their scientists stationed on their own side of the contact, since always they were studying it and examining it. Those signals they had at once answered, and so they had got into communication with me in the way I have described. Masking their real purpose, they had feigned sympathy for my desire to open the contact, and had furnished me with information which would enable me to do so. It was one chance in a million, for them, this chance of getting someone on our side to help them open the contact. They had learned from me the condition and resources of the earth and knew that once the contact was opened they could rush through and conquer it; so that they awaited only the opening of the contact. And I had opened it!

"I had opened the contact, had acted unconsciously as their tool, had loosed a horde of savage conquerors upon the world, to annihilate the races of man. And as I listened to their clicking signals, I understood, too, what forces they would use to crash down the power and civilization of man, without the slightest risk to themselves. Forming a truly colossal plan, they meant to destroy, in a single moment, every bit of iron and steel on the surface of the earth, and thus, in that one moment, to destroy all the civilization and organizations of mankind.

"THINK what a part iron, and iron as steel, plays in our civilization! Man's civilization was built upon steel, made possible by steel alone. All forms of communication, of transport, of defense and attack, of daily existence, depend upon this one element, iron, whether as wrought-iron or cast-iron or steel. Trains, ships, planes, rails, bridges, buildings, machinery, weapons, instruments—all are built of iron or steel, or on a basis of iron or steel. Annihilate all iron and steel in the world and you have annihilated the civilization and power of man.

"And that is what these beetlemen were coldly planning to do. And as I listened to their signals and understood the method which they planned to use, I knew that they could do it. Already, as you know, men have achieved success in the age-old dream of transmutation of elements, and have changed one element to another with ease, in the laboratory. Modern alchemy! Not only the familiar uranium to radium process, which is a natural one, but also they have changed ordinary, every-day elements such as nitrogen or sodium into wholly different elements. Nor, knowing what we do, is such an accomplishment to be wondered at.

"We know that every atom of every element consists of a certain number of positive and negative electrons, some of which form a nucleus around which the others revolve. We know, too, that the nature of any element depends upon the number of electrons it contains, and that if you change that number you change the nature of the element, change it into a totally different element, in fact. That has been done, in the laboratory. An aluminum atom has a large number of electrons, while a hydrogen atom has but two. But suppose you use some ray or force to knock out of the atom of aluminum all electrons but two. Then what you have left is an atom of hydrogen. That very process has been accomplished. You will remember the experiments of Professor Ernest Rutherford, of Cambridge University. He was able to knock

electrons loose from atoms almost at will, and was thus able to change a dozen different elements, such as aluminum, sodium and chlorine, into hydrogen, simply by knocking electrons loose from the atoms of those elements.

"The scientists of the beetle-people, too, had discovered this process, and had gone farther in it, even, than we, since they were able to change iron, also, to hydrogen, by using an electrical vibration or wave which knocked loose electrons from each iron atom. It was a small wave-generator of this type which they had used to make the iron and steel in my rifle vanish, changing it from iron to weightless, impalpable hydrogen. Steel, of course, being but iron and a little carbon, was changed in the same way as the pure iron, by the same wave. And it was with this disintegrating wave that they planned to wreck the civilization of man, by using a wave-generator powerful enough to encircle the whole surface of the earth with its vibrations, destroying, in a single moment, all iron and steel on the earth's surface by converting it into hydrogen, into tenuous gas. A mighty blow that would crash down in one moment all the pride and power and civilization of a world!

"They had brought with them, through the contact, the materials which they needed, and at once they set to work to build the wave-generator which was to depose man from his lordship of the world. They did not set it up on the same knoll as the contact, the knoll on which I lay fettered, but erected it, instead, on a neighboring knoll, which lay some fifty or sixty feet away and was much smaller. Lying there on the ground, the bitterness of death in my heart, I could hear them working, splashing back and forth through the marsh from one knoll to the other, conversing in the squeaking twittering that was their speech.

"They paid no attention to me, for the time, though one remained always near by to watch me, but were intent on the wave-generator which they were building. Through the hours I lay there, under the hot sunlight, wondering what my own fate was to be. They had spared my life, so far, but that I could only attribute to the fact that of all men on earth I knew most about the contact, which was the gateway from their world to ours. I had no hope for long-continued life, nor did I wish to live long if I were thus to be the cause of the world's death.

"With mid-afternoon their work on the other knoll slackened and ceased, and I saw that they had apparently finished their work on the great wave-generator. It was simple in appearance, being a disk like the one with which they had destroyed my rifle, but many times larger, since this disk was all of thirty feet across and a fifth of that in height. Connected to it by heavy cables were other, smaller mechanisms, and there were other connections that seemed to run down into the soil of the knoll. The thing, however, appeared to be quite ready, and I knew that soon they would be putting it into operation. I knew, too, from their communication through the contact by means of the signals, that on the other side of the contact, in that other world, the forces of the beetle-people were massing, and that after the world had been devastated by the wave-generator, those forces would be able to sweep through the contact upon our world, spreading over it in their air-vehicles and raining down destruction on the races of man. They had agreed to open the contact just before dawn of the next day, when the signal would be given from the other side.

"Now, if ever, I must escape, but there seemed no chance for escape.

Two of the beetle-men still remained beside me, one being engaged in a general examination of the ray-projector's mechanism. It occurred to me that the ray-projector itself would be destroyed by the annihilating wave they planned to send out, but even that hope died as I remembered that in building it I had used, under their orders, no scrap of iron or steel. The only chance was for me to escape and carry a warning of the thing which threatened earth; yet how to escape?

"At last, though, there came my chance. For a moment the two guards on my own knoll left it, splashing across the marsh to join the others in their twittering conversation around the great wave-generator. At once, with pounding heart, I rolled across the knoll toward my tent, and into it. There, after a moment of agonized fumbling, I found what I sought, a heavy, keen-edged hunting-knife. Gripping this in my hands, behind my back, I managed to sever the bonds that held my ankles, and in a moment had freed my hands also. I jumped to my feet, then, and crept cautiously from the tent.

"All the beetle-men were still gathering around the mechanism on the other knoll, and were apparently paying no attention to me for the moment. I crept stealthily across the knoll and slid quietly into the marsh on the other side, then started to make my way, as quietly as possible, in the direction of the spot where my motor-boat was moored. Before I had taken twenty steps, a squeaking cry went up from behind and I knew that my escape had been discovered. Abandoning all efforts at stealth, I splashed madly ahead.

"Just ahead of me lay a great patch of high, concealing reeds, and I threw all my strength into an effort to reach it. I neared it, reached its edge, and then from behind came a sighing, whistling sound, and something flicked through the air past my ear. It was a little cloud of dense brown gas, flying through the air with arrow speed, fired from some weapon by my pursuers, I knew. It must have been intensely poisonous gas, too, for the reeds where it touched ahead withered and shriveled instantly under its touch. For the moment, though, I was safe, since before they could fire the thing at me again I was inside the shelter of the reeds.

A single moment I halted, panting; then moved as quietly as possible on through the reeds, toward the knoll where my boat was moored. I heard the cracking and splashing of my pursuers' progress, behind, but in that swamp they could not trace me, and as I went on the sounds of their pursuit died away. Within the next twenty minutes I had come to the little patch of solid ground that was my goal, and throwing the cover off the boat I started its motor, then swung it out toward the open sea. Slumped across the wheel in an utter stupor of exhaustion, I held to a course that took me southward along the coast.

"The sun was sinking by that time, and I split the waters with the utmost speed of which the craft was capable as I swung on around the resorts at the point of the coast and headed up the bay toward New York City. I was racing against time, I knew, for the beetle-men would inevitably hasten to carry out their plan, turning on the wave-generator as soon as I escaped, lest I carry warning. Yet there was a chance in a million that I might reach the city in time to bring that warning, and might take back help to destroy the invaders and their mechanisms.

"Hope rose in me as I sped up the bay toward the city, narrowly missing collisions by reason of my crazy speed. Then, when my hope was at its highest, when I was only a hundred yards from the docks, from the

city, there came the terror. I heard a low, metallic click, and the next moment I saw the whole city ahead collapse to earth; saw every building and bridge and vehicle in sight crash to earth, disintegrate. The next instant I found myself struggling in the water, my boat in floating fragments around me.

"I knew, in that moment, that my chance in a million had failed, and that the invaders had turned on the wave-generator, and in one moment had devastated a world. For a moment I felt like letting myself sink to my death in the waters below me, but the will to live was too strong in me for that, and I found myself swimming toward the shore. I reached it, that shore of ruin and death, and for a time lay like one dead myself. When I finally rose to my feet it was deepest night, and on all the horizon there was no sign of light. Vaguely it occurred to me to search over the ruined city for others who might have escaped, and so I set off across the desert of wreckage. And in the darkness I blundered into you, Harron. And now you know all.

"There in the marsh lies the machine that has wrecked our world, and there, too, are the invaders, the beetle-men, who have loosed this doom upon us. A few hours, now, and the contact will again open, and through it will pour the hordes of the beetle-people to annihilate mankind, already terrorized by this cataclysm. Out of that gateway into the unknown has come a terror that has shattered the civilization of man, and now, beyond that gateway, a greater terror waits to spring upon our wrecked and riven world!"

4

HARRON sat quite silent and unmoving, when Graham's voice had ceased. From somewhere out in the darkness there whispered again to his ears the sound of wailing voices, thin and unreal, but that was the only sound to be heard—that and the far howling of a dog.

It was Graham who broke the silence first. "There lies but one course open for us, Harron," he said. "but one chance yet, for the world. We must go back. Back to the marsh, to the contact. If we can get to that contact, can prevent its opening again, there will yet be a chance for man. That wave-generator—it destroyed all iron and steel in the world, at the will of the invaders, but if we could annihilate them we could use it to build up iron and steel at will, out of any element, to build up a new and fairer world. But the contact—that must not open again. There is so little time——"

The two stood up, and it was only then that Harron found his voice. "It's the only chance," he said, his voice sounding strangely in his own ears. "If we can get there—in time——"

Graham glanced up at the moon, a misty ball of light behind its screening clouds. "It's near midnight, now," he said, "and they plan to open the contact just before dawn. That will give us almost six hours. If we can make it in that——"

A moment longer they paused; then, silently, moved off over the ruins toward the east, Graham leading and Harron following close on his tracks.

Harron was never to forget the things he saw on that journey east across the face of a wrecked world, that journey through night and death toward the final hour of a planet's doom. Over the width of Manhattan Island they encountered only the mountainous ranges of wreckage, though there were voices, from north and south, coming faintly to their ears. Graham stayed for none of these, but pressed on through the darkness toward the docks east of the island, where they must cross to Brooklyn. There, after clambering

over mighty masses of shattered timber which were all that remained of docks and ships, they managed to cross the river on a crude raft made of planks tied together with lengths of rope. On this they were able to paddle over to the Brooklyn side.

That other side they found to be only a reproduction, on a smaller scale, of the desert of ruins which they had left. More had escaped there than in New York, though, and some had escaped who were not unscathed, for there came to their ears through the darkness piercing cries of pain, and vain appeals for help. Harron would have stopped for these, but Graham pressed on, with set face, through the night, toward the east. So at last they came out of the wreckage-plain that had been Brooklyn and made their way through the ruins of the suburban villages eastward. A thin moonlight illuminated the scene, by then, and there were other lights bobbing about in the wreckage on all sides of them, for it was apparent that many had escaped in these less thickly settled portions. Still the two forged on, east, east, east.

Four hours had passed, and the moon had sunk beneath the western horizon, when they came at last to an expanse of sandy beach, beyond which thundered the rolling waves of the Atlantic. Then, at last, Graham halted for a moment, grasping Harron's arm and pointing toward the north.

"Look!" he whispered.

Harron strained to pierce the darkness ahead with his vision, and at last made out, far ahead, a point of white light, a flaring speck of light that lay far out to their right. He turned questioning eyes to Graham.

"The knoll!" whispered Graham. "That light can only come from it, Harron. The marsh lies just ahead of us."

Stumbling and slipping, they started through the dry sand of the beach, and soon there came to Harron's nostrils the peculiar rotten smell of decaying vegetation and stagnant waters. A few rods more and there loomed ahead of them, white and ghostly, a forest of slender reeds, extending far ahead and far out on each side.

"The marsh," whispered Graham. A moment he halted, glancing toward the flaring point of light and taking his bearings from it; then plunged into the reeds, followed by Harron. Then began what was, to Harron, the hardest phase of their journey. The reeds were thick, and they dared not break their way through them, for they cracked with the sound of pistol-shots, there in the silence of the night; so they had to slide between them in slow, tortuous progress. At every step their feet sank into the water and mud for inches, and each step was an effort. They had lost sight of the point of light, on entering the reeds, but Graham pressed unhesitatingly forward. And after almost an hour of such progress there glimmered to their eyes, from far ahead, a feeble white light, a faint and far illumination that they were able to see only by reason of the darkness of the night.

At once Graham halted, crouching down, and pulling Harron down beside him. He spoke rapidly, in whispers.

"We must separate, Harron," he said. "One of us has as good a chance as the other, now, and by separating our chances are doubled. I'll circle around and approach the knoll from the other side, while you make your way straight to it from here. If one of us can get to that ray-projector and smash it, or damage it, it means a respite for the world, and before they can repair it we can get help and crush them. But it is the last chance, for earth, now."

THE two men rose to their feet, and Graham took a few steps away, then paused and turned back to Harron, his face strange and drawn in the pale light from ahead, and lit by a haggard smile.

"Good-bye, Harron," he said. "I could wish that you had never been drawn into this, but—good luck!"

With that, and a final wave of his hand, Graham moved away, and in a moment he was swallowed up by the darkness. Harron found himself alone, and with racing pulses he, too, crept forward, toward the distant glimmer of light. That light intensified as he went on, and there came to his ears strange, small sounds, high and squeaking—twittering sounds, like none he had ever heard. Pushing forward through the mud and rotted reed-stalks and evil-smelling water, he came at last to the end of the reeds, and before him lay a clear circle of open marsh.

In this circle were two knolls, or patches of solid ground, rising above the shallow green water. The larger of these knolls lay on the other side of the clearing from where he crouched, while the smaller, on which was nothing but a single great disk-like object, was not a dozen feet from him. The flaring white light which illuminated the clearing proceeded from a single round bulb, or torch, which was suspended from the top of a tall rod planted in the larger knoll.

On this larger knoll, too, stood the machine Graham had described, the ray-projector, its stubby nose pointing toward the knoll's north edge. And around it, too, stood a dozen grotesque, nightmare forms. The beetle-men!

Harron's skin crept with deep horror as he gazed on them for the first time. The hard, shiny bodies, the blank faces, the protruding eyes and unhuman limbs—they gave, together, a sense of an inhabiting intelligence far removed from the intelligence of man, yet, in a way, akin to and superior to it. The beetle-men, he saw, were gathering around the ray-projector, for the moment, except for one who was busy with a smaller apparatus at the other side of the knoll, an apparatus which Harron guessed to be the sound-receiver which recorded the signals from the other side of the contact.

As he watched, the one at the sound-receiver uttered a squeaking call and the others left the projector for the moment and hastened toward him. Harron heard a clicking sound and knew them to be in communication with those on the contact's other side. For the moment, though, he did not heed them, for his eyes were on the projector, standing unprotected for the time being. It was the chance that Harron had hoped for, and at once he slipped from his place of concealment and crept forward across the open water, writhing snakelike onward toward the larger knoll, toward the mechanism on which depended the fate of a world.

He saw the beetle-men there suddenly turn and hurry back to the projector. In the next moment, one of them grasped a large switch on its side. One turned and stared fixedly toward the spot where Harron lay, then uttered a twittering cry. In a moment a half-dozen of them leapt from the knoll toward him. And at the same moment there rose abruptly from the sound-receiver behind them a mighty, clanging sound, a single great bell-note, that rolled out over the silent marsh like the stroke of doom.

One!

The first of the ten notes of the signal! The thought flashed through Harron's brain even as he strove to leap aside from the onrush of the beetle-men. They were too swift for him, though, and in an instant they were upon him.

Two!

The second great note clanged out as Harron went down beneath the rush of the invaders. He struck out with blind rage, felt the hard outer shell of their bodies break, crack, beneath his blows. But the others had gripped him from behind, pinioning him in their grasp.

Three!

With the last of his strength Harron struck out to free himself, but his blows were futile. He was hauled to his feet and dragged toward the smaller knoll, and onto it.

Four!

Harron had a glimpse of the beetle-man at the projector, standing ready at its switch. He and the one at the sound-receiver were all who remained on the larger knoll, now. The others were crowding about Harron, some holding him while others began to bind his arms and feet with thongs.

Five!

Abruptly Harron's body stiffened, and his eyes widened, as glancing beyond the beetle-men around him he saw something moving at the opposite edge of the clearing—something dark that was creeping slowly toward the larger knoll, unperceived as yet by any of the beetle-men. On it crawled—on——

Six!

Suddenly Harron bit his lips to keep from shouting aloud. That dark, creeping figure had raised itself a little, for a moment, and Harron had glimpsed its face. It was Graham!

Seven!

Abruptly, at that moment, a cry went up from the beetle-man at the sound-receiver, on the larger knoll, as he glimpsed Graham. He rushed from the knoll toward him, while the figures around Harron turned swiftly, startled from their task of binding him; then they, too, raced across the marsh toward Graham.

Eight!

Harron uttered a mad shout. He had seen Graham plunging about in mad conflict with the single beetle-man from the sound receiver, who had thrown himself upon him. And while the two whirled about in the shallow water the others raced toward the mêlée, with Harron struggling to release himself from his half-tied bonds.

Nine!

Graham suddenly straightened, and with a great whirling blow thrust the beetle-man with whom he struggled from him, then raced toward the knoll. He had reached it, now, was staggering toward the ray-projector, where the single guard there stood ready at the switch. The others were splashing madly toward the knoll, now—had reached its edge. The last of Harron's bonds gave way beneath his frantic fingers, and as he jumped to his feet he saw Graham throw himself upon the single figure at the projector-switch.

Ten!

The last mighty note clanged out, and in the instant that it did so the beetle-man at the switch threw that switch half over. But before he could completely open it Graham had reached him and with a single mighty blow had knocked him back from the machine. The next moment an oval of dazzling light appeared for a single instant at the edge of the knoll, and then it seemed to vomit azure lightnings upon the knoll, in one vast burst of brilliant blue fire, while a mighty explosion rocked the ground beneath Harron, throwing him from his feet.

He struggled up again, to see only thick clouds of white steam that hung where the knoll had been. They cleared, in a moment, and there, where the knoll had stood, where the ray-projector and Graham and the beetle-men had been, there was now but a single great gulf torn from the

soft ooze of the marsh—a single great crater blasted from the earth's surface there by the ray that had flashed through the contact from the other side—the ray that had blasted earth on this side, even as Graham had foretold, when it was not met by the opposing, equalizing ray from this side. The projector, and the man who had built it, and the beings who had thought to use it to loose hell upon the world—all these had been annihilated, together, in that one instant.

The contact was closed—forever.

IT WAS more than an hour later that Harron staggered out of the marsh, at last, and into a wrecked little village that lay at its edge. He walked down its street with slow, uncertain steps, and paused, finally, to seat himself on some concrete steps, all that remained whole of a small building. He glanced around him, then, with weary eyes.

In the little expanse of wrecked buildings around him, lying silent beneath the paling light of dawn, there was no sign of life. Wherever the people of the village had fled, they were not in sight. Harron turned from it, toward the east, where, even as he watched, the gray sky was flushing to rose—a rose that deepened to crimson. Then rose the sun, flaming red, washing the world with rosy light as it swung higher and higher.

All over the world, Harron knew, that rising sun would be looking down on scenes like the one around him, on shattered villages and cities, on a devastated planet. All over the world, too, its first rays would be falling upon a dazed and terror-stricken humanity, wandering among the ruins of its world of yesterday.

But that would soon pass. It would pass. . . . That wave-generator lying back there in the marsh, that mechanism that had wrecked a world, it would help to rebuild a world, too; it would help to rear up that fairer world of which Graham had spoken. The disorganized, terrorized races of man would gather together again, build up again their ruined civilization.

And then, at least, they would understand the greater doom that had hung above them—the doom that they had escaped only by the narrowest of margins. Then, at least, they would come to know how the world had been saved, at the last moment, by one man.

One man. . . .

"They were slithering shadows of red madness."

The LURKING FEAR

by H. P. LOVECRAFT

1. The Shadow on the Chimney

THERE was thunder in the air on the night I went to the deserted mansion atop Tempest Mountain to find the lurking fear. I was not alone, for foolhardiness was not then mixed with that love of the grotesque and the terrible which has made my career a series of quests for strange horrors in literature and in life. With me were two faithful and muscular men for whom I had sent when the time came; men long associated with me in my ghastly explorations because of their peculiar fitness.

We had started quietly from the village because of the reporters who still lingered about after the eldritch panic of a month before—the nightmare creeping death. Later, I thought, they might aid me; but I did not want them then. Would to God I had let them share the search, that I might not have had to bear the secret alone so long; to bear it alone for fear the world would call me mad or go mad itself at the demon implications of the thing. Now that I am telling it anyway, lest the brooding make me a maniac, I wish I had never concealed it. For I, and I only, know what manner of fear lurked on that spectral and desolate mountain.

In a small motor-car we covered the miles of primeval forest and hill until the wooded ascent checked it. The country bore an aspect more than usually sinister as we viewed it by night and without the accustomed crowds of investigators, so that we

were often tempted to use the acetylene headlights despite the attention it might attract. It was not a wholesome landscape after dark, and I believe I would have noticed its morbidity even had I been ignorant of the terror that stalked there. Of wild creatures there were none—they are wise when death leers close. The ancient lightning-scarred trees seemed unnaturally large and twisted, and the other vegetation unnaturally thick and feverish, while curious mounds and hummocks in the weedy, fulgurite-pitted earth reminded me of snakes and dead men's skulls swelled to gigantic proportions.

Fear had lurked on Tempest Mountain for more than a century. This I learned at once from newspaper accounts of the catastrophe which first brought the region to the world's notice. The place is a remote, lonely elevation in that part of the Catskills where Dutch civilization once feebly and transiently penetrated, leaving behind as it receded only a few ruined mansions and a degenerate squatter population inhabiting pitiful hamlets on isolated slopes. Normal beings seldom visited the locality till the state police were formed, and even now only infrequent troopers patrol it. The fear, however, is an old tradition throughout the neighboring villages; since it is a prime topic in the simple discourse of the poor mongrels who sometimes leave their valleys to trade hand-woven baskets for such primitive necessities as they can not shoot, raise, or make.

The lurking fear dwelt in the shunned and deserted Martense mansion, which crowned the high but gradual eminence whose liability to frequent thunderstorms gave it the name of Tempest Mountain. For over a hundred years the antique, grove-circled stone house had been the subject of stories incredibly wild and monstrously hideous; stories of a silent colossal creeping death which stalked abroad in summer. With whimpering insistence the squatters told tales of a demon which seized lone wayfarers after dark, either carrying them off or leaving them in a frightful state of gnawed dismemberment; while sometimes they whispered of blood-trails toward the distant mansion. Some said the thunder called the lurking fear out of its habitation, while others said the thunder was its voice.

No one outside the backwoods had believed these varying and conflicting stories, with their incoherent, extravagant descriptions of the half-glimpsed fiend; yet not a farmer or villager doubted that the Martense mansion was ghoulishly haunted. Local history forbade such a doubt, although no ghostly evidence was ever found by such investigators as had visited the building after some especially vivid tales of the squatters. Grandmothers told strange myths of the Martense specter; myths concerning the Martense family itself, its queer hereditary dissimilarity of eyes, its long, unnatural annals, and the murder which had cursed it.

The terror which brought me to the scene was a sudden and portentous confirmation of the mountaineers' wildest legends. One summer night, after a thunderstorm of unprecedented violence, the countryside was aroused by a squatter stampede which no mere delusion could create. The pitiful throngs of natives shrieked and whined of the unnamable horror which had descended upon them, and they were not doubted. They had not seen it, but had heard such cries from one of their hamlets that they knew a creeping death had come.

In the morning citizens and state troopers followed the shuddering mountaineers to the place where they said the death had come. Death was indeed there. The ground under one of the squatters' villages had caved in after a lightning stroke,

destroying several of the malodorous shanties; but upon this property damage was superimposed an organic devastation which paled it to insignificance. Of a possible seventy-five natives who had inhabited this spot, not one living specimen was visible. The disordered earth was covered with blood and human debris bespeaking too vividly the ravages of demon teeth and talons; yet no visible trail led away from the carnage. That some hideous animal must be the cause, everyone quickly agreed; nor did any tongue now revive the charge that such cryptic deaths formed merely the sordid murders common in decadent communities. That charge was revived only when about twenty-five of the estimated population were found missing from the dead; and even then it was hard to explain the murder of fifty by half that number. But the fact remained that on a summer night a bolt had come out of the heavens and left a dead village whose corpses were horribly mangled, chewed, and clawed.

The excited countryside immediately connected the horror with the haunted Martense mansion, though the localities were over three miles apart. The troopers were more skeptical, including the mansion only casually in their investigations, and dropping it altogether when they found it thoroughly deserted. Country and village people, however, canvassed the place with infinite care; overturning everything in the house, sounding ponds and brooks, beating down bushes, and ransacking the near-by forests. All was in vain; the death that had come had left no trace save destruction itself.

By the second day of the search the affair was fully treated by the newspapers, whose reporters overran Tempest Mountain. They described it in much detail, and with many interviews to elucidate the horror's history as told by local grandams. I followed the accounts languidly at first, for I am a connoisseur in horrors; but after a week I detected an atmosphere which stirred me oddly, so that on August 5th, 1921, I registered among the reporters who crowded the hotel at Lefferts Corners, nearest village to Tempest Mountain and acknowledged headquarters of the searchers. Three weeks more, and the dispersal of the reporters left me free to begin a terrible exploration based on the minute inquiries and surveying with which I had meanwhile busied myself.

So on this summer night, while distant thunder rumbled, I left a silent motor-car and tramped with two armed companions up the last mound-covered reaches of Tempest Mountain, casting the beams of an electric torch on the spectral gray walls that began to appear through the giant oaks ahead. In this morbid night solitude and feeble shifting illumination, the vast boxlike pile displayed obscure hints of terror which day could not uncover; yet I did not hesitate, since I had come with fierce resolution to test an idea. I believed that the thunder called the death-demon out of some fearsome secret place; and be that demon solid entity or vaporous pestilence, I meant to see it.

I HAD thoroughly searched the ruin before, hence knew my plan well; choosing as the seat of my vigil the old room of Jan Martense, whose murder looms so great in the rural legends. I felt subtly that the apartment of this ancient victim was best for my purposes. The chamber, measuring about twenty feet square, contained like the other rooms some rubbish which had once been furniture. It lay on the second story, on the southeast corner of the house,

and had an immense east window and narrow south window, both devoid of panes or shutters. Opposite the large window was an enormous Dutch fireplace with scriptural tiles representing the prodigal son, and opposite the narrow window was a spacious bed built into the wall.

As the tree-muffled thunder grew louder, I arranged my plan's details. First I fastened side by side on the ledge of the large window three rope ladders which I had brought with me. I knew they reached a suitable spot on the grass outside, for I had tested them. Then the three of us dragged from another room a wide four-poster bedstead, crowding it laterally against the window. Having strewn it with fir boughs, all now rested on it with drawn automatics, two relaxing while the third watched. From whatever direction the demon might come, our potential escape was provided. If it came from within the house, we had the window ladders; if from outside, the door and the stairs. We did not think, judging from precedent, that it would pursue us far even at worst.

I watched from midnight to 1 o'clock, when in spite of the sinister house, the unprotected window, and the approaching thunder and lightning, I felt singularly drowsy. I was between my two companions. George Bennett being toward the window and William Tobey toward the fireplace. Bennett was asleep, having apparently felt the same anomalous drowsiness which affected me, so I designated Tobey for the next watch although even he was nodding. It is curious how intently I had been watching that fireplace.

The increasing thunder must have affected my dreams, for in the brief time I slept there came to me apocalyptic visions. Once I partly awaked, probably because the sleeper toward the window had restlessly flung an arm across my chest. I was not sufficiently awake to see whether Tobey was attending to his duties as sentinel, but felt a distinct anxiety on that score. Never before had the presence of evil so poignantly oppressed me. Later I must have dropped asleep again, for it was out of a phantasmal chaos that my mind leaped when the night grew hideous with shrieks beyond anything in my former experience or imagination.

In that shrieking the inmost soul of human fear and agony clawed hopelessly and insanely at the ebony gates of oblivion. I awoke to red madness and the mockery of diabolism, as farther and farther down inconceivable vistas that phobic and crystalline anguish retreated and reverberated. There was no light, but I knew from the empty space at my right that Tobey was gone, God alone knew whither. Across my chest still lay the heavy arm of the sleeper at my left.

Then came the devastating stroke of lightning which shook the whole mountain, lit the darkest crypts of the hoary grove, and splintered the patriarch of the twisted trees. In the demon flash of a monstrous fireball the sleeper started up suddenly while the glare from beyond the window threw his shadow vividly upon the chimney above the fireplace from which my eyes had never strayed. That I am still alive and sane, is a marvel I can not fathom. I can not fathom it, for the shadow on that chimney was not that of George Bennett or of any other human creature; but a blasphemous abnormality from hell's nethermost craters; a nameless, shapeless abomination which no mind could fully grasp and no pen even partly describe. In another second I was alone in the accursed mansion, shivering and gibbering. George Bennett and William Tobey had left no trace, not even of a struggle. They were never heard of again.

2. *A Passer in the Storm*

For days after that hideous experience in the forest-swathed mansion I lay nervously exhausted in my hotel room at Lefferts Corners. I do not remember exactly how I managed to reach the motor-car, start it, and slip unobserved back to the village; for I retain no distinct impression save of wild-armed titan trees, demoniac mutterings of thunder, and Charonian shadows athwart the low mounds that dotted and streaked the region.

As I shivered and brooded on the casting of that brain-blasting shadow, I knew that I had at last pried out one of earth's supreme horrors—one of those nameless blights of outer voids whose faint demon scratchings we sometimes hear on the farthest rim of space, yet from which our own finite vision has given us a merciful immunity. The shadow I had seen, I hardly dared to analyze or identify. Something had lain between me and the window that night, but I shuddered whenever I could not cast off the instinct to classify it. If it had only snarled, or bayed, or laughed titteringly—even that would have relieved the abysmal hideousness. But it was so silent. It had rested a heavy arm or foreleg on my chest. . . . Obviously it was organic, or had once been organic. . . . Jan Martense, whose room I had invaded, was buried in the graveyard near the mansion. . . . I must find Bennett and Tobey, if they lived . . . why had it picked them, and left me for the last? . . . Drowsiness is so stifling, and dreams are so horrible. . . .

In a short time I realized that I must tell my story to someone or break down completely. I had already decided not to abandon the quest for the lurking fear, for in my rash ignorance it seemed to me that uncertainty was worse than enlightenment, however terrible the latter might prove to be. Accordingly I revolved in my mind the best course to pursue; whom to select for my confidences, and how to track down the thing which had obliterated two men and cast a nightmare shadow.

My chief acquaintances at Lefferts Corners had been the affable reporters, of whom several still remained to collect final echoes of the tragedy. It was from these that I determined to choose a colleague, and the more I reflected the more my preference inclined toward one Arthur Munroe, a dark, lean man of about thirty-five, whose education, taste, intelligence, and temperament all seemed to mark him as one not bound to conventional ideas and experiences.

On an afternoon in early September Arthur Munroe listened to my story. I saw from the beginning that he was both interested and sympathetic, and when I had finished he analyzed and discussed the thing with the greatest shrewdness and judgment. His advice, moreover, was eminently practical; for he recommended a postponement of operations at the Martense mansion until we might become fortified with more detailed historical and geographical data. On his initiative we combed the countryside for information regarding the terrible Martense family, and discovered a man who possessed a marvelously illuminating ancestral diary. We also talked at length with such of the mountain mongrels as had not fled from the terror and confusion to remoter slopes, and arranged to precede our culminating task—the exhaustive and definitive examination of the mansion in the light of its detailed history—with an equally exhaustive and definitive examination of spots associated with the various tragedies of squatter legend.

The results of this examination were not at first very enlightening, though our tabulation of them seemed to reveal a fairly significant trend; namely, that the number of reported

horrors was by far the greatest in areas either comparatively near the avoided house or connected with it by stretches of the morbidly overnourished forest. There were, it is true, exceptions; indeed, the horror which had caught the world's ear had happened in a treeless space remote alike from the mansion and from any connecting woods.

As to the nature and appearance of the lurking fear, nothing could be gained from the scared and witless shanty-dwellers. In the same breath they called it a snake and a giant, a thunder-devil and a bat, a vulture and a walking tree. We did, however, deem ourselves justified in assuming that it was a living organism highly susceptible to electrical storms; and although certain of the stories suggested wings, we believed that its aversion for open spaces made land locomotion a more probable theory. The only thing really incompatible with the latter view was the rapidity with which the creature must have traveled in order to perform all the deeds attributed to it.

When we came to know the squatters better, we found them curiously likable in many ways. Simple animals they were, gently descending the evolutionary scale because of their unfortunate ancestry and stultifying isolation. They feared outsiders, but slowly grew accustomed to us; finally helping vastly when we beat down all the thickets and tore out all the partitions of the mansion in our search for the lurking fear. When we asked them to help us find Bennett and Tobey they were truly distressed; for they wanted to help us, yet knew that these victims had gone as wholly out of the world as their own missing people. That great numbers of them had actually been killed and removed, just as the wild animals had long been exterminated, we were of course thoroughly convinced; and we waited apprehensively for further tragedies to occur.

By the middle of October we were puzzled by our lack of progress. Owing to the clear nights no demoniac aggressions had taken place, and the completeness of our vain searches of house and country almost drove us to regard the lurking fear as a non-material agency. We feared that the cold weather would come on and halt our explorations, for all agreed that the demon was generally quiet in winter. Thus there was a kind of haste and desperation in our last daylight canvass of the horror-visited hamlet; a hamlet now deserted because of the squatters' fears.

The ill-fated squatter hamlet had borne no name, but had long stood in a sheltered though treeless cleft between two elevations called respectively Cone Mountain and Maple Hill. It was closer to Maple Hill than to Cone Mountain, some of the crude abodes indeed being dugouts on the side of the former eminence. Geographically it lay about two miles northwest of the base of Tempest Mountain, and three miles from the oak-girt mansion. Of the distance between the hamlet and the mansion, fully two miles and a quarter on the hamlet's side was entirely open country; the plain being of fairly level character save for some of the low snakelike mounds, and having as vegetation only grass and scattered weeds. Considering this topography, we had finally concluded that the demon must have come by way of Cone Mountain, a wooded southern prolongation of which ran to within a short distance of the westernmost spur of Tempest Mountain. The upheaval of ground we traced conclusively to a landslide from Maple Hill, a tall lone splintered tree on whose side had been the striking point of the thunderbolt which summoned the fiend.

As for the twentieth time or more Arthur Munroe and I went minutely over every inch of the violated village, we were filled with a certain discouragement coupled with vague and novel fears. It was acutely uncanny, even when frightful and uncanny things were common, to encounter so blankly clueless a scene after such overwhelming occurrences; and we moved about beneath the leaden, darkening sky with that tragic directionless zeal which results from a combined sense of futility and necessity of action. Our care was gravely minute; every cottage was again entered, every hillside dugout again searched for bodies, every thorny foot of adjacent slope again scanned for dens and caves, but all without result. And yet, as I have said, vague new fears hovered menacingly over us; as if giant bat-winged gryphons squatted invisibly on the mountain-tops and leered with Abaddon-eyes that had looked on transcosmic gulfs.

As the afternoon advanced, it became increasingly difficult to see; and we heard the rumble of a thunderstorm gathering over Tempest Mountain. This sound in such a locality naturally stirred us, though less than it would have done at night. As it was, we hoped desperately that the storm would last until well after dark; and with that hope turned from our aimless hillside searching toward the nearest inhabited hamlet to gather a body of squatters as helpers in the investigation. Timid as they were, a few of the younger men were sufficiently inspired by our protective leadership to promise such help.

We had hardly more than turned, however, when there descended such a blinding sheet of torrential rain that shelter became imperative. The extreme, almost nocturnal darkness of the sky caused us to stumble sadly, but guided by the frequent flashes of lightning and by our minute knowledge of the hamlet we soon reached the least porous cabin of the lot; an heterogeneous combination of logs and boards whose still existing door and single tiny window both faced Maple Hill. Barring the door after us against the fury of the wind and rain, we put in place the crude window shutter which our frequent searches had taught us where to find. It was dismal sitting there on rickety boxes in the pitchy darkness, but we smoked pipes and occasionally flashed our pocket lamps about. Now and then we could see the lightning through cracks in the wall; the afternoon was so incredibly dark that each flash was extremely vivid.

The stormy vigil reminded me shudderingly of my ghastly night on Tempest Mountain. My mind turned to that odd question which had kept recurring ever since the nightmare thing had happened; and again I wondered why the demon, approaching the three watchers either from the window or the interior, had begun with the men on each side and left the middle man till the last, when the titan fireball had scared it away. Why had it not taken its victims in natural order, with myself second, from whichever direction it had approached? With what manner of far-reaching tentacles did it prey? Or did it know that I was the leader, and save me for a fate worse than that of my companions?

In the midst of these reflections, as if dramatically arranged to intensify them, there fell near by a terrific bolt of lightning followed by the sound of sliding earth. At the same time the wolfish wind rose to demoniac crescendos of ululation. We were sure that the lone tree on Maple Hill had been struck again, and Munroe rose from his box and went to the tiny window to ascertain the damage. When he took down the shutter the wind and rain howled deafeningly in, so that I could not

hear what he said; but I waited while he leaned out and tried to fathom nature's pandemonium.

Gradually a calming of the wind and dispersal of the unusual darkness told of the storm's passing. I had hoped it would last into the night to help our quest, but a furtive sunbeam from a knothole behind me removed the likelihood of such a thing. Suggesting to Munroe that we had better get some light even if more showers came, I unbarred and opened the crude door. The ground outside was a singular mass of mud and pools, with fresh heaps of earth from the slight landslide; but I saw nothing to justify the interest which kept my companion silently leaning out the window. Crossing to where he leaned, I touched his shoulder; but he did not move. Then, as I playfully shook him and turned him around, I felt the strangling tendrils of a cancerous horror whose roots reached into illimitable pasts and fathomless abysms of the night that broods beyond time.

For Arthur Munroe was dead. And on what remained of his chewed and gouged head there was no longer a face.

3. *What the Red Glare Meant*

On the tempest-racked night of November 8th, 1921, with a lantern which cast charnel shadows, I stood digging alone and idiotically in the grave of Jan Martense. I had begun to dig in the afternoon, because a thunderstorm was brewing, and now that it was dark and the storm had burst above the maniacally thick foliage I was glad.

I believe that my mind was partly unhinged by events since August 5th; the demon shadow in the mansion, the general strain and disappointment, and the thing that occurred at the hamlet in an October storm. After that thing I had dug a grave for one whose death I could not understand. I knew that others could not understand either, so let them think Arthur Munroe had wandered away. They searched, but found nothing. The squatters might have understood, but I dared not frighten them more. I myself seemed strangely callous. That shock at the mansion had done something to my brain, and I could think only of the quest for a horror now grown to cataclysmic stature in my imagination; a quest which the fate of Arthur Munroe made me vow to keep silent and solitary.

The scene of my excavations would alone have been enough to unnerve any ordinary man. Baleful primal trees of unholy size, age, and grotesqueness leered above me like the pillars of some hellish Druidic temple; muffling the thunder, hushing the clawing wind, and admitting but little rain. Beyond the scarred trunks in the background, illumined by faint flashes of filtered lightning, rose the damp ivied stones of the deserted mansion, while somewhat nearer was the abandoned Dutch garden whose walks and beds were polluted by a white, fungous, fetid, overnourished vegetation that never saw full daylight. And nearest of all was the graveyard, where deformed trees tossed insane branches as their roots displaced unhallowed slabs and sucked venom from what lay below. Now and then, beneath the brown pall of leaves that rotted and festered in the antediluvian forest darkness, I could trace the sinister outlines of some of these low mounds which characterized the lightning-pierced region.

History had led me to this archaic grave. History, indeed, was all I had after everything else ended in mocking Satanism. I now believed that the lurking fear was no material thing, but a wolf-fanged ghost that rode the midnight lightning. And I believed, because of the masses of local tradition I had unearthed in

my search with Arthur Munroe, that the ghost was that of Jan Martense, who died in 1762. That is why I was digging idiotically in his grave.

The Martense mansion was built in 1670 by Gerrit Martense, a wealthy New Amsterdam merchant who disliked the changing order under British rule, and had constructed this magnificent domicile on a remote woodland summit whose untrodden solitude and unusual scenery pleased him. The only substantial disappointment encountered in this site was that which concerned the prevalence of violent thunderstorms in summer. When selecting the hill and building his mansion, Mynheer Martense had laid these frequent natural outbursts to some peculiarity of the year; but in time he perceived that the locality was especially liable to such phenomena. At length, having found these storms injurious to his head, he fitted up a cellar into which he could retreat from their wildest pandemonium.

Of Gerrit Martense's descendants less is known than of himself; since they were all reared in hatred of the English civilization, and trained to shun such of the colonists as accepted it. Their life was exceedingly secluded, and people declared that their isolation had made them heavy of speech and comprehension. In appearance all were marked by a peculiar inherited dissimilarity of eyes; one generally being blue and the other brown. Their social contacts grew fewer and fewer, till at last they took to intermarrying with the numerous menial class about the estate. Many of the crowded family degenerated, moved across the valley, and merged with the mongrel population which was later to produce the pitiful squatters. The rest had stuck sullenly to their ancestral mansion, becoming more and more clannish and taciturn, yet developing a nervous responsiveness to the frequent thunderstorms.

Most of this information reached the outside world through young Jan Martense, who from some kind of restlessness joined the colonial army when news of the Albany Convention reached Tempest Mountain. He was the first of Gerrit's descendants to see much of the world; and when he returned in 1760, after six years of campaigning, he was hated as an outsider by his father, uncles, and brothers, in spite of his dissimilar Martense eyes. No longer could he share the peculiarities and prejudices of the Martenses, while the very mountain thunderstorms failed to intoxicate him as they had before. Instead, his surroundings depressed him; and he frequently wrote to a friend in Albany of plans to leave the paternal roof.

In the spring of 1763 Jonathan Gifford, the Albany friend of Jan Martense, became worried by his correspondent's silence; especially in view of the conditions and quarrels at the Martense mansion. Determined to visit Jan in person, he went into the mountains on horseback. His diary states that he reached Tempest Mountain on September 20th, finding the mansion in great decrepitude. The sullen, odd-eyed Martenses, whose unclean animal aspect shocked him, told him in broken gutturals than Jan was dead. He had, they insisted, been struck by lightning the autumn before, and now lay buried behind the neglected sunken gardens. They showed the visitor the grave, barren and devoid of markers. Something in the Martenses' manner gave Gifford a feeling of repulsion and suspicion, and a week later he returned with spade and mattock to explore the sepulchral spot. He found what he expected—a skull crushed cruelly as if by savage blows—so returning to Albany he openly charged the Martenses with the murder of their kinsman.

Legal evidence was lacking, but the story spread rapidly around the

countryside; and from that time the Martenses were ostracized by the world. No one would deal with them, and their distant manor was shunned as an accursed place. Somehow they managed to live on independently by the products of their estate, for occasional lights glimpsed from far-away hills attested their continued presence. These lights were seen as late as 1810, but toward the last they became very infrequent.

Meanwhile there grew up about the mansion and the mountain a body of diabolic legendry. The place was avoided with doubled assiduousness, and invested with every whispered myth tradition could supply. It remained unvisited till 1816, when the continued absence of lights was noticed by the squatters. At that time a party made investigations, finding the house deserted and partly in ruins.

There were no skeletons about, so that departure rather than death was inferred. The clan seemed to have left several years before, and improvised penthouses showed how numerous it had grown prior to its migration. Its cultural level had fallen very low, as proved by decaying furniture and scattered silverware which must have been long abandoned when its owners left. But though the dreaded Martenses were gone, the fear of the haunted house continued; and grew very acute when new and strange stories arose among the mountain decadents. There it stood; deserted, feared, and linked with the vengeful ghost of Jan Martense. There it still stood on the night I dug in Jan Martense's grave.

I HAVE described my protracted digging as idiotic, and such it indeed was in object and method. The coffin of Jan Martense had been soon unearthed—it now held only dust and niter—but in my fury to exhume his ghost I delved irrationally and clumsily down beneath where he had lain. God knows what I expected to find—I only felt that I was digging in the grave of a man whose ghost stalked by night.

It is impossible to say what monstrous depth I had attained when my spade, and soon my feet, broke through the ground beneath. The event, under the circumstances, was tremendous; for in the existence of a subterranean space here, my mad theories had terrible confirmation. My slight fall had extinguished the lantern, but I produced an electric pocket-lamp and viewed the small horizontal tunnel which led away indefinitely in both directions. It was amply large for a man to wriggle through; and though no sane person would have tried it at that time, I forgot danger, reason, and cleanliness in my single-minded fever to unearth the lurking fear. Choosing the direction toward the house, I scrambled recklessly into the narrow burrow; squirming ahead blindly and rapidly, and flashing but seldom the lamp I kept before me.

What language can describe the spectacle of a man lost in infinitely abysmal earth; pawing, twisting, wheezing; scrambling madly through sunken convolutions of immemorial blackness without an idea of time, safety, direction, or definite object? There is something hideous in it, but that is what I did. I did it for so long that life faded to a far memory, and I became one with the moles and grubs of nighted depths. Indeed, it was only by accident that after interminable writhings I jarred my forgotten electric lamp alight, so that it shone eerily along the burrow of caked loam that stretched and curved ahead.

I had been scrambling in this way for some time, so that my battery had burned very low, when the passage suddenly inclined sharply upward, altering my mode of progress. And as I raised my glance it was without preparation that I saw glistening in

the distance two demoniac reflections of my expiring lamp; two reflections glowing with a baneful and unmistakable effulgence, and provoking maddeningly nebulous memories. I stopped automatically, though lacking the brain to retreat. The eyes approached, yet of the thing that bore them I could distinguish only a claw. But what a claw! Then far overhead I heard a faint crashing which I recognized. It was the wild thunder of the mountain, raised to hysteric fury. I must have been crawling upward for some time, so that the surface was now quite near. And as the muffled thunder clattered, those eyes still stared with vacuous viciousness.

Thank God I did not then know what it was, else I should have died. But I was saved by the very thunder that had summoned it, for after a hideous wait there burst from the unseen outside sky one of those frequent mountainward bolts whose aftermath I had noticed here and there as gashes of disturbed earth and fulgurites of various sizes. With Cyclopean rage it tore through the soil above that damnable pit, blinding and deafening me, yet not wholly reducing me to a coma.

In the chaos of sliding, shifting earth I clawed and floundered helplessly till the rain on my head steadied me and I saw that I had come to the surface in a familiar spot; a steep unforested place on the southwest slope of the mountain. Recurrent sheet lightnings illumed the tumbled ground and the remains of the curious low hummock which had stretched down from the wooded higher slope, but there was nothing in the chaos to show my place of egress from the lethal catacomb. My brain was as great a chaos as the earth, and as a distant red glare burst on the landscape from the south I hardly realized the horror I had been through.

But when two days later the squatters told me what the red glare meant, I felt more horror than that which the mold-burrow and the claw and eyes had given; more horror because of the overwhelming implications. In a hamlet twenty miles away an orgy of fear had followed the bolt which brought me above ground, and a nameless thing had dropped from an overhanging tree into a weak-roofed cabin. It had done a deed, but the squatters had fired the cabin in frenzy before it could escape. It had been doing that deed at the very moment the earth caved in on the thing with the claw and eyes.

4. The Horror in the Eyes

THERE can be nothing normal in the mind of one who, knowing what I knew of the horrors of Tempest Mountain, would seek alone for the fear that lurked there. That at least two of the fear's embodiments were destroyed, formed but a slight guarantee of mental and physical safety in this Acheron of multiform diabolism; yet I continued my quest with even greater zeal as events and revelations became more monstrous.

When, two days after my frightful crawl through that crypt of the eyes and claw, I learned that a thing had malignly hovered twenty miles away at the same instant the eyes were glaring at me, I experienced virtual convulsions of fright. But that fright was so mixed with wonder and alluring grotesqueness, that it was almost a pleasant sensation. Sometimes, in the throes of a nightmare when unseen powers whirl one over the roofs of strange dead cities toward the grinning chasm of Nis, it is a relief and even a delight to shriek wildly and throw oneself voluntarily along with the hideous vortex of dream-doom down into whatever bottomless gulf may yawn. And so it was with the waking nightmare of Tempest Mountain; the discovery that two monsters had haunted the

spot gave me ultimately a mad craving to plunge into the very earth of the accursed region, and with bare hands dig out the death that lecred from every inch of the poisonous soil.

As soon as possible I visited the grave of Jan Martense and dug vainly where I had dug before. Some extensive cave-in had obliterated all trace of the underground passage, while the rain had washed so much earth back into the excavation that I could not tell how deeply I had dug that other day. I likewise made a difficult trip to the distant hamlet where the death-creature had been burnt, and was little repaid for my trouble. In the ashes of the fateful cabin I found several bones, but apparently none of the monster's. The squatters said the thing had had only one victim; but in this I judged them inaccurate, since besides the complete skull of a human being, there was another bony fragment which seemed certainly to have belonged to a human skull at some time. Though the rapid drop of the monster had been seen, no one could say just what the creature was like; those who had glimpsed it called it simply a devil. Examining the great tree where it had lurked, I could discern no distinctive marks. I tried to find some trail into the black forest, but on this occasion could not stand the sight of those morbidly large boles, or of those vast serpentlike roots that twisted so malevolently before they sank into the earth.

My next step was to re-examine with microscopic care the deserted hamlet where death had come most abundantly, and where Arthur Munroe had seen something he never lived to describe. Though my vain previous searches had been exceedingly minute, I now had new data to test; for my horrible grave-crawl convinced me that at least one of the phases of the monstrosity had been an underground creature. This time, on the 14th of November, my quest concerned itself mostly with the slopes of Cone Mountain and Maple Hill where they overlook the unfortunate hamlet, and I gave particular attention to the loose earth of the landslide region on the latter eminence.

The afternoon of my search brought nothing to light, and dusk came as I stood on Maple Hill looking down at the hamlet and across the valley to Tempest Mountain. There had been a gorgeous sunset, and now the moon came up, nearly full and shedding a silver flood over the plain, the distant mountainside, and the curious low mounds that rose here and there. It was a peaceful Arcadian scene, but knowing what it hid I hated it. I hated the mocking moon, the hypocritical plain, the festering mountain, and those sinister mounds. Everything seemed to me tainted with a loathsome contagion, and inspired by a noxious alliance with distorted hidden powers.

Presently, as I gazed abstractedly at the moonlit panorama, my eye became attracted by something singular in the nature and arrangement of a certain topographical element. Without having any exact knowledge of geology, I had from the first been interested in the odd mounds and hummocks of the region. I had noticed that they were pretty widely distributed around Tempest Mountain, though less numerous on the plain than near the hilltop itself, where prehistoric glaciation had doubtless found feebler opposition to its striking and fantastic caprices. Now, in the light of that low moon which cast long weird shadows, it struck me forcibly that the various points and lines of the mound system had a peculiar relation to the summit of Tempest Mountain. That summit was undeniably a center from which the lines or rows of points radiated indefinitely and irregularly, as if the unwholesome Martense man-

sion had thrown out visible tentacles of terror. The idea of such tentacles gave me an unexplained thrill, and I stopped to analyze my reason for believing these mounds glacial phenomena.

The more I analyzed the less I believed, and against my newly opened mind there began to beat grotesque and horrible analogies based on superficial aspects and upon my experience beneath the earth. Before I knew it I was uttering frenzied and disjointed words to myself: "My God! . . . Molehills . . . the damned place must be honeycombed . . . how many . . . that night at the mansion . . . they took Bennett and Tobey first . . . on each side of us." . . . Then I was digging frantically into the mound which had stretched nearest me; digging desperately, shiveringly, but almost jubilantly; digging and at last shrieking aloud with some unplaced emotion as I came upon a tunnel or burrow just like the one through which I had crawled on that other demoniac night.

After that I recall running, spade in hand; a hideous run across moonlitten, mound-marked meadows and through diseased, precipitous abysses of haunted hillside forest; leaping, screaming, panting, bounding toward the terrible Martense mansion. I recall digging unreasoningly in all parts of the brier-choked cellar; digging to find the core and center of that malignant universe of mounds. And then I recall how I laughed when I stumbled on the passageway; the hole at the base of the old chimney, where the thick weeds grew and cast queer shadows in the light of the lone candle I had happened to have with me. What still remained down in that hell-hive, lurking and waiting for the thunder to arouse it, I did not know. Two had been killed; perhaps that had finished it. But still there remained that burning determination to reach the innermost secret of the fear, which I had once more come to deem definite, material, and organic.

My indecisive speculation whether to explore the passage alone and immediately with my pocket-light or to try to assemble a band of squatters for the quest was interrupted after a time by a sudden rush of wind from the outside which blew out the candle and left me in stark blackness. The moon no longer shone through the chinks and apertures above me, and with a sense of fateful alarm I heard the sinister and significant rumble of approaching thunder. A confusion of associated ideas possessed my brain, leading me to grope back toward the farthest corner of the cellar. My eyes, however, never turned away from the horrible opening at the base of the chimney; and I began to get glimpses of the crumbling bricks and unhealthy weeds as faint glows of lightning penetrated the woods outside and illumined the chinks in the upper wall. Every second I was consumed with a mixture of fear and curiosity. What would the storm call forth—or was there anything left for it to call? Guided by a lightning flash I settled myself down behind a dense clump of vegetation, through which I could see the opening without being seen.

IF HEAVEN is merciful, it will some day efface from my consciousness the sight that I saw, and let me live my last years in peace. I can not sleep at night now, and have to take opiates when it thunders. The thing came abruptly and unannounced; a demon, ratlike scurrying from pits remote and unimaginable, a hellish panting and stifled grunting, and then from that opening beneath the chimney a burst of multitudinous and leprous life—a loathsome night-spawned flood of organic corruption more devastatingly hideous than the blackest conjurations of mortal madness and morbidity. Seething, stewing, surging, bubbling like serpents'

slime it rolled up and out of that yawning hole, spreading like a septic contagion and streaming from the cellar at every point of egress—streaming out to scatter through the accursed midnight forests and strew fear, madness, and death.

God knows how many there were—there must have been thousands. To see the stream of them in that faint, intermittent lightning was shocking. When they had thinned out enough to be glimpsed as separate organisms, I saw that they were dwarfed, deformed hairy devils or apes—monstrous and diabolic caricatures of the monkey tribe. They were so hideously silent; there was hardly a squeal when one of the last stragglers turned with the skill of long practise to make a meal in accustomed fashion on a weaker companion. Others snapped up what it left and ate with slavering relish. Then, in spite of my daze of fright and disgust, my morbid curiosity triumphed; and as the last of the monstrosities oozed up alone from that nether world of unknown nightmare, I drew my automatic pistol and shot it under cover of the thunder.

Shrieking, slithering, torrential shadows of red viscous madness chasing one another through endless, ensanguined corridors of purple fulgurous sky . . . formless phantasms and kaleidoscopic mutations of a ghoulish, remembered scene; forests of monstrous overnourished oaks with serpent roots twisting and sucking unnamable juices from an earth verminous with millions of cannibal devils; moundlike tentacles groping from underground nuclei of polypous perversion . . . insane lightning over malignant ivied walls and demon arcades choked with fungous vegetation. . . . Heaven be thanked for the instinct which led me unconscious to places where men dwell; to the peaceful village that slept under the calm stars of clearing skies.

I had recovered enough in a week to send to Albany for a gang of men to blow up the Martense mansion and the entire top of Tempest Mountain with dynamite, stop up all the discoverable mound-burrows, and destroy certain overnourished trees whose very existence seemed an insult to sanity. I could sleep a little after they had done this, but true rest will never come as long as I remember that nameless secret of the lurking fear. The thing will haunt me, for who can say the extermination is complete, and that analogous phenomena do not exist all over the world? Who can, with my knowledge, think of the earth's unknown caverns without a nightmare dread of future possibilities? I can not see a well or a subway entrance without shuddering . . . why can not the doctors give me something to make me sleep, or truly calm my brain when it thunders?

What I saw in the glow of my flashlight after I shot the unspeakable straggling object was so simple that almost a minute elapsed before I understood and went delirious. The object was nauseous; a filthy whitish gorilla thing with sharp yellow fangs and matted fur. It was the ultimate product of mammalian degeneration; the frightful outcome of isolated spawning, multiplication, and cannibal nutrition above and below the ground; the embodiment of all the snarling chaos and grinning fear that lurk behind life. It had looked at me as it died, and its eyes had the same odd quality that marked those other eyes which had stared at me underground and excited cloudy recollections. One eye was blue, the other brown. They were the dissimilar Martense eyes of the old legends, and I knew in one inundating cataclysm of voiceless horror what had become of that vanished family; the terrible and thunder-crazed house of Martense.

A Short Tale of the Borgias

THE PHILOSOPHERS' STONE

By AUGUST W. DERLETH

THE lackey at the window inclined his head toward Messer Orsini, who sat fidgeting nervously at the high oaken table near the center of the room.

"The three come, Excellency."

Messer, the Duke Ercola di Orsini, turned and rose, and walked swiftly to the window. The lackey pulled aside the heavy, velvet hangings. Three men were walking on the drawbridge of his castle. The duke made a sign; the hangings dropped.

"It is well. Admit them at once to this room."

The lackey departed. Messer Orsini meditatively donned a mask, then seated himself to await the three. He had not long to wait.

The three came into the room, bowing servilely.

"You have brought it?" came from the masked Orsini.

"We have, Messer."

"Let me see it."

One of the three men drew a long glass phial from his doublet. In the bottom of the glass gleamed a jewel. Messer Orsini repressed an exclamation.

"The philosophers' stone, as you commanded, Messer."

"Of what portent is the scroll above the stone?"

"It is a formula of death, Messer."

The Duke di Orsini threw a pouch of gold upon the table. One of the three seized it. The duke spoke again.

"There is to be no word of this in outer circles."

"It shall be as you say, Messer. Our instructions were to warn you not to open the phial before the hour of midnight; seven glasses of sand hence."

"They shall be obeyed. But carry back this warning: If the stone is not true, you die in company with your master."

"We are at your command, at your mercy, if the stone fails to perform its duty."

The curtains swished behind the three. At once Messer Orsini struck a gong. A lackey appeared.

"Seize and bind the three men who are leaving my abode. Cast them into the dungeons until further word from me is received."

The lackey disappeared. As if summoned by magic another came to take his place.

"Messer, a runner from Rome awaits your pleasure."

"From Rome?"

"Yes, Excellency."

"Bring him to me."

The lackey departed as silently as he had come. In a trice the runner stood before the Duke di Orsini. He bowed low. With a quick motion he opened an amulet about his neck and drew from it a piece of folded paper, which he threw to the table before him. The duke grasped it and read:

"Be armed; prepare to attack the Bull.
"Your cousin."

At once the duke struck his gong, and as before, a lackey appeared.

"Ring the alarum bell."

The lackey vanished, and the duke turned again to the messenger.

"You come from His Eminence?"

"Yes, Excellency."

"You are acquainted with the content of this message?"

"No, Excellency. I was told to read it only in case of attack."

"You are from my cousin's household?"

"Yes, Highness."

"It is well; you may go. Tonight you shall be housed with me; tomorrow you join my army."

A lackey conducted the runner from the room. From outside came the insistent pealing of the alarum bell, and the clatter of arms; the duke's soldiers were assembling. Messer Orsini rose and moved across the room to the terrace; he stepped onto the balcony and addressed his men-at-arms.

"It is by command of His Eminence, the Cardinal Orsini, coupled with that of His Eminence, the Cardinal della Rovere, that you are to remain constantly in arms in preparation for an attack upon the Borgia, who moves now through this country. An attempt will be made in Rome tonight to poison the Borgia usurper on the papal throne. The men of our ally, the Duke di Colonna, are in readiness; the Milanese Sforzas have declared themselves neutral. As usual, the Doge of Venice remains neutral until such time as he sees who will win the victory; then he will ally himself to the victorious standard. The Florentine de Medicis are willing to aid us, but not openly; all negotiations must be in secret. They are by no means in favor of our cause, but they live in constant fear of the Borgia Bull."

As one man the soldiers inclined their heads. The duke stepped back into the room and pulled the curtains across the window. Meditatively he turned the hour-glass. He sat down at his table and regarded the phial containing the philosophers' stone.

For a long time he sat there. A lackey came and lit the candles in their sconces, and withdrew again, leaving the duke alone. At length the Duke di Orsini drew from a panel in the table a map of the surrounding country, and began to sketch the passage of Cesare Borgia's troops. He wondered how his cousin's envoy had managed to get through the Borgia's lines. He saw clearly that the envoy would have had to come through the enemy's lines to reach him. But abruptly he dismissed the question and turned his attention to the attack he would make on the morrow.

The last grains of sand of the eleventh hour dribbled into a heap as Messer Orsini rose from the table with the phial in his hand. He moved quickly beneath a sconce of candles, the better to see the precious stone, upon which the light glittered and sparkled. Almost feverishly he broke the end of the phial. He drew out the scroll, then turned the phial upside down to catch the jewel with the palm of his outstretched hand.

But though the jewel slid down the polished surface of the glass, it never reached the hand of the Duke Ercola di Orsini. For suddenly came a sharp pop, as if a glass bubble had been broken, and immediately afterward a thin film of white dust rose like a vapor to the nostrils of the duke.

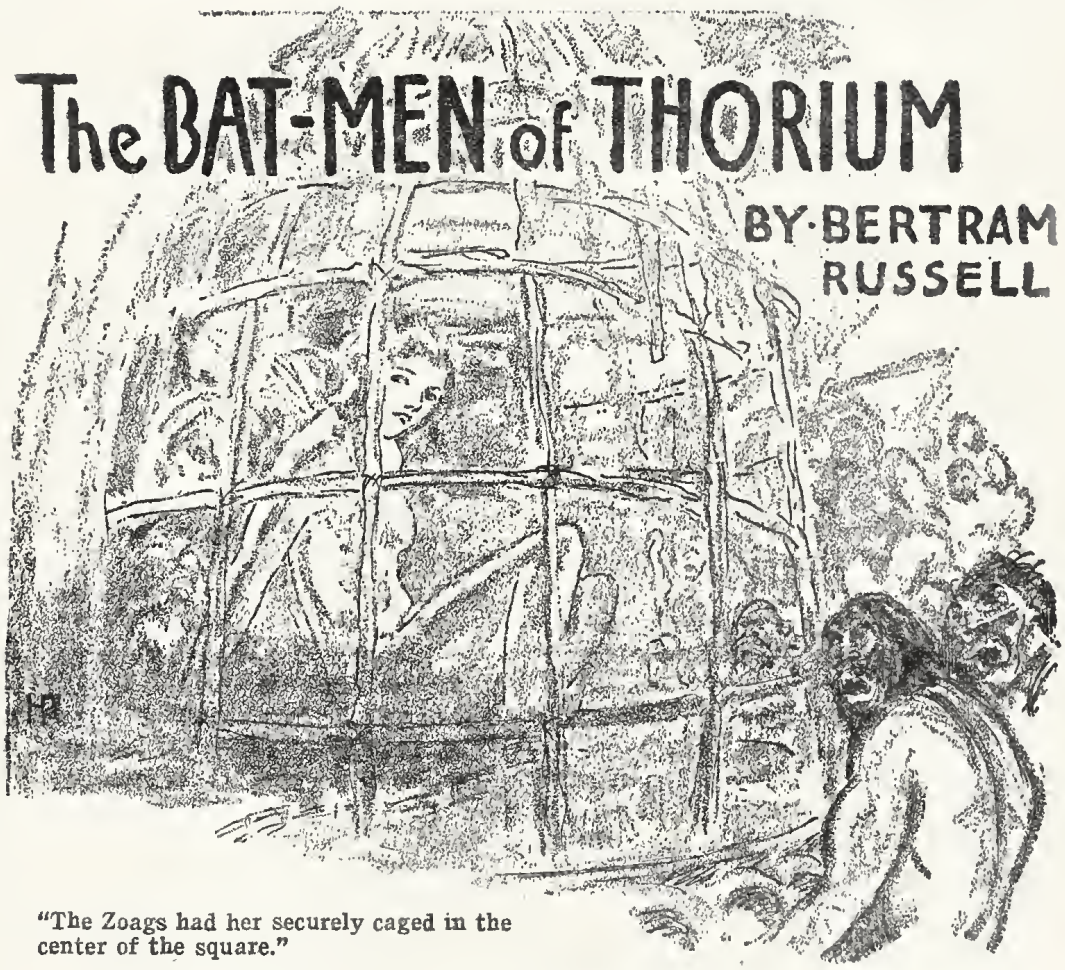
For a moment he stared in amazement at his dust-laden palm. Then he tore at the scroll, madly, as if in a frenzy. He opened it and read. His face twisted into an expression of horrible fear. He made as if to step forward. Two steps he went, then fell flat on his face, the opened scroll beneath his palm. He twitched convulsively and lay still.

The candles gleamed on the writing on the scroll, while from without came the sharp cries of a surprized army. The scroll read:

"With the compliments of Cesare Borgia!"

The BAT-MEN of THORIUM

BY BERTRAM RUSSELL



"The Zoags had her securely caged in the center of the square."

The Story Thus Far

PROFESSOR PERRY and his party, making deep-sea researches in a specially constructed submarine, are sucked down five miles below the ocean's surface by a maelstrom. At the bottom of the ocean they are attacked by a gigantic octopus, which encircles the submarine with its tentacles. Cutting the tentacles and freeing the submarine from the monster's grip, they are then drawn by the rush of the ocean current into a long tunnel, and thence into a vast cavern, and finally emerge into a great underground lake, five miles below the surface of the Pacific Ocean. The vegetation is white and beautiful, and as the *Atlantis* moves along, in the phosphorescent light the crew sees that many winged forms are flying above them. These are the strange bat-men, who inhabit the island of Thorium, ruled by Diegon. The bat-men communicate silently, by reading one another's thoughts. They have mastered decay and death, and have lived for countless years. The crew of the submarine, on landing, are attacked by terrible beings known as Ottars, but shoot their way to freedom, and are entertained by Diegon, the ruler of the bat-men. Diegon's daughter, Thalia, has been kidnaped by the Zoags, or ape-men, and Diegon asks the Americans to assist in rescuing her. While they are investigating the power house, run by atomic energy, with which the bat-men suck fresh air from the outer world into Thorium through a vent in the earth, the professor utters a cry. His friends turn around, but the professor has disappeared.

THE sense of catastrophe lay heavy upon me. It seemed like a stroke of fate that the professor had been snatched from our sight when escape lay at hand. Now we should be forced to stay in this underground world until we had either recovered the professor or discovered his remains; for I was quite sure that he was in dire peril. His agonized cry still rang in my ears. Whatever it was that he had seen or stumbled upon, it certainly had had power to terrorize him completely. It was the thought of this that exasperated me and the faithful Griggs, as we stood uncertainly surveying the rocky cavernous aspect of the place, hoping against hope to discover the professor with his ankle caught in some hidden

This story began in WEIRD TALES for May

hole, or to see him come limping back to us with a new sort of specimen, to capture which he had had to place himself in danger. But there was not a single trace of my dear friend, and I knew that it was something very much more dangerous than these simple accidents that had wrung from him that cry of agony.

Griggs stood at my side, his clothing torn into shreds, his hands cut and bleeding, mute evidence to the frantic search search he had just concluded.

I turned to him with a wry face. "What is it to be now?" I said.

I had come to expect from the little cockney a certain form of mental activity that I completely lacked. Although he was not overburdened with brain-power, he still possessed a faculty that served admirably to reinforce my own thinking ability, and even in many cases to lead the way when nothing but complete mental darkness enshrouded me. It was a sort of intuition. He had given abundant evidence of it already, in his sensing of things that the intellect of the professor and me had kept hidden from us. For instance in the matter of the gale of wind, where Griggs had unerringly scented its origin at the surface of the earth, and in its intuitive knowledge that led him first of the three of us to realize that we were actually inside the earth, it had proved of inestimable value to us. It was, therefore, without any qualms that I addressed to him a remark that might have seemed very unusual under circumstances less extraordinary. Griggs had only half heard my question. He was peering intently into the gloom that surrounded us upon all sides, here at this high point in the limits of Thorium.

"It looks to me as if the professor has been attacked by some living thing, and either killed, or carried away, because otherwise he would have answered our calls just now."

Griggs still continued to stare into the gloom, and I began to wonder whether he had found a clue, when he turned to me. "There is somebody coming down from behind that power house," he whispered, forgetting that voice meant nothing down here in Thorium, where thoughts themselves were the means of conversation.

I followed his gaze, and after some moments detected a shadowy form moving across the rocky ground in our direction.

After some minutes the man came near to us. I gasped with relief. "It's Diegon," I said to Griggs.

"Don't you be too sure," said the little cockney, peering at the newcomer, who indeed did not seem to recognize us.

At length he stood before us, and I knew that it was not Diegon, although the resemblance was startling enough. Like the other batmen, he addressed me in silence.

"You are perhaps looking for a friend who has disappeared?" he began.

I nodded acquiescence.

"It is useless to search more now. I came as soon as I could, for I apprehended struggling, but I was not in time to prevent your friend from meeting a fate that many of my fellows have fallen victim to."

"You mean he has been killed, sir?" cried Griggs, wringing his hands helplessly.

"No. He has not been killed as yet, but it is more than probable that he will die in a few days. He has been carried off by the Zoags."

"Ah yes. Your natural enemies," I interrupted. "The great Diegon has told us of them."

"Yes. My brother has been harassed by them much of late."

I understood the reason for the great resemblance which this creature bore to Diegon. They were brothers. I remembered that Diegon had told us about a brother who tended the air supply.

"If you will come with me, you may see your friend as he is carried away by our enemies," said the old man, whose name was Dodd. I smiled at the whimsical notion of a man with an earth-used patronymic here miles below the surface. But he had started to return up the hill, and Griggs and I followed carefully.

We wound around the hillside, ascending gradually in the direction of the great power-house. With every step its motors whirred louder in our ears. At length we came before the main gate, which we had seen from our tiny platform when we had first stumbled upon the suction plant. Instead of passing through this, however, we skirted it, and after a few more seconds of climbing, emerged upon the roof of the power plant, which was, in fact, the highest point in Thorium, and the nearest, therefore, to our own world upon the surface.

Dodd pointed down into the depths below us, and after some seconds of straining my eyes I caught a glimpse of what he saw. It was my first sight of a Zoag. Scampering down the rocky incline, now far out of reach of any pursuit that we might offer, there was a monstrous thing that looked at first sight more like an ape than anything human. Dodd informed me that it was one of the Zoags. It held the professor loosely, as though he had been a bag of straw in a huge arm, which was twined around my friend. He swung with his free arm, and hopped hither and thither in his descent. He had reached the forest now, and I marveled at the ease with which he swung from bough to bough of the strange white trees, using only his free arm. I saw that the arms were of enormous length in comparison with the legs, and the body was very dark in color, being at this distance almost black.

I feared for the safety of my friend as I saw him borne helpless by this grotesque thing. The creature had skirted the forest, and had changed his course slightly, so that he appeared to be making for the water's edge. I noticed a small boat that lay against the land in the direction ahead of him. With a few bounds he leaped for it, but suddenly he swung upon his heel, still clinging to the professor in that loose grasp. I wondered what had caused him to stop, but had not long to wait. A flood of joy filled me at what I saw. The Ottars! In my excitement I had forgotten those strange creatures, white as the driven snow, huge things clumsy and heavy but faithful friends of the bat-men. Dodd noted my excitement and smiled wanly.

"It will not avail us aught," he said. "They can not swim."

I looked at the figures at the water's edge, and before long his opinion was confirmed. The foremost of the Ottars flew at the great Zoag, but with a single stroke of his huge arm the Zoag felled the white thing. Another and yet another tried to stay him, but the Zoag held his own, and stood still, prepared to withstand further onslaughts. I began to apprehend some purpose to the movements of the Ottars, however. They were gradually circling around the back of the Zoag. I could see that their object was to cut off the retreat to the boat. Undoubtedly if there were enough of them, they could prevent his escape by sheer force of numbers.

"I'm going to get down a bit lower, and take a shot at that big monkey," said Griggs, who had been unhitching his revolver as we looked. "It's no use standing here, and we may still be able to save the professor."

"Don't risk a shot unless you are sure that you can fire without hitting the professor," I cautioned as he

leaped down the mountainside. He motioned assent.

Dodd and I watched the conflict with breathless interest. The Ottars had almost cut off the retreat of the Zoag, when he turned and perceived their design. Wildly, then, he flung himself upon them, his arm flailing to right and left at his opponents. He even used the professor as a sort of battering-ram, swinging him at his attackers as though he had been a bag of flour. I trembled for the safety of my poor friend.

Griggs, down the mountainside, had seen the danger also, and I saw him kneeling down, taking accurate aim with the sights of his revolver. I prayed that the marksmanship that he had learned which had earned him such praise in " 'is Majisty's submarines" might stand us in good stead now. Through what seemed an eternity, Griggs waited. The Ottars had retreated slightly, so that there was a comparatively clear space around the Zoag. He turned slowly, so that his back was spread before Griggs. Now was the time! I eagerly awaited the report from Griggs' revolver. Suddenly, it shattered the silence. With a burst of flame, the bullet sped on its way, but too late. The Zoag had started to turn again the instant that Griggs had fired, so that the best the bullet could do would have been to pierce an arm or leg. This it must have done, for suddenly the Zoag staggered and seemed about to fall. In his pain, he dropped the professor, who lay still upon the ground. How I wished he had strength enough to flee now that he was free!

The Ottars, who had stood wonderingly around, quite unable to comprehend the cause of the Zoag's distress (for they could not hear the report of the pistol), now advanced cautiously upon him. With a last gathering of his strength, however, he grasped the professor, and started to dart hither and thither with movements of lightninglike agility. He was even able, with the help of his powerful limbs, to vault completely over the smaller of the Ottars who surrounded him. He had now a free space between himself and his boat, and leaping in great jumps, he commenced to shorten the distance between himself and it.

Griggs was madly descending the mountainside in an effort to overtake him before he could escape, but it was all quite hopeless from the start. He would not now be able to fire without danger of killing the professor, and the Zoag was already pushing his craft into the water. The Ottars who had chased him to the water's edge now stood impotently around while the Zoag paddled himself and his captive out upon the lake.

Griggs took one half-hearted shot at the departing quarry, but it splashed harmlessly into the water beside the boat. The Zoag had escaped.

THE little cockney came panting up the hill to my side, strapping his gun back in place.

"There is only one thing to do now," I said to him. "We must get to the *Atlantis* as fast as we can, and start in pursuit."

The old man Dodd spoke. "It is war," he said. "We have known for ages that it had to be. First they take Thalia, my brother's daughter, and now they take your friend, our guest. Two such acts can not be overlooked. There must be battle. It will be a fight for the domination of the world itself." By "world," of course, he meant the world that we were in then—the whole world, so far as he understood it.

"What is to be done first?" I asked him.

"The entire plan of campaign will have to be worked out," answered Dodd. "First you and your friend must speed to Diegon, my brother,

and apprise him of the facts that have taken place."

"But—the professor——" I began.

"He will be safe for a space. The Zoags always exhibit their captives in the public place for long before putting them to death. You must hurry to Thorium, and acquaint Diegon with all. He will devise a scheme. Now haste away—time is valuable."

"But you——" I began.

"I can not leave this place. My duty is to keep this plant in operation. Without it, the people of Thorium would perish in short order. Once it did nearly happen, when the former keeper, my father, died. He passed suddenly, and none knew of it, until the air became hot and heavy, and people gasped for breath. Since then, I have not left this place for more than the shortest time."

"Very well; we will hasten to Diegon, and tell him all," I said, and with the words, Griggs and I swung on our heels and hurried down the mountainside.

But our steps were heavy. The last time we had come over this path, the professor had been with us. We would have been happy to stamp our feet in impatience while he scampered away after butterflies, if only he could have been with us once more. But we both knew that the way was long before we should see our friend again, and indeed, we might never see him again alive.

As we walked slowly down the jagged side of the incline that would lead us back to the city of Thorium, I could not help but wish that I had never commenced this terrible journey. It was only a few days ago that we had sailed bravely forth, and the smiles and farewells of our relatives and friends were still fresh in my memory. Days! It seemed that we had been away from civilization for centuries. Our remoteness from all the affairs of the outside world separated us from humanity by a barrier higher than mere time. We were literally lost to the world of men.

But reality was still with us, nevertheless. A low sound from Griggs recalled me from my reflections to the affairs of the moment. He had drawn me to a standstill, and was warningly holding me back with his left arm. What it was that had alarmed him, I was at a loss to discover. Presently, however, I saw that which had occasioned his caution. We were surrounded by the Zoags!

APPARENTLY, as yet we had remained unseen, and these creatures, who had already constituted themselves our natural enemies, were engaged upon some other business. We had evidently stumbled upon a scouting party, invading the limits of Thorium. The trees were full of them, scampering in the same direction as that which we were pursuing. They darted from rock to boulder with the agility of monkeys, which, indeed, they greatly resembled. But there was another reason for their presence here. Ahead of us there was gathered a knot of the repulsive things, who stood eagerly looking at something in their midst, much as a street crowd in our surface cities stands watching a man who has fallen and sprained an ankle, or clamors about the man selling the patent potato peeler, or the necktie fastener. Every second the crowd became denser, as more Zoags appeared from every hand. From the trees they jumped, from the rocks they poured, a writhing mass of ugly, slimy-appearing green monsters, neither men nor animals, gesticulating wildly, and speaking in a cackle of gutturals, exactly as the apes do upon the surface. They were excitedly talking and pointing at something in their midst.

Their intentness was so great that Griggs and I were able to approach quite close to the group without any

danger of being discovered. Griggs drew me aside, and whispered into my ear. "They've got one of them bat-men there and they're a-torturin' 'im."

I looked through a breach in the crowd, and could occasionally discern the white outline of one of the beautiful flying creatures that had treated us so kindly. His face writhed in pain, and I could see the brutal arms of the captors as they twisted his delicate frame in a process of torture. Before each new attack, they addressed him in the same gutturals. The bat-man made no reply, and the torture was repeated.

"The fools," I thought. "Do they not know that he can not speak?"

"What do you think they're up to, sir?" Griggs said.

"I think they must be trying to extort information," I answered after a few moments of reflection. I had thought that a few vibrations of telepathic speech had reached me from the agonized bat-man, and they had seemed to me to be negative—evidently a refusal to tell whatever it was that he knew of value to his captors. Griggs was quite unable to "hear" this speech, but he became satisfied that I was right. "The question is—how are we going to prevent those blighters from killin' that poor fellow?" he said, fingering his pistol lovingly.

Clearly, it would not be easy for the two of us to vanquish this crowd of Zoags, after what we had already witnessed of their fighting prowess. I thought a moment. The Zoags were standing clustered in a small open space by the roadside. There were no trees very close to them—nothing but hard rock. An idea came to me. But we should have to be speedy if we were to save the unfortunate bat-man from an untimely death.

I communicated the scheme to Griggs, and together we carefully crept away to the shelter of the forest that lay a few paces away. We then gathered a few branches from the strange white trees and laid them upon the ground. Then I took a box of matches which I had fortunately remembered to bring with me from the *Atlantis*. Griggs then circled away from me into the forest to a spot nearer the assembled Zoags, and opposite my position. We lighted matches, and carefully applied them to the branches. The foliage, which, as I have already stated in this history, was very much like cotton wool, caught fire as though it had been tinder, and burned brightly. There was no rain here, and consequently it was not moist as our earth-leaves would be in the same circumstances. I had noticed that the denizens of this world were quite unacquainted with the properties of fire. They had no means of producing it, and because fire was quite unnecessary for them, they had sought no method of producing it. So far as I knew, they had never seen flame before. This was the chief merit of my plan.

I stood still, awaiting the given signal. Griggs, when properly concealed and ready, was to fire his pistol into the air. I counted upon the report, at such close quarters, to alarm the Zoags, who would have their ear-drums well nigh shattered by the explosion. It did. With one accord, they all stood motionless, having dropped the bat-man, who was quite forgotten for the moment in this new terror.

Griggs was not slow to follow up his advantage. Suddenly from the shelter of the trees there came hurtling a great blazing limb of the woolly substance. Griggs' aim was true. It fell with a slight plop in the midst of the astonished Zoags. There was a howl of agony, as the flames, burning at the foot of one of them, scorched his body. Hurriedly he stooped to pick up the blazing limb, but more hurriedly he dropped

it—not, however, upon the ground, but upon the toes of one of his comrades, who kicked it with a howl of agony into the back of his neighbor. We had been pelting the terrified Zoags with the flaming branches, accompanying them with occasional shots into the air, whose noise reverberating in that still atmosphere must have sounded like the crack of doom to the Zoags. The whole place seemed afire where they stood. They recognized the woolly branches for what they were, but their horror of the fire was apparent on every face. They must have thought that the inanimate trees had suddenly assumed malignant intentions and were bent upon their destruction.

We were nearly out of branches now, and the Zoags were commencing to run from the accursed spot. Griggs had been unable to restrain his excitement, for he had not waited for them to leave altogether. It was enough for him that they were alarmed and fleeing. As I watched the scene, I saw the strangest apparition loom from the shades of the forest. It was a grotesque figure of a man, with gaunt arms flailing about it, in circles of fire. Flame and smoke ascended from its head too, while roars of the most terrible character proceeded from its throat. This was the final straw that broke the back of the Zoags. Dropping everything, they ran. Griggs immediately stopped his gesticulating and pantomime, and hastily stooped to the fallen bat-man.

I had emerged as soon as I had seen Griggs' foolhardy action, and was immediately at the side of my friend. Together, we bore the weakened man away from the scene of the encounter. As I saw the slowly smoldering embers of the branches, I could not help but smile at the simple plan which had sufficed to outwit these monsters, where the attack of a score of men might have proved fruitless.

But my smile froze on my face. Some of the Zoags, evidently less impressionable than their comrades, had stayed within range of the place, and as we bore the injured man away, I saw that they were cautiously lifting the fast-dying coals from the ground, and examining them. Some idea of what had taken place seemed to glimmer upon them, for they angrily threw the burned branches away, and muttering those gutturals which were the speech of their kind, they stood defiantly, as though inviting a return of the onslaught.

Since it did not come, they began to peer around in search of their escaped captive. I knew then that we must be discovered, although we hurried as fast as we could. We had almost reached the shelter of the trees when they saw us. With a great shout, the largest, who was evidently some kind of leader, came at us. We took to our heels and fled. We hoped to keep out of reach of the lumbering Zoags until we were within the jurisdiction of the city of Thorium, beyond which we knew they would not dare to come.

Panting, slipping, and sliding, Griggs and I dashed wildly on, always in the direction of Thorium. The shouts of the pursuing Zoags were ever at our ears, and once when I attempted a hasty glance over my shoulder, I saw the murderous features of a huge green thing almost at arm's length. But we again increased our speed.

The buildings of Thorium were in sight now, and we did not spare ourselves in that last mad race. We ran wildly up the great avenue that led to the main gate of the city. Our pursuers, too, were straining every nerve in an effort to capture us before we could come within the walls. We were within a stone's throw of the

great walls, when I tripped upon a stone, and the three of us went hurtling upon the road. From behind there came excited shouts, as our pursuers saw the accident. In a trice we were pounced upon by the green monsters, and our plight was an unenviable one indeed.

The bat-man, however, had struggled from the grasp of the Zoags, and flying bravely to the city, must have brought the news. Suddenly, as the Zoags were about to drag Griggs and me away, to be pilloried in their market-place, we heard the flapping of hundreds of wings. I could not help but admire the beautiful sight, great though my danger was, as I watched the graceful motions of the hundreds or more bat-men, who sailed through the air, in perfect formation, hurrying yet unhurried, to our rescue. The Zoags saw them too, and, evidently deciding not to try conclusions with this dauntless array, dropped us and fled up the avenue and out of sight.

IT WAS a sorry-looking pair that the bat-men carried before the dais of the great Diegon. But our story had evidently preceded us. We saw the wounded man who had been saved by our subterfuge, standing at the side of the dais. His face beamed with love, as we approached Diegon.

"My friends," said Diegon, "you have done well. I have heard of your rescue of my son from the hand of our enemies. It is good. I hope I may later repay you for the act."

The young-looking man was smiling, too, as he acquiesced in his father's words.

"I was traveling to my uncle—Dodd, the guardian of the air—when they fell upon me, and sought to obtain information of our plans to recover my dear sister Thalia," he said.

"We have but a short while ago left your uncle," I answered. The surprize on Diegon's face was plain. "If you will permit me, I will tell you all," I continued.

Diegon nodded assent, and with an occasional correction from Griggs, I recounted the circumstances of the kidnaping of the professor by the Zoag, and ended with the declaration of Dodd that this meant war.

The faces of all were grave when I had finished. Diegon and his son seemed to be communing together, though I could not interpret their meanings. At length they turned to me.

"You are right. It is war!" Diegon pronounced. "First they take my dear Thalia, then they steal your friend, and lastly, they attack and try to kill my son. There is but one answer. Death and destruction! The Zoags must learn their lesson. I have been over-easy with them. They understood it not. They took my tolerance for dread. Now by blood and ruin must they learn that they shall harass us no more. After you are rested, we will say more of this."

We were led away from the great council chamber by the same attendants as before, and rested in the same apartment as on the preceding day. We were very tired, and soon fell asleep.

It was surely some hours later when we awoke, or rather were awakened by the gentle shaking of one of our attendants. We ate hastily, and were again led into the great council chamber. But what a different aspect it presented to the eye now! Its vast width was packed with thousands of the bat-men. They covered the smooth floor, they flitted in the air, they clung to columns overhead. They were everywhere. And what a gorgeous array!

These were evidently the fighting units of Thorium. They were ranged in orderly array about the great hall. Though the Thoriumites wore no clothing (unless, indeed, their great wings which they habitually

kept folded about them were to be regarded as clothing), these men wore small vestlike garments of the brightest colors I had ever seen. They were mostly shades of those strange violets and reds. But there were other colors also. These apparently served to distinguish the different fighting units from each other. Surrounded by some twenty or twenty-five men, also clad in the brightly colored uniforms, sat Diegon on the great dais. These men, evidently his military commanders and generals, made way for Griggs and me to pass as we approached the dais. With a graceful gesture of his wings, the venerable Diegon bade us come to his side and be seated.

When we were comfortably seated near him, and all motion had ceased within the hall, so that a significant silence prevailed, Diegon addressed the gathered throng about him:

"Brothers: For ages we have endured the acts of our enemies, the Zoags, believing that in course of time they might come to learn charity such as we ourselves practise. But in their ignorance they have accepted our attitude of tolerance for one of fear, and now they seek to dominate the world. They have offered us unbearable insults recently, and we can not bear them longer and still call ourselves men. It is to be the age-long conflict between mind and matter, between brain and brawn. And we have developed our minds, at the expense of our bodies. It will therefore be no easy matter if we are to achieve victory. It may require all the resources of Thorium. There will be rivers of blood flowing into our sea before the conflict is ended. Every resource you can bring to bear, my brothers, will be needed to win such a war. Answer me. Are you ready?"

It was a thrilling sight to see all those thousands of winged creatures, gathered in the lofty hall, as they pledged themselves to the cause. There was no shouting, no rowdy flag-waving, but still I felt more powerfully than if I had heard it their acceptance of the words of their ruler. Like statues of white marble they stood erect and motionless, their wings folded about them, their firm jaws signifying their determination.

"It is good," said Diegon, who had understood their assent. "Let us to the consideration of plans."

He turned to Griggs and me. "Do you wish to assist us in this war, as you once stated?"

Griggs' hand strayed to his pistol, and I remembered his readiness for a scrap at any time. I therefore answered for both of us.

"It is so," I said. "We must join with you, if only to rescue our dear friend."

"Ah, yes. Your friend. I had almost forgotten him. Perhaps he may be able to aid us. My daughter is behind walls, and carefully guarded. She can therefore aid us but little. Let us hope that things are not so with your friend."

"I only want to know that they have not killed him yet," said Griggs, wrathfully.

"That we shall soon learn," replied Diegon gravely.

WHAT happened during the next few minutes defies description. Words can be but feeble when an attempt is made to express the uncanny effect that it all produced upon me.

Diegon sat motionless upon the great dais. There was not a movement from the gathered thousands about him. It was a silence as of the grave. I looked at Diegon. He seemed to be gazing away into the far distance, and his face was lined with a deep concentration. I began to wonder what was to happen. Clearly all were expecting something to take place, but I was wholly unprepared for what actually did happen. I stood tensely waiting, like all

the expectant throng about me. Then came the voice! Pure and clear, it echoed throughout my consciousness, for I know that I only heard it within myself. It was the most uncanny thing that ever occurred to me. I placed my fingers in my ears, but the voice rang with undiminished vigor. Strong and clear, it spoke in scholarly language and cultured tones. The voice and words of my friend the professor!

Then there followed the most extraordinary conversation that the mind of man could ever conceive.

"I feel that someone calls me, though my eyes show me nothing," said the professor.

"It is I, Diegon," answered the old man. "Please attend with care."

"God bless my soul," came the professor's favorite expression. "Diegon! I must be dreaming! I'll soon find out."

He must have pinched himself in an attempt to ascertain whether he was dreaming or no, for he presently began again: "Well, I am certainly awake. But it is against all the laws of nature that I should thus be talking to Diegon when he is miles away from this place. It is utterly beyond my comprehension."

"You are indeed talking to Diegon, and we are going to rescue you shortly. Tell us please if you are in danger at present."

"God bless my—so I am not dreaming, then! I must remember to relate this before the faculty. Speech, miles from the speaker! It will electrify! But pardon me, sir—your question. No, there appears to be no immediate danger. I am at present fastened by some extremely unpleasant means to a sort of altar, prominently placed in the principal square of this city. Where I am, I can not say."

"You are in the power of the Zoags, and you need have no fear for at least one Opal more," answered Diegon. "They will exhibit you thus, until the curiosity of the populace is satisfied, and then it is to be *Joost.*"

"What is *Joost?*" said the professor.

"It is a custom of the Zoags. But do not be alarmed. We shall rescue you before it comes to that."

"Indeed, I hope so. These people are not at all friendly. They speak a language that I can not comprehend, if language it is at all. They receive my offers of friendship with jeers, and physical repulses. They are most unpleasant companions."

"Have you noticed any warlike preparations?" questioned Diegon.

"Yes. There is great excitement. Men are gathering everywhere. They seem to be ordered in some sort of way, for they congregate in crude formations that have the appearance of regularity. Arms of a crude sort there are also. There is much ado about the cleaning and polishing of warlike implements."

"Has there been any movement to leave as yet?"

"No. They are still mobilizing. They have brought enormous numbers of small boats together, and evidently intend to attack you by water. This has all been effected with the utmost secrecy. They evidently intend to surprize you. They also have sentries posted on prominent points, evidently to prevent the possibility of a surprize attack from you."

"Ah! Your words are of great value. We shall not permit ourselves to be surprized. Can you give us any idea about when they intend to attack us?"

"Yes. Perhaps I might. Of course I may be wrong, as I can only judge by what I see. I should say roughly—ah——!"

The professor's words died away at their most important point, smothered in a cry of pain. Try as he would, Diegon could not again reach the professor. Clearly, he had been attacked by the Zoags, or in some way prevented from continuing the

conversation. Perhaps they had suspected his silent conversation with us, and adopted some measures to still his voice. I shuddered to think what those measures might have been. Perhaps the dread *Joost* had been hastened. It might be that the professor was even now breathing his last.

To such conjectures there was no answer. Our only course lay in action. We knew much of the enemy's plans, and to thwart them must henceforth be our aim. He was planning to surprize us: therefore we must surprize him. He was planning offense: therefore we must adopt the offensive. We should have to strike fast, in order to rescue the professor and the Princess Thalia before it was too late.

The *Atlantis* lay gently floating at anchor a short distance away. With the thought of it, a plan came to me. We should have to use it to reach the kingdom of the Zoags. The bat-men, of course, would fly there, but we should need something that would float to reach the land of the enemy —the dim and dark island far away in the dark reaches of the lake. Griggs had also evolved some sort of plan that included the *Atlantis,* and in a whisper he told me of it. Diegon had not heard us, for he was deep in conversation with his captains.

BIDDING a hasty good-bye to Diegon and the court, we started rapidly for the submersible. We believed that this was the best means that we could employ to reach the land of the Zoags. With the electric power in operation, there would not be any sound to betray our presence to the Zoags, and by means of the periscope we could still navigate while completely submerged.

We had no difficulty in finding the craft, nor in getting the machinery started. After about an hour's cruise we were able to approach the land of the Zoags, where the Princess Thalia and the professor were in such great danger. It is a very different country from the beautiful land of Thorium. Dark, dismal, and forbidding, it has no cities worth the name, no buildings, save a few hovels squatting upon the ground.

Navigating entirely by the periscope, a somewhat risky procedure at this close range, we were enabled to come very near the shores of the Zoags. The dim light made it almost impossible for us to distinguish individual objects by the aid of our periscope alone, but we thought after considerable experiment that we had successfully located the professor. It was indeed so. We could clearly see him, as we gradually skirted the shore. He was caged up securely in a prominent position in the center of a large square, surrounded by a wildly gesticulating throng, who, though they could not touch him, were still able to prod him with sticks, and to hit him with missiles. Not far away was a beautiful white-winged creature—unmistakably the Princess Thalia. We could not help but admire the splendid courage of both these captives, as they sat there caged and prisoners, but with their heads serenely aloft, seemingly quite ignorant of their tormentors below them.

"It ain't going to be the easiest job in the world to rescue them; is it, sir?" said Griggs ruefully.

I was forced to agree, but it had to be done somehow. Clearly our first duty was to rescue the princess, both because she was a woman, and also because she, having been longer in captivity, was more likely than the professor to be subjected to the *Joost*. Our most valuable weapon was the submarine, and the fact that our presence was quite unsuspected by the Zoags.

"Get the searchlights and the mitrailleuse ready!" I ordered. "But do not shoot unless it is unavoidable!"

"Aye, aye, sir!" replied Griggs, the light of battle in his eye. I think he had been half afraid, for a few minutes, that I intended to return to Thorium for reinforcements. But we could not afford to await the coming of Diegon's hosts. By that time it would, perhaps, be too late. The speed with which they could travel was not to be compared with the faster cruising speed of the submarine.

"Surface!" I ordered, and Griggs started the elevating controls. Gradually the submarine rose to the surface, and the Zoags, still busy tormenting their prey, did not suspect that we were near. Noiselessly we edged to the very shore, and opened the hatch leading to the deck of the craft.

"Now!" I said.

Two beams of merciless white fire flashed upon the astonished Zoags, and we could see them standing together in a single compact mass, according to their usual custom, and blinking into the stupendous glare of the great Klieg lights, too dumfounded to move. The strain upon their eyes, accustomed only to the dim radium emanation, must have been pitiless, and we doubted not that they were already almost blinded.

"I almost think it would be safe for us to advance upon them now; we are as good as protected by these lights, and yet I should like to see them take flight," I said.

"They're comin' at us, sir!" said Griggs eagerly, his finger twitching upon the trigger of the mitrailleuse.

I knew he longed for a rush, and he was not disappointed. At that moment I had an opportunity to admire the courage of the ape-men. With a single concerted movement, they rushed headlong into the heart of that blinding glare, intent upon annihilation. There was no hope for it. If they once succeeded in advancing to the submarine, they would sink her with their weight, open as she was to the outside air. They were only a few feet away.

"Fire!" I shouted, and turned my head away.

The terrific battle as the bat-men attack the city of the Zoags, and the appalling catastrophe that comes to Thorium, will be told in the gripping chapters that bring this story to an end in next month's WEIRD TALES.

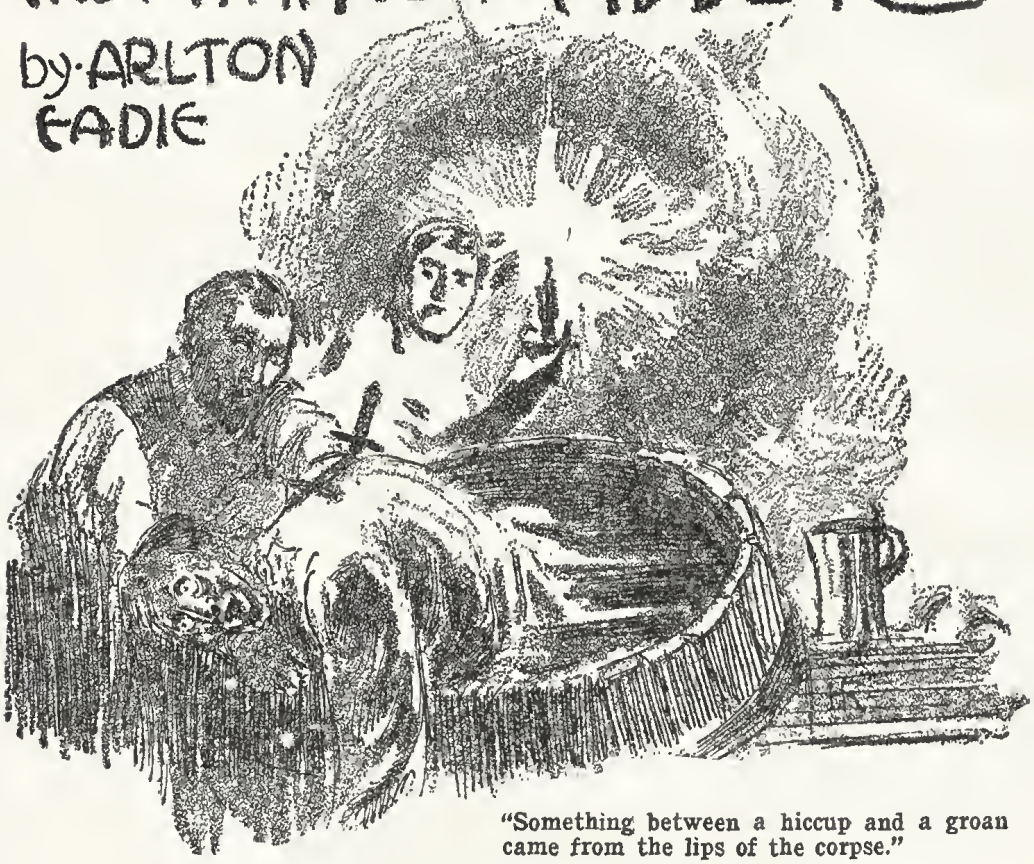
WILD HORSES

By EUGENE C. DOLSON

The moon throws out a ghostly light
Through storm-clouds hurrying by;
Fantastic forms take tireless flight
On banks piled mountain-high;
The white wild horses speed tonight
Across dark hills of sky.

The PHANTOM FIDDLER

by ARLTON EADIE



"Something between a hiccup and a groan came from the lips of the corpse."

I HAD been exceptionally busy that day, both at the hospital and my own surgery, and was just in the act of smoking a final pipe before turning in to enjoy a well-earned night's rest when my hopes in that direction were rudely dispelled by a loud ring at the night bell. Opening the door, I found a ragged urchin, breathless and excited.

"Old George—dahn at Melford's Wharf—'e's taken real bad, Doctor," he gasped out. " 'E yelled outer the winder to me as 'ow 'e was slipping 'is cable. I finks yer had better come rahnd at once, afore 'e snuffs out."

A few moments of thought, together with his nautical mode of expressing his impending demise, enabled me to fix the identity of "Old George." He was a panel patient of mine, an old naval pensioner who acted as watchman at a large warehouse and wharf lying between Wapping High Street and the Thames. Flinging on my hat and overcoat, I was soon threading my way through the narrow side-streets leading to the riverside.

I soon reached the High Street, and entering the unlatched door of the lodge beside the double gates of the wharf, where the old man lived alone, I found my patient propped up with pillows in a great armchair. A huge fire roared on the old-fashioned open hearth before him; a stiff glass of grog was at his elbow, and

the room was hazy with the fumes of plug tobacco from the clay pipe he held between his teeth. Altogether he looked about as much unlike a dying man as it is possible to imagine. But there was a drawn look on his weather-beaten features, and this, added to the constrained attitude in which he held his right leg, made my diagnosis an easy one.

"So it's the old trouble again, eh?" I inquired in that tone of hearty cheerfulness which the slum doctor has to assume for his bedside manner.

"Aye, sir. The rheumatiz be real bad tonight. Seems as though summat's seized in the knee o' my starboard leg, so's I can't get it under way nohow."

A brief examination satisfied me that the old man's condition was not very serious, but the slight synovitis which had developed in the knee made movement painful and difficult. As the old fellow had nobody to look after him it was clearly a case for hospital treatment.

"But, Lord love yer, sir, I can't do that," he cried when I announced my verdict. "If I goes into dock, who's to look after the wharf? It's the rule that someone has allers to be here at night."

"Well, it's getting on toward morning now," I answered, glancing at my watch. "I'll arrange for the ambulance to take you away tomorrow, and afterward, if you'll give me their city address, I'll 'phone up your employers and explain how matters stand, so that they can make arrangements for another man to take your place until you're about again—which will not be long, I promise you."

I assisted him to hobble across the room to his bed, afterward making him as comfortable as possible under the circumstances by giving an injection to alleviate the pain.

"Why, you ought to be doctor to the king, sir!" he beamed presently. "I feel cured already."

You may be sure I did not explain to him that his present blissful state was merely due to the transient effect of the opiate I had administered. Consequently, under the firm conviction that I had already effected a cure, he grew cheerful and talkative, his gratitude taking the form of insisting on recounting for my benefit some of the adventures that had befallen him during his threescore or so years afloat.

He was a hearty, white-bearded old sea-dog of an age now past, "when a sailorman was a sailorman—not a half-baked mechanic same's they are now," as he explained to me more than once that evening; and his yarns, though they may possibly have been spiced with picturesque details outside the borderland of strict veracity, were absorbing to a landsman like me. In spite of my weariness I found myself interested, and occasionally somewhat amused, at the naïve recital, which had a quaint charm that a more polished narrative might have lacked.

It was in the middle of a thrilling account of a hurricane off Cape Horn that I first heard the faint strains of a violin played, I surmised, in the street outside. For a while I listened to it heedlessly as the old man rambled on. All at once it struck me as being a queer time of night for an itinerant musician to be plying his calling.

"Somebody hereabouts must be very fond of music," I remarked with a laugh. "That's the third time he has played that tune."

Old George paused in his narrative and listened, a tense look taking the place of the cheerful animation called up by the recollection of past perils. For a few moments he remained silent; then he slowly nodded his head.

"It's the Fiddler," he said in a low voice.

I laughed again. "So I presume—seeing that he is playing a fiddle," I rejoined gayly. "But I can't honestly say that I admire his idea of a fitting time at which to exhibit his talent. He'll get run in if he's not careful."

Old George turned and looked at me queerly.

"He ain't outside in the street," he said, speaking very deliberately. "He's inside this house!"

"Indeed?" I cried in surprize. "I was certainly not aware that you had a lodger."

"No more I ain't," he answered with ungrammatical decisiveness. "At least, none o' my own choosing."

"What do you mean?"

The old seaman gave a sardonic chuckle. "You're by way o' being an eddieated college gent, and I suppose you reekons you knows a'most all there is to know. Just listen a bit and see what you make o' that there music."

IMPRESSED in spite of myself by the man's manner, I listened. To my uneritieal ear the playing seemed passable enough; at the same time it was apparent that the performer was no genius. The tune was a spirited nautieal air, possibly a hornpipe; but in spite of its intended liveliness there was a plaintive sound in the distant strains.

Not a word passed between us until the strange, sad-merry air had been scraped over and over again for maybe half a dozen times. Then Old George broke the silenee with a husky whisper.

"That's an old capstan shanty he's playing. Many's the time that I've footed it round the deek as we broke the anchor out to that there tune—long afore they had them stinking steam winches——"

I held up my hand with a sudden gesture and motioned him to be silent. It seemed to me that the musie was getting louder, almost as though the unseen player were slowly approaching the room in which we were. Old George seemed to read my thoughts.

"Aye, he's eoming nearer—the Fiddler's a-coming nearer!" he chuckled, apparently finding something humorous in the bewilderment that must have been refleeted on my face. "He's a-coming here—he allers does about this time!"

I turned sharply on him, but the words I was about to utter died on my lips. For he was right. Whoever the mysterious nocturnal musician might be, it was clear that he was advancing steadily toward us.

"Dandy tune, ain't it?" the old man rambled on, dreamily waving his hand in time to the music. "When ye listen to that can't ye hear the clatter o' the winch and the thudding o' the bare feet on the planks o' the deek? And then—ashore—money in yer poeket—a can o' grog in yer fist and a gal on yer knee—and the same old tune a-playing! Don't yer feet just itch to go dancing to the lilt of it? Ah, many's the time——"

"Hush!" I whispered fiereely, for the strangeness of the whole thing was affecting my nerves. "You are right. The fiddler is eoming this way."

"Didn't I tell ye so?" he muttered peevishly. "I allers hears him about this time. At first I was seared-like; but after a bit I didn't seem to mind. But I never could abide that screech at the end—when he finishes up. It allers seems to me as though summat has happened to him just then."

"Happened to whom?" I demanded tersely.

He gave a vague, enigmatieal smile as he made answer.

"The Fiddler."

I turned and faced him squarely.

"Don't talk in riddles, man!" I cried. "Who is this Fiddler of yours?"

"Have a look for yourself, Doctor," he answered with a laugh. "He's just outside the door now."

So loud and distinct had the music become that the player must have been standing on the very threshold at that moment. Yet, although I was a skeptic in matters concerning the supernatural, I felt an unaccountable reluctance to open the door. But the feeling quickly passed. Of course, I told myself, it must be some old crony of George's, with a taste for music and late hours, who was seeking to perpetrate a joke at my expense. A joke—I took heart again at the thought. After all, what other explanation could there possibly be?

Walking on tiptoe, I silently approached the door. In my hand I carried my heavy walking-stick. If this unknown serenader was so fond of a joke I could show him one at which we could all laugh!

Reaching the doorway, I raised the stick above my head and laid my hand on the door-handle. On the other side, separated only by the thickness of the wood, the fiddler was still scraping away merrily. A quick turn of the wrist, and I had flung the door open to its fullest extent. At the same instant a horribly discordant screech came from the violin, as though the bow had been drawn violently and at random across the strings. I peered out into the passage—then drew back, a nameless dread clutching my heart like an icy hand.

A gas jet was burning at the head of the stairs, revealing the long stretch of corridor bare and empty from end to end.

The Fiddler had vanished.

THE long course of scientific study which every medical man has of necessity to undergo usually leaves him with a firm and unshakable belief in the immutability of what are for convenience termed the "laws of nature." So accustomed does his well-drilled mind become to the invariable sequence of cause and effect, that he views with extreme distrust any occurrence for which a definite and satisfactory reason is not forthcoming. This does not, of course, imply that the scientist denies the existence of the mysterious in nature. He admits that the germination of the commonest plant-seed may be called a mystery inasmuch as it defies scientific explanation. Combustion is yet another mystery; likewise electricity; and life—the commonest thing, perhaps, on this planet—is the greatest mystery of all.

But these are mysteries which conform with the established order of things. Experience has enabled us to predict with certainty the effect of the working of the various unknown forces, and even to utilize them in the service of mankind. But when the trained scientist comes into contact with something which, besides being contrary to human experience, is also unexplainable, he finds his carefully constructed edifice of cherished dogmas is apt to come tumbling about his ears, reducing his preconceived notions to a state of chaos. Such, in fact, was the condition of mind in which my adventure left me. Throughout the routine of work on the following day I found my thoughts continually reverting to the subject. Of course, I argued, there must be some natural explanation, some peculiar acoustic property possessed by the old house, some accidental freak in its construction, which would explain what I had heard. But in spite of my efforts to reason the matter off I found it taking a greater hold than ever on my mind; so much so that when I 'phoned up the firm that owned the wharf and informed them that their watchman was now in the hospital, I at the same time requested per-

mission to take his place for the coming night.

It was the junior partner who answered my call—a very junior partner, judging from his voice—and he was somewhat taken aback by my request, as well he might be.

"I suppose you're not a night-watchman by—er—profession?" he asked over the wire.

"No. I happen to be a doctor," I answered.

There was a pause.

"I hope you will not mind my saying so," he went on presently, "but it strikes me as being rather a queer idea for a medical man to want to stay the night in a rat-ridden old shanty like that."

There was nothing for it but to take him into my confidence.

"As a matter of fact," I said, "I believe the place to be haunted." And I went on to tell him what had happened. Judging by the interjections he threw in, he seemed to be interested in my story.

"Well, that's about the limit!" he called out when I had finished. "I know the place is hundreds of years old—it was standing there before our warehouse was built, and that's over eighty years ago—but I never knew we had a real live spook on the premises. I say," he went on in a tone of almost boyish excitement, "I've a jolly good mind to run down and join in the fun. It's been deathly dull here all day, and I feel just in the humor for a little spook-hunting."

"I should be very pleased to have you with me," I answered. "If the thing is really due to some supernatural cause I should be glad of a witness to check my observations."

"Righty-oh," came the cheerful response. "I'll send for the keys and fix it up with the foreman so that we have the place entirely to ourselves. I'll be round at your place in good time to enable us to take up our position well before the witching hour. And I'm going to borrow the pater's six-shooter—just in case we should knock up against something solid enough to stop a bullet. Bye-bye. Hope you'll enjoy the hunting!"

PROMPTLY at 10 o'clock the sound of a high-powered car drawing up before my surgery announced the fact that my prospective companion had been as good as his word. Dick Melford—as he introduced himself with gay informality—was considerably younger than I. He had, in fact, but recently left Oxford, and his brief experience of business life had not been sufficient to quench the spirit of irresponsible, daredevil adventure which seems to be indigenous to that grave seat of learning. He was all agog with excitement and even keener on seeing the outcome of the strange business than I myself.

Dismissing his car at the main gates of the wharf, young Melford let himself into the now deserted lodge.

"Old George has been with our firm for years," he told me as we made our way upstairs. "He must be a queer old card—listening to that banshee jazz-band night after night and not letting on to a soul about it. That is," he added with a laugh, "unless the whole thing is just bunkum."

I shook my head. "I heard it myself, and I am certainly not subject to hallucinations."

Thereupon I seized the opportunity to relate the events of the previous night in a more detailed manner than had been possible over the 'phone. Presently I noticed him shiver slightly.

"Oh, it's all right, Doctor," he said with that ready laugh of his. "Don't flatter yourself that your yarn was giving me the creeps. It's this confounded house—no wonder the old chap has developed rheumatism—it seems as cold as an ice-

house and as damp as the very deuce." Then he glanced at the empty fireplace. "What about having a fire?"

"It would certainly make things more comfortable," I agreed; for the chill mist that was rising from the river was beginning to find its way into the room. "I wonder where he keeps his firewood and coals?"

We finally located the necessary combustibles in a little lean-to at the rear of the house, and soon had a fire roaring cheerfully up the wide chimney.

"We have long intended to have this place knocked down and a new lodge built," Melford explained as he spread his hands to the blaze. "We would have done so years ago if the antiquarian fanatics hadn't raised such a chorus of protest about destroying an historic landmark of Old Wapping. You know the way they carry on—'interesting links with the past' and all that sort of tosh. According to them this house was one of the most famous of the one hundred and forty ale-houses which used to line the High Street in the days when the old wooden hulls used to anchor within hail of Wapping Old Stairs, being in fact the very tavern where the notorious 'Meg of Wapping,' whose charms have been sung in verse by Dibdin, kept open house night and day. I bet these old walls have witnessed some queer doings in their time—yes, and been the scene of many a dark deed, too! In the days of Nelson's wars this was reckoned the foulest and most lawless spot in all London—and the London of the Georges bore none too good a reputation on the whole. The vilest characters gathered at the riverside to prey upon the seamen who came ashore at the Old Stairs with their pockets bursting with prize-money, only to be drugged, robbed, and either murdered outright or else shipped while still insensible on some floating hell which could not otherwise get a crew. You can take it from me that the sailor of the last century did not have quite such a rollicking good time as the old sea-songs would lead you to suppose! Many a poor devil has probably met his death within a few feet of where we stand, and——"

He broke off suddenly and stood as motionless as a man turned to stone. Faint and muffled, as though coming from deep beneath the foundations of the old house, the thin wail of the fiddle had made itself heard. It was the same unskilful playing, the same sad-merry air.

Silently, breathlessly intent, we stood with straining ears for what, under the circumstances, seemed hours. Yes, the music was getting louder, nearer, even as it had done before. I could almost fancy that I could trace the progress of the unseen musician while he traversed the long corridor beneath, slowly mounted the worm-eaten stairs, then played his doleful way down the passage which terminated at the door of the room.

Young Melford's face was very set and grim when at length he turned toward me.

"We forgot to light the gas at the head of the stairs!" he said in a low whisper.

I shrugged in hopeless dismay. Like a fool I had quite overlooked the fact that the passage would be pitch-dark; and, to add to our discomfiture, neither of us had possessed the forethought to bring an electric torch. However, it was too late to rectify our blunder now; for, judging from its loud tone, the fiddle was now droning and wailing not a couple of yards from the closed door.

Melford straightened himself up with a quick, nervous jerk, and slipped his right hand behind him; when it again came into sight it was

grasping something that reflected the firelight from its plated parts.

"I reckon this'll fix him—whoever he is!" he cried.

As he spoke he dashed forward and wrenched open the door.

"Now then, you there!" he shouted into the darkness. "Quit that foolery and put your hands up!"

There was no answer; but the music still continued to play.

"None of your tricks," he called out again, his voice taking a higher key in his excitement. "If you don't stop that infernal row I'll pepper your hide in a way you won't fancy! It's no use your trying to come the giddy spook over *us!* I can see you quite plainly, my man, and I've got you covered."

In spite of the tenseness of the situation I could not help smiling as he made use of this time-honored ruse to expose a lurking enemy. As a matter of fact it was obvious that he could not see more than a few feet up the passage.

"I shall count up to six," he cried, after waiting in vain for a response. "Then I shall certainly fire."

I heard, to the accompaniment of the wailing violin, Melford's voice slowly count the numbers.

"*Six!*"

Following hard upon the final word came a spurt of flame and a crashing report. The music ceased abruptly in a sharp, discordant howl. Melford pocketed his revolver and turned to me.

"Get a light of some sort and help me bring him in," he said grimly. "I couldn't have missed at that range."

I LIT the candle-end I found on the mantelpiece, and, holding it low, slowly paced the length of the passage. At the head of the stairs I straightened myself up and turned to meet the scared eyes of my companion.

"That cartridge was loaded with swan-shot—and it spreads like the very devil!" he gasped. "If there was anyone in the passage he must have been hit. I can't understand it at all."

"Neither can I. But there seems to be quite a lot of things about this house——"

I started violently and the words died away on my lips. The unearthly music had commenced again—almost at my elbow, it seemed. I held the candle high. Nothing was visible on the staircase before us. To the right—nothing; to the left—nothing. All around us was emptiness, and yet that droning devil's tune throbbed at our very ears.

I felt a hand clutch my wrist. Melford was pointing excitedly downward.

"It's going downstairs!" he whispered hoarsely. "Listen! the thing is going down the stairs!"

He was right. Step by step, one could trace the course of the invisible musician as he receded; could even detect the moment when he changed direction after rounding the end of the banisters in order to make his way along the ground-floor passage running immediately under where we stood.

"I'm going to see this through," said Melford with a reckless laugh. "Come on, let's follow him. I'll lay you six to four that the thing is all humbug."

The volume of sound swelled louder as we hastened down the creaking stairs—I took note of the fact that they had not creaked beneath the tread of the one who had passed before us. Along the lower passage, our straining ears tracing the progress of our ghostly guide, we made our way, through a low door leading into what appeared to be a kind of kitchen; and here, at a spot in the center of the floor, the music began to die gradually away.

We looked at each other in silent disappointment. So engrossed had

we been in the excitement of the chase that this tame anticlimax seemed a thing incredible.

Suddenly Melford slapped his thigh. "Don't you see?—he's gone farther down. There must be a trapdoor or something beneath the floor!"

Hastily kicking aside the strips of worn oilcloth which covered the floor, I examined the boards. Yes, the boy was right! A large square space was composed of shorter planks of a different and less ancient wood than the rest. Evidently they had been nailed there to fill the gap where a trapdoor had formerly existed.

The same thought must have flashed across Melford's mind.

"Old George has some tools here somewhere," he muttered as he commenced searching the cupboards. "I'm going to see what's under that floor if I die for it!"

He presently found a short claw-headed wrench such as is used for opening packing-cases. With this we quickly removed a section of the planking of sufficient width to admit the passage of a man. Again the music swelled louder. It seemed as though it were beckoning, compelling us to follow where it led.

Lying down full-length on the floor, I lowered the candle to light up the yawning black gulf below. But all that was revealed by the feeble rays was the top rungs of a ladder leading downward into the obscurity. Very gingerly, testing each of the worn rungs before trusting my full weight on it, I descended.

"Come on," I called when I felt my feet touched level ground.

In an instant Melford was at my side.

THE underground apartment in which we found ourselves must have been of considerable size, for the rays of the candle failed to reach the farther walls. The manner in which it was furnished presented such a mingled contrast of luxury and squalor as to be positively grotesque. The rough, uneven floor was spread with rich-piled rugs which, rat-gnawed and rotting as they were, still bore unmistakable signs of having come from some rare Eastern loom. On the walls of unplastered brick were ornate gilt candle-sconces; while a rusty and battered ship's lantern hung from a hook in one of the beams overhead. A long table of polished mahogany occupied the center of the room, and on it was as motley a collection of tableware as it is possible to imagine. Chipped china mugs lay cheek-by-jowl with the most exquisite Venetian glass; dishes of delicate porcelain stood beside platters of dinted pewter. The seats round the board ranged from elaborately carved chairs, upholstered in rich velvet, to rough wooden forms and upturned kegs. But everything alike bore signs of age, damp and decay. It seemed as though the place had not been entered for centuries. Long festoons of gray cobwebs hung from the rafters; patches of yellow fungus grew on the reeking walls. An indescribable moldy odor pervaded the whole place.

Everywhere were signs of a revel suddenly abandoned. Those seats that were not overturned were standing at all angles, just as they had been pushed back when their occupants rose from the table. The brown, dried-up dregs of liquid still remained in the glasses; a queer-shaped clay pipe still contained some half-burned tobacco within its tiny bowl. On the table, near a nosegay of withered roses, lay a woman's fan. A mothcaten boat-cloak hung over the high back of one of the chairs, on the corner of which a three-cornered hat, trimmed with tarnished gold lace, was perched rakishly. Almost at my feet, as though it had fallen from her shoulders as the

wearer rushed from the room, lay an old-fashioned hooded mantle. So perished was it with age that, when I attempted to lift it, the silken fabric came to shreds in my hand.

What secret orgy was it whose relics lay before us? What had happened to cause the revelers to fly abruptly from the place, never to return? Then, as if to answer the flood of questions which rose to my mind, the plaintive strains of the fiddle came floating out of the darkness that screened the farther end of the room. As though by one accord we made our way toward the sound.

An age seemed to elapse while we, intruders from another century, made our way across the untrodden dust of that scene of long-dead gayety. My confused mind began to speculate on the nature of the horror we should presently behold. I braced my nerves to meet the worst as some object at last became visible in the circle of candle-light. For a moment I halted, peering. Then I think I must have laughed aloud in the sudden sense of relief which came over me. The thing before us was merely one of the series of casks stacked against the wall. Kegs, barrels, hogsheads, of all shapes and sizes; I counted more than twenty of them within the short range of my guttering candle, besides crates of dust-covered bottles. Truly "Landlady Meg" had kept her cellar well stocked! Then, as a sequence of the thought, all my misgivings returned. What terrible thing could have happened to cause so much valuable liquor to be abandoned?

A sudden movement from Melford roused me from my revery. He had stepped to the side of one of the largest casks, a huge hogshead standing a little apart from the others, and was bending over it with his ear close to the staves.

"I do believe the music's coming from inside this barrel!" he cried in horrified tones. Before I could make answer he snatched the wrench from my hand and set to work to prize off the head.

Considering its massiveness, the top came off with surprizing ease. As it did so the music came to an end with a loud, triumphant chord.

In a silence so profound that I could hear the beating of my own heart I drew near to the cask and looked within. It was filled to the brim with an amber-colored liquid which, judging from its almost overpowering fumes, must have been cognac of a strength not nowadays met with. Floating on the surface was an old violin and a broken bow. Years must have elapsed since they had been placed there, for upon my attempting to remove the instrument I discovered that its prolonged immersion had so softened the glue of the joints that each piece came apart.

But the fiddle was not the only thing contained within the cask. Deep down in the clear amber liquor a shrunken and wrinkled face was staring horribly up at us, its open mouth and distended eyeballs giving it an aspect of unspeakable terror—an aspect that was accentuated by the long hair which, floating upward except where it was tied into a pigtail at the back, seemed literally to be standing on end.

A MEDICAL man is popularly credited with the ability to retain his composure in the presence of the ghastliest relics of departed humanity; but I will confess that the sight of that face leering up at me from its strange coffin left me for a moment sick and nerveless. Melford, less accustomed to the sight of death than I, had drawn back appalled. He seemed hesitating whether he should take to his heels or not.

"Hold the candle," I said, at the same time thrusting it into his hand, "while I get the body out."

I took off my coat and rolled my shirt sleeves up as far as possible.

Then I reached—not without an inward shudder, however—beneath the brandy until I got my hands under the armpits of the corpse. Melford leaned over my shoulder, his eyes fixed in a fascinated stare, as I slowly raised the body.

Even in the brief glimpse I caught of it I could see that it was attired in a fashion of a bygone age. A draggled lace cravat hung limply over a long vest embroidered with flowers worked in bleached silk. Large buttons of blackened silver adorned the snuff-colored coat. Then something else came into view—the hilt of a sailor's sheath-knife protruding from between the shoulder-blades!

Almost at the same moment, as I realized the import of the sight, a sound, something between a hiccup and a groan, came from the lips of the corpse. Subsequent cool reflection has convinced me that it was but the natural effect of the imprisoned gas escaping because of the body's being disturbed; but the sound, coming as it did on top of the weird experiences of that night, caused me to start so violently that I lost my hold, and the corpse sank downward with a sullen splash. As it did so the half-human moan again burst from its shriveled lips.

"My God!" Melford almost screamed. "It's alive!"

He threw up his hands in horror, letting fall the lighted candle. It glanced off my shoulder—then my wrist—then plunged, still alight, straight into the cask of spirit!

A spurt of bluish flame flashed up before my eyes as, with a loud explosive whoof, the whole contents took fire.

"The ladder! Up!—up for your life!"

I shouted the words as I groped through the smoke and fumes of that devil's bonfire. The released cognac was now spreading over the floor, and little rivulets of blue flames followed its course. If in the gloom we missed the ladder we were doomed. But we had entirely lost our sense of direction. We could only grope like blind men, while further explosions at the far end of the cellar told that the other barrels of spirit were fast adding their quota to the inferno.

It was more by luck than anything else that Melford at last stumbled against the foot of the ladder.

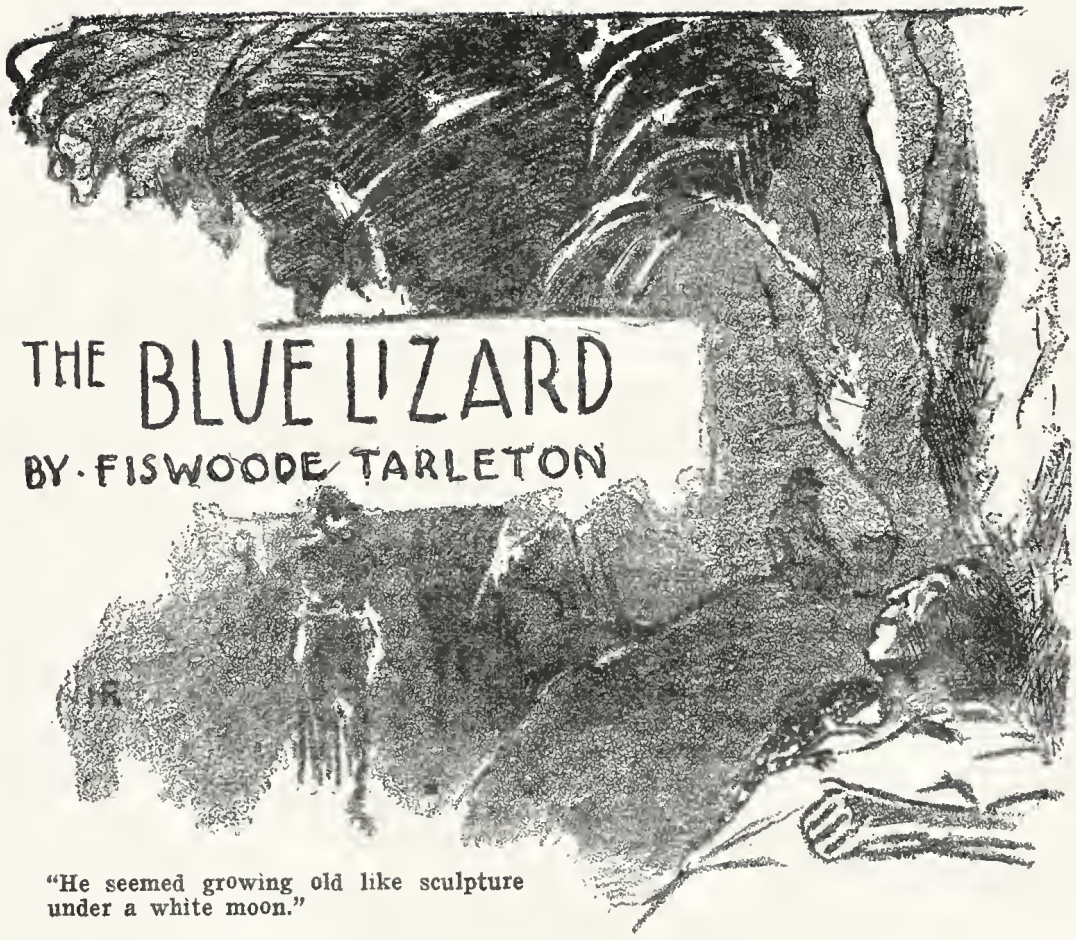
"Here!" he cried. "Make for the sound of my voice! Here!"

For two precious minutes he remained there, not daring to leave the spot lest he should be unable to find it again, yet pluckily imperiling his own safety in order to insure mine.

His devotion was likely to have cost him dear. At the same moment that my groping hand met his, a salvo of the remaining barrels turned the cellar to a sea of roaring flame.

Scorched and half blinded, we staggered out into the street and gave the alarm. But the fire brigade when they arrived could only confine their efforts to preventing the flames from spreading to the surrounding property.

In less than two hours nothing remained of the old Ship Inn but a heap of smoldering ashes, beneath which lay for ever buried the secret of the ghostly fiddler.



THE BLUE LIZARD

BY · FISWOODE TARLETON

"He seemed growing old like sculpture under a white moon."

MOUNTAIN thunder boomed like artillery, with the regularity of a triphammer, and caused Turtlelove, the zoologist, to rise from his kneeling posture and with a surprized look inspect the sky. Absently holding a captured lizard, he fixed his attention upon a green storm cloud that scraped the mountain in the west and sagged into the gap. Sinister, ragged streamers of gray-black vapor seemed to forge ahead of the wall of cloud, as if they, the feelers of the storm, were pointing out the targets for the thrusts, the blinding javelins of lightning.

Turtlelove, mechanically putting the lizard specimen into his coat pocket and buttoning the flap, turned sharply at right angles and hastily followed a fork in the trail that dipped down to a cove. He hurried because he knew the attraction certain trees held for lightning. He kept on the lookout for a cabin as he ran, looked sharply to the right and left, but saw no signs of a habitation. Working his way through some tight, tough laurel, he stood at last on the bank of a branch whose waters crept lazily, sluggishly to unite with a creek three hundred yards below. He inspected both sides of the branch; then, as the first drops of rain struck his face, he crossed the branch by hopping from rock to rock. In half a minute he stood under the shelter of a ledge.

Breathless, yet congratulating himself upon his gaining protection from a good soaking, he sat down well back under the ledge, and rest-

ing his elbow on the ground and his head in his hand, contemplated that which threatened to be a storm of uncommon fury. It became actually that, a fury the like of which he had never before witnessed.

Soon he could see nothing across the branch, though he could dimly distinguish the boiling, roaring waters. During the lightning flashes the falling rain, whipped by the wind, became a raging waterfall.

Later, when the zoologist looked at his watch, he made a guess that he had been under the ledge about fifteen minutes and estimated that in that time the water had risen at least six feet. Then he found a new interest in watching what the racing waters brought down from the surrounding hillsides—fence pickets, whole fences, rails cut by some mountain woodsman, even outbuildings that bounced and crashed against submerged boulders. Life floated by—chickens, pigs that rode helplessly on their backs, and, lastly, a calf seemed to flash its white eyes at the zoologist. He felt afraid to look longer. There was no telling whose eyes might speak to him from the insatiable torrent.

He looked back of him. When a flash came he saw that he was really in a cave, a cavern. Rising, he took his flashlight and began to explore, examining the low walls and the roof. They were supported by rough-hewn timbers, and between the timbers he discovered a medium grade of bituminous coal. Before him, about ten feet away, his flashlight revealed a low pile of coal, and beyond the pile a turn in the cavern. Toward this turn he made his way through black dust that seemed unable to settle.

At the turn he paused to watch a lizard that stared at him for a few seconds through jeweled eyes, then suddenly disappeared. The lizard was of a common species not worth the capturing; yet, hopeful of finding rarer specimens, he kept his light flashed on the ground until, sensing the end of the cavern, he stopped and threw his light directly ahead of him. What he saw held him transfixed. Not three feet away, seated or propped in the corner, in an attitude of sleep, was a man—a bearded man, his head well forward and resting on his breast.

"A mountaineer, about fifty, very poor," thought Turtlelove.

The zoologist found no marks of violence, no blood, no signs of a scuffle about the ground, or on the dead man's jean pants and calico shirt. He was about to retrace his steps, not caring to waste the battery cells of his flashlight, at the same time he concluded that the hillman, becoming ill while mining coal, must have died before he could summon aid or make his way home. Actual decomposition had not yet set in. To Turtlelove's mind the skin had the common, more or less serene cast of a victim of heart-failure.

As the zoologist swept his flashlight away his eyes caught a point of blue fire at the end of the dead man's beard. Throwing the light again full on the face of the victim he deliberately lifted the beard and revealed a bluetail lizard lying against the neck. Seemingly, the head of the lizard was caught in the roots of the hair.

At first Turtlelove was not excited to any great degree of interest. He thought that the lizard, as a lizard will, had discovered a new cranny in which to hide, and had in its dumb way found a new resting-place. Not until the thought struck the zoologist that, to be in character, the lizard should have raced from its hiding-place at the first flash of light did the proceeding grip him with interest. He clutched the lizard with his thumb and forefinger, found that it, too, was dead. Dead, yet it seemed to resist a sudden jerk to free it. Upon closer examination Turtlelove

found that the jaws of the lizard had a grip on the dead man's throat.

Resentment and anger suddenly stirred Turtlelove. With a hand on his hip and his face flushing he glared at the dead man. "Hell!" he exclaimed; "nobody can make me believe it! Absolutely impossible! Who ever heard of a lizard killing a man? No more venom than a frog!"

With a jerk he freed the lizard and gave it a toss back of him. Then, as if taking the incident as a personal joke played on him, he threw his light down the narrow passageway, half expecting to see the joker. "Somebody must consider science a fool," he thought, and picking up a small lump of coal he threw it with bad aim at a lizard that stuck its head out from a crevice in the timbered wall.

The personal way with which he viewed the contradiction of life finally gave way to reasoning. He was a stranger in the Cumberlands; so how could a hoax be arranged for him? And, granting the cheapness with which a hillman holds life, even he would consider the cost of such a joke. The storm had turned Turtlelove quite unexpectedly into the cave. Man had had nothing to do with it; had had no knowledge of it.

AGAIN the zoologist's attention centered upon the storm, and he returned slowly to the mouth of the cave, where he stood silently, unmoving for a minute, peering out. The rain had lessened. The thunder sounded removed, weaker. Overhead the clouds were breaking into ragged-edged fragments. He stepped out of the cave mouth, and, unmindful of the drizzle, methodically inspected both sides of the swollen, roaring creek-branch. He hoped to find a habitation, find somebody who could direct him to the county seat, somebody he could question about the coal mine. Besides, he began to feel gnawing hunger.

At first Turtlelove could see nothing but the typical wooded slopes, the foaming branch as it rushed down the narrow ravine, the dripping laurel and rhododendron. The dimming effect of the misty rain, the puffs of vapor, made him uncertain as to whether a narrow bluish feather that rose above the tops of second-growth timber across the branch was smoke or merely a lifting of vapor caused by a peculiar and local effect of temperature. For several minutes he pondered over this. Then a gust of wind whipped the feather above the tree tops, made it whirl. Vapor, he knew perfectly well, would not do this, would not change its shape so suddenly. What his attention was fixed on was surely smoke, and smoke meant a habitation.

Fed no more by the water washing down the slopes, the branch was beginning to recede. Yet he knew it would be some time before there would be an appreciable fall in the water. Now and then he heard back of him in the cave the faint tappings of loosened coal fragments as they dropped to the ground. They sounded like light footfalls. Once he turned quickly. After what he saw at the end of the cavern, he wouldn't have been surprized at anything. Inaction lay heavy upon him.

Suddenly he removed his coat and shoes and stepped to the edge of the water. He made another quick inspection up and down the bank, and waded in. When the water reached his waist he could feel its power, its pull. Once he was in the middle of the stream and in the clutch of the current, he had the sensation that he was racing at railroad speed under the tips of laurel and rhododendron. Fragments of cloud keeping pace with him told him more than any physical sense of his that he was on his back, floating, or rather borne on helplessly. He expected destruction after his first futile effort to right his body.

Turtlelove began to condemn himself for not waiting until the waters subsided. Inwardly he cursed his zeal, his impatience. He fretted for short minutes under the seemingly inevitable and inglorious end of his career. His mind flew to the scene in the coal mine and the unsolved murder, and virtually rehearsed the whole adventure from the beginning of the storm. Then, quickly, as if the act were the end of the drama, as if his part in disengaging the false proof of the lizard's killing the hillman were the end of the whole thing so far as he was concerned, he found a growing consolation in it. He had been loyal to science. He had saved it from ridicule. But, *if he hadn't thought to remove the lizard from the dead hillman's throat!*

A sudden sense of floating on his belly made the zoologist hunt for an advantage over the boiling, whirling, pitiless creek-branch. Though he could not, because of the undertow, lower his legs to feel for the bed of the creek-branch, he threw out his arms, vainly trying to hold on to the thickets he passed. When finally he was borne on to a sharp turn, where the waters flushed the creek bank, he made a grab and found himself hanging to tough strong dripping laurel branches. For several minutes he could no more than keep his hold; he neither gained nor lost ground. Then slowly, so that the movement would not disengage his fingers from their feeble clutch, he drew in his legs, kicked backward, and got the branches firmly in his hand. Alternately grabbing other branches, he managed to pull his body to the bank and shallow water. He straightened up, breathed heavily, and shook his fist at the creek-branch.

At first it didn't seem difficult to work his way through the laurel, though his arms soon became tired of the eternal bending and pushing aside of the branches. He soon left the water, but the thicket became tighter, and, more to his discomfort, it became laced with greenbrier. Yet, steeling himself to the tearing thorns and gritting his teeth, he continued on.

After a while the thicket thinned, and with a last maddening rush he stood in a clearing. Dressed in ribbons, scratched all over and dripping water stained by his own blood, he sat on a stump to regain his wind and to get his bearings. He saw the ledge up the creek-branch, and his coat lying under it. On his side of the branch he saw above him a small pawpaw grove, and a cabin, its chimney smoking.

Looking at himself he laughed lightly. "I wanted to get in the field. Wanted to leave the confining museum. Cloudbursts. Almost drowned. What next?"

What next? Food if possible, he told himself, and rose.

THOUGH weak on his legs, he tried to make his movements deliberate as he started for the cabin. He knew that suspicion in the hills is more surely aroused by an appearance of stealth than by an open and nothing-to-fear attitude. He knew also that it is imprudence of the worst kind to approach a mountain cabin without calling first. Twenty feet from the cabin he stopped, waited to see if his presence stirred anybody to come to the door, then called, in a moderate tone. Meeting with no response, he called again in a louder tone. He waited a minute, and when he was about to call for the third time it seemed to him that the door had been opened a crack. While he looked, a rifle muzzle was pushed through.

Several minutes of absolute inaction passed. Turtlelove sensed that he was being very closely examined, meticulously inspected, appraised by eyes behind the door. Not only was he sure he was being sized up, but looking at himself suddenly he sus-

pected that his grotesque appearance was creating more than ordinary wonder. He recalled that in the hills time is of no consequence and suspicion is slow to die. Finally, because of the stinging of his wounds and the hunger gnawing at his stomach, his patience flew. He yelled loudly and in a provoked tone.

The door opened wider and a man stared at him from under a wide-brimmed hat. A powerful, big-boned man, bearded, black-eyed and grim-looking.

Turtlelove particularly noticed the length of the man's arms and the size of his hands; was in fact almost overawed by them. "He's downright conscious of those hands," the zoologist told himself; then approached nearer, to within five feet of the doorway. "Howdy," he said, with an attempt at cordiality.

The hillman spat. His face remained a mask. For half a minute he looked away from the zoologist—looked across the creek, directly at the top of the ledge over the cave entrance across the branch. Then, as if he had considered the matter, his face swung slowly around. "Howdy," he said.

"The storm drove me here," explained Turtlelove. "Worst storm I ever saw. There were things floating by in the creek. Hogs—and a calf. The calf looked right at me. I couldn't give it any help."

"Whar yuh from?" asked the hillman.

"New York."

"What fotched yuh hyar?"

"Why, salamanders, snakes, lizards. I'm collecting 'em."

The expression in the hillman's face changed. His stolidness of countenance gave way to a look of mingled curiosity and purpose.

"Air yuh 'at scorpion-hunter I heerd on?"

"Huh, it's sinister the way these hillmen flash news of a stranger's coming," thought Turtlelove. He had wondered much about the system by which a stranger's status is carried from settlement to settlement and from hill to hill. He was inclined to feel amused over the mysterious mountain telegraph, but as usual the "scorpion business" aroused his ire; more, it aroused his disgust. For the dozenth time he asked himself, "Who the devil in these hills ever started calling a lizard a 'scorpion'?" The very connotation of the name implied a venomous hate, and basely traduced the harmless little jewel-eyed lizard, which is as helpless as a rabbit.

"It's a wonder," the zoologist told himself, "that they don't call a horse a 'whale'." He had always been amazed over the almost universal credence given the belief in the death-dealing characteristic of the lizards by hill people. He had stood and listened with disgust to the tales of lizards killing folks in bed and of their scooting up the skirts of women. And now to have this silly superstition sprung again when he was seared all over with flesh wounds and as hungry as a beast was quite too much.

For the dozenth time, with his voice carrying disgust and anger, he corrected the error. "A lizard is a reptile. A scorpion is—well, call it an insect. There are no scorpions within five hundred miles of this place. When a scorpion stings you, you want to look out. As for your lizard, I'd sleep with a million. They're harmless. We *know* they are—know it as surely as we know that water runs down-hill."

Turtlelove reached in his pocket for a cigarette, but the package was dripping wet and he threw it away. "Yes," he continued, "I'm collecting lizards. I'm the man you heard about. Any grub? I'm starved."

With a pull at his chin and an accurately aimed squirt at a chip of wood that jumped from the impact, the hillman stepped back into the

cabin. "Air pizen," he muttered. "Scorpions air pizen. Allus a-killin' we-uns."

"Oh hell!" exclaimed Turtlelove, and moved to the door of the cabin to watch the dim figure of the hillman as he worked over the fire in the warped, antique stove. His attention was fastened particularly on the hands that broke thick lengths of wood with ease and almost filled the stove holes as they placed wood on the smoldering embers.

The zoologist, leaning against the door tired and sore, watched the hands over the stove cut off chunks of fat pork and let them fall into a pan. He heard the hillman muttering to himself again, "Scorpions air pizen. 'At's a God-truth."

Too hungry for thoughts or words, Turtlelove entered the cabin and took a seat on a stool before a pine table. Soon, when the hillman's big hands carried the food to the table, the zoologist turned to it. He cut the pork into small pieces and shook off the grease before he carried them to his mouth. And with every bite he mixed a piece of cold corn pone. He sipped the cheap chickory-coffee out of a tin cup between bites. Unsugared, it was bitter.

Turtlelove's eyes now and then looked out the cabin door. Not only had the storm worn itself completely out, but the slope of the hill across the creek-branch was touched with the light of a clearing sky. The branch waters no longer roared. There was only a subdued wash of waters about the boulders and a faint overtone which seemed to the zoologist more like the humming of countless bees than anything else. Because of the pawpaw bushes surrounding the cabin and unusually high rhododendron on the bank he could not see the ledge overhanging the cave-mouth on the other side, but knew approximately where it lay.

His attention returned to the hillman, who stepped out the door and returned soon with an armful of dripping wood, which he arranged in the doorless oven to dry. The zoologist wondered why the hillman didn't burn coal, since it was handy. Thinking of coal brought his mind quickly to the dead man in the cave and the lizard. The food gave him strength. The unsolved tragedy once more gripped him.

"You ought to burn coal," he said, watching for the slightest change of expression in the hillman's face.

The hillman scratched his head as if he had never thought of the idea before. He pulled at his chin as if giving consideration to the zoologist's suggestion.

"Lots of coal yonder, across the branch, isn't there?" Turtlelove asked, pointing with his wooden spoon.

"Haint we-un's coal," the hillman answered simply.

"Whose, then?"

Turtlelove finished eating and moved his stool away from the table. When he looked up again he found the hillman's eyes boring him with a steady stare. Instinctively the zoologist knew that he had overstepped himself, and that further questioning would get him nothing. In the hills inquisitiveness is the inevitable plug to a native's mouth.

The darkness began to thicken in the cabin. There was a heaviness, a sinister, indescribable weight that seemed to attach itself to everything. When Turtlelove absently lifted a spoon, it seemed strangely heavy. He attributed this to his fatigue. He was tired, and the close, unventilated air of the cabin gave him a doped feeling. Everything seemed tied, bound to something else. The thought came to him that he was really fighting sleep, and the fear of losing consciousness somehow made him inwardly shiver.

He rose and took a bill from his pocket and placed it on the table. As he took a step toward the door a lizard raced across the floor directly toward the hillman, and touched the hillman's foot. The zoologist was sure the hillman saw the lizard, must have felt its touch; yet he seemed to show no fear. "There wasn't time for the hillman to assume fear," Turtlelove told himself, and went outdoors. When he reached the rhododendron-covered bank he turned to look back.

The hillman stood in the doorway, leaning against the frame. His thumbs were hooked in his pockets and his eyes gazed upward, unconcernedly, at the sky. When in half a minute he proceeded to fill his pipe, his hands were sharply, grimly significant to the zoologist. As if the very sight of them motivated his next move, Turtlelove abruptly broke his way through the rhododendron and stood at the edge of the creek-branch.

Since the branch had reduced itself, Turtlelove without hesitation waded in. At the deepest spot it was scarcely up to his waist.

Once again he stood under the ledge at the mouth of the cave. He found his flashlight under his coat, snapped it on, and deliberately, as if he were going after something whose location was no mystery to him, he made his way rapidly to the turn in the cavern.

When the zoologist stood before the corpse again and splashed it with the flashlight, he made a swift grab for the beard but allowed a short pause before he lifted it over the face. "These things must be done with some reverence," he thought. Then he got down on his knees and held the brilliant beam against the dead man's neck, under his beard. Inch by inch he examined the hair-covered skin. He found what he was dead-sure he'd find: the somewhat faded finger-marks on the dead man's windpipe. Mentally he measured the width of the finger marks and the uncommonly deep indentures in the skin.

"If," thought Turtlelove, "the sheriff, whoever he is, has a grain of penetration, a grain of common sense, he will be able to see that the fingers of this hill-billy fit this throat. In a few days more decomposition will set in; then good-bye to the evidence."

Turtlelove rose, thinking that when morning came he would report the case to the authorities. It would have been folly to attempt to reach the county seat that night. He was unfamiliar with the trails. He could only with great difficulty have made his way back through the darkness to the point where he was turned by the storm.

Slowly he made his way back to the cave entrance, spread out his coat and lay down. With his head clasped in his locked hands, he watched the light dwindle, listened to the soft lapping of the waters on the boulders and rocks, the croaking of frogs, the thin notes of night insects. He would have preferred to surrender to the drowsiness that crept over him. The scratches on his body stung incessantly; his muscles were sore and his mind weary. But his mind could not detach itself from the thing at hand. The details of the crime assembled themselves with overpowering demands.

"If this big-handed hill-billy is guilty," thought the zoologist, "what motive drove him to commit the murder? An old feud? Was the dead man an informant? A traitor in the ranks of blockaders? Was he killed for money, for gain of any kind? Here is a coal mine——"

Turtlelove released his locked fingers behind his head, snapped them. "When I mentioned coal to this hill-billy he shut up like a clam. If he had coal himself he wouldn't

lug in wet wood, would he? It's coal. Motive's coal. And wouldn't the bogey at the cave's end forever scare away the neighbors? Sure as water runs down-hill."

The zoologist observed the new silvery light spread by the rising moon, and reflected briefly upon the quick transformations of nature. Once more he wished he could surrender to sleep, and once more, tantalizing him with its interesting aspects, another phase of the case opened his mind wide. The hill-billy wasn't afraid of lizards, yet he recognized the preponderance of belief in the silly and unwarranted superstition. In a country where an autopsy is never held, where external appearances guide all reasoning, all philosophy, the finding of the lizard locked to the dead man's throat would not only have been accepted as proof by the hill people, but likely also by the county officers themselves.

Turtlelove saw, as a scientist naturally would see, the far-reaching and uncontrollable impetus that would be given to the belief that the lizard was venomous and deadly. And he knew that from generation to generation the tale would be handed down with embellishments. This affair of the cave would become a folk-tale used by hill women to frighten their children. Songs would be composed and sung with the same literalness accorded every tragedy in the hills. The harmless lizard would be doomed. It would be kill, kill, kill wherever he was met. Salamanders as well as lizards.

Then he came abruptly to another consideration. "Suppose," he told himself, "suppose that this hill-billy has an inkling, a suspicion, that I'm on to his crime. It would be in character for him to get rid of me, or try to. He is not a fool. He showed a fine stroke of imagination in saddling the lizard with the crime. He could do it again. With me!"

Watching the water flow by, the moon climb the sky and the overhanging laurel etch itself in more pronounced lines against the heavens, the zoologist continued to fight sleep. It seemed to him that a long time ago he had become familiar with every contour, every shape in the existing scene, the laurel hanging over the ledge and etched against the sky, the willows by the bank that stood languid and drooped like seven old men afraid to cross the water. His ears, too, knew the peculiar harmonies of the night—the thin singing of insects, the contented faint hum, almost a crooning, of the creek-branch.

Then, toward midnight, he heard an overtone—the faintest sort of splash. He rose to his elbows. Pretty soon he saw an addition to the company of willow shadows—saw one shadow disintegrate and evolve in the full moonlight into the form of the hillman. The hillman was barefoot. He approached the cave entrance deliberately though quietly, as if in a hurry to block the door of the trap.

TURTLELOVE thought to move back into the blackness of the cave, out of the strong moonlight, where he might defend himself by hurling lumps of coal. Yet at best it would have only been prolonging a most certain and unpleasant fate. The hillman could have afforded to wait, even until the lingering process of starvation ended the zoologist's existence. Hunger would leave even less of a mark than hands.

Strangely, what happened when the zoologist's enemy was ten paces from the cave entrance seemed inspired by neither terror nor desperation. A smile crossed Turtlelove's face as he made a quick search in his coat pocket and found the lizard he had captured just before the storm broke. With a flick of his right wrist he knocked the lizard's head

against the knuckles of his left hand, then clapped the reptile to his neck. It lay stunned, unmoving, its mouth tight against Turtlelove's throat.

Once more Turtlelove stretched out on his back. He closed his eyes to slits, held his breath, watched the hillman come to the cave entrance, pass through and stand within four feet of him. The hillman leaned over to see better. His hands were held out ahead of him. Then suddenly his mouth flew open, his eyes dilated. The shadows of his hands lay unmoving on the floor. In this pose he appeared to freeze.

Fighting the growing impulse to breathe, and by sheer will overcoming the tendency of his muscles to twitch, Turtlelove felt seconds grow into eternity. It seemed to him that he had been looking into horror-struck eyes and a froth-flecked mouth for ages, that he and the hillman were growing old like sculpture under a hard, white moon.

Suddenly, as if to bring the agony of suspense to a close, the lizard stirred. Turtlelove could feel its flight across his body, see the flash of its leap to the hillman's foot and its race for a cranny in the wall. The hillman's body broke up. With a cry which seemed tuned to a vision of something worse than death the hillman threw out his arms as if for support, spun around and crashed to earth.

Rising to his elbows, breathing heavily, beads of sweat covering his forehead, Turtlelove shivered and stared at the hillman's face, horror-frozen by death, and the silent, open mouth flecked with froth.

3. Purple

There where I wandered, purple shadows ran
  Along a purple ground to purple cliffs
    And back; and purple suns flamed northerly
      Across a velvet sky. And when I came,
And when I crossed the imperial weaving span
  Of purple leagues, violet hippogriffs
    With wings of beating purple flew to me
      Through sullen skies empurpled with vast flame.
And so I soared on pinions of the night
  Through mightier gulfs where still the purple rule
    Held sway, with purple dreamlands all around.
And when my steed permitted me to light,
  I seemed to sink in some huge cosmic pool,
    And in a sea of purple shadows drowned.

A Strange Tale of African Horror

The Last Laugh

By C. FRANKLIN MILLER

ANTHONY BANE hung up the receiver and stared at the phone. His eyes were bulging, horror-struck; his cheeks were gray. Beads of perspiration stood out on his forehead.

"God!" he whispered hoarsely. "That voice—Godfrey's!"

He climbed to his feet and a fit of trembling seized him as he made his way across the study. The beat of his heart felt strangely feeble. It hurt.

Of a sudden things went black; his knees sagged under him. With an agonized cry he clutched at the mantel atop the hearth and, missing, stumbled into the arms of a chair. In the light of the fire he looked like a corpse, but his eyes were open. A voice in his brain insisted steadily, "Godfrey is *dead* . . . Godfrey is *dead*. . . ."

Outside, a gale was blowing. The chatter of hail against the window-panes came in sweeping gusts; the windows rattled in their sashes; the wind prowled and muttered along the eaves as though jealous of the flaming logs on the hearth inside.

Yet Anthony Bane heard none of it. With wildly distended eyes he stared through the fire, tense, unseeing, conscious only of a soul-racking fear—a fear of the kind that tortures and destroys. That voice on the phone had set it gnawing.

Slowly he raised his head. His nerves were shattered. A satanic patchwork of writhing tentacles seemed to have replaced them. He leaned heavily on the table at his side and gulped some liquor from a pocket flask. He drained the flask, and his heart began to pound; an unnatural flush stole through the ashes in his cheeks. With an effort he dragged himself erect and started pacing back and forth before the hearth, fighting madly for control over mind and body.

What was it the voice had said?

"Don't leave the house, Tony. I want to see you—alone!"

That had been all. No name. But he had recognized the voice of Godfrey Allen, so softly commanding and confident.

And yet—he had to believe!—Godfrey Allen was dead. . . .

It was now four years—five almost—since he had last set eyes on Godfrey. They had been hunting big game together down in the wilds of Africa and had pushed far up along the Zambezi into the very heart of northern Rhodesia. Here they had come upon Tod Harrington—friend, hunter, explorer—and his well-known string of gun-bearers encamped along the stream.

"Boys," Tod had said in his eager manner, "my blacks have been spilling some wild tales about a tribe of fire-worshipers not so many moons ahead. They refuse to go a step farther. Superstitious as hell! What say you? Shall we three push along and have a look-see?"

Godfrey had been willing. Tony had not; but——

"You two go," he had begged. "I'm all in. This damnable heat has

got me. I'll wait for you here and rest up."

Next day Tony had helped his friends with their preparations; had even accompanied them some distance into the wilds of that little-known region ahead. Not far, to be sure; less than a half-mile upstream. There he had wished them luck, as any pal would; had left them, and returned to camp. This, in spite of the heat!

Both Godfrey and Tom had wondered, but had they witnessed Tony's return their amazement would have been unbounded. Panting, disheveled and bleeding from numerous cuts, he had stumbled into camp, carrying a horrible tale of cannibalism and death—their deaths, Godfrey's and Tod's—to the ears of the gullible blacks. Camp had been broken immediately—frantically, in fact, for the blacks had been eager to put that dreaded region far behind them.

Two months later, with his tale of death carefully matured, Tony had returned to the States, seeking the presence of a certain Joan, Godfrey's Joan by betrothal. To her in a low, sad voice he had recounted his tale, adding many words of comfort—some of praise for Godfrey's heroism. Joan had believed, and after the first heart-rending shock had spent itself she had pressed his hand, moved by the loyalty of this "best of friends."

"You did all that you could to save him, Tony. I shall never forget."

Tony had bowed his head.

"No more than any pal would, Joan," had been his answer. "Godfrey was much like a brother. I'd willingly give my life to bring him back."

A studied declaration, that! Joan had been impressed, and throughout the ensuing year her regard for Tony had grown apace. No word had ever seeped out of Africa, yet Tony had bided his time with cunning patience. And in the end, cunning won. Joan, the desirable, had married him.

But now——

That voice on the phone—like a voice from beyond!

Godfrey?

Anthony Bane shivered; but his nerves had abated somewhat. With a sudden, furtive movement he sprang to the table and pulled out a drawer. His fingers closed on the cold steel of an automatic. A false sense of security, druglike in quality, pervaded his body as he transferred the weapon to a pocket in his coat. A cunning gleam entered his eyes. . . . If Godfrey Allen lived——

"A GENTLEMAN to see you, sir!" Anthony Bane started.

Cheeves, the butler, was standing in the doorway.

"He would give no name, sir."

"A—stranger, Cheeves?"

"Yes, sir! I believe so, sir!"

And Cheeves had known Godfrey. The master of the house considered this for a moment, hoping against reason that Cheeves was right. His hand never left his pocket.

"Has Mrs. Bane returned yet, Cheeves?"

"No, sir! She left word with Suzanne not to expect her before 1."

Anthony Bane's heart was surprizingly steady now. His lips were still pale, but grim. . . . If Godfrey Allen lived——

He drew some bills from his vest pocket and handed them to Cheeves.

"I want you and Suzanne to take the night off. Ugly weather, but—you may use the sedan. Understand?"

"Yes, sir! Thank you, Mr. Bane! Shall I show the stranger up here?"

Anthony Bane nodded. When Cheeves had gone he planted himself in front of the hearth with his back to the fire and waited. One hand was clenched tightly at his side; the

other was still in his pocket. Both of them were cold.

Sounded a muffled footstep from the corridor without, and in spite of himself his heart gave a surge. He stiffened perceptibly as a dark form appeared in the doorway.

"Good evening, Tony!"

Anthony Bane stared, hesitated, then laughed; laughed hysterically, with the relief of a murderer who has been unjustly pardoned. He had to; his relaxing nerves commanded it.

Short, thin and uncommonly pale, the stranger framed in the doorway bore no resemblance to Godfrey Allen. His face was drawn, seamed, haggard; his eyes hollowed and ringed. He gave one the impression of having aged prematurely through some uncanny process of shrinkage. He displayed no emotion whatever over the unusual greeting accorded him; merely gazed, disinterestedly—waiting.

"Lord, man," chuckled Anthony Bane, "you gave me a start. I thought for a moment——"

"Of Godfrey Allen?"

Anthony Bane's eyes grew big and round. He noticed it now—that voice, Godfrey's! Low, rich and well-modulated, it possessed that same touch of confidence which had always been so fascinating in his one-time friend.

Said the voice, "You don't seem to know me, Tony. I am not surprized. One changes a lot in five years, especially when one has been through—hell!"

Anthony Bane stared at the shrunken stranger; stared at his haggard face and into his hollowed eyes where he caught a familiar glint of eagerness which had been characteristic of a man he had almost forgotten.

"Tod Harrington!" he whispered—and his hand crept back to his coat pocket.

Tod smiled—a cracking sort of a smile—and advanced farther into the room.

"At last!" said he, extending his arm. "It's fine to be welcomed by a friend. Come—give me your hand, Tony!"

Slowly, Anthony Bane raised his hand—his free one—and Tod took it in both his own. But there was no warmth in the clasp; it was merely a contact—deliberate, studied.

Tod held the hand for a moment or two, pressed it mechanically, smiled again, and then let it go. This done, he turned his back on Anthony Bane and pulled a chair closer to the fire.

"Not any too warm in here, Tony," said he, opening his hands to the blaze. "Hear that wind! Come, gather round, man, and act sociable. . . . Want a cigarette?"

Anthony Bane hesitated and slid slowly into the chair opposite. He accepted a cigarette and lit it at the flaring match which Tod held out. A certain indefinable terror had gripped his heart.

"We thought you were—dead," he finally managed; his tongue felt thick and dry.

Tod blew a cloud of smoke into the fire.

"Some of us can stand a lot. Others can't. I belong in the first group—fortunately. . . . Not so sure about that word!" He reflected. "Sometimes I think it's the man who cracks and goes under who's the fortunate one. He skips at least a *part* of hell!"

He flicked his ashes into the blazing logs and turned suddenly. His eyes bored straight into those of Anthony Bane.

"You know, Tony, there *is* such a thing as hell on earth!"

For a moment only their glances met and then Anthony Bane's glance fell. He toyed nervously with his cigarette, scarcely able to conceal the panic that shook his body. Tod Harrington saw it and his eyes narrowed;

a queer smile barely curled the corners of his mouth.

"Would you care to hear about that hell of ours—Godfrey's and mine?"

Anthony Bane murmured some reply, he scarcely knew what. His brain was beset by a number of battling demons—indecision, fright, uncertainty. One finger was still crooked around the trigger of the weapon in his pocket. After a moment of silence he ventured a furtive glance at Tod, who had turned away and was staring thoughtfully into the fire.

Finally Tod spoke.

"Tony," said he without shifting his eyes, "you won't like this tale of mine. It's not a thing of beauty. Hell was never meant to be! But it will make you—think," softly. "It will help you to imagine—possibly feel—some of those awful agonies. . . . It will, Tony, if you still have a part of your God-given soul!"

ANTHONY BANE'S lips went white. He half rose in his chair, murder in his heart; but he sank back again, weak and trembling. A strange fascination filmed his eyes as he riveted them on Tod.

Tod never moved.

"It all started with Bmini," he declared after a moment's pause. "Strange, how often a woman's hand unwittingly opens the gate to hell! In the very beginning there was Eve. Bmini was our Eve—Godfrey's and mine! She wasn't a beauty—not according to a white man's standard. You wouldn't have cared for her, Tony. . . . Yet she was perfectly formed, far from repulsive, and young. Had you seen her come tearing out of the jungle like a frightened animal, you—well, you might have fallen, at that! She looked like anything but a heathen native, with her big, startled eyes and bronze-colored body. It was that peculiar coloring of her skin, much like a white man's tan, that made me wary. My blacks had warned me, and I reminded Godfrey of the fact. But Godfrey always did have a heart as big as a house. When he saw the girl collapse on the edge of the jungle, nothing could restrain him.

"He ran across to her and I followed—at a distance. I saw her try to crawl to her feet and fall back again as though from weakness. In her side was a long, gaping wound, still fresh and dripping. It looked like the rip of a tiger's claw. Godfrey picked her up and carried her down to the river. He bathed the wound—a horrible sight it was, Tony—and applied some iodine from the sack on his back. Most people would have fainted from the pain of it. Bmini never winced. In her eyes were only wonder and fear. I prayed for some sign of pain—prayed for Godfrey's sake—but she only stared, childlike, first at Godfrey, at his deeply tanned arms, then at me, then down at her own bronzed body. I knew what it meant. She herself had noted the similarity of the coloring. I called it to Godfrey's attention. The girl *had* no pain—no physical sensation whatever! My kaffirs were right.

"'Rot!' murmured Godfrey and never paused in his task. 'You've absorbed some of that kaffir superstition, Tod. She is simply scared stiff, maybe over us. We are different, you know.'

"Far from satisfied, I studied her narrowly, and my eyes settled on her fingers. My heart almost stopped. Those fingers were black, and shriveled, like jointed sticks of charcoal. Godfrey had called it 'rot,' and the word seemed horribly applicable. A sickening despair clutched my stomach.

"I wanted to turn and run, but I couldn't leave Godfrey. He, too, had noticed those unsightly fingers, for he gave vent to a sudden exclamation and swayed backward on his heels. . . . I can still see that

puzzled frown in his eyes. He seemed so utterly helpless, bewildered.

"Suddenly there came a voice from the near-by jungle. 'Bmini!' it called, quite clearly. The girl gave a startled cry and shrank close to Godfrey as though for protection. Instinctively I turned toward our camp. Too late! Too late to reach the rifles. Before I could move, we were surrounded by dozens of near-naked savages. Big, silent fellows they were, all armed with spears. And they were black, the natural black of the country, except for hideous daubs of red and yellow with which they had stained their bodies. In spite of their ferocious appearance, there was a certain amount of gravity and awe in their bearing as they looked us over from head to foot.

"Had my automatic been in working order, there might have been a different story to tell. But it was jammed—useless! So was Godfrey's." Tod's voice went harsh. "You know all about that, Tony!" he added bitterly.

Anthony Bane did know. His was the hand that had jammed those guns!

"But no matter!" exclaimed Tod with a dismissing wave of his hand. "The trick was done. We had to make the best of it. I tried to walk straight through that mob of savages, hoping to reach the rifles, but was stopped by a number of spear-points in my ribs. It wasn't pleasant.

"I fell back again, and our captors started jabbering among themselves, jabbering and gesticulating freely. Sounded like a war-time palaver. A number of times I caught the word *'Mbuitiramo!'* and recalled having heard my kaffirs use the phrase in their tales of the fire-worshipers. 'Chosen of the Fire-God!' That's what it meant. Apparently Godfrey and I were among the elect!" grimly.

At this point Tod paused and lit another cigarette. He seemed to have forgotten about Anthony Bane, who had been hanging feverishly on every word, waiting for the death of Godfrey Allen—waiting for that and something more, something that his frightened brain could scarcely fathom.

Tod took a puff or two on his cigarette and then continued.

"Things looked bad—horribly so. Godfrey realized this fact as well as I, for he whispered to me under cover of the general palaver. 'Tod,' said he, 'it isn't easy to believe those gruesome tales. But I want you to play safe. One of us must get back to Tony. Joan must know!'

"I understood, and something caught in my throat at the sight of Godfrey facing the unholy possibilities of the future with that big, firm heart of his.

"Suddenly the largest of our captors raised his spear on high and the palaver ended abruptly. He spat out some commands, and those nearest prodded us with their weapons and pointed upstream. We started marching.

"IT WASN'T far to that accursed village of theirs—only a half-hour trudge through the bush, and it was made in silence. I watched our captors closely, struck by the absence of all hostility. They were as solemn as so many owls and noticeably careful about keeping their distance from Bmini, Godfrey and me. Several of them ran on ahead, and as we neared the village we were greeted by the eery beating of tam-tams. Our captors broke into a wild sort of chant, and I knew what it meant. This was the beginning of some devilish religious rite.

"In the center of the village was a long, low structure which I knew for a mbuiti-hut—the African house of worship. They led us around to the rear of the hut where, before a

small door in the wall, two of the biggest blacks I have ever seen stood guard. The door was opened and Bmini entered. Godfrey and me they had to jam in with the ends of their spears. . . . Would to God I had let them kill me then and there! This was the entrance to hell itself!

"The door closed behind us. A nauseating stench assailed my nostrils—the putrid odor of decayed flesh. I thought of Bmini's blackened fingers and shuddered in the darkness. All about me I could feel the living presence of many beings and, as my eyes grew accustomed to the gloom, I could see them. Humans, they were; some standing, motionless, some squatting on their haunches, others huddled on the ground. Ominous, brooding shadows—living corpses, all of them! What loathsome sights the light of the sun might have revealed in that unholy den of disease, I could only conjecture. But the smell of rotting flesh was pungently eloquent.

"Outside in the long auditorium of the hut, the sounding tam-tams maintained their steady cadence. The singsong chant of the natives was fairly deafening. Through a tiny crack in the wall I looked out upon the scene, and my blood almost froze at the ghastliness of it.

"The darkness of night had fallen, but the interior of the hut was illuminated by a huge bonfire blazing in the center and dozens of flaring torches stuck in the ground at regular intervals down both sides of the structure. Between these torches and the walls the shrieking savages were ranged, their bodies streaked and daubed with various colors. They looked like a troop of devils conjured from the lower regions to celebrate some diabolical rite. Around the blazing fire in the center a number of hideously appareled mbuitimen were dancing, twisting and distorting their bodies in the most fantastic manner. Suddenly one of them paused and let out an ear-piercing scream. A dead silence ensued.

"'*Mbuitiramo!*' he shrieked, and the entire assemblage took up the cry, '*Mbuitiramo!*' The din was hideous. They were calling for us—the 'chosen' ones!

"A narrow slit of a door leading into the interior of the hut opened. Those brooding shadows all about me started moving, stealthily. I pressed my body against the wall and raised my hands above my head. The slightest contact with one of those ghostly forms would have been disastrous. Whatever the disease, I knew it was deadly.

"The door closed and that terrifying movement about me ceased. I lowered my hands and for the first time discovered my body wet with sweat. As the 'chosen' ones filed out, a weird sort of chant was set up outside. I glued my eyes to the crack in the wall, but only for a moment. That glimpse was awful, insufferable, Tony.

"About a dozen of those wretched creatures were moving slowly down through the center of the hut to where their Fire-God was sending out licking tongues of flame as though in greeting. I say they were moving, Tony, but the manner of their progress is indescribable. Only a few walked upright. Those few had great patches of scaly black on their otherwise bronze-colored bodies. The rest were crawling and sliding along the ground in the most hideous fashion, their limbs having rotted away to only short, blackened stumps. I saw the leader reach the fire. I saw the flames envelop him—and he made no outcry! Even as I turned from the loathsome sight, I could taste the burning odor of charred flesh on my tongue. . . . The Fire-God was claiming his own!

"How long I stood there staring, horrified, into the darkness, I do not know. I was only partly conscious of that eery chant and of that insup-

portable stench. Then suddenly I heard Godfrey's voice close to me. It was hoarse. 'Tod,' he whispered, 'I'm going to burn this God-forsaken hole. In the confusion you ought to make good your escape.'

"A terrible weakness assailed me. I could scarcely frame the question that trembled on my lips. Godfrey struck a match and I saw, with sinking heart, that which I had feared. The tips of his fingers were black! Black, Tony! Black as coals! He applied the tiny flame to his knuckles, burned them—and never winced. 'Tell Joan—there was no suffering, Tod!' he whispered. 'I am going to stay. I—must!'

TOD'S voice fell away, ceased. The room was silent, except for the crackling logs on the hearth.

"Then—Godfrey is—dead?" came a straggling whisper from Anthony Bane.

Tod nodded, and something much like a sob escaped his lips. For a moment he gazed ahead with dull, unseeing eyes, and then his head fell forward on his chest; his hands dropped limply at his sides. He was motionless.

In the chair opposite, Anthony Bane sat and stared; stared with wildly dilated eyes at Tod Harrington's dangling fingers, at the glowing stub of a cigarette held fast therein. He saw that creeping point of fire singe the skin, penetrate, and eat its way in to the bone.

Tod Harrington never winced!

A cry of mortal agony filled the room. It came from the lips of Anthony Bane. Huddled in one corner of his chair, he raised his hands and stared at the wide-spread fingers, a look of insane terror in his eyes.

"Damn you, Tod," he whispered hoarsely. "You—knew!"

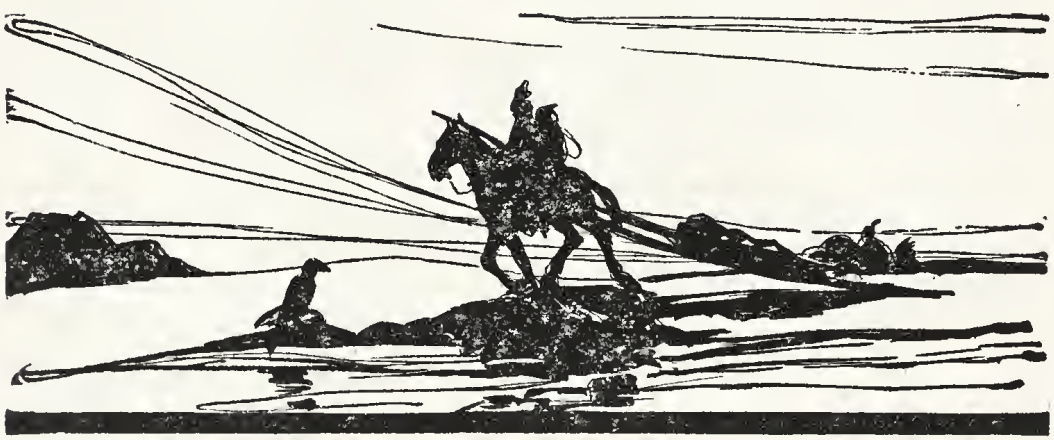
Tod Harrington never moved. Between his black-scorched finger tips the cigarette still glowed.

"You—knew!" screamed Anthony Bane; but his voice trailed away to a moan.

And then that cowardly streak of his ran true to form. Slowly he drew his gun, pressed it to his temple—and fired!

Tod Harrington raised his head. His eyes were filmed, his face distorted under the self-inflicted torture he endured. With a hasty gesture he flung the cigarette far from him and nursed his pain-racked fingers.

"Thank God—for the pain of it," he murmured through clenched teeth. And then: "He's on his way, Godfrey. The last laugh is yours. Go to it!"



The White Road

By MANLY WADE WELLMAN

The desert is dun at the noon of day
And sable at noon of night;
At dawn and at dusk it is silver-gray,
But the caravan route is white.
Across the sand
Like a pallid band,
The caravan route is white.

The traveler's face is drawn and pale
And he prays beneath his breath;
For the bones of Dead Things fill the trail
Like the road to the gates of Death.
Instead of stones
It is paved with bones,
Like the road to the gates of Death.

The men of Egypt, the men of Rome,
The men of many a land
Lay down to die far away from home
On the road through the weary sand.
They died, and each
Left his bones to bleach
On the road through the weary sand.

Men turn from the path when daylight dies;
For after the sun is set
The ghosts of the Dead Things stir and rise
To travel the roadway yet.
Dead beasts and men
Are alive again,
To travel the roadway yet.

The desert is dun at the noon of day
And sable at noon of night;
At dawn and at dusk it is silver-gray,
But the caravan route is white.
The silent dead
Build a road of dread—
The caravan route is white!

The Specter Bridegroom

By WASHINGTON IRVING

ON THE summit of one of the heights of the Odenwald, a wild and romantic tract of Upper Germany, that lies not far from the confluence of the Main and the Rhine, there stood, many, many years since, the Castle of the Baron von Landshort. It is now quite fallen to decay, and almost buried among beech trees and dark firs; above which, however, its old watch-tower may still be seen, struggling, like the former possessor I have mentioned, to carry a high head, and look down upon the neighboring country.

The baron was a dry branch of the great family of Katzenellenbogen, and inherited the relics of the property, and all the pride of his ancestors. Though the warlike disposition of his predecessors had much impaired the family possessions, yet the baron still endeavored to keep up some show of former state. The times were peaceable, and the German nobles, in general, had abandoned their inconvenient old castles, perched like eagles' nests among the mountains, and had built more convenient residences in the valleys: still the baron remained proudly drawn up in his little fortress, cherishing, with hereditary inveteracy, all the old family feuds; so that he was on ill terms with some of his nearest neighbors, on account of disputes that had happened between their great-great-grandfathers.

The baron had but one child, a daughter; but nature, when she grants but one child, always compensates by making it a prodigy; and so it was with the daughter of the baron. All the nurses, gossips, and country cousins assured her father that she had not her equal for beauty in all Germany; and who should know better than they? She had, moreover, been brought up with great care under the superintendence of two maiden aunts, who had spent some years of their early life at one of the little German courts, and were skilled in all the branches of knowledge necessary to the education of a fine lady. Under their instructions she became a miracle of accomplishments. By the time she was eighteen, she could embroider to admiration, and had worked whole histories of the saints in tapestry, with such strength of expression in their countenances, that they looked like so many souls in purgatory. She could read without great difficulty, and had spelled her way through several church legends, and almost all the chivalric wonders of the *Heldenbuch*. She had even made considerable proficiency in writ-

ing; could sign her own name without missing a letter, and so legibly, that her aunts could read it without spectacles. She excelled in making little elegant good-for-nothing ladylike nicknacks of all kinds; was versed in the most abstruse dancing of the day; played a number of airs on the harp and guitar; and knew all the tender ballads of the *Minnelieder* by heart.

Her aunts, too, having been great flirts and coquettes in their younger days, were admirably calculated to be vigilant guardians and strict censors of the conduct of their niece; for there is no duenna so rigidly prudent, and inexorably decorous, as a superannuated coquette. She was rarely suffered out of their sight; never went beyond the domains of the castle, unless well attended, or rather well watched; had continual lectures read to her about strict decorum and implicit obedience; and, as to the men—pah!—she was taught to hold them at such a distance, and in such absolute distrust, that, unless properly authorized, she would not have cast a glance upon the handsomest cavalier in the world—no, not if he were even dying at her feet.

The good effects of this system were wonderfully apparent. The young lady was a pattern of docility and correctness. While others were wasting their sweetness in the glare of the world, and liable to be plucked and thrown aside by every hand, she was coyly blooming into fresh and lovely womanhood under the protection of those immaculate spinsters, like a rosebud blushing forth among guardian thorns. Her aunts looked upon her with pride and exultation, and vaunted that though all the other young ladies in the world might go astray, yet, thank heaven, nothing of the kind could happen to the heiress of Katzenellenbogen.

But, however scantily the Baron von Landshort might be provided with children, his household was by no means a small one; for providence had enriched him with abundance of poor relations. They, one and all, possessed the affectionate disposition common to humble relatives; were wonderfully attached to the baron, and took every possible occasion to come in swarms and enliven the castle. All family festivals were commemorated by these good people at the baron's expense; and when they were filled with good cheer, they would declare that there was nothing on earth so delightful as these family meetings, these jubilees of the heart.

The baron, though a small man, had a large soul, and it swelled with satisfaction at the consciousness of being the greatest man in the little world about him. He loved to tell long stories about the dark old warriors whose portraits looked grimly down from the walls around, and he found no listeners equal to those that fed at his expense. He was much given to the marvelous, and a firm believer in all those supernatural tales with which every mountain and valley in Germany abounds. The faith of his guests exceeded even his own: they listened to every tale of wonder with open eyes and mouth, and never failed to be astonished, even though repeated for the hundredth time. Thus lived the Baron von Landshort, the oracle of his table, the absolute monarch of his little territory, and happy, above all things, in the persuasion that he was the wisest man of the age.

AT THE time of which my story treats, there was a great family gathering at the castle, on an affair of the utmost importance: it was to receive the destined bridegroom of the baron's daughter. A negotiation had been carried on between the father and an old nobleman of Bavaria, to unite the dignity of their houses by the marriage of their children. The preliminaries had been conducted with proper punctilio. The young people were betrothed without seeing each other; and the time was

appointed for the marriage ceremony. The young Count von Altenburg had been recalled from the army for the purpose, and was actually on his way to the baron's to receive his bride. Missives had even been received from him, from Würzburg, where he was accidentally detained, mentioning the day and hour when he might be expected to arrive.

The castle was in a tumult of preparation to give him a suitable welcome. The fair bride had been decked out with uncommon care. The two aunts had superintended her toilet, and quarreled the whole morning about every article of her dress. The young lady had taken advantage of their contest to follow the bent of her own taste; and fortunately it was a good one. She looked as lovely as youthful bridegroom could desire; and the flutter of expectation heightened the luster of her charms.

The suffusions that mantled her face and neck, the gentle heaving of the bosom, the eye now and then lost in revery, all betrayed the soft tumult that was going on in her little heart. The aunts were continually hovering around her; for maiden aunts are apt to take great interest in affairs of this nature. They were giving her a world of staid counsel how to deport herself, what to say, and in what manner to receive the expected lover.

The baron was no less busied in preparations. He had, in truth, nothing exactly to do; but he was naturally a fuming, bustling little man, and could not remain passive when all the world was in a hurry. He worried from top to bottom of the castle with an air of infinite anxiety; he continually called the servants from their work to exhort them to be diligent; and buzzed about every hall and chamber, as idly restless and importunate as a bluebottle fly on a warm summer's day.

In the meantime the fatted calf had been killed; the forests had rung with the clamor of the huntsmen; the kitchen was crowded with good cheer; the cellars had yielded up whole oceans of *Rhein-wein* and *Ferne-wein;* and even the great Heidelberg tun had been laid under contribution. Everything was ready to receive the distinguished guest with *Saus und Braus* in the true spirit of German hospitality—but the guest delayed to make his appearance. Hour rolled after hour. The sun, that had poured his downward rays upon the rich forest of the Odenwald, now just gleamed along the summits of the mountains. The baron mounted the highest tower, and strained his eyes in hope of catching a distant sight of the count and his attendants. Once he thought he beheld them; the sound of horns came floating from the valley, prolonged by the mountain echoes. A number of horsemen were seen far below, slowly advancing along the road; but when they had nearly reached the foot of the mountain, they suddenly struck off in a different direction. The last ray of sunshine departed—the bats began to flit by in the twilight—the road grew dimmer and dimmer to the view; and nothing appeared stirring in it but now and then a peasant lagging homeward from his labor.

WHILE the old castle of Landshort was in this state of perplexity, a very interesting scene was transacting in a different part of the Odenwald.

The young Count von Altenburg was tranquilly pursuing his route in that sober jog-trot way, in which a man travels toward matrimony when his friends have taken all the trouble and uncertainty of courtship off his hands, and a bride is waiting for him, as certainly as a dinner at the end of his journey. He had encountered at Würzburg a youthful companion in arms, with whom he had seen some service on the frontiers: Herman von Starkenfaust, one of the stoutest hands, and worthiest hearts, of Ger-

man chivalry, who was now returning from the army. His father's castle was not far distant from the old fortress of Landshort, although an hereditary feud rendered the families hostile, and strangers to each other.

In the warm-hearted moment of recognition, the young friends related all their past adventures and fortunes, and the count gave the whole history of his intended nuptials with a young lady whom he had never seen, but of whose charms he had received the most enrapturing descriptions.

As the route of the friends lay in the same direction, they agreed to perform the rest of their journey together; and, that they might do it the more leisurely, set off from Würzburg at an early hour, the count having given directions for his retinue to follow and overtake him.

They beguiled their wayfaring with recollections of their military scenes and adventures; but the count was apt to be a little tedious, now and then, about the reputed charms of his bride, and the felicity that awaited him.

In this way they had entered among the mountains of the Odenwald, and were traversing one of its most lonely and thickly wooded passes. It is well known that the forests of Germany have always been as much infested by robbers as its castles by specters; and, at this time, the former were particularly numerous, from the hordes of disbanded soldiers wandering about the country. It will not appear extraordinary, therefore, that the cavaliers were attacked by a gang of these stragglers, in the midst of the forest. They defended themselves with bravery, but were nearly overpowered, when the count's retinue arrived to their assistance. At sight of them the robbers fled, but not until the count had received a mortal wound. He was slowly and carefully conveyed back to the city of Würzburg, and a friar summoned from a neighboring convent, who was famous for his skill in administering to both soul and body; but half of his skill was superfluous; the moments of the unfortunate count were numbered.

With his dying breath he entreated his friend to repair instantly to the castle of Landshort, and explain the fatal cause of his not keeping his appointment with his bride. Though not the most ardent of lovers, he was one of the most punctilious of men, and appeared earnestly solicitous that his mission should be speedily and courteously executed. "Unless this is done," said he, "I shall not sleep quietly in my grave!" He repeated these last words with peculiar solemnity. A request, at a moment so impressive, admitted no hesitation. Starkenfaust endeavored to soothe him to calmness; promised faithfully to execute his wish, and gave him his hand in solemn pledge. The dying man pressed it in acknowledgment, but soon lapsed into delirium—raved about his bride—his engagements—his plighted word; ordered his horse, that he might ride to the castle of Landshort; and expired in the fancied act of vaulting into the saddle.

Starkenfaust bestowed a sigh and a soldier's tear on the untimely fate of his comrade; and then pondered on the awkward mission he had undertaken. His heart was heavy, and his head perplexed; for he was to present himself an unbidden guest among hostile people, and to damp their festivity with tidings fatal to their hopes. Still there were certain whisperings of curiosity in his bosom to see this far-famed beauty of Katzenellenbogen, so cautiously shut up from the world; for he was a passionate admirer of the sex, and there was a dash of eccentricity and enterprise in his character that made him fond of all singular adventure.

Previous to his departure he made all due arrangements with the holy fraternity of the convent for the fu-

neral solemnities of his friend, who was to be buried in the cathedral of Würzburg, near some of his illustrious relatives; and the mourning retinue of the count took charge of his remains.

It is now high time that we should return to the ancient family of Katzenellenbogen, who were impatient for their guest, and still more for their dinner; and to the worthy little baron, whom we left airing himself on the watch-tower.

Night closed in, but still no guest arrived. The baron descended from the tower in despair. The banquet, which had been delayed from hour to hour, could no longer be postponed. The meats were already overdone; the cook in an agony; and the whole household had the look of a garrison that had been reduced by famine. The baron was obliged reluctantly to give orders for the feast without the presence of the guest. All were seated at table, and just on the point of commencing, when the sound of a horn from without the gate gave notice of the approach of a stranger. Another long blast filled the old courts of the castle with its echoes, and was answered by the warder from the walls. The baron hastened to receive his future son-in-law.

The drawbridge had been let down, and the stranger was before the gate. He was a tall, gallant cavalier, mounted on a black steed. His countenance was pale, but he had a beaming, romantic eye, and an air of stately melancholy. The baron was a little mortified that he should have come in this simple, solitary style. His dignity for a moment was ruffled, and he felt disposed to consider it a want of proper respect for the important occasion, and the important family with which he was to be connected. He pacified himself, however, with the conclusion that it must have been youthful impatience which had induced him thus to spur on sooner than his attendants.

"I am sorry," said the stranger, "to break in upon you thus unseasonably——"

Here the baron interrupted him with a world of compliments and greetings; for, to tell the truth, he prided himself upon his courtesy and eloquence. The stranger attempted, once or twice, to stem the torrent of words, but in vain, so he bowed his head and suffered it to flow on. By the time the baron had come to a pause, they had reached the inner court of the castle; and the stranger was again about to speak, when he was once more interrupted by the appearance of the female part of the family, leading forth the shrinking and blushing bride. He gazed on her for a moment as one entranced; it seemed as if his whole soul beamed forth in the gaze, and rested upon that lovely form. One of the maiden aunts whispered something in her ear; she made an effort to speak; her moist blue eye was timidly raised, gave a shy glance of inquiry on the stranger, and was cast again to the ground. The words died away; but there was a sweet smile playing about her lips, and a soft dimpling of the cheek that showed her glance had not been unsatisfactory. It was impossible for a girl of the fond age of eighteen, highly predisposed for love and matrimony, not to be pleased with so gallant a cavalier.

The late hour at which the guest had arrived left no time for parley. The baron was peremptory and deferred all particular conversation until the morning, and led the way to the untasted banquet.

It was served up in the great hall of the castle. Around the walls hung the hard-favored portraits of the heroes of the house of Katzenellenbogen, and the trophies which they had gained in the field and in the chase. Hacked corselets, splintered jousting spears, and tattered banners,

were mingled with the spoils of sylvan warfare; the jaws of the wolf, and the tusks of the boar, grinned horribly among crossbows and battle-axes, and a huge pair of antlers branched immediately over the head of the youthful bridegroom.

The cavalier took but little notice of the company or the entertainment. He scarcely tasted the banquet, but seemed absorbed in admiration of his bride. He conversed in a low tone that could not be overheard—for the language of love is never loud; but where is the female ear so dull that it can not catch the softest whisper of the lover? There was a mingled tenderness and gravity in his manner, that appeared to have a powerful effect upon the young lady. Her color came and went as she listened with deep attention. Now and then she made some blushing reply, and when his eye was turned away, she would steal a sidelong glance at his romantic countenance, and heave a gentle sigh of tender happiness. It was evident that the young couple were completely enamored. The aunts, who were deeply versed in the mysteries of the heart, declared that they had fallen in love with each other at first sight.

The feast went on merrily, or at least noisily, for the guests were all blessed with those keen appetites that attend upon light purses and mountain air. The baron told his best and longest stories, and never had he told them so well, or with such great effect. If there was anything marvelous, his auditors were lost in astonishment; and if anything facetious, they were sure to laugh exactly in the right place. The baron, it is true, like most great men, was too dignified to utter any joke but a dull one; it was always enforced, however, by a bumper of excellent Hockheimer; and even a dull joke, at one's own table, served up with jolly old wine, is irresistible. Many good things were said by poorer and keener wits, that would not bear repeating, except on similar occasions; many sly speeches whispered in ladies' ears, that almost convulsed them with suppressed laughter; and a song or two roared out by a poor but merry and broad-faced cousin of the baron, that absolutely made the maiden aunts hold up their fans.

Amidst all this revelry, the stranger guest maintained a most singular and unseasonable gravity. His countenance assumed a deeper cast of dejection as the evening advanced; and, strange as it may appear, even the baron's jokes seemed only to render him the more melancholy. At times he was lost in thought, and at times there was a perturbed and restless wandering of the eye that bespoke a mind but ill at ease. His conversations with the bride became more and more earnest and mysterious. Lowering clouds began to steal over the fair serenity of her brow, and tremors to run through her tender frame.

All this could not escape the notice of the company. Their gayety was chilled by the unaccountable gloom of the bridegroom; their spirits were infected; whispers and glances were interchanged, accompanied by shrugs and dubious shakes of the head. The song and the laugh grew less and less frequent; there were dreary pauses in the conversation, which were at length succeeded by wild tales and supernatural legends. One dismal story produced another still more dismal, and the baron nearly frightened some of the ladies into hysterics with the history of the goblin horseman that carried away the fair Leonora; a dreadful story, which has since been put into excellent verse, and is read and believed by all the world.

The bridegroom listened to this tale with profound attention. He kept his eyes steadily fixed on the baron, and, as the story drew to a close, began gradually to rise from his seat, growing taller and taller, until, in the

baron's entranced eye, he seemed almost to tower into a giant. The moment the tale was finished, he heaved a deep sigh, and took a solemn farewell of the company. They were all amazement. The baron was perfeetly thunder-struck.

What! going to leave the castle at midnight? Why, everything was prepared for his reception; a chamber was ready for him if he wished to retire.

The stranger shook his head mournfully and mysteriously: "I must lay my head in a different chamber tonight!"

There was something in this reply, and the tone in which it was uttered, that made the baron's heart misgive him; but he rallied his forces, and repeated his hospitable entreaties.

The stranger shook his head silently, but positively, at every offer; and, waving his farewell to the company, stalked slowly out of the hall. The maiden aunts were absolutely petrified—the bride hung her head, and a tear stole to her eye.

The baron followed the stranger to the great court of the castle, where the black charger stood pawing the earth, and snorting with impatience. When they had reached the portal, whose deep archway was dimly lighted by a cresset, the stranger paused, and addressed the baron in a hollow tone of voice, which the vaulted roof rendered still more sepulchral.

"Now that we are alone," said he, "I will impart to you the reason of my going. I have a solemn, an indispensable engagement——"

"Why," said the baron, "can you not send someone in your place?"

"It admits of no substitute—I must attend it in person—I must away to Würzburg cathedral——"

"Ay," said the baron, plucking up spirit, "but not until tomorrow—tomorrow you shall take your bride there."

"No! **no!**" replied the stranger, with tenfold solemnity, "my engagement is with no bride—the worms! the worms expeet me! I am a dead man—I have been slain by robbers—my body lies at Würzburg—at midnight I am to be buried—the grave is waiting for me—I must keep my appointment!"

He sprang to his black charger, dashed over the drawbridge, and the clattering of his horse's hoofs was lost in the whistling of the night blast.

THE baron returned to the hall in the utmost consternation, and related what had passed. Two ladies fainted outright, others sickened at the idea of having banqueted with a specter. It was the opinion of some that this might be the wild huntsman, famous in German legend. Some talked of mountain sprites, of wood-demons, and of other supernatural beings, with which the good people of Germany have been so grievously harassed since time immemorial. One of the poor relations ventured to suggest that it might be some sportive evasion of the young cavalier, and that the very gloominess of the caprice seemed to accord with so melancholy a personage. This, however, drew on him the indignation of the whole company, and especially of the baron, who looked upon him as little better than an infidel; so that he was fain to abjure his heresy as speedily as possible, and come into the faith of the true believers.

But whatever may have been the doubts entertained, they were completely put to an end by the arrival, next day, of regular missives, confirming the intelligence of the young count's murder, and his interment in Würzburg cathedral.

The dismay at the castle may well be imagined. The baron shut himself up in his chamber. The guests, who had come to rejoice with him, could not think of abandoning him in his distress. They wandered about the courts, or collected in groups in the hall, shaking their heads and shrug-

ging their shoulders at the troubles of so good a man; and sat longer than ever at table, and ate and drank more stoutly than ever, by way of keeping up their spirits. But the situation of the widowed bride was the most pitiable. To have lost a husband before she had even embraced him—and such a husband! If the very specter could be so gracious and noble, what must have been the living man! She filled the house with lamentations.

On the night of the second day of her widowhood, she had retired to her chamber, accompanied by one of her aunts, who insisted on sleeping with her. The aunt, who was one of the best tellers of ghost stories in all Germany, had just been recounting one of her longest, and had fallen asleep in the very midst of it. The chamber was remote, and overlooked a small garden. The niece lay pensively gazing at the beams of the rising moon, as they trembled on the leaves of an aspen tree before the lattice. The castle-clock had just tolled midnight, when a soft strain of music stole up from the garden. She rose hastily from her bed, and stepped lightly to the window. A tall figure stood among the shadows of the trees. As it raised its head, a beam of moonlight fell upon the countenance. Heaven and earth! she beheld the Specter Bridegroom! A loud shriek at that moment burst upon her ear, and her aunt, who had been awakened by the music, and had followed her silently to the window, fell into her arms. When she looked again, the specter had disappeared.

Of the two females, the aunt now required the most soothing, for she was perfectly beside herself with terror. As to the young lady, there was something, even in the specter of her lover, that seemed endearing. There was still the semblance of manly beauty; and though the shadow of a man is but little calculated to satisfy the affections of a love-sick girl, yet, where the substance is not to be had, even that is consoling. The aunt declared she would never sleep in that chamber again; the niece, for once, was refractory, and declared as strongly that she would sleep in no other in the castle; the consequence was, that she had to sleep in it alone: but she drew a promise from her aunt not to relate the story of the specter, lest she should be denied the only melancholy pleasure left her on earth —that of inhabiting the chamber over which the guardian shade of her lover kept its nightly vigils.

How long the good old lady would have observed this promise is uncertain, for she dearly loved to talk of the marvelous, and there is a triumph in being the first to tell a frightful story; it is, however, still quoted in the neighborhood, as a memorable instance of female secrecy, that she kept it to herself for a whole week; when she was suddenly absolved from all further restraint by intelligence brought to the breakfast table one morning that the young lady was not to be found. Her room was empty—the bed had not been slept in—the window was open, and the bird had flown!

The astonishment and concern with which the intelligence was received can only be imagined by those who have witnessed the agitation which the mishaps of a great man cause among his friends. Even the poor relations paused for a moment from the indefatigable labors of the trencher; when the aunt, who had at first been struck speechless, wrung her hands, and shrieked out, "The goblin! the goblin! she's carried away by the goblin."

In a few words she related the fearful scene of the garden, and concluded that the specter must have carried off his bride. Two of the domestics corroborated the opinion, for they had heard the clattering of a horse's hoofs down the mountain about midnight, and had no doubt that it was the specter on his black charger, bear-

ing her away to the tomb. All present were struck with the direful probability; for events of the kind are extremely common in Germany, as many well authenticated histories bear witness.

What a lamentable situation was that of the poor baron! What a heart-rending dilemma for a fond father, and a member of the great family of Katzenellenbogen! His only daughter had either been rapt away to the grave, or he was to have some wood-demon for a son-in-law, and, perchance, a troop of goblin grandchildren. As usual, he was completely bewildered, and all the castle in an uproar. The men were ordered to take horse, and scour every road and path and glen of the Odenwald. The baron himself had just drawn on his jack-boots, girded on his sword, and was about to mount his steed to sally forth on the doubtful quest, when he was brought to a pause by a new apparition. A lady was seen approaching the castle, mounted on a palfrey, attended by a cavalier on horseback. She galloped up to the gate, sprang from her horse, and falling at the baron's feet, embraced his knees. It was his lost daughter, and her companion—the Specter Bridegroom! The baron was astounded. He looked at his daughter, then at the specter, and almost doubted the evidence of his senses. The latter, too, was wonderfully improved in his appearance since his visit to the world of spirits. His dress was splendid, and set off a noble figure of manly symmetry. He was no longer pale and melancholy. His fine countenance was flushed with the glow of youth, and joy rioted in his large dark eye.

The mystery was soon cleared up. The cavalier (for, in truth, as you must have known all the while, he was no goblin) announced himself as Sir Herman von Starkenfaust. He related his adventure with the young count. He told how he had hastened to the castle to deliver the unwelcome tidings, but that the eloquence of the baron had interrupted him in every attempt to tell his tale. How the sight of the bride had completely captivated him, and that to pass a few hours near her, he had tacitly suffered the mistake to continue. How he had been sorely perplexed in what way to make a decent retreat, until the baron's goblin stories had suggested his eccentric exit. How, fearing the feudal hostility of the family, he had repeated his visits by stealth—had haunted the garden beneath the young lady's window—had wooed—had won—had borne away in triumph—and, in a word, had wedded the fair.

Under any other circumstances the baron would have been inflexible, for he was tenacious of paternal authority, and devoutly obstinate in all family feuds; but he loved his daughter; he had lamented her as lost; he rejoiced to find her still alive; and, though her husband was of a hostile house, yet, thank heaven, he was not a goblin. There was something, it must be acknowledged, that did not exactly accord with his notions of strict veracity, in the joke the knight had passed upon him of his being a dead man; but several old friends present, who had served in the wars, assured him that every stratagem was excusable in love, and that the cavalier was entitled to especial privilege, having lately served as a trooper.

Matters, therefore, were happily arranged. The baron pardoned the young couple on the spot. The revels at the castle were resumed. The poor relations overwhelmed this new member of the family with loving kindness; he was so gallant, so generous—and so rich. The aunts, it is true, were somewhat scandalized that their system of strict seclusion and passive obedience should be so badly exemplified, but attributed it all to their negligence in not having the windows

grated. One of them was particularly mortified at having her marvelous story marred, and that the only specter she had ever seen should turn out a counterfeit; but the niece seemed perfectly happy at having found him substantial flesh and blood—and so the story ends.

The Fad for Relics

MEDIEVAL Christians had a craze for collecting relics, or supposed relics, of saints and sacred events; and they did not hesitate to claim relics of ethereal beings—as for instance, a feather from the wing of the Archangel Michael. Every abbey and church in Europe had its teeth, bones and bits of clothing from some holy personage. Relics even became an article of commerce. Canute, King of England in the Eleventh Century, commissioned his agent in Rome to purchase St. Augustine's arm for one hundred talents of silver and one of gold.

By the presence of these relics many miracles were said to have been performed—particularly by those which were believed to be portions of the body of Christ; but it is said that in some abbeys, when the saints did not readily answer prayers, the monks flogged the relics vigorously in the hope of bringing them to compliance.

A monk of St. Anthony, on a visit to to Jerusalem, saw there several relics "among which were a bit of the finger of the Holy Ghost, as sound and entire as it had ever been; the snout of the seraphim that appeared to St. Francis; one of the nails of a cherubim; one of the ribs of the *verbum caro factum* (the Word made flesh); some rays of the star which appeared to the three Wise Men in the East; a phial of St. Michael's sweat when he was fighting against the devil; a hem of St. Joseph's garment, which he wore when he cleaved wood, etc.; all of which," concludes the narrator, "I have brought very devoutly with me home."

King Henry III of England (1216-1272) once summoned all the great in the kingdom to come to London, and upon their arrival told them that the Great Master of the Templars had sent him a phial of the blood of Christ, which he had shed upon the cross—attested as genuine by the seals of the Patriarch of Jerusalem and others. The relic was carried in solemn procession to Westminster Abbey the next day, and the historian adds that though the road between St. Paul's and Westminster was very rough and miry, the king, as he rode along, kept his eyes constantly fixed on the sacred phial. Hales, in Gloucestershire, also possessed some of the blood of Christ.

The Eyrie

(Continued from page 724)

And then, rushing toward our solar system out of space comes another sun, and Earth and its companion planets are threatened with destruction in a titanic holocaust of crashing suns. And in Mr. Hamilton's latest story, *The Star-Stealers,* just received and read with mounting enthusiasm in the editorial rooms of WEIRD TALES, he sends his audacious vision out into the unplumbed depths of outer space, *a million years in the future.* Mr. Hamilton breaks away from all earthly standards in picturing the inhabitants of his titanic dark sun out in the lightless reaches of space outside our universe. Even the strange brain-men of Algol and the birdlike people of the worlds about Sirius, though utterly unhuman, bear some remote likeness to earthly standards, but on the dark star all is different—even speech is unknown. This utterly strange and thrilling tale, we believe, sets a new high mark in pseudo-scientific fiction, surpassing any scientific story every written before. Then we have also two other marvelous stories of Mr. Hamilton's, for early publication in WEIRD TALES, that are set right here on Earth—*The Polar Doom,* a startling tale of a strange city buried under the arctic ice; and *The Abysmal Invaders,* a tale of a dark horror out of long-dead ages that rose to sweep upon the world in an avalanche of destruction and death.

"In the April issue," writes H. Warner Munn, author of *The Chain* and *The Werewolf of Ponkert,* "there are two stories which strongly impressed me: *Whispers,* by Robert S. Carr, and *Medusa,* by R. W. Jimerson. *Whispers* is by far the best story in so far as the creation and holding of suspense is concerned, but after all its only difference in theme from many other tales of the same nature is the suggestion that, after all, *it* was not *quite* a bat. *Medusa,* however, is a refreshing departure from the ordinary. I wonder why more stories haven't been written on the subject of atavism? There are immense possibilities in the idea. So, I go on record as voting for *Medusa* as the best story in the April issue."

"I found *Medusa* in the April issue to be a very remarkable story, and one that will leave an impression with its reader for some time," writes Jerry H. Laird, of Leadville, Colorado. "I wonder if Murray Leinster really knows the historical background of his story, *The Strange People,* and if he realizes that the main issue is more truth that fiction."

E. L. Dumas, of Chicago, writes to The Eyrie: "I have read every issue of WEIRD TALES, and I find all the stories interesting, although naturally some better than others, particularly stories by Seabury Quinn, one of the few authors who can have their hero a braggart and still be liked."

"Well of all the silliest things!" exclaims J. Wasso, Jr., of Pen Argyle, Pennsylvania, in a letter to The Eyrie. "There must be something radically wrong with that person who knocked *The Infidel's Daughter* as propaganda.

(Continued on page 858)

FUTURE ISSUES

A WEALTH of fascinating stories is scheduled for early publication in WEIRD TALES, the unique magazine. The brilliant success of WEIRD TALES has been founded on its unrivaled, superb stories of the strange, the grotesque and the terrible—gripping stories that stimulate the imagination and send shivers of apprehension up the spine—tales that take the reader from the humdrum world about us into a deathless realm of fancy—marvelous tales so thrillingly told that they seem very real. WEIRD TALES prints the best weird fiction in the world today. If Poe were alive he would undoubtedly be a contributor. In addition to creepy mystery stories, ghost-tales, stories of devil-worship, witchcraft, vampires and strange monsters, this magazine also prints the cream of the weird-scientific fiction that is written today—tales of the spaces between the worlds, surgical stories, and stories that scan the future with the eye of prophecy. Among the amazing tales in the next few issues will be:

CRASHING SUNS, *by Edmond Hamilton*
A thrilling weird-scientific tale of a hundred thousand years in the future, when the planets of our solar system are threatened with destruction, like flowers in a furnace, in a titanic holocaust of crashing suns.

RED SHADOWS, *by Robert E. Howard*
Through medieval Europe to the shores of Africa Solomon Kane pursued the French murderer and bandit, Le Loup, and found him at last in the witch-festivities in Songa'e cannibal hut. A powerful weird tale with plenty of action and eery, blood-freezing incidents.

THE MAN IN THE GREEN COAT, *by Eli Colter*
An utterly strange and unusual ghost-tale, in the best vein of this well-known author. A fascinating tale of the supernatural.

VULTURE CRAG, *by Everil Worrell*
Count Zolani projected eighteen men and women through space, while their physical bodies lay in his mortuary on that lonely crag, and around the building the vultures wheeled to the attack. A weird-scientific story with a shuddery ending.

THE OATH OF HUL JOK, *by Nictzin Dyalhis*
Weirdly and unbelievably terrible was the lot of mankind on the green star, Earth, when the war-lords of Venus came hither—a brilliant and thrilling story of thousands of years in the future, by the author of "When the Green Star Waned."

THE GREEN MONSTER, *by Arthur Macom*
An eery tale of maes hypnotism, through which slithers the Green Monster that turned on its creator and leaped out of the shuddering dark to spread horror and disaster and death.

THE SPACE-EATERS, *by Frank Belknap Long, Jr.*
One of the eerlest and most shuddery of all weird stories—a tale of a tremendous menace that closes in upon the earth from outside our solar system—a powerful story of strange horror and uncanny terror, that will make your flesh creep as you read it.

THESE are but a few of the many super-excellent stories in store for the readers of WEIRD TALES. To make sure of getting your copy each month, and thus avoid the embarrassment of finding your favorite news stand sold out, just fill out the coupon below and let us send it right to your home. That's the safest way.

WEIRD TALES,
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Enclosed find $2.50 for 1 year's subscription to "Weird Tales," to begin with the July issue. ($3.00 in Canada.)

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(Continued from page 856)

WEIRD TALES is for intelligent people who know how to enjoy good fiction without making vague and absurd charges. We, the readers, are very proud of 'our own' magazine and the high standard maintained by it."

May V. Illingworth, of Brookline, Massachusetts, writes: "For five years I have read WEIRD TALES without missing a single copy, and I still maintain that Seabury Quinn is the star among your writers. His latest story, *The Jewel of Seven Stones*, is a masterpiece. I am particularly interested in the Egyptian stories which you publish. They are excellent—but then the majority of the stories you publish are. And again—a word for *The Strange People*, by Murray Leinster. That is, I think, the best serial you have run for months, and I am very anxious to get the May issue in order to read the solution of the mystery."

Writes Vernon Temple, of San Francisco: "I have just finished reading your book, *The Moon Terror*, which you have reprinted from WEIRD TALES. Please put out more book reprints of your serials, for I have read no other book that gripped my interest and thrilled me as *The Moon Terror* has done. I was not acquainted with your magazine when *The Moon Terror* appeared as a serial in its pages, so I wouldn't have been able to read it if you hadn't reprinted it as a book—and I wouldn't have missed it for anything."

Readers, what is your favorite story in this issue? Your favorite in the April WEIRD TALES, as shown by your votes, is *The Jewel of Seven Stones*, by Seabury Quinn; and two other stories are in an exact tie for second place as this issue goes to press: *The Chain*, by H. Warner Munn, and *Whispers*, by Robert S. Carr.

MY FAVORITE STORIES IN THE JUNE WEIRD TALES ARE:

Story	Remarks
(1)----------	----------
(2)----------	----------
(3)----------	----------

I do not like the following stories:

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(2)---------- ----------

It will help us to know what kind of stories you want in Weird Tales if you will fill out this coupon and mail it to The Eyrie, Weird Tales, 450 E. Ohio St., Chicago, Ill.

Reader's name and address:

The Elemental Law

(Continued from page 766)

any more than they could entirely stop thinking of it.

"An enormous bird, almost like the fabled roc, might have done it," Wildreth would say, trying to think so. "Swooping down for a victim, but a little afraid of the three of us and the big plane, and so only striking with beak or talons, and rising——"

"But the shadow, the shadow of a plane—the clear, square outline——"

Helen would say as much as that, and fall silent. Into the stillness would obtrude unpleasant memories of Van Ryder's hoarse voice, telling his horrible story in the sunlight; unpleasant memories of the visions his voice had made real before them, of dead faces in a dark pool of death, and dead figures re-enacting crime-tragedies of days that were dead, and centuries that were dead, and among them the slaying of a comrade in the manner of Van Ryder's own going.

Thin as a cloud that may be scattered by a ray of sunshine is the veil that lies between the things which are seen and the things which are unseen; and no man may say what those things so mercifully hidden are, or what is the manner of their working upon those souls to which dark passions give them access.

The Devil's Martyr

(Continued from page 736)

mark on a witch she has no feeling, at any rate Father Sebastian says so, and if she doesn't scream when the needle is pushed far into her flesh they know they have found the mark. Even so she may not confess. But there are ways—I think perhaps they will lock her legs between two iron plates and screw them together. They can break the bones and start the marrow from them——" He paused expectantly.

"I will confess. Only save her!" Erik moaned.

The monk called, and a clerk entered carrying a parchment.

"Write down," the almoner commanded, "that Erik, Count of Visby, confesses of his own free will that he has entered into a compact with the Devil——"

Erik nodded. "Save her," he whispered.

"Wait—the said Count Erik now renounces the Devil and all his works and is ready to expiate his sin in whatever way we decide to recommend to the secular arm."

With shaking fingers Erik signed this, and Father Laurence started to leave when he was met by Father Sebastian, white and strained.

"Has he confessed?"

"He has."

"Praise God!" the other declared ecstatically. "I have obtained grace for him from the Bishop, should be confess."

Erik burst out, "Father Laurence just promised me that Karin would not be tortured."

Father Sebastian looked blank. "The young witch? But she has been tortured already. As she would not confess she is to die by fire. Think about your own immortal soul, my poor boy!"

Crying out, "He tricked me, and I recant my confession; I lied, I said what I did only to save her! I lied, I lied!" Erik fell unconscious to the floor, looking suddenly as pallid and thin as he had looked a month ago.

Father Sebastian bent over him tenderly, tears flowing.

"This is very terrible——"

"It is—I can not understand," said the almoner, "why the Bishop should have changed. When I left him he understood he could not pardon even his own nephew if he confessed so abominable a crime. Especially as the accomplice must die——"

"She dies because she would *not* confess. Then there can be no mercy. That is the law. Who knows it better than I? Alas, if Erik persists in recanting his confession, he too must die for his soul's sake. But I may yet save him!" He buried his face in his hands.

The placid, practical face of the almoner twisted suddenly into fury. He thrust out an unyielding jaw and hurried off to hammer the Bishop again.

When Erik recovered consciousness he found he was clothed in his former black garb. The two monks were both beside him, but as he looked from one to the other they seemed changed. They were mild and grave. He determined to test them.

"I do not confess," he said defiantly.

Father Sebastian bent his head.

"I accept that," he said.

"What will you do with me?"

The almoner said hastily, "You will soon be of age now, and the Bishop, although he is not well and

can not say good-bye to you, desires us to take you to Visby Castle."

Erik rose unsteadily. He could hardly walk, but they were ready to lead him. Father Sebastian supported him down the stairs. In the courtyard a carriage was waiting. They drove away in stony silence through the long tomb of sad dark trees, and he glanced at the little fountain where the sun was bright on the water and the statue sat gray and pensive. His thoughts hovered like the dragon-flies above the tragic contents of his mind without touching it, without remembering anything except when they rolled cumbrously into the great park of Visby full of gracious open spaces and gay with flowers. It suddenly came to him that here he had been happy. He pointed out childishly that there he had learned to shoot arrows at a target, and there he had learned to ride. But his companions were grimly still.

As if wandering in a dream he walked between them into the castle, and then Father Laurence opened a door. Erik stepped back. The cry of a terrified animal broke from him.

The room was hung from ceiling to ground, from door to window, in long, dead, merciless folds of black, and it was empty—empty except for a low block in the center, and by this there stood immobile a masked man in black with a cold bright sword in his hand. His eyes rolled white through the mask and he took hold of the boy.

Father Laurence read in a voice of iron from a large parchment.

"Erik, Count of Visby, as you are a nobleman and a kinsman of his, the Bishop has recommended you to the favor of death by the sword, although the death for an unrepentant sorcerer is by fire. Executioner, do your duty."

Then he strode out, his sandals clattering on the stone.

Erik tore himself loose. The

ultimate fear crazed him. He shrieked: "Father Sebastian, I confess, I renounce! Let me live!"

The monk took him in his arms. "You shall live, by all the Martyrs!" he exclaimed, but even as he held the boy he felt him cease shaking. He saw him raise his head, saw the color come back into the pale handsome face, saw that Erik was listening intently to something. He too listened, but heard nothing, except a starling that fluted sweetly on a branch beside the open window. Erik stood straight now, with a radiant, exalted air.

"Forgive me," he said, as if to an invisible presence; and then to Father Sebastian, "I do not renounce the Devil. I *am* his. If I were not I would be. I love him. Make me his martyr."

With sure step he walked over, knelt and laid his head on the block. He smoothed the brown wavy hair with a glint of gold in it down over the dark-blue eyes.

Father Sebastian hid his face.

* * * * * * *

Afterward he wrote his side of this true story in the Latin chronicles of the Bishopric, and his last words were:

"And so, without a groan of pain or a word of piety, his head fell to the ground—God grant that his soul did not fall into eternal fire."

STATEMENT OF THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, CIRCULATION, ETC., REQUIRED BY THE ACT OF CONGRESS OF AUGUST 24, 1912,

Of Weird Tales, published monthly at Indianapolis, Indiana, for April 1, 1928.

State of Illinois } ss.
County of Cook }

Before me, a notary public in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared Wm. R. Sprenger, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the Business Manager of the Weird Tales and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management (and if a daily paper, the circulation), etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption required by the Act of August 24, 1912, embodied in section 411, Postal Laws and Regulations, printed on the reverse of this form, to wit:

1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are:

Publisher—Popular Fiction Publishing Company, 2457 E. Washington St., Indianapolis, Ind.

Editor—Farnsworth Wright, 450 E. Ohio St., Chicago, Ill.

Managing Editor—None.

Business Manager—William R. Sprenger. 450 E. Ohio St., Chicago, Ill.

2. That the owner is: (If owned by a corporation, its name and address must be stated and also immediately thereunder the names and addresses of stockholders owning or holding one per cent or more of total amount of stock. If not owned by a corporation, the names and addresses of the individual owners must be given. If owned by a firm, company, or other unincorporated concern, its name and address, as well as those of each individual member must be given.)

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5. That the average number of copies of each issue of this publication sold or distributed, through the mails or otherwise, to paid subscribers during the six months preceding the date shown above is_____. (This information is required from daily publications only.)

WM. R. SPRENGER,
Business Manager.

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 30th day of March, 1928. JAMES H. COREY,
[SEAL] Notary Public.
My commission expires July 12, 1928.

The Serpent Woman

(Continued from page 752)

Monsieur and Madame Candace of two thousand dollars, I know. I have seen such cases. He have asked in his letter that we throw the money from an automobile. 'Ah-ha, Monsieur the Kidnaper,' I say, 'Jules de Grandin shall throw you something you do not expect.'

"I go to New York and have an artizan make me a satchel which is only one great tear-gas bomb disguised. In its top are many tiny holes, and inside its metal interior is much tear-gas, pumped in at great pressure. The handle is like a trigger, and the minute anyone grasps it the holes in the bag's top are opened and the gas rushes out, blinding the person who holds the handles. Remember, Friend Trowbridge, how I warned you not to touch those handles?

"Very good. 'But what connection have the snake with the stealing of the child?' I want to know. Not much, I believe, yet one thing make me stop and think. Was it only coincidence that those tracks appear in Madame Candace's garden the night her little boy was stolen? Perhaps so; perhaps not. At any rate, Jules de Grandin does not sleep when wakefulness is necessary. I have made also a fork something like the notched sticks the Burmese use to catch the great snakes of their country—the snakes which later make shoes for the pretty ladies. Now, I am ready for human kidnapers or reptile devourers of children.

"We go to the woods as the note directs, we fling out the bag, and the little woman who stole to refill her aching, empty heart, is caught by the fumes of my so clever bomb-satchel.

"So far all is well, but it was as well I had my snake-stick with me,

for the excellent Beppo, who doubtless was a most affectionate snake, was also there, and I, not being aware of his good qualities, was obliged to exterminate him in self-defense. *Eh bien,* Beppo is not the first to die because of evil appearances.

"Friend Trowbridge, I think our work is done. We have restored the little boy to his parents; we have made one great fool of that so odious Perkinson person who suspected Madame Candace of killing her son; we have apprehended the kidnaper. Let us go."

He bowed to the company, strode to the door, then paused abruptly, a half-diffident, ingratiating smile on his face. "Monsieur Candace," he asked, "as a favor to me, if you feel at all obligated for the little I have done, I would ask that you be merciful to the poor, bereaved mother when her trial comes up. Remember, though she sinned against you greatly by stealing your child, her temptation was also great."

"Trial, hell!" Candace retorted. "There isn't going to be any trial. D'ye think I'd have the heart to prosecute her after what she told us at the barracks? Not much! As far as I'm concerned, she can go free now."

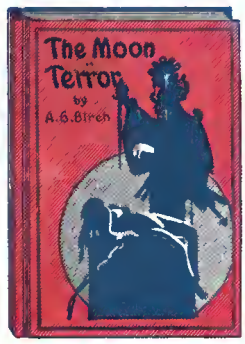
"*Eh bien,* Trowbridge, my friend," de Grandin confided as we walked down the garden path, "I do admire that Monsieur Candace immensely. Truly, the great heart of America is reflected in the great hearts of her citizens."

As we reached the waiting car he paused with a chuckle. "And the great thirst of the great desert is reflected in Jules de Grandin," he confided. "Come, make haste, my friend, I pray. I would imbibe one of your so glorious gin rickies before I bid myself good night."

Missing Ad Page

What Would You Do

IF you had received thousands of letters requesting you to reprint a certain story which was too long to be republished in the magazine, what would you do? THE MOON TERROR, by A. G. Birch, which appeared as a serial in WEIRD TALES in 1923, is too long to republish in our magazine consistent with our policy. As a matter of service to the multitude of readers who have requested us to reprint this story, we have had it printed in cloth-bound book form to sell at the publishers' price of $1.50 per copy. This fascinating book will be sent to you direct; we pay the postage.



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THE MOON TERROR was such a thrilling story that the entire reserve stock of the issue containing the first part was sold out on special orders to those who were not fortunate enough to start the story from the beginning, but began to read it with the second installment. It narrates the sensational attempt of a group of Chinese scientists to obtain rulership of the world by a tremendous threat against the very existence of the earth. The diabolical methods by which they put their scheme into execution, the frantic race across the ocean to circumvent them, the weird and exciting adventures that befell, make one of the most gripping and fascinating novels ever written.

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