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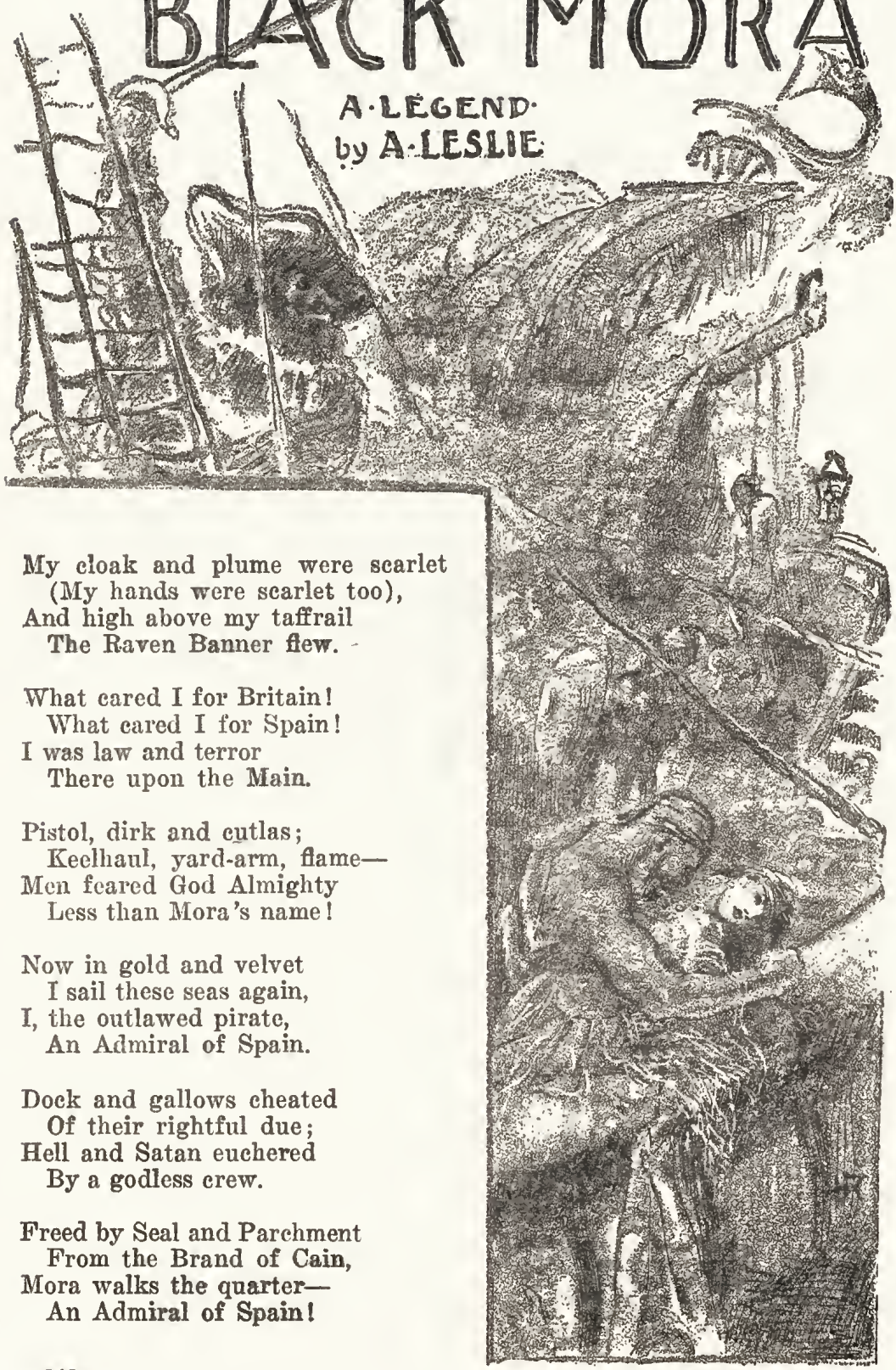
BLACK MORA

A·LEGEND·
by A·LESLIE·



My cloak and plume were scarlet
(My hands were scarlet too),
And high above my taffrail
The Raven Banner flew.

What cared I for Britain!
What cared I for Spain!
I was law and terror
There upon the Main.

Pistol, dirk and cutlas;
Keelhaul, yard-arm, flame—
Men feared God Almighty
Less than Mora's name!

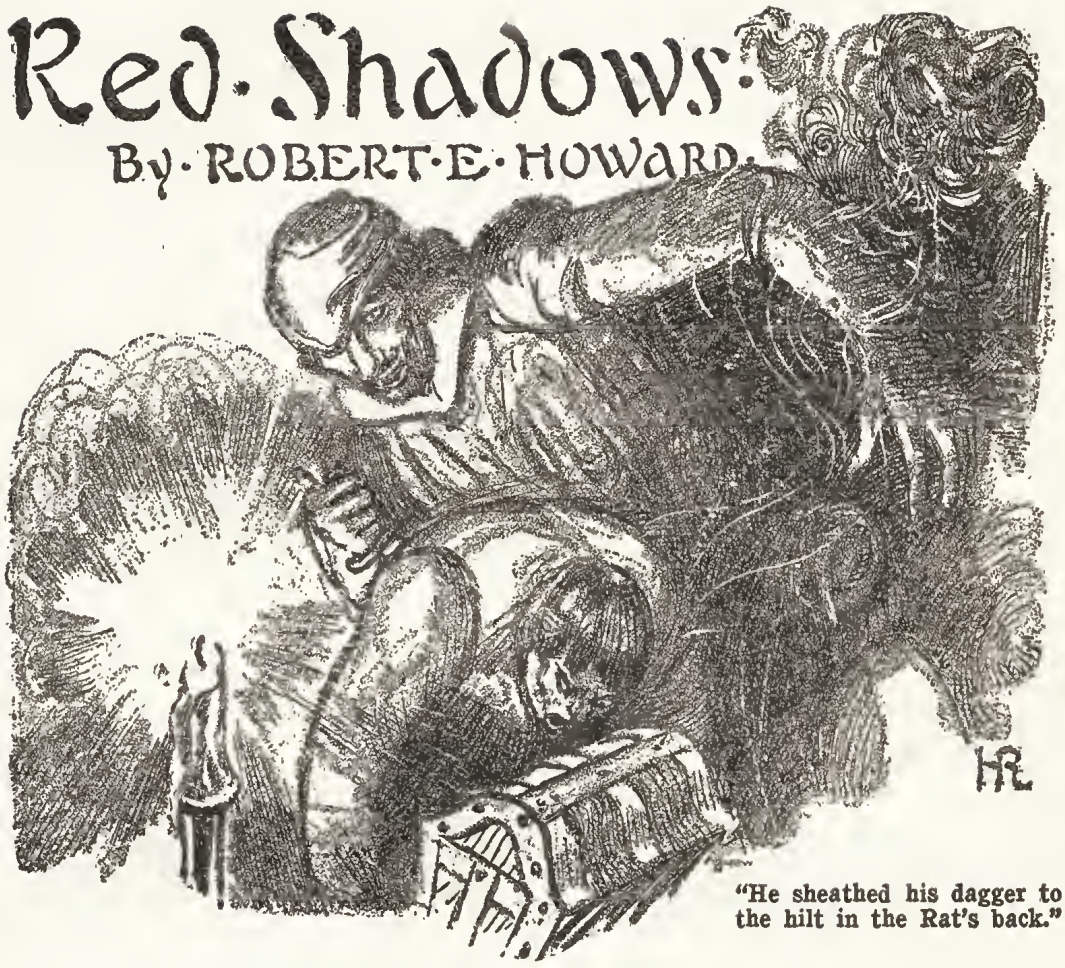
Now in gold and velvet
I sail these seas again,
I, the outlawed pirate,
An Admiral of Spain.

Dock and gallows cheated
Of their rightful due;
Hell and Satan euchered
By a godless crew.

Freed by Seal and Parchment
From the Brand of Cain,
Mora walks the quarter—
An Admiral of Spain!

Red Shadows

By Robert E. Howard



"He sheathed his dagger to the hilt in the Rat's back."

1. *The Coming of Solomon*

THE moonlight shimmered hazily, making silvery mists of illusion among the shadowy trees. A faint breeze whispered down the valley, bearing a shadow that was not of the moon-mist. A faint scent of smoke was apparent.

The man whose long, swinging strides, unhurried yet unswerving, had carried him for many a mile since sunrise, stopped suddenly. A movement in the trees had caught his attention, and he moved silently toward the shadows, a hand resting lightly on the hilt of his long, slim rapier.

Warily he advanced, his eyes striving to pierce the darkness that brooded under the trees. This was a wild and menacing country; death might be lurking under those trees. Then his hand fell away from the hilt and he leaned forward. Death indeed was there, but not in such shape as might cause him fear.

"The fires of Hades!" he murmured. "A girl! What has harmed you, child? Be not afraid of me."

The girl looked up at him, her face like a dim white rose in the dark.

"You—who are—you?" her words came in gasps.

"Naught but a wanderer, a landless man, but a friend to all in need." The gentle voice sounded somehow incongruous, coming from the man.

The girl sought to prop herself up on her elbow, and instantly he knelt

and raised her to a sitting position, her head resting against his shoulder. His hand touched her breast and came away red and wet.

"Tell me." His voice was soft, soothing, as one speaks to a babe.

"Le Loup," she gasped, her voice swiftly growing weaker. "He and his men—descended upon our village—a mile up the valley. They robbed—slew—burned——"

"That, then, was the smoke I scented," muttered the man. "Go on, child."

"I ran. He, the Wolf, pursued me—and—caught me——" The words died away in a shuddering silence.

"I understand, child. Then——?"

"Then—he—he—stabbed me—with his dagger—oh, blessed saints!—mercy——"

Suddenly the slim form went limp. The man eased her to the earth, and touched her brow lightly.

"Dead!" he muttered.

Slowly he rose, mechanically wiping his hands upon his cloak. A dark scowl had settled on his somber brow. Yet he made no wild, reckless vow, swore no oath by saints or devils.

"Men shall die for this," he said coldly.

2. *The Lair of the Wolf*

"You are a fool!" The words came in a cold snarl that curdled the hearer's blood.

He who had just been named a fool lowered his eyes sullenly without answer.

"You and all the others I lead!" The speaker leaned forward, his fist pounding emphasis on the rude table between them. He was a tall, rangy-built man, supple as a leopard and with a lean, cruel, predatory face. His eyes danced and glittered with a kind of reckless mockery.

The fellow spoken to replied sullenly, "This Solomon Kane is a demon from hell, I tell you."

"Faugh! Dolt! He is a man—who will die from a pistol ball or a sword thrust."

"So thought Jean, Juan and La Costa," answered the other grimly. "Where are they? Ask the mountain wolves that tore the flesh from their dead bones. Where does this Kane hide? We have searched the mountains and the valleys for leagues, and we have found no trace. I tell you, Le Loup, he comes up from hell. I knew no good would come from hanging that friar a moon ago."

The Wolf strummed impatiently upon the table. His keen face, despite lines of wild living and dissipation, was the face of a thinker. The superstitions of his followers affected him not at all.

"Faugh! I say again. The fellow has found some cavern or secret vale of which we do not know where he hides in the day."

"And at night he sallies forth and slays us," gloomily commented the other. "He hunts us down as a wolf hunts deer—by God, Le Loup, you name yourself Wolf but I think you have met at last a fiercer and more crafty wolf than yourself! The first we know of this man is when we find Jean, the most desperate bandit unhung, nailed to a tree with his own dagger through his breast, and the letters S. L. K. carved upon his dead cheeks. Then the Spaniard Juan is struck down, and after we find him he lives long enough to tell us that the slayer is an Englishman, Solomon Kane, who has sworn to destroy our entire band! What then? La Costa, a swordsman second only to yourself, goes forth swearing to meet this Kane. By the demons of perdition, it seems he met him! For we found his sword-pierced corpse upon a cliff. What now? Are we all to fall before this English fiend?"

"True, our best men have been done to death by him," mused the

bandit chief. "Soon the rest return from that little trip to the hermit's; then we shall see. Kane can not hide forever. Then—ha, what was that?"

The two turned swiftly as a shadow fell across the table. Into the entrance of the cave that formed the bandit lair, a man staggered. His eyes were wide and staring; he reeled on buckling legs, and a dark red stain dyed his tunic. He came a few tottering steps forward, then pitched across the table, sliding off onto the floor.

"Hell's devils!" cursed the Wolf, hauling him upright and propping him in a chair. "Where are the rest, curse you?"

"Dead! All dead!"

"How? Satan's curses on you, speak!" The Wolf shook the man savagely, the other bandit gazing on in wide-eyed horror.

"We reached the hermit's hut just as the moon rose," the man muttered. "I stayed outside—to watch—the others went in—to torture the hermit—to make him reveal—the hiding-place—of his gold."

"Yes, yes! Then what?" The Wolf was raging with impatience.

"Then the world turned red—the hut went up in a roar and a red rain flooded the valley—through it I saw—the hermit and a tall man clad all in black—coming from the trees——"

"Solomon Kane!" gasped the bandit. "I knew it! I——"

"Silence, fool!" snarled the chief. "Go on!"

"I fled—Kane pursued—wounded me—but I outran—him—got—here—first——"

The man slumped forward on the table.

"Saints and devils!" raged the Wolf. "What does he look like, this Kane?"

"Like—Satan——"

The voice trailed off in silence. The dead man slid from the table to lie in a red heap upon the floor.

"Like Satan!" babbled the other bandit. "I told you! 'Tis the Horned One himself! I tell you——"

He ceased as a frightened face peered in at the cave entrance.

"Kane?"

"Aye." The Wolf was too much at sea to lie. "Keep close watch, La Mon; in a moment the Rat and I will join you."

The face withdrew and Le Loup turned to the other.

"This ends the band," said he. "You, I, and that thief La Mon are all that are left. What would you suggest?"

The Rat's pallid lips barely formed the word: "Flight!"

"You are right. Let us take the gems and gold from the chests and flee, using the secret passageway."

"And La Mon?"

"He can watch until we are ready to flee. Then—why divide the treasure three ways?"

A faint smile touched the Rat's malevolent features. Then a sudden thought smote him.

"He," indicating the corpse on the floor, "said, 'I got here first.' Does that mean Kane was pursuing him here?" And as the Wolf nodded impatiently the other turned to the chests with chattering haste.

The flickering candle on the rough table lighted up a strange and wild scene. The light, uncertain and dancing, gleamed redly in the slowly widening lake of blood in which the dead man lay; it danced upon the heaps of gems and coins emptied hastily upon the floor from the brass-bound chests that ranged the walls; and it glittered in the eyes of the Wolf with the same gleam which sparkled from his sheathed dagger.

The chests were empty, their treasure lying in a shimmering mass upon the blood-stained floor. The Wolf stopped and listened. Outside was silence. There was no moon, and Le Loup's keen imagination pictured the dark slayer, Solomon Kane, gliding

through the blackness, a shadow among shadows. He grinned crookedly; this time the Englishman would be foiled.

"There is a chest yet unopened," said he, pointing.

The Rat, with a muttered exclamation of surprize, bent over the chest indicated. With a single, catlike motion, the Wolf sprang upon him, sheathing his dagger to the hilt in the Rat's back, between the shoulders. The Rat sagged to the floor without a sound.

"Why divide the treasure two ways?" murmured Le Loup, wiping his blade upon the dead man's doublet. "Now for La Mon."

He stepped toward the door; then stopped and shrank back.

AT FIRST he thought that it was the shadow of a man who stood in the entrance; then he saw that it was a man himself, though so dark and still he stood that a fantastic semblance of shadow was lent him by the guttering candle.

A tall man, as tall as Le Loup he was, clad in black from head to foot, in plain, close-fitting garments that somehow suited the somber face. Long arms and broad shoulders betokened the swordsman, as plainly as the long rapier in his hand. The features of the man were saturnine and gloomy. A kind of dark pallor lent him a ghostly appearance in the uncertain light, an effect heightened by the satanic darkness of his lowering brows. Eyes, large, deep-set and unblinking, fixed their gaze upon the bandit, and looking into them, Le Loup was unable to decide what color they were. Strangely, the mephistophelean trend of the lower features was offset by a high, broad forehead, though this was partly hidden by a featherless hat.

That forehead marked the dreamer, the idealist, the introvert, just as the eyes and the thin, straight nose betrayed the fanatic. An observer would have been struck by the eyes of the two men who stood there, facing each other. Eyes of both betokened untold deeps of power, but there the resemblance ceased.

The eyes of the bandit were hard, almost opaque, with a curious scintillant shallowness that reflected a thousand changing lights and gleams, like some strange gem; there was mockery in those eyes, cruelty and recklessness.

The eyes of the man in black, on the other hand, deep-set and staring from under prominent brows, were cold but deep; gazing into them, one had the impression of looking into countless fathoms of ice.

Now the eyes clashed, and the Wolf, who was used to being feared, felt a strange coolness on his spine. The sensation was new to him—a new thrill to one who lived for thrills, and he laughed suddenly.

"You are Solomon Kane, I suppose?" he asked, managing to make his question sound politely incurious.

"I am Solomon Kane." The voice was resonant and powerful. "Are you prepared to meet your God?"

"Why, *Monsieur,*" Le Loup answered, bowing, "I assure you I am as ready as I ever will be. I might ask *Monsieur* the same question."

"No doubt I stated my inquiry wrongly," Kane said grimly. "I will change it: Are you prepared to meet your master, the Devil?"

"As to that, *Monsieur*"—Le Loup examined his finger nails with elaborate unconcern—"I must say that I can at present render a most satisfactory account to his Horned Excellency, though really I have no intention of so doing—for a while at least."

Le Loup did not wonder as to the fate of La Mon; Kane's presence in the cave was sufficient answer that did not need the trace of blood on his rapier to verify it.

"What I wish to know, *Monsieur,*" said the bandit, "is why in the

Devil's name have you harassed my band as you have, and how did you destroy that last set of fools?"

"Your last question is easily answered, sir," Kane replied. "I myself had the tale spread that the hermit possessed a store of gold, knowing that would draw your scum as carrion draws vultures. For days and nights I have watched the hut, and tonight, when I saw your villains coming, I warned the hermit, and together we went among the trees back of the hut. Then, when the rogues were inside, I struck flint and steel to the train I had laid, and flame ran through the trees like a red snake until it reached the powder I had placed beneath the hut floor. Then the hut and thirteen sinners went to hell in a great roar of flame and smoke. True, one escaped, but him I had slain in the forest had not I stumbled and fallen upon a broken root, which gave him time to elude me."

"*Monsieur,*" said Le Loup with another low bow, "I grant you the admiration I must needs bestow on a brave and shrewd foeman. Yet tell me this: Why have you followed me as a wolf follows deer?"

"Some moons ago," said Kane, his frown becoming more menacing, "you and your fiends raided a small village down the valley. You know the details better than I. There was a girl there, a mere child, who, hoping to escape your lust, fled up the valley; but you, you jackal of hell, you caught her and left her, violated and dying. I found her there, and above her dead form I made up my mind to hunt you down and kill you."

"H'm," mused the Wolf. "Yes, I remember the wench. *Mon Dieu,* so the softer sentiments enter into the affair! *Monsieur,* I had not thought you an amorous man; be not jealous, good fellow, there are many more wenches."

"Le Loup, take care!" Kane exclaimed, a terrible menace in his voice, "I have never yet done a man to death by torture, but by God, sir, you tempt me!"

The tone, and more especially the unexpected oath, coming as it did from Kane, slightly sobered Le Loup; his eyes narrowed and his hand moved toward his rapier. The air was tense for an instant; then the Wolf relaxed elaborately.

"Who was the girl?" he asked idly, "Your wife?"

"I never saw her before," answered Kane.

"*Nom d'un nom!*" swore the bandit. "What sort of a man are you, *Monsieur,* who takes up a feud of this sort merely to avenge a wench unknown to you?"

"That, sir, is my own affair; it is sufficient that I do so."

Kane could not have explained, even to himself, nor did he ever seek an explanation within himself. A true fanatic, his promptings were reasons enough for his actions.

"You are right, *Monsieur.*" Le Loup was sparring now for time; casually he edged backward inch by inch, with such consummate acting skill that he aroused no suspicion even in the hawk who watched him. "*Monsieur,*" said he, "possibly you will say that you are merely a noble cavalier, wandering about like a true Galahad, protecting the weaker; but you and I know different. There on the floor is the equivalent to an emperor's ransom. Let us divide it peaceably; then if you like not my company, why —*nom d'un nom!*—we can go our separate ways."

Kane leaned forward, a terrible brooding threat growing in his cold eyes. He seemed like a great condor about to launch himself upon his victim.

"Sir, do you assume me to be as great a villain as yourself?"

Suddenly Le Loup threw back his head, his eyes dancing and leaping with a wild mockery and a kind of insane recklessness. His shout of laughter sent the echoes flying.

"Gods of hell! No, you fool, I do not class you with myself! *Mon Dieu,* Monsieur Kane, you have a task indeed if you intend to avenge all the wenches who have known my favors!"

"Shades of death! Shall I waste time in parleying with this base scoundrel!" Kane snarled in a voice suddenly blood-thirsting, and his lean frame flashed forward like a bent bow suddenly released.

At the same instant Le Loup with a wild laugh bounded backward with a movement as swift as Kane's. His timing was perfect; his back-flung hands struck the table and hurled it aside, plunging the cave into darkness as the candle toppled and went out.

Kane's rapier sang like an arrow in the dark as he thrust blindly and ferociously.

"*Adieu,* Monsieur Galahad!" The taunt came from somewhere in front of him, but Kane, plunging toward the sound with the savage fury of baffled wrath, caromed against a blank wall that did not yield to his blow. From somewhere seemed to come an echo of a mocking laugh.

Kane whirled, eyes fixed on the dimly outlined entrance, thinking his foe would try to slip past him and out of the cave; but no form bulked there, and when his groping hands found the candle and lighted it, the cave was empty, save for himself and the dead men on the floor.

3. The Chant of the Drums

ACROSS the dusky waters the whisper came: boom, boom, boom!—a sullen reiteration. Far away and more faintly sounded a whisper of different timbre: thrum, throom, thrum! Back and forth went the vibrations as the throbbing drums spoke to each other. What tales did they carry? What monstrous secrets whispered across the sullen, shadowy reaches of the unmapped jungle?

"This, you are sure, is the bay where the Spanish ship put in?"

"Yes, *Senhor;* the negro swears this is the bay where the white man left the ship alone and went into the jungle."

Kane nodded grimly.

"Then put me ashore here, alone. Wait seven days; then if I have not returned and if you have no word of me, set sail wherever you will."

"Yes, *Senhor.*"

The waves slapped lazily against the sides of the boat that carried Kane ashore. The village that he sought was on the river bank but set back from the bay shore, the jungle hiding it from sight of the ship.

Kane had adopted what seemed the most hazardous course, that of going ashore by night, for the reason that he knew, if the man he sought were in the village, he would never reach it by day. As it was, he was taking a most desperate chance in daring the nighttime jungle, but all his life he had been used to taking desperate chances. Now he gambled his life upon the slim chance of gaining the negro village under cover of darkness and unknown to the villagers.

At the beach he left the boat with a few muttered commands, and as the rowers put back to the ship which lay anchored some distance out in the bay, he turned and engulfed himself in the blackness of the jungle. Sword in one hand, dagger in the other, he stole forward, seeking to keep pointed in the direction from which the drums still muttered and grumbled.

He went with the stealth and easy movement of a leopard, feeling his way cautiously, every nerve alert and straining, but the way was not easy. Vines tripped him and slapped him in the face, impeding his progress; he was forced to grope his way between the huge boles of towering trees, and all through the underbrush about him sounded vague and menacing rustlings and shadows of movement. Thrice his foot touched something

that moved beneath it and writhed away, and once he glimpsed the baleful glimmer of feline eyes among the trees. They vanished, however, as he advanced.

Thrum, thrum, thrum, came the ceaseless monotone of the drums: war and death (they said); blood and lust; human sacrifice and human feast! The soul of Africa (said the drums); the spirit of the jungle; the chant of the gods of outer darkness, the gods that roar and gibber, the gods men knew when dawns were young, beast-eyed, gaping-mouthed, huge-bellied, bloody-handed, the Black Gods (sang the drums).

All this and more the drums roared and bellowed to Kane as he worked his way through the forest. Somewhere in his soul a responsive chord was smitten and answered. You too are of the night (sang the drums); there is the strength of darkness, the strength of the primitive in you; come back down the ages; let us teach you, let us teach you (chanted the drums).

Kane stepped out of the thick jungle and came upon a plainly defined trail. Beyond, through the trees came the gleam of the village fires, flames glowing through the palisades. Kane walked down the trail swiftly.

He went silently and warily, sword extended in front of him, eyes straining to catch any hint of movement in the darkness ahead, for the trees loomed like sullen giants on each hand; sometimes their great branches intertwined above the trail and he could see only a slight way ahead of him.

Like a dark ghost he moved along the shadowed trail; alertly he stared and harkened; yet no warning came first to him, as a great, vague bulk rose up out of the shadows and struck him down, silently.

4. The Black God

THRUM, thrum, thrum! Somewhere, with deadening monotony, a cadence was repeated, over and over, bearing out the same theme: "Fool—fool—fool!" Now it was far away, now he could stretch out his hand and almost reach it. Now it merged with the throbbing in his head until the two vibrations were as one: "Fool—fool—fool—fool——"

The fogs faded and vanished. Kane sought to raise his hand to his head, but found that he was bound hand and foot. He lay on the floor of a hut—alone? He twisted about to view the place. No, two eyes glimmered at him from the darkness. Now a form took shape, and Kane, still mazed, believed that he looked on the man who had struck him unconscious. Yet no; this man could never strike such a blow. He was lean, withered and wrinkled. The only thing that seemed alive about him were his eyes, and they seemed like the eyes of a snake.

The man squatted on the floor of the hut, near the doorway, naked save for a loin-cloth and the usual paraphernalia of bracelets, anklets and armlets. Weird fetishes of ivory, bone and hide, animal and human, adorned his arms and legs. Suddenly and unexpectedly he spoke in English.

"Ha, you wake, white man? Why you come here, eh?"

Kane asked the inevitable question, following the habit of the Caucasian.

"You speak my language—how is that?"

The black man grinned.

"I slave—long time, me boy. Me, N'Longa, ju-ju man, me, great fetish. No black man like me! You white man, you hunt brother?"

Kane snarled. "I! Brother! I seek a man, yes."

The negro nodded. "Maybe so you find um, eh?"

"He dies!"

Again the negro grinned. "Me pow'rful ju-ju man," he announced apropos of nothing. He bent closer. "White man you hunt, eyes like a leopard, eh? Yes? Ha! ha! ha! ha! Listen, white man: man-with-eyes-of-a-leopard, he and Chief Songa make

pow'rful palaver; they blood brothers now. Say nothing, I help you; you help me, eh?"

"Why should you help me?" asked Kane suspiciously.

The ju-ju man bent closer and whispered, "White man Songa's right-hand man; Songa more pow'rful than N'Longa. White man mighty ju-ju! N'Longa's white brother kill man-with-eyes-of-a-leopard, be blood brother to N'Longa, N'Longa be more pow'rful than Songa; palaver set."

And like a dusky ghost he floated out of the hut so swiftly that Kane was not sure but that the whole affair was a dream.

Without, Kane could see the flare of fires. The drums were still booming, but close at hand the tones merged and mingled, and the impulse-producing vibrations were lost. All seemed a barbaric clamor without rime or reason, yet there was an undertone of mockery there, savage and gloating. "Lies," thought Kane, his mind still swimming, "jungle lies like jungle women that lure a man to his doom."

Two warriors entered the hut—black giants, hideous with paint and armed with crude spears. They lifted the white man and carried him out of the hut. They bore him across an open space, leaned him upright against a post and bound him there. About him, behind him and to the side, a great semicircle of black faces leered and faded in the firelight as the flames leaped and sank. There in front of him loomed a shape hideous and obscene—a black, formless thing, a grotesque parody of the human. Still, brooding, blood-stained, like the formless soul of Africa, the horror, the Black God.

And in front and to each side, upon roughly carven thrones of teakwood, sat two men. He who sat upon the right was a black man, huge, ungainly, a gigantic and unlovely mass of dusky flesh and muscles. Small, hog-like eyes blinked out over sin-marked cheeks; huge, flabby red lips pursed in fleshly haughtiness.

The other——

"Ah, *Monsieur*, we meet again." The speaker was far from being the debonair villain who had taunted Kane in the cavern among the mountains. His clothes were rags; there were more lines in his face; he had sunk lower in the years that had passed. Yet his eyes still gleamed and danced with their old recklessness and his voice held the same mocking timbre.

"The last time I heard that accursed voice," said Kane calmly, "was in a cave, in darkness, whence you fled like a hunted rat."

"Aye, under different conditions," answered Le Loup imperturbably. "What did you do after blundering about like an elephant in the dark?"

Kane hesitated, then: "I left the mountain——"

"By the front entrance? Yes? I might have known you were too stupid to find the secret door. Hoofs of the Devil, had you thrust against the chest with the golden lock, which stood against the wall, the door had opened to you and revealed the secret passageway through which I went."

"I traced you to the nearest port and there took ship and followed you to Italy, where I found you had gone."

"Aye, by the saints, you nearly cornered me in Florence. Ho! ho! ho! I was climbing through a back window while Monsieur Galahad was battering down the front door of the tavern. And had your horse not gone lame, you would have caught up with me on the road to Rome. Again, the ship on which I left Spain had barely put out to sea when Monsieur Galahad rides up to the wharfs. Why have you followed me like this? I do not understand."

"Because you are a rogue whom it is my destiny to kill," answered Kane coldly. He did not understand. All his life he had roamed about the

world aiding the weak and fighting oppression, he neither knew nor questioned why. That was his obsession, his driving force of life. Cruelty and tyranny to the weak sent a red blaze of fury, fierce and lasting, through his soul. When the full flame of his hatred was wakened and loosed, there was no rest for him until his vengeance had been fulfilled to the uttermost. If he thought of it at all, he considered himself a fulfiller of God's judgment, a vessel of wrath to be emptied upon the souls of the unrighteous. Yet in the full sense of the word Solomon Kane was not wholly a Puritan, though he thought of himself as such.

Le Loup shrugged his shoulders. "I could understand had I wronged you personally. *Mon Dieu!* I, too, would follow an enemy across the world, but, though I would have joy-

"The dead man reeled and fell with him."

fully slain and robbed you, I never heard of you until you declared war on me."

KANE was silent, his still fury overcoming him. Though he did not realize it, the Wolf was more than merely an enemy to him; the bandit symbolized, to Kane, all the things against which the Puritan had fought all his life: cruelty, outrage, oppression and tyranny.

Le Loup broke in on his vengeful meditations. "What did you do with the treasure, which—gods of Hades! —took me years to accumulate? Devil take it, I had time only to snatch a handful of coins and trinkets as I ran."

"I took such as I needed to hunt you down. The rest I gave to the villages which you had looted."

"Saints and the devil!" swore Le Loup. "*Monsieur,* you are the greatest fool I have yet met. To throw that vast treasure—by Satan, I rage to think of it in the hands of base peasants, vile villagers! Yet, ho! ho! ho! ho! they will steal, and kill each other for it! That is human nature."

"Yes, damn you!" flamed Kane suddenly, showing that his conscience had not been at rest. "Doubtless they will, being fools. Yet what could I do? Had I left it there, people might have starved and gone naked for lack of it. More, it would have been found, and theft and slaughter would have followed anyway. You are to blame, for had this treasure been left with its rightful owners, no such trouble would have ensued."

The Wolf grinned without reply. Kane not being a profane man, his rare curses had double effect and always startled his hearers, no matter how vicious or hardened they might be.

It was Kane who spoke next. "Why have you fled from me across the world? You do not really fear me."

"No, you are right. Really I do not know; perhaps flight is a habit which is difficult to break. I made my mistake when I did not kill you that night in the mountains. I am sure I could kill you in a fair fight, yet I have never even, ere now, sought to ambush you. Somehow I have not had a liking to meet you, *Monsieur*—a whim of mine, a mere whim. Then—*mon Dieu!*—mayhap I have enjoyed a new sensation—and I had thought that I had exhausted the thrills of life. And then, a man must either be the hunter or the hunted. Until now, *Monsieur,* I was the hunted, but I grew weary of the rôle—I thought I had thrown you off the trail.

"A negro slave, brought from this vicinity, told a Portugal ship captain of a white man who landed from a Spanish ship and went into the jungle. I heard of it and hired the ship, paying the captain to bring me here.

"*Monsieur,* I admire you for your attempt, but you must admire me, too! Alone I came into this village, and alone among savages and cannibals I—with some slight knowledge of the language learned from a slave aboard ship—I gained the confidence of King Songa and supplanted that mummer, N'Longa. I am a braver man than you, *Monsieur,* for I had no ship to retreat to, and a ship is waiting for you."

"I admire your courage," said Kane, "but you are content to rule amongst cannibals—you the blackest soul of them all. I intend to return to my own people when I have slain you."

"Your confidence would be admirable were it not amusing. Ho, Gulka!"

A giant negro stalked into the space between them. He was the hugest man that Kane had ever seen, though he moved with catlike ease and suppleness. His arms and legs were like trees, and the great, sinuous muscles rippled with each motion. His apelike head was set squarely between gigantic shoulders. His great,

dusky hands were like the talons of an ape, and his brow slanted back from above bestial eyes. Flat nose and great, thiek red lips eompleted this pieture of primitive, lustful savagery.

"That is Gulka, the gorilla-slayer," said Le Loup. "He it was who lay in wait beside the trail and smote you down. You are like a wolf, yourself, Monsieur Kane, but since your ship hove in sight you have been watched by many eyes, and had you had all the powers of a leopard, you had not seen Gulka nor heard him. He hunts the most terrible and crafty of all beasts, in their native forests, far to the north, the beasts-who-walk-like-men—as that one, whom he slew some days since."

Kane, following Le Loup's fingers, made out a eurious, manlike thing, dangling from a roof-pole of a hut. A jagged end thrust through the thing's body held it there. Kane could scarcely distinguish its charaeteristics by the firelight, but there was a weird, humanlike semblance about the hideous, hairy thing.

"A female gorilla that Gulka slew and brought to the village," said Le Loup.

The giant black slouched elose to Kane and stared into the white man's eyes. Kane returned his gaze somberly, and presently the negro's eyes dropped sullenly and he slouched baek a few paees. The look in the Puritan's grim eyes had pierced the primitive hazes of the gorilla-slayer's soul, and for the first time in his life he felt fear. To throw this off, he tossed a challenging look about; then, with unexpected animalness, he struck his huge chest resoundingly, grinned cavernously and flexed his mighty arms. No one spoke. Primordial bestiality had the stage, and the more highly developed types looked on with various feelings of amusement, tolerance or contempt.

Gulka glaneed furtively at Kane to see if the white man was watehing him, then with a sudden beastly roar, plunged forward and dragged a man from the semicircle. While the trembling victim screeched for mercy, the giant hurled him upon the erude altar before the shadowy idol. A spear rose and flashed, and the screeching ceased. The Black God looked on, his monstrous features seeming to leer in the flickering firelight. He had drunk; was the Black God pleased with the draft—with the sacrifice?

Gulka stalked back, and stopping before Kane, flourished the bloody spear before the white man's face.

Le Loup laughed. Then suddenly N'Longa appeared. He came from nowhere in particular; suddenly he was standing there, beside the post to which Kane was bound. A lifetime of study of the art of illusion had given the ju-ju man a highly technieal knowledge of appearing and disappearing—which after all, consisted only in timing the audience's attention.

He waved Gulka aside with a grand gesture, and the gorilla-man slunk back, apparently to get out of N'Longa's gaze—then with ineredible swiftness he turned and struck the ju-ju man a terrifie blow upon the side of the head with his open hand. N'Longa went down like a felled ox, and in an instant he had been seized and bound to a post close to Kane. An uncertain murmuring rose from the negroes, which died out as King Songa stared angrily toward them.

Le Loup leaned back upon his throne and laughed uproariously.

"The trail ends here, Monsieur Galahad. That ancient fool thought I did not know of his plotting! I was hiding outside the hut and heard the interesting conversation you two had. Ha! ha! ha! ha! The Black God must drink, *Monsieur*, but I have persuaded Songa to have you two burnt; that will be much more enjoyable, though we shall have to forego the usual feast, I fear. For after the fires are lit about your feet the devil himself

could not keep your carcasses from becoming charred frames of bone."

Songa shouted something imperiously, and blacks came bearing wood, which they piled about the feet of N'Longa and Kane. The ju-ju man had recovered consciousness, and he now shouted something in his native language. Again the murmuring arose among the shadowy throng. Songa snarled something in reply.

KANE gazed at the scene almost impersonally. Again, somewhere in his soul, dim primal deeps were stirring, age-old thought memories, veiled in the fogs of lost eons. He had been here before, thought Kane; he knew all this of old—the lurid flames beating back the sullen night, the bestial faces leering expectantly, and the god, the Black God, there in the shadows! Always the Black God, brooding back in the shadows. He had known the shouts, the frenzied chant of the worshipers, back there in the gray dawn of the world, the speech of the bellowing drums, the singing priests, the repellent, inflaming, all-pervading scent of freshly spilt blood. All this have I known, somewhere, sometime, thought Kane; now I am the main actor——

He became aware that someone was speaking to him through the roar of the drums; he had not realized that the drums had begun to boom again. The speaker was N'Longa:

"Me pow'rful ju-ju man! Watch now: I work mighty magic. Songa!" His voice rose in a screech that drowned out the wildly clamoring drums.

Songa grinned at the words N'Longa screamed at him. The chant of the drums now had dropped to a low, sinister monotone and Kane plainly heard Le Loup when he spoke:

"N'Longa says that he will now work that magic which it is death to speak, even. Never before has it been worked in the sight of living men; it is the nameless ju-ju magic. Watch closely, *Monsieur;* possibly we shall be further amused." The Wolf laughed lightly and sardonically.

A black man stooped, applying a torch to the wood about Kane's feet. Tiny jets of flame began to leap up and catch. Another bent to do the same with N'Longa, then hesitated. The ju-ju man sagged in his bonds; his head drooped upon his chest. He seemed dying.

Le Loup leaned forward, cursing, "Feet of the Devil! is the scoundrel about to cheat us of our pleasure of seeing him writhe in the flames?"

The warrior gingerly touched the wizard and said something in his own language.

Le Loup laughed: "He died of fright. A great wizard, by the——"

His voice trailed off suddenly. The drums stopped as if the drummers had fallen dead simultaneously. Silence dropped like a fog upon the village and in the stillness Kane heard only the sharp crackle of the flames whose heat he was beginning to feel.

All eyes were turned upon the dead man upon the altar, *for the corpse had begun to move!*

First a twitching of a hand, then an aimless motion of an arm, a motion which gradually spread over the body and limbs. Slowly, with blind, uncertain gestures, the dead man turned upon his side, the trailing limbs found the earth. Then, horribly like something being born, like some frightful reptilian thing bursting the shell of non-existence, the corpse tottered and reared upright, standing on legs wide apart and stiffly braced, arms still making useless, infantile motions. Utter silence, save somewhere a man's quick breath sounded loud in the stillness.

Kane stared, for the first time in his life smitten speechless and thoughtless. To his Puritan mind this was Satan's hand manifested.

Le Loup sat on his throne, eyes wide and staring, hand still half raised in the careless gesture he was

making when frozen into silence by the unbelievable sight. Songa sat beside him, mouth and eyes wide open, fingers making curious jerky motions upon the carved arms of the throne.

Now the corpse was upright, swaying on stiltlike legs, body tilting far back until the sightless eyes seemed to stare straight into the red moon that was just rising over the black jungle. The thing tottered uncertainly in a wide, erratic half-circle, arms flung out grotesquely as if in balance, then swaying about to face the two thrones—and the Black God. A burning twig at Kane's feet cracked like the crash of a cannon in the tense silence. The horror thrust forth a black foot—it took a wavering step—another. Then with stiff, jerky and automatonlike steps, legs straddled far apart, the dead man came toward the two who sat in speechless horror to each side of the Black God.

"Ah-h-h!" from somewhere came the explosive sigh, from that shadowy semicircle where crouched the terror-fascinated worshipers. Straight on stalked the grim specter. Now it was within three strides of the thrones, and Le Loup, faced by fear for the first time in his bloody life, cringed back in his chair; while Songa, with a superhuman effort breaking the chains of horror that held him helpless, shattered the night with a wild scream and, springing to his feet, lifted a spear, shrieking and gibbering in wild menace. Then as the ghastly thing halted not its frightful advance, he hurled the spear with all the power of his great, black muscles, and the spear tore through the dead man's breast with a rending of flesh and bone. Not an instant halted the thing—for the dead die not—and Songa the king stood frozen, arms outstretched as if to fend off the terror.

An instant they stood so, leaping firelight and eery moonlight etching the scene forever in the minds of the beholders. The changeless staring eyes of the corpse looked full into the bulging eyes of Songa, where were reflected all the hells of horror. Then with a jerky motion the arms of the thing went out and up. The dead hands fell on Songa's shoulders. At the first touch, the king seemed to shrink and shrivel, and with a scream that was to haunt the dreams of every watcher through all the rest of time, Songa crumpled and fell, and the dead man reeled stiffly and fell with him. Motionless lay the two at the feet of the Black God, and to Kane's dazed mind it seemed that the idol's great, inhuman eyes were fixed upon them with terrible, still laughter.

At the instant of the king's fall, a great shout went up from the blacks, and Kane, with a clarity lent his subconscious mind by the depths of his hate, looked for Le Loup and saw him spring from his throne and vanish in the darkness. Then vision was blurred by a rush of black figures who swept into the space before the god. Feet knocked aside the blazing brands whose heat Kane had forgotten, and dusky hands freed him; others loosed the wizard's body and laid it upon the earth. Kane dimly understood that the blacks believed this thing to be the work of N'Longa, and that they connected the vengeance of the wizard with himself. He bent, laid a hand on the ju-ju man's shoulder. No doubt of it: he was dead, the flesh was already cold. He glanced at the other corpses. Songa was dead, too, and the thing that had slain him lay now without movement.

Kane started to rise, then halted. Was he dreaming, or did he really feel a sudden warmth in the dead flesh he touched? Mind reeling, he again bent over the wizard's body, and slowly he felt warmness steal over the limbs and the blood begin to flow sluggishly through the veins again.

Then N'Longa opened his eyes and stared up into Kane's, with the blank expression of a new-born babe. Kane watched, flesh crawling, and saw the knowing, reptilian glitter come back, saw the wizard's thick lips part in a wide grin. N'Longa sat up, and a strange chant arose from the negroes.

Kane looked about. The blacks were all kneeling, swaying their bodies to and fro, and in their shouts Kane caught the word, "N'Longa!" repeated over and over in a kind of fearsomely ecstatic refrain of terror and worship. As the wizard rose, they all fell prostrate.

N'Longa nodded, as if in satisfaction.

"Great ju-ju—great fetish, me!" he announced to Kane. "You see? My ghost go out—kill Songa—come back to me! Great magic! Great fetish, me!"

Kane glanced at the Black God looming back in the shadows, at N'Longa, who now flung out his arms toward the idol as if in invocation.

I am everlasting (Kane thought the Black God said); I drink, no matter who rules; chiefs, slayers, wizards, they pass like the ghosts of dead men through the gray jungle; I stand, I rule; I am the soul of the jungle (said the Black God).

Suddenly Kane came back from the illusory mists in which he had been wandering. "The white man! Which way did he flee?"

N'Longa shouted something. A score of dusky hands pointed; from somewhere Kane's rapier was thrust out to him. The fogs faded and vanished; again he was the avenger, the scourge of the unrighteous; with the sudden volcanic speed of a tiger he snatched the sword and was gone.

5. The End of the Red Trail

LIMBS and vines slapped against Kane's face. The oppressive steam of the tropic night rose like mist about him. The moon, now floating high above the jungle, limned the black shadows in its white glow and patterned the jungle floor in grotesque designs. Kane knew not if the man he sought was ahead of him, but broken limbs and trampled underbrush showed that some man had gone that way, some man who fled in haste, nor halted to pick his way. Kane followed these signs unswervingly. Believing in the justice of his vengeance, he did not doubt that the dim beings who rule men's destinies would finally bring him face to face with Le Loup.

Behind him the drums boomed and muttered. What a tale they had to tell this night! of the triumph of N'Longa, the death of the black king, the overthrow of the white-man-with-eyes-like-a-leopard, and a more darksome tale, a tale to be whispered in low, muttering vibrations: the nameless ju-ju.

Was he dreaming? Kane wondered as he hurried on. Was all this part of some foul magic? He had seen a dead man rise and slay and die again; he had seen a man die and come to life again. Did N'Longa in truth send his ghost, his soul, his life essence forth into the void, dominating a corpse to do his will? Aye, N'Longa died a real death there, bound to the torture stake, and he who lay dead on the altar rose and did as N'Longa would have done had he been free. Then, the unseen force animating the dead man fading, N'Longa had lived again.

Yes, Kane thought, he must admit it as a fact. Somewhere in the darksome reaches of jungle and river, N'Longa had stumbled upon the Secret—the Secret of controlling life and death, of overcoming the shackles and limitations of the flesh. How had this dark wisdom, born in the black and blood-stained shadows of this grim land, been given to the wizard? What sacrifice had been so pleasing to the Black Gods, what ritual so monstrous, as to make

them give up the knowledge of this magic? And what thoughtless, timeless journeys had N'Longa taken, when he chose to send his ego, his ghost, through the far, misty countries, reached only by death?

There is wisdom in the shadows (brooded the drums), wisdom and magic; go into the darkness for wisdom; ancient magic shuns the light; we remember the lost ages (whispered the drums), ere man became wise and foolish; we remember the beast gods—the serpent gods and the ape gods and the nameless, the Black Gods, they who drank blood and whose voices roared through the shadowy hills, who feasted and lusted. The secrets of life and of death are theirs; we remember, we remember (sang the drums).

Kane heard them as he hastened on. The tale they told to the feathered black warriors farther up the river, he could not translate; but they spoke to him in their own way, and that language was deeper, more basic.

The moon, high in the dark blue skies, lighted his way and gave him a clear vision as he came out at last into a glade and saw Le Loup standing there. The Wolf's naked blade was a long gleam of silver in the moon, and he stood with shoulders thrown back, the old, defiant smile still on his face.

"A long trail, *Monsieur,*" said he. "It began in the mountains of France; it ends in an African jungle. I have wearied of the game at last, *Monsieur*—and you die. I had not fled from the village, even, save that —I admit it freely—that damnable witchcraft of N'Longa's shook my nerves. More, I saw that the whole tribe would turn against me."

Kane advanced warily, wondering what dim, forgotten tinge of chivalry in the bandit's soul had caused him thus to take his chance in the open. He half suspected treachery, but his keen eyes could detect no shadow of movement in the jungle on either side of the glade.

"*Monsieur,* on guard!" Le Loup's voice was crisp. "Time that we ended this fool's dance about the world. Here we are alone."

THE men were now within reach of each other, and Le Loup, in the midst of his sentence, suddenly plunged forward with the speed of light, thrusting viciously. A slower man had died there, but Kane parried and sent his own blade in a silver streak that slit Le Loup's tunic as the Wolf bounded backward. Le Loup admitted the failure of his trick with a wild laugh and came in with the breath-taking speed and fury of a tiger, his blade making a white fan of steel about him.

Rapier clashed on rapier as the two swordsmen fought. They were fire and ice opposed. Le Loup fought wildly but craftily, leaving no openings, taking advantage of every opportunity. He was a living flame, bounding back, leaping in, feinting, thrusting, warding, striking—laughing like a wild man, taunting and cursing.

Kane's skill was cold, calculating, scintillant. He made no waste movement, no motion not absolutely necessary. He seemed to devote more time and effort toward defense than did Le Loup, yet there was no hesitancy in his attack, and when he thrust, his blade shot out with the speed of a striking snake.

There was little to choose between the men as to height, strength and reach. Le Loup was the swifter by a scant, flashing margin, but Kane's skill reached a finer point of perfection. The Wolf's fencing was fiery, dynamic, like the blast from a furnace. Kane was more steady—less the instinctive, more the thinking fighter, though he, too, was a born slayer, with the co-ordination that only a natural fighter possessed.

Thrust, parry, a feint, a sudden whirl of blades——

"Ha!" the Wolf sent up a shout of ferocious laughter as the blood started from a cut on Kane's cheek. As if the sight drove him to further fury, he attacked like the beast men named him. Kane was forced back before that blood-lusting onslaught, but the Puritan's expression did not alter.

Minutes flew by; the clang and clash of steel did not diminish. Now they stood squarely in the center of the glade, Le Loup untouched, Kane's garments red with the blood that oozed from wounds on cheek, breast, arm and thigh. The Wolf grinned savagely and mockingly in the moonlight, but he had begun to doubt.

His breath came hissing fast and his arm began to weary; who was this man of steel and ice who never seemed to weaken? Le Loup knew that the wounds he had inflicted on Kane were not deep, but even so, the steady flow of blood should have sapped some of the man's strength and speed by this time. But if Kane felt the ebb of his powers, it did not show. His brooding countenance did not change in expression, and he pressed the fight with as much cold fury as at the beginning.

Le Loup felt his might fading, and with one last desperate effort he rallied all his fury and strength into a single plunge. A sudden, unexpected attack too wild and swift for the eye to follow, a dynamic burst of speed and fury no man could have withstood, and Solomon Kane reeled for the first time as he felt cold steel tear through his body. He reeled back, and Le Loup, with a wild shout, plunged after him, his reddened sword free, a gasping taunt on his lips.

Kane's sword, backed by the force of desperation, met Le Loup's in midair; met, held and wrenched. The Wolf's yell of triumph died on his lips as his sword flew singing from his hand.

For a fleeting instant he stopped short, arms flung wide as a crucifix, and Kane heard his wild, mocking laughter peal forth for the last time, as the Englishman's rapier made a silver line in the moonlight.

FAR away came the mutter of the drums. Kane mechanically cleansed his sword on his tattered garments. The trail ended here, and Kane was conscious of a strange feeling of futility. He always felt that, after he had killed a foe. Somehow it always seemed that no real good had been wrought; as if the foe had, after all, escaped his just vengeance.

With a shrug of his shoulders Kane turned his attention to his bodily needs. Now that the heat of battle had passed, he began to feel weak and faint from the loss of blood. That last thrust had been close; had he not managed to avoid its full point by a twist of his body, the blade had transfixed him. As it was, the sword had struck glancingly, plowed along his ribs and sunk deep in the muscles beneath the shoulder-blade, inflicting a long, shallow wound.

Kane looked about him and saw that a small stream trickled through the glade at the far side. Here he made the only mistake of that kind that he ever made in his entire life. Mayhap he was dizzy from loss of blood and still mazed from the weird happenings of the night; be that as it may, he laid down his rapier and crossed, weaponless, to the stream. There he laved his wounds and bandaged them as best he could, with strips torn from his clothing.

Then he rose and was about to retrace his steps when a motion among the trees on the side of the glade where he first entered, caught his eye. A huge figure stepped out of the jungle, and Kane saw, and recognized, his doom. The man was Gulka, the gorilla-slayer. Kane remembered that he had not seen the black among

(Continued on page 282)

YOU·CAN'T·KILL·A·GHOST

BY FRANK BELKNAP LONG·Jr·

"He was swaying absurdly back and forth, drinking out of a neckless bottle."

PERHAPS you've seen Talbot's picture in the New York papers —a lean, leisurely young man with wilted collar and bow tie, and a grin reaching from ear to ear. His Haitian revelations put him on a journalistic pinnacle where he *almost* rubbed shoulders with artists. His prose was exceedingly jerky and nervous, but before he had written three articles the yellow journals were roaring for his stuff, and the other papers were making timid bids.

But he gave me his best yarn gratis. You remember, or maybe you don't, that he kept absurdly quiet about his imprisonment. He wasn't ashamed of it, but he knew that I would use it in a story and he didn't want to spill the beans for me. You see, I had given him two or three good cigars and promised him a week's lodging, and for some reason he had taken a fancy to me. He didn't have a friend when he arrived in New York, and he was going back to Haiti. I argued him out of it, and now there are seventy thousand words more of good journalism in the public libraries.

We sat smoking panetelas in the men's compartment at the rear end of an Overland Express train, and Talbot told his story in a whimsically sonorous voice. I urged him to start at the beginning, but he smiled and shrugged eloquently.

"This story has no beginning," he said. "I was drunk on the night they

arrested me. I can't recall the details, but it seems I borrowed a revolutionist's uniform and paraded about the streets in it.

"In Haiti revolutions start in the mountains and wind up in Cap Haitien or Port au Prince when the rebels cool off. Nine-tenths of them never get into the press dispatches. On every national holiday the president witnesses the amusing spectacle of two or three dozen ruffians in yellow sashes shouting each other down and shooting into store windows. The president usually ties their hands by denying them official recognition.

"But the president refused to ignore me. I didn't hurt a soul but I may have made more noise than the others. Or I may have walked under a ladder or broken a mirror. Anyhow, the president took advantage of my idiocy, and I was arrested and put where I couldn't make a fool of myself."

It gave Talbot exquisite pleasure to contemplate his degradation. A mischievous smile played about his lips, and his eager eyes sparkled.

"The jail was a ramshackle and disgusting affair, and I shared my cell with two revolutionary generals. A revolutionary general in the Black Republic has absolutely nothing to commend him. He is a low creature and his philosophy of life is terrible. He is a fatalist and he wouldn't cross the street to avoid being shot at. And he is unthinkably dirty.

"My companions never washed. Their beards were six inches long, and there was no difference in their appearance. They were so ridiculously alike that I frequently got them mixed up.

"At first I naturally despised them, and thought only of getting out. I pounded on the bars, stamped my feet and shouted until I was red in the face.

"Never in my life had I been so angry. When the jailer came I glared at him, and I could see that he knew I had something on my mind and that that something meant trouble.

" 'How long do you think you can keep an American citizen in jail?' I asked.

"The jailer was a small, round-shouldered man between forty and fifty, with puckered, evil eyes and white eyebrows that met above the arch of his nose. His thick lips writhed back from his dirty yellow teeth in a cynical smile.

" 'You are such a brown American!' he sneered. 'Who would believe that you are merely sunburned? You are essentially one of our enemies. The color of your face and uniform combine to make you a rebel.'

"I forgot that bars separated us. I reached for his throat, but he jumped back and grinned. In my disappointment I nearly bit my tongue through without feeling it. 'You're too vile to kill,' I raved, 'but if I could get my hands on your superiors——'

"The jailer assured me that my wish could not be granted. 'My superiors are very busy men,' he said. 'But I do not blame you for getting angry. It isn't pleasant to be shot at. But we are obliged to obey orders, and the president hates rebels.'

"He departed, grotesquely sneering.

"I SAT on the edge of my cot and rolled a cigarette with white, nervous fingers. I was horribly upset. One of the generals grunted and swore that the jailer was a pig. He expressed no other emotion, but he added a few words of advice in a curiously colorless voice.

" 'Look in the soles of your shoes,' he suggested. 'I wouldn't want to see you crying and begging for mercy. It would make the president too indecently happy.'

"I looked up, and for an instant he smiled into my astonished eyes. Then he moved slowly to the other side of the wall. 'Sometimes you don't find the metal,' his companion volunteered. 'But if you are wearing a regulation army shoe you are in luck.'

"I wanted very much to believe them. I looked down at my shoes. They were not army shoes, but I didn't let that discourage me. I wanted to pay the jailer out for his insults. I laughed when I thought how angry and disappointed he would be to find the bars sawed through and the bird flown. The American bird! I was thinking: 'Now he'll laugh on the other side of his face. Did he really think that he could keep an American in his filthy old jail?'

"The generals watched me with tolerant and cynical eyes. They winked at each other and ran their fingers through their brittle black beards. But I knew that there was no use bothering about them. I held the key to my own salvation and it was up to me to make good.

"A sense of something like exultation stole over me. I unlaced my shoes and examined them. There were unquestionably pieces of metal in the soles. I was ready to shout. I worked at the stiff leather, tearing it apart with my fingers and teeth, until the blood pounded in my ears and I very nearly keeled over.

" 'It's better than being shot,' one of the generals said, but I scarcely heard him. When I got the metal out I did a voodoo dance on the cell floor.

"One of the generals scowled. It was perfectly apparent that he didn't like my enthusiasm. He stood there endeavoring to be civil, but there was an expression in his small blue eyes that told me clearer than words how he despised that sort of thing. I brought myself up with a jerk.

" 'I didn't intend to go on so,' I explained. 'But this thing means a lot to me. I'm only twenty-two and it isn't pleasant to be taken out and shot. Leastwise, it's not pleasant to be shot by mistake. I wouldn't mind ordinarily——'

"I saw that I had taken the wrong tack. The general's scowl grew in volume. 'You shouldn't anticipate, my friend,' he said. 'You have first to saw through the bars, and there's a guard stationed outside.'

"I saw then what I had let myself in for. My spirits dropped. It would take at least two days to saw the bars through, and I didn't see how I could conceal my progress from the jailer. I was in a tight place and said so. I'll never forget the decent way in which the general met my objection.

" 'You mustn't eat your bread,' he said. 'Rub it on the floor when the pig isn't looking and use it on the bars.'

"But after that he got pretty silent, and I couldn't persuade him to escape with me. 'It is very easy to die when ten men shoot at you at the same time,' he said, and his companion added that life was a very stupid affair.

"Naturally their logic repelled me, but what could I do? I didn't like the idea of leaving them there to shoulder the blame, but it was no good arguing with them. When a Haitian's mind is made up it is made up. I told them to think of their wives, but when they swore at me I gave it up.

"The jailer seemed to suspect something when he brought the bread, but I didn't give him half a chance to talk to the generals. I hung on to the bars and insulted him until I was blue in the face. He put the bread on the floor and looked inquiringly at the generals. I think that he was amused and a little frightened.

"As soon as he left I seized my portion of bread and rubbed it on the floor until it was blacker than the president's beard. Then I kneaded it between my fingers. The generals watched me indifferently and I knew that they grimly appreciated the silent comedy of an American endeavoring to escape from a Haitian pig-sty. I made a violent effort to control myself, and went to work on the bars without so much as a groan to let them know what I was suffering. My heart kept coming up in my throat and flopping over. I couldn't forget the risk I was running, and I began to fear I'd funk the job sure.

"There were five bars, and the window was two feet broad and eighteen inches high. It would be necessary to work against time, but I figured it wouldn't take me more than two days to get out. I'd forgotten that a man has to eat and sleep. Sawing through bars is the hardest kind of work and no man can stand it more than eight hours on a stretch.

"I worked steadily for six hours, and all the time the generals were snickering and comparing notes behind my back. However, I tried to keep thinking of what I would say to the consul when I got out. I didn't even stop to drink. My right arm got so devilishly stiff that it almost killed me to move it. But I wasn't going to weaken before those generals.

"At the end of nine hours I got dizzy and weak. I had a small pocket mirror, and when I looked at myself I found I was yellow under the gills. The water was running in streams down my face and I had sense enough left to quit, after smearing the bars with the sooty bread to conceal what I had done. I had filed completely through one of the bars! But before I'd had time to congratulate myself I found myself on the floor in a heap, and my brain getting cloudy.

"Twelve hours later one of the generals kicked me awake and told me that I'd nearly spoiled my chances.

"The jailer hadn't been able to discover anything, but my exhaustion had puzzled him. He had poked into corners and questioned the generals, and he had come near to trying the bars. I had a queer, dizzy feeling in my head, but I had no intention of taking a day off.

"I set to work on the bars again, and by the end of the day I had sawed through the second one. My fingers were bleeding and my brain reeled, and the generals didn't say anything to encourage me. But I felt that my luck wasn't bad under the circumstances, and maybe I wasn't happy when I thought of how I would fool the jailer!

"By sundown the next day I had completed the job. The generals stared and shrugged their shoulders and urged me to escape immediately. I rolled a cigarette and puffed it until I had made a halo of blue-gray smoke about my head. I felt like a hero, standing there before those indifferent fools. 'I'll get out when it's dark,' I said, 'and not before. I'm not taking unnecessary chances.'

"A couple of hours later I crawled to the bars and waited for the moon to get behind a cloud. The generals started laughing and I thought sure they'd give the game away. I was hopelessly upset, but it was no good being angry with them.

"THE bars came out easier than children's first teeth. I simply stood up and pulled and there was an opening large enough to admit two men. In a moment I was halfway through the opening and wishing that I'd been more civil to the generals.

"But I might have known there would be a hitch somewhere. My coat got caught on a nail and I stuck. I wriggled and wriggled, but I couldn't get my legs over.

"I lay wedged between the bars, and things began to look pretty black. At any moment I might be discovered by the jailer, and the generals wouldn't be any help to me. And then I did a foolish thing. I struggled until something snapped and a sudden pain gripped my right leg. I groaned aloud, and to make matters worse the moon came out and flooded the clearing with light.

"And then I saw him. He was standing against the wall, swaying absurdly back and forth and drinking out of a neckless bottle. At first he did not notice me, but when his eyes finally rested on my agonized face he removed his great hat and bowed.

" 'Another newspaper man, I presume,' he said. 'Our little revolution certainly makes copy. But personally, I don't think we're worth it. This is strictly between you and me, you understand.'

" 'Do I look like a newspaper man?' I snapped. I was in no humor to discuss trivialities with him. I could see that he was absurdly drunk, but it did not occur to me that I might find him useful.

" 'Permit me to introduce myself,' he continued. 'I am the president's right-hand man—some call me his shadow. He couldn't get along without me. We have too much in common. And yet I am but a pale reflection of his greatness. I am called Henriquez, but to you, who are an American, it shall be Henry. I should not even object to Harry. It seems that we are endeavoring to escape from prison. I can sympathize with the gesture. All human beings desire liberty. I myself have longed for liberty. They would not even permit me to drink the rich, red wine; it was necessary that I set the army a good example. But I fooled them. Today I am as free as the air and I have no responsibilities. I have escaped from my prison. Shall I help you to escape from yours?'

" 'Why should you?' I roared. 'Why don't you call the guards and have them put me back again?'

"He smiled good-humoredly. 'That would be such a waste of time!' he said. 'And besides, the guard might shoot you. I shouldn't care to see you shot. Is it not strange how I differ from the president? The president hates rebels—and yet I am his shadow. But you seem to be having some trouble with those bars.'

"He suddenly became serious, and stepping quickly forward he looked me straight in the eyes. 'Do you really wish to escape?' he said.

"I nodded and groaned. 'With every drop of blood in my body,' I said, 'I wish to escape. They have promised to shoot me. I am only twenty-two, and at my age it is not pleasant to be shot.'

"He nodded sympathetically. 'I think I can help you,' he said. 'I do not wish to make any promises, but I think I can help.'

"He stepped forward and seized one of the remaining bars in his hairy hand. I saw the muscles of his enormous arms contract, and a hard, set expression come into his face. Merely to loosen the bar took a tremendous effort, and for a moment I did not think that he could possibly succeed. But slowly the bar gave way and then he literally tore it from its fastenings.

"A sudden sense of unspeakable joy possessed me. I hurled myself forward and nearly succeeded in wriggling free; but I could not quite pass my hips through. Henriquez was not discouraged. He beamed encouragement, and set himself the task of loosening the last bar. He succeeded in tearing the coat from my back, but the bar stuck.

"He backed away, still smiling. He seemed bracing himself for a titanic effort. He advanced again and took the last bar firmly between his two hands. He pulled and pulled.

The bar gave way and bent outward; then it came away with a loud retching sound that I feared would bring the jailer on a run. I struggled through the window and collapsed in Henriquez's arms. I could not stand. I was bleeding from a dozen wounds, and I had evidently sprained my hips, for when I moved it gave me exquisite pain.

"'I can't walk, Henry,' I said. 'What shall I do?'

"'Have no fear, my lad,' responded Henriquez. 'I have carried heavier than you. There is an American ship in the bay and if we hurry I can put you on board before dawn. What do you say?'

"I nodded a silent approval. Henriquez laughed and lifted me on his huge shoulders. He made as if he would pick up the discarded bottle, but then he wavered and kicked it aside with the toe of his boot. 'The president would have been very angry,' he chuckled.

"WITH rapid steps he left the courtyard and proceeded cautiously along a white road. No doubt he found me heavy, for he stopped from time to time to mop his brow with his coat-sleeve. 'The president,' he kept muttering, 'would never have understood.'

"'Stop there!' A blue-coated sentry stood on a muddy embankment and challenged Henriquez with leveled gun. Henriquez stood very still in the center of the road and whistled. 'Don't you know me?' he vociferated. 'I'm on official business. Let me pass.'

"The sentry scowled. 'What have you got on your back?' he asked.

"I heard Henriquez curse under his breath. 'Mind your own business, my friend,' he said, 'and let me pass. It is evident that you do not who I am!'

"'You are a traitor to the president,' said the sentry. 'You carry upon your back the rebel traitor who calls himself an American.'

"Henriquez suddenly crouched in the road. I felt his body grow taut beneath me. The muscles of his great arms tightened. He hissed through his teeth.

"Cautiously he advanced a few paces toward the embankment. 'Stop!' ordered the sentry. But Henriquez did not stop. He dropped me like a leaden weight and sprang forward.

"I rolled into a muddy ditch and lay still. My whole body was one great wound. My teeth were knocking together like billiard balls. I heard a brief gasp, and then a torrent of frightened words issued from beneath the embankment. 'I thought you were a man! For heaven's sake pity me! I didn't know—I didn't, so help me God! Please don't! I beg you on my knees to pity me!'

"There followed the sounds of a scuffle, terminating in a prolonged scream: 'Ah-h-h-h!'

"Another moment and Henriquez was picking me up. 'It's all right now, lad,' he said. 'I'm sorry I had to drop you, but it was the only way!'

"We passed through gray, deserted orchards and along horribly muddy roads. Once a shot rang out behind us. A tremor passed over my friend's huge form and he whistled through his teeth.

"'Another guard!' he muttered. 'The president was unduly cautious. But I can not blame him. He suspects all rebels, and there are so many attacks upon his life.'

"Henriquez was breathing so heavily that I urged him to rest, but he only grunted and plunged doggedly forward.

"I can assure you that we were welcome on board the American ship. We were toasted and treated like kings, but it took some time to dis-

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VULTURE·CRAG

BY EVERIL WORRELL.

"The man you came to find is dead."

WHEN Donald Chester was invited to accompany his new friend, Count Zolani, on a hunting-trip, he was surprized. Count Zolani had showed sufficient preference for Donald's company—more than Donald had been able, in the bottom of his heart, to feel for Zolani. He wouldn't have been surprized in the least at a week-end invitation on a house-party, even a yachting-party. But Count Zolani and the simple life—an unattended camp for two in one of the near-by lonely places of the world—that was the unexpected feature of the affair.

"We'll camp at a place I found on a solitary expedition," the count had said. And that added to the strangeness of things. Count Zolani, who moved surrounded by satellites, attended always by at least one good serving-man pre-eminently not of the type to be converted at a moment's notice into a wilderness guide, to have been in the habit of making lonely trips away from civilization and its amusements and luxuries!

Until the actual moment of starting, Donald had half expected that all this was only Zolani's way of talking about his trips, and that after all the two of them would be attended by a retinue of servants.

But when they set forth together in a gray dawn in midsummer—which meant that they started very early indeed—he was obliged to admit to himself that here was a Zolani with whom he was unacquainted. The languid grace, the touch of boredom, the weary sophistication—all had fallen from the count. In the beginning of this new day he was as keenly eager as any great explorer might have been before plunging into an unmapped continental interior. One might have imagined that the two men were on the verge of an adventure, instead of merely being about to camp alone for a few days in a spot on the Maryland sea-coast—a spot unfrequented, but not far at all from the beaten paths of travel.

Through the long, hot day his enthusiasm did not flag. Donald relieved him at the wheel for a few hours, at his own suggestion, knowing that Zolani was not at all weary, and believing that he would have been capable of making a non-stop drive of days and nights on end, so long as that quiet look of intensity brooded on his aquiline features. Toward sunset, they were well down into the "eastern shore" country. The macadam road stretched fair and even, with few turns and no hills, between primeval bits of forest and empty meadows. The world might have been asleep while it still was light, so deep was the sense of peacefulness that brooded over it. Only when the road was tinged with red and the shadows of the pines were blue-black across it, the count turned his low-slung roadster from the highway and headed eastward over an unmade road.

"I take it we're in reach of the end," Donald volunteered. Words had been few between the two men, all through the long day of hot high speed. The car, of necessity, went slowly now for the first time in many hours.

"In reach of the end," Zolani smiled, with a sudden flash of teeth beneath his well-kept tiny black mustaches. "I wonder—I wonder what you will think of the end, when you see—and when you know!"

Donald was not altogether surprized at the turn of his companion's sentence. It implied that there was about this journey something that lay beneath the surface. That, however, was not altogether a new thought to Donald.

"I'm expecting to see something—and maybe to know something too," he said carelessly enough. "I'll be glad to get to it, Zolani. I never thought you insisted on dragging me down here for nothing except the beauties of nature!"

For a moment, Zolani's flashing smile was turned on him again. Then the count's attention was taken by the nature of the road, which had degenerated rather suddenly after the last crossroad into a rough, rutty pair of wheel tracks with grass growing between them. From that point, also, the road became winding; at the next crossroad and at the next, Zolani turned to right and left. Turns came frequently during the next hour, while the red of sunset faded to the ashes of twilight and plunged into the blue gloom of dusk. The thought crossed Donald's mind that Zolani knew this lonely territory well, well enough to have been here not once, but many times, and that his frequent turnings were in the nature of detours, which brought him back always to a direction he might have adhered to more closely but for a desire to make the way of his going intricate and labyrinthine.

"Is it possible he's trying to lose me?" Donald wondered idly, once, and blushed at the fantastic nature of the thought.

"We're here, and soon the moon will rise and I shall show you—Vulture Crag!"

Zolani's words sounded like a shout of triumph, so silent was the night around them as the car went slowly with motor all but inaudible.

"Vulture Crag! Cheerful name!" Donald commented.

"I named it, but not without good reason," the count rejoined. "I like the name. The truth is, Chester, I'm planning to make some improvements in this part of the country; but I'm not planning to make it a popular summer resort. Not even to attract picnic parties from the countryside near by."

INTO the stillness of the summer evening a new sound had crept—a rhythmic, murmuring sound which Donald at first had hardly been conscious of. Now it was louder, nearer. The road had become sandy and heavy. It seemed almost to shake itself, so sudden was the next turn—and Donald uttered a cry of pleasure. He loved the sea, and they had come upon it so suddenly that its far, dark mystery was like an unexpected adventure. Through a break in crags they saw it, across a miniature sandy desert where rolling dunes rose toward the distant horizon. Upon that unbroken sky line blazed a tiny speck where a ship moved, and above, the sky was sown with stars.

"Ecstasy, to stand upon the shore of the trackless sea!" Count Zolani's voice showed more feeling than Donald had ever heard in it. "Ecstasy! In imagination one breaks the bonds that hold him to the shore and follows his outward gaze. Think, friend! In all the universe, I think there is possible one greater ecstasy of contemplation. What, then, is that?"

Donald gazed into his companion's face, half visible in the deepening gloom. Was he idly philosophizing, playing with an abstract fancy, or was he challenging Donald to answer a riddle which had to do with this odd trip of theirs? Donald made a sudden gesture of impatience.

"I've come along because you asked me to, Zolani, and I've gone blind for quite a while. I know there's something beneath the surface, something I hope you're going to explain, and something I hope will give motive to our journey—not that it needs one to be pleasant, but because I feel there *is* one. So I won't do any guessing at meanings; I'll just tell you I'm waiting, and getting more than a little anxious to find out what it's all about. The ecstasy of contemplation doesn't sound like an adventure; yet, somehow, you make me feel as though we're on the edge of an adventure!"

Zolani stopped the motor and leaned back in his seat, lighting a cigarette with provoking deliberation.

"The greatest ecstasy of contemplation!" he resumed slowly. "To stand, my friend, on the shore of the sea—on the shore of the world! To gaze outward across the boundless ocean—outward into more boundless space! To know that one can voyage afar upon that sea—can voyage farther, farther—farther than the farthest stars your feeble vision can detect, in the limitless sea of space. You, Chester, if you will, shall know the delirious thrill of traversing space. I promise it. Is that adventure enough for you?"

There was silence between the two men. Count Zolani's cigarette made a near-by circle of light which outshone some of those distant specks of light which were, perhaps, larger than the sun around which the earth and her sister planets revolved. Donald was caught in an odd feeling of futility. Not for a moment did he think Zolani mad, although he wondered why he did not. He felt only that space was a thing apart, a thing that did not concern mankind; he felt that his spirit had been called

upon to grasp a thing beyond its conception. He could have read of such a thing between the covers of a book, and felt his imagination kindle; but personally to him like this, the very stupendousness of the idea stunned his perceptions.

The count's profile, visible in the starlight, gave a tinge of reality to the impossible statement he had made. It was not the profile of a dreamer's face. In it there was power. There might be in it, also, evil; but no touch of vagueness, of futility. Looking at it, Donald forced himself to clear thought. If he was to take Zolani's words literally, and since he could not for a moment think of Zolani as the victim of a hallucination, he was up against a tremendous opportunity—a new thing. Later, he would realize it; even now he might at least try to understand it. There were the tales of Jules Verne—the *Trip to the Moon*—Edgar Allan Poe's fanciful trip, and others. . . .

"I suppose you're going to perfect an invention down here, and I suppose you're going to tell me you've solved the problem of making a space-ship—that will fly!" he said at last. "I can't grasp it at once; but everyone knows that the fancies of yesterday are the facts of tomorrow. So another tomorrow has come!"

Zolani turned to face him. The glow from his cigarette lit up his aquiline features, which seemed more clearly lit by his triumphant smile.

"Proud as Lucifer!" Donald found himself thinking. "And Lucifer fell through pride. But Zolani has reason enough to be the proudest man on earth, if he's solved the thing few men have dared dream of attempting!"

"Chester, my friend," Zolani began, "my invention is to be perfected here, but it's not an old dream of another man made real by myself; it is my own dream, my own thought, perhaps, if there is any new thought under the sun. It is——"

At that instant a flapping of great wings swept away the sound of his words, and a dark, ugly form blotted out the starlight and swooped low toward the side of the open car. Donald caught a glare as of red eyes in the darkness and smelled an evil smell—and then the thing was gone.

"One of the v u l t u r e s—m y friends!" Zolani said, with a little, twisted smile. "Look yonder!"

Donald, gazing seaward, had noticed but little the sides of the ravine through which they had approached. The structure was unusual for the eastern coast so far south as this. A low crag to the south made the end of the ravine on one side, a high crag to the north; and for the first time Donald saw that a house stood on this northern crag, built against the natural elevation of the land so that in the darkness it was easily overlooked. It seemed, however, to be a large house—an abandoned mansion. Some recluse had fancied a home in this lonely spot, and had tired of the unchanging solitude. Everything about the place spoke of utter desolation. And—final touch and most sinister—as the two men gazed, several dark forms detached themselves from the block of unlit darkness which was the deserted building, and circled against the sky, while odd, raucous, creaking cries were borne on the sweet sea breeze.

"More of our friends!" Zolani spoke again. "That old house is their roosting-place. Odd fancies, vultures have, to take to artificial shelter of four walls and a roof. The windows, mostly broken, give them easy access, however; and you and I, my friend, will camp in the open. And not too much in the open either; our tent shall have the flaps well drawn together. A man need hardly be dead, but only sleeping, to have his eyes plucked from his head by our scavenger friends, whose inde-

fatigable zeal makes them so valuable that the state sets a fine of fifty dollars on the killing of one of them. Well! I shall explain no more of my grand plan until tomorrow. I can see that you need time for adjustment; tomorrow in the light of day what I say to you will be real; if I told you all tonight, tomorrow it would appear as a dream and require retelling.

"Only let me say that I am to rob our vultures of their happy home—I intend to make use of that building. I hope, friend Chester, for your interest—and for the loan of a little of your superabundant wealth. A short loan; with the working of my scheme, gold will flow freely to our hands. And for the rest, and to keep the curious of the countryside from showing too much interest in our affairs, I depend on our friends the vultures, who make this portion of the coast very disagreeable by their presence, and who will not go far from the home of which I dispossess them."

To the end of his life, Donald Chester would remember the year 1928 as the most vivid of his whole manhood; at least it eclipsed utterly all the years and all the seasons which had preceded it.

It was only a few days after the memorable night when he beheld for the first time Vulture Crag, and the equally memorable morning of shining blue and silver when he listened to Count Zolani's recital of his plans and intentions, before he was back again in the city arranging a loan of several thousand dollars, which would put Zolani's scheme in the way of fruition. That scheme burned day and night in Donald's brain, with its wonderful train of adventures. Donald would make possible the realization of man's loftiest dream; he would be a pioneer in exploring the mystery of the universe; he would know the unknowable, grasp the unattainable, help Zolani to add a new and most lustrous wreath of laurel to the ever more glorious wreath of man's victories and achievements.

Then, on the top of adventure's highest pinnacle of rapture—and now it was all as real and close at hand as on that first evening beside the sea all had been tenuous and unreal—he met Dorothy Leigh.

Dorothy—"Gift of God!" Never was any living creature so well named. There were stars in the depths of her blue-black eyes, stars which beckoned as those stars in the night sky toward which Donald never failed now to lift eager eyes in anticipation of the nearing time of his flight of exploration toward them. But there were other things about Dorothy, so dear that they might well nigh hold a man to the earth. There were her little, clinging hands, that seemed eloquent when they caressed merely the leaves of a book or touched the steering-gear of Donald's car; there were all her graceful, little, unstudied ways, her fragile beauty of form and feature, and the gay daring of her sudden laughter.

Donald had only begun to hope that he, too, by some mysterious magic, was beginning to live in Dorothy's heart, when he found himself telling her about the great secret. And in the telling, there was an interruption; and by the interruption many things were made clear.

"Oh, Donald—my dear!" Dorothy had cried, the pain in her voice a heritage from time immemorial, since the first woman watched her man go forth to adventure hand in hand with death. "My dear, must it be you—among the first?"

For a while after that, Donald did not give the details which had been locked in his heart for months. Neither the world nor the universe mattered beside Dorothy's "My

dear." But when a little later Donald remembered, his spirit was more than ever unshaken. If he had been able to dare the horror of utter emptiness through which stars and planets hurtle on their courses, how much better able was he to dare them, now that he held Dorothy's love locked safe within his breast, a charm against all evil?

"You won't ask me to give up my adventure when you know how much it means to me," he said gently to Dorothy. "When a man loves as I love you, he wants, more than ever, to prove his manhood. But after all, my darling, this adventure, while thrilling enough, has hardly enough of peril about it to prove that. In fact, when I have explained it to you as the count explained it to me on a June morning, you'll laugh at your fears."

He went on, then, to paint her the picture of Count Zolani's great project in the colors in which he himself saw it.

"You're familiar with simple chemistry, Dorothy," he began. "Well! Take one of the very simplest experiments of all—the conversion of water into its two elements, hydrogen and oxygen. Is there any doubt that hydrogen and oxygen can be brought together to form water?"

Dorothy shook her head, deeply puzzled. What a simple chemical experiment had to do with the extreme safety of the launching of a ship in space, she could not imagine. Nevertheless, because she was rather given to quiet thought than to disjointed protest, she listened after that without a word until the end of Donald's rather long explanation.

"Suppose, now, that the hydrogen and oxygen so separated and released could be given a certain rate of atomic vibration—you've heard of that, too. So that, wherever they might wander in the whole universe, they would retain a separate entity from any other atoms of hydrogen and oxygen. And now—I'm mixing my metaphors because it is necessary, because as the different laws of nature are always interactive, so to explain any complicated phenomenon of nature whether naturally or artificially—which still, of course, is naturally—produced, it is necessary to describe the various actions of the different laws involved in whatever way makes them most easily comprehended.

"To continue where I broke off to apologize. Suppose, now, that the hydrogen atoms to which you give a certain atomic vibration were to be magnetized with a certain definite magnetism, as definite as the positive and negative magnetism which everybody knows, but infinitely diversified—as diversified, in fact, as the infinite differences of wave length which can be established in a radio station, so that the etheric vibrations to which that station is attuned will be received there, out of all the other vibrations that permeate space.

"I'm afraid this is all rather deep, and quite involved, but Zolani gave it to me in far more intricate and technical terms, and I'm doing what I can to translate. In brief, Dorothy, Zolani's achievement lies rather within the field of physical chemistry than in the field of mechanics. He isn't going to launch me, with other favored souls, through space in a ship the mechanism of which *might* go wrong. He is, instead, through a triumph of chemistry and physics which involves plain chemistry, atomic vibration and magnetism all three, to change the nature of my being, and of the others, so that we, loosed from the chains of gravity and physical necessity, can travel at our own free will through space, to be drawn back quite definitely and certainly by means of his apparatus to our own bodies."

Dorothy had grown paler as she listened to the end of Donald's speech. A low cry of horror issued from her lips, at last.

"I didn't understand what you were talking about, Donald. And now that I see the application of it, it still seems vague, and horrible. Do you mean that you are going to put yourself in the hands of that man, to be altered in the inmost fibers of your being?—Oh!"

She shuddered, and the words died away on her lips. Donald shrugged his shoulders in mock despair.

"Darling, I've been telling you how very safe it is, and this is the impression you've drawn from all I've been saying!" he protested. "Well! It serves me right for unloading that scientific stuff on a girl who only dabbled in the shallowest ripples of science a finishing-school ever taught. I haven't given up making you see and understand, however. I'll tackle it next, Dorothy, from the descriptive angle. Suppose——"

Donald was off again, talking eagerly, urgently. And this time, as he talked, Dorothy was better able to understand the picture his words painted.

ZOLANI, he told her, had taken the lonely house at Vulture Crag (he touched lightly on the subject of those vultures, and the desolation of the spot). In the basement, Zolani had set up a powerful apparatus, while the top of the house, renovated and repaired, had been made into a sort of hospital. In that hospital, carefully guarded, were to repose the bodies of the space-travelers, while their intelligences and certain vital elements temporarily translated out of those bodies roved freely through space. Out of that exploration would vanish the black night of ignorance; to future generations the ways and customs of the oddest denizens of the farthest stars, were any of them indeed populated, would be as freely studied as were now the habits of people living on the other side of the world.

The powerful apparatus which Zolani had set up in his basement laboratory would react upon men and women harmlessly. Upon each space-traveler it would be set differently in certain small degrees, so that the liberated spirit might have a "vibration number" of its own. Twenty space-travelers could be taken care of at the same time, and twenty levers corresponded to twenty storage batteries—Donald described them so. At least, they stored the current which would draw back, when the levers were shot backward in their slots, the various twenty wandering spirits. The unconscious physical forms of the twenty, properly attached to the apparatus, would then receive the spirits, souls, intelligences—Donald rather stammered in his search of words, since no words previously coined exactly described what actually took place; "the released entity" suited him better than the triter forms, but he sought for a terminology which would make the things he spoke of more real to Dorothy.

"Since the portion of the man or woman who has been exploring space comprises only the intelligence, plus a certain amount of vital energy—all the vital energy not required to keep the body which remains behind from actual death," he added, "the space traveler can not have been harmed. You see there is nothing to hurt. Since Zolani's apparatus is minutely tuned, as I must express it, to each individuality, that individuality must be attracted back to its earthly habitation, so soon as he sets in action the powerful magnetic current which 'receives it.'

"I don't mean to become technical again. But this, you see, is what really happens. On October first, I,

and nineteen others, will find ourselves with Count Zolani at his restored mansion beside the sea. In the building comfortable arrangements are made, so that a person might comfortably sleep and rest for —two weeks was the period he spoke of. You may picture, Dorothy, the safe orderliness of a hospital ward, if you like. Well, there our bodies will sleep, after we have spent a quiet hour in the laboratory below, and had an agreeable current passed through our bodies, like a mild, invigorating electric current, or so Zolani describes it.

"Say that the two weeks are up. Attendants will carry our sleeping forms back to the laboratory, and each man and woman will be attached to the storage battery which has the power to call him, or her, back to life. A slight effort of will will be required on the part of the wandering spirit to re-enter the body itself, but that will present no complications; should any one of us desire, for some strange, unknown, unpredictable reason, to remain free in space, it is understood that we will make our return there at a future time. Zolani has picked only honorable men and women for his great experiment—men and women who will not be subject to freaks of fancy which might embarrass him and thwart the purpose of the experiment. As for myself, beloved, returning to earth will mean returning to you; my effort of will, then, will hardly be an effort at all, since my soul will speed to you—would speed to you even if the forces of Zolani's magnetism were directed not for but against it."

Love had won where arguments might all have failed. Looking into the depths of Dorothy's eyes, Donald knew that there was to be no strife between them. And in the weeks that followed, love even displaced in his mind the thrill of anticipation that had filled his days and nights, together with his thoughts of Dorothy. Now that he knew Dorothy returned his love, everything in the world beside that magnificent fact seemed dwarfed and of no consequence. And as for Dorothy, he suspected that she almost forgot the ordeal the autumn would bring. Having spent herself in combat to no avail and yielded gracefully—although, thinking back, Donald was not sure that either combat or yielding had taken place in words—she was now feeling the unreal dreaminess about the affair which had possessed Donald in the beginning. Perhaps she believed that, after all, Zolani would be defeated; that the first of October would find him ready to give up his fantastic scheme. Perhaps she only felt that life and love and the world on which the sun shone were real, and that the vast emptiness which encircled these things was not, and could not actually become so, to herself or to Donald or to anyone.

THE summer had come in on rose-flung wings of anticipation; it came to its height of beauty on a high-pitched ecstasy that seemed, perhaps, too beautiful to last. The perfection of summer, the full sweetness of love, have about them something of the evanescent shimmer of the wings of a dragon-fly, which is a thing of beauty doomed to live full and vibrantly, but never long. Summer had, then, to die, and its passing was sorrowful, wind-torn and rain-weary. Toward the end of September heavy rains set in, but they were not as dismal as the slow falling of inward tears which takes the place of the tears a man may not shed.

It had been inevitable that Dorothy should meet Zolani, with whom Donald had associated in a social way before the two men became identified with the same venture. The meeting had taken place on a hotel roof garden, and the stars Don-

ald had all but worshiped through the summer in his eagerness to explore them seemed to be watching in a shining surprize, as Dorothy gave to Zolani the deep, sweet look Donald had never seen her give to anyone but him.

After that, Dorothy had seen Donald often, but not so often as before, although their engagement was not broken. She had, however, seen Zolani at least as often, while he was in town; and, what was worst of all, Donald knew that he was not wrong when he felt that Dorothy's deepest interest hung upon Zolani's slightest word. Never a word was spoken now of her concern for Donald in the coming adventure; and while Donald did not want Dorothy to be distressed, it cut him cruelly to know that the reason for her ceasing to worry was, simply, that she had ceased to care. Donald's journey among distant stars and planets? It had become more real to Dorothy since her meeting with Zolani, and since certain long talks which she had had with him alone. Donald knew that, but he knew, too, that she wasted no alarms now. Let the first of October come; it brought no slightest uneasiness with it, so far as Donald could see. He himself was not uneasy, but he knew that Dorothy, in the natural course of events, should now be deeply worried.

And the last week of September brought in the delayed equinoctial storm, and the weeping skies opened their fountains yet unemptied, and the winds tore the sodden, clinging leaves from the trees. And on the last day of the month, Donald drove four men over the road that led to Zolani's restored mansion, followed by two other cars, each carrying five. Zolani had driven down the day before. Not since the evening before that day had Donald seen Dorothy; she had suggested then that she wish him luck, and say good-bye—thus hastening needlessly the time of their parting.

Dusk on this thirtieth of September was dull and heavy, and fell early. It was dark night, and the rain-wet wind from the sea howled like seven demons, when the party under Donald's convoy reached Vulture Crag. Even in the blackness, Donald had a consciousness of black wings upborne on the raging wind. He was glad to step inside the square lighted hallway of the building Count Zolani had restored, and conscious of a sense of hurrying drama as he stood waiting there with his four companions. It was as though a long-awaited hour at last had struck.

The count came to them after a short delay.

"I shall take our newcomers with me into the laboratory," he smiled with the flash of white teeth Donald had come to dislike, since he had so often seen its glitter turned upon Dorothy. "For you, Chester my friend, I have a great surprize. Wait here. Ah!"

The door through which the count had entered swung slowly open again. Donald, following his gaze, saw the last face he would have expected to behold here, of any in the world which he, perhaps, might be leaving forever, in spite of the confidence he had felt stedfastly for months. It was the face of Dorothy.

The count bowed low, his eyes on the deep blue ones turned to him. His voice when he spoke again was a caress.

"My dear, you had better explain to our friend Chester, who does not understand."

Once more the white teeth flashed. The count was bowing the four men who were to join in his experiment through another doorway. A moment more, and they were alone—Donald and Dorothy, with the sound of Zolani's "My dear" ringing in

Donald's ears. So Dorothy had first revealed her love for Donald—in just those two words. But Zolani must have had full confidence that his love was returned, to use those words to Dorothy in the presence of others; in the presence of Donald, whose engagement to Dorothy had not been definitely broken.

It was Dorothy who broke the silence.

"You see, Chester—Zolani considers that we are engaged," she offered timidly.

And then Donald's wrath broke the bounds that had held it.

"As I have still considered that you and I——" he began.

Looking back later, he could not remember all that he said then to Dorothy, though he never forgot the stricken look in her eyes as she listened. At last she held up her hand with a gesture which stopped him.

"Donald, I thought I could go through with it, but I can't," she said with a little moan. "I had steeled myself to endure your hurt. But I find that I can't. To let you believe that I am honest with Zolani—that would have been safer for both of us, dear. Since I can't, I will explain. There is no time to lose."

A little flame of hope springing up in Donald's heart seemed to change the universe from a barren waste back to the old paradise, as Dorothy continued.

"Donald, I was determined to share in this experiment. To go with you—wherever you go—to become as you become—not to be parted from you, whatever may be your destiny. I knew there was no hope of persuading you to let me go. I knew, too, that, so long as Zolani was your friend and I nothing to Zolani, he would probably accede to your wishes if the matter were put up to him. So—I let him fall in love with me, Donald. Perhaps I made him. Certainly, I willed him to. I'm sorry, but it was the only way to accomplish the thing I was determined to accomplish—that I should not be parted from you. When this is over, when we are safely back on earth in the bodies our spirits inhabit, I shall explain to Zolani. I hope he will forgive me. Surely, he can understand the feeling that drove me to make him serve my purpose.

"At least, that was the way I have felt about it until lately. Of late, I have come to doubt his forgiveness, and to feel that I can do without it. Because, Donald, I do not trust Zolani. I have come to feel that he is evil; and if he knew, or dreamed, or guessed that my love is unalterably yours——"

She was leaning toward him now. In the brilliantly lit entrance hall, Donald could see deeply into her blue-black eyes, could mark every shade of expression in their tender depths. Never had she been more adorable than with the expression of anxiety softening them, as she thought of Zolani with regret and foreboding. With a sudden motion, Donald drew her into his arms, where he had thought never to hold her again. Their lips met——

"Zolani!"

Donald cried the name out like a challenge, as the count's dark, hawk-like face appeared suddenly in the doorway. There was again the flash of the count's white teeth—Donald had come to dread that ordinary phenomenon.

"I smile—because a man must be as you would say, a good sport!" Zolani said in light, but slightly strained tones. "So a love is not so easily changed, and my promised bride is still *your* promised bride—and her wandering heart returns to its allegiance, as her wandering spirit will return *at my command* to the lovely form which enshrines it. Well! Perhaps, friend Chester, her heart never wandered at all. Never has she looked at me as she looked

at you, and she has withheld her lips. Perhaps it was all a game—to make me consent to experiment upon so lovely a victim, so that she could accompany you on your flight through space."

There was a heavy silence in the little room, except for the beating of the wind outside—could the beating of wings be heard as well? Donald and Dorothy had given one startled glance, each at the other. Had Zolani heard everything, or had he guessed? Now they stood silently, with eyes downcast. Dorothy, Donald knew, was both frightened and ashamed. As for himself, he was conscious of a heavy depression which he could not analyze.

After a little, Zolani spoke again.

"Perhaps it will be as well to speak no more of this unhappy affair—unhappy for me, however fortunate for my friend. Although I have smiled, my heart is breaking. Now, however, I am ready to forget myself, and to show to my two most honored guests what I have done, and what will take place tomorrow. It is my suggestion that you, Chester, and Miss Leigh, behold with me the beginning of my experiment upon the others. After that, it will be the turn of you two. And, in the meantime, I shall give myself the honor of showing you over the place—my dormuary."

"Dormuary?"

Dorothy's lips parted as Donald repeated the word. It had an ugly sound. Donald was sure that it had put both of them in mind of the same other word, "mortuary," which it greatly resembled. The count smiled back at them serenely.

"Don't like the sound of it? Think it sounds like 'mortuary'?" he said coolly. "I created it from that word, of course. Pardon me if my humor is a little grim, but a man who works his brain as hard as I work mine requires the relief of humor, and his humor should suit his fancy. My fancies have always, I am afraid, been a little grim. You see, this place I have equipped is a reposing-place for the sleeping, as a mortuary is for the dead. I put away the sleeping, as I shall show you, to remain asleep for the period I shall choose, as a mortician puts away the dead, to be dead forever. I, then, am a dormician. But I must show you these sleeping-places."

DURING the hour that followed, Dorothy clung close to Donald's arm. It was a rather horrible hour.

Zolani had prepared his house to accommodate more than twenty, although he was not completely equipped as to laboratory apparatus to handle more than twenty now. Donald had spoken of the upper regions of this building as a sort of hospital; they did, in fact, much more resemble the corridors of a morgue.

There were no beds, in the ordinary sense of the word, to accommodate the tenantless, sleeping bodies. It was well, perhaps, that the others who had already retired had not been shown over the place at all, and were to see only the laboratory. Donald marveled at the calmness with which they accepted their ignorance, until he remembered that they were spending this night crowded together in several large, comfortable bedrooms containing various beds and couches, and that they probably pictured these very rooms as their abiding-place for Zolani's period of two weeks, during which only their bodies were to remain on earth. As a matter of fact, instead of beds and rooms, the sleepers were to occupy lockers very much like the lockers of a well-equipped morgue, except that comfortable mattresses had been installed.

Gruesome, indeed, were the rows of empty, yawning lockers. Gruesome, and suggestive of either a morgue or a mausoleum. Certainly,

Zolani in his efficiency had had no regard for esthetics.

"They're safer in lockers, you know!" Zolani answered Donald's thought with his usual uncanny intuition. "A lever in the laboratory controls all the doors of these lockers at once. Ordinarily, I don't think it will be necessary to have them closed. But in case of any accident or disturbance, I should close them immediately. Should there be even so much as a broken window, I should close the lockers, for otherwise the dispossessed vultures, returning, might make a meal——

"I beg your pardon!" Zolani broke off abruptly, his eyes on Dorothy's face, who looked as though she might be about to faint. "I forget, where we are all daring adventurers, that one of us is yet a delicate girl who should be shielded from too much of the gruesome. But let me continue, taking care not to offend again."

With a long forefinger, he pointed within the nearest white-enameled locker.

"My device for pumping air through all the lockers, should it be necessary to close the doors," he explained. "You see, although these sleeping bodies will hardly seem to breathe, yet breathe they will a little, and must."

The pipe he had designated had openings through which the air would pass. Another pipe beside it, however, had none.

Donald questioned him as to the use of this pipe. "It looks like——"

He broke off as Zolani had done a moment before, mindful of Dorothy.

"It is. You see, I thought some day I might wish to use this place for the other thing which it resembles. My scheme is safe enough, but it might break down. The government might object to my sending its citizens so far abroad without passports—anything might happen. Then I had a scheme for using the refrigeration plant"—Zolani approached his mouth to Chester's ear —"making a sure enough morgue of the joint, you see, and keeping people here preserved by cold without embalmment for a while, while I tried to resuscitate them. No, I'm not the wizard of the ages; I can't restore life, and I have no hope of doing that. But I could pull in some money while making the attempt."

Before Donald's horrified stare, the count showed some slight uneasiness.

"Well, perhaps I'm letting you see and know too much. But you needn't assume an air of superior virtue. Most people resort to various methods of gaining their ends. Perhaps if you knew *everything* I have in mind at this moment, you would be even more shocked. Your fiancée tricked me quite thoroughly and well. And you know many men in your own world who have founded fortunes by putting something over on the right person at the right time, or even cheating thousands out of their just dues. No! I wouldn't presume to look down on me, if I were you. Life is short—too short for indulgence in snobbery."

They had returned at last to the outer hall, and Zolani pressed an electric button.

"Show the gentleman and the lady to their respective rooms. They have a hard day ahead tomorrow," the count said to a herculean colored man who appeared.

They passed the door of Dorothy's room before they reached the one which was Donald's. Talking together, Dorothy and Donald did not address the giant serving-man. It was only at the door of his own room that Donald discovered that the negro could hear but not speak. He pointed to his mouth in explanation and Donald, looking, saw that his tongue was shriveled almost to the root.

"As he fell asleep, the sight of that shriveled tongue was with him like a nightmare horror.

"Born like that? Maybe. But Zolani wouldn't have to *cut* a tongue out. He'd know a way—some chemical, some devilish compound—that would produce an effect like that without being telltale." That was his last conscious thought.

ZOLANI had selected the hour of dawn for his great experiment. Seeing the group of men who reported at that zero hour in the little waiting-room off his basement laboratory, Donald marveled. Bank presidents, statesmen, college professors—these were among others at whose identity Donald could only guess. Truly, this affair was to make Zolani famous immediately, and rich almost as soon. There could be no claiming that a fraud had been practised upon one or two insignificant or unbalanced dupes. Zolani had assured Donald that he had set free and recalled the spirits of one or two individuals who "did not greatly matter." Perhaps the servitor with the withered tongue was one of these. At any rate, the count was marvelously sure of himself.

In spite of himself, Donald sickened as he watched this experiment proceed—so far as one could watch a thing, the salient feature of which was invisible. He saw eighteen men lie back in comfortable reclining-chairs and suffer Zolani to hook them up by means of wires to a great, humming dynamo in the center of the room; so far, it was unpleasantly like the preparation for an electrocution. There were dials which Zolani watched, delicate manipulations which he performed. Over the top of the dynamo was a great flask in which a watery bubbling liquid alternately clouded and cleared. Before each man was a smaller globe which seemed to duplicate the reaction of the large one; and, as Donald observed that the men leaning back in their chairs appeared one by one to drowse and doze, he observed the liquid in each man's respective globe change color from white to rose. A little later a white flame appeared to shine within the center of the fluid, which was now brilliant in color and quite clear, and no longer bubbling at all; and as this phenomenon appeared, each man drew a long sigh and appeared to sink into deep slumber. Donald, watching the nearest man—the one who was president of one of the large eastern universities—observed an expression of peace upon his face, which seemed a moment later to grow sharp of feature and livid of complexion, so that Donald felt as though he were indeed gazing upon a corpse. He would have cried out, then, and called upon Zolani, perhaps, to bring the hovering spirit back to the habitation in which God had placed it for the span of an earthly lifetime; but in that moment the light disappeared from the rose-colored, liquid-filled globe, as though it had been snuffed out, and the liquid itself suffered a change, becoming leaden gray, with an over-tinge of green. This, for some reason, was more horrible to Donald than all the other features of the transformation: it spoke so clearly of the withdrawing of life to a far distant place. Even the carting away of the limp figures one by one, in the arms of Zolani's withered-tongued assistant, to be stored in their respective locker spaces like so many carcasses, was no worse than that sickly changing of the bright-colored liquid in the glass.

Donald turned to Zolani now, prepared to fight out a thing upon which he had determined.

"Miss Leigh can't be allowed to take part in this, however safe, however sure," he said firmly. "Women were never meant to pioneer among

new dangers and new horrors. They are to be cherished, safeguarded. You have loved Miss Leigh; perhaps you still love her. I love her, too, and, since I am to be her husband, I must protect her. I have no doubt that you will agree with me—that you will forbid at the last minute that to which you have already consented."

Zolani's smile cut whitely across his dark face like a menace.

"My friend, you are too late!" he cried softly. Beckoning Donald, he led him to a near-by doorway and bade him look through it. Incredulous, Donald saw the deeply slumbering form of Dorothy Leigh stretched upon a couch in the room beyond.

"This is the chair in which she reclined, and this the glass globe filled with the essence into which her spirit was withdrawn, before it took its farther flight in space."

As Donald looked upon these things, his heart sank sickly, while the pounding of his pulse was like the beating of a drum. Oh, he had believed in the safety of Zolani's experiment!—but then he had trusted Zolani. What had Dorothy said? "I have come to feel that he is evil." Donald, too, had come to feel that the count was evil.

"You will want to follow her swiftly," the count was continuing. "See, you may have this last place—the one next Dorothy Leigh's. You will wish to hasten?"

Donald was about to follow the count's instructions. What instinct he had indeed prompted him to share as rapidly as possible Dorothy's fate. He should follow her out into the great unknown, even though he did not trust Zolani, because it was the only thing he knew which he could do.

And then a little thing occurred. Donald was possessed of keen powers of observation. Now, just before he seated himself in the reclining-chair, he noticed a tiny green bulb, apparently an ordinary electric light, which burned upon the baseboard that supported the individual smallish globes of liquid. This light was burning beside none of the other globes—only beside his own. Donald was sure that during the experiment which had been completed on the others—completed in its first stage, at least—this light had not been lit. And now, stooping suddenly, he was able to read the letters of an abbreviated word, small and almost invisible on the black baseboard underneath the green light: "Refrig."

He started back, more than half expecting to be instantly engaged in a fight for his life. The doors of the room were closed—probably locked. There was no escape, and besides, the helpless, sleeping, deathlike form of Dorothy Leigh lay in the adjoining room, dependent upon Count Zolani's whim if it were to be restored ever to life and consciousness. To challenge Zolani would do little good, but perhaps it was as well to have all of the cards on the table.

"Zolani!" Donald cried as these thoughts coursed through his brain. "I'll stay in my own body, please; and I'll see that you take good care of that helpless girl in there. I'm not blind, nor a fool."

He pointed to the green light with its all but invisible labeling.

"You had the refrigeration current turned on for *me*—only for me, Zolani," he continued. "You would have locked me into my locker and let me freeze—killed my body while my soul was absent, so that I could never come back to claim Dorothy—to protect her!"

For several minutes, the two men stared into each other's eyes. At last Zolani shrugged his shoulders, though now his white-toothed smile was absent.

"Well, it is true you are not the fool I thought you!" he said, slowly. "So, while you may perhaps surmise

that your future is a brief one, you may as well see a little drama which will deeply interest you. Dorothy Leigh sleeps only for a brief interval —only for the space of one hour. Already that hour is near its end. And I shall let you see the restoration. One warning, first.

"It is not my will that you leave this place alive. So much you have already divined. But since I choose to let you take with you the bitter memory of that which you are to behold, remember this: only *I* can restore the absent soul of Dorothy Leigh. And, whatever you see me do, if you interrupt me it shall not be restored. It shall wander, homeless and friendless in outer space, until the normal time of the termination of her life upon this earth—a period of some fifty years, no doubt. If you interrupt me, you will have condemned her whom you love to the most horrible exile the mind of man can imagine. Do you agree—do you swear—*to hold your hand, not to interrupt me under any circumstances?*"

Donald took the oath which Zolani commanded. He watched then, while Zolani brought the deathlike body of Dorothy Leigh and laid it in the reclining-chair which awaited it. The horrible apparatus which had reminded him of the electric connections essential to a death chair was put in correct arrangement. Zolani showed him the irreversible switch marked "time," which he had set for one hour, and which in a few minutes would have its period of operation fulfilled. He showed him the other switch which was to be operated by the throwing of a lever—and when this switch was thrown in, the returning spirit of Dorothy would appear as a bright flame in the glass globe. Then, and then only, the element of will-power entered into consideration: Dorothy must will herself back from the rosy fluid into her waiting body.

"No trouble there—she'll come to me! She'll come to me!" Donald thought, trying to forget that soon after her coming she would in all probability find herself mourning Donald's death by murder at the hands of Zolani or his dumb assistant.

IT SEEMED a long time, but was probably in reality only minutes, before the leaden-colored liquid began to quiver and change within its glass walls. Donald's heart leaped high; then suddenly a soft brightness like the glow of a sunrise made the globe beautiful, and in another instant a pure flame like the fire of a star bathed in dawnlight appeared —the soul of Dorothy Leigh imprisoned in the globe, needing only an effort of her pure will to re-enter the waiting body, which now seemed to stir a little and to breathe visibly.

"Dorothy!" Donald's soul was on his lips. But Zolani suddenly stooped over the girl, reminding Donald of the swooping flight of one of the vultures whose home this desolate place had been. His arms encircled the plastic waist of the girl, his lips were laid upon her fluttering lips. Donald cried out again, this time in horror. For a moment only, Zolani turned to him.

"She makes her choice!" he cried triumphantly. "Either her exiled spirit refuses to re-enter her body, and is condemned to the horrible fate I have described—or she comes back, not only to herself, but—to me—to my arms, my lips! My spirit strives with hers. If Dorothy Leigh is now restored to life, never can her spirit shake off mine—never can she be free of me, or free to love any but her master! Fool! I could almost let you live, in your harmlessness—almost!"

In the next moments, Donald lived an eternity of anguish. What fate to pray for, for the girl he loved, he did not know. Horrible, that long

disembodied exile—horrible beyond words! But equally horrible, the slavery Zolani hinted at—the slavery which would begin by forcing Dorothy, who loathed Zolani, to return to consciousness in his arms, never again to be far from them or free of him.

Once more, Zolani's embrace clasped the girl more closely. Once more his avid lips sought hers. And suddenly, a splintering crash, which was again and again repeated, broke the spell which seemed to hold them all immovable. Zolani sprang to his feet, a pale horror on his countenance:

"In spite of all precautions, I am discovered!" he cried. "In spite of my silencing all those who have helped, in spite of all—surely, men are battering in the windows of the house upstairs—the windows of my dormuary——"

Undecided, he looked at the body of Dorothy Leigh. But to Donald, nothing but Dorothy mattered—nothing else in the world. For him there was no fatal moment of vacillation. Even as Zolani spoke, he had rushed to her, drawn her into his arms, kissed her warming lips—and felt the ecstasy of their return kiss.

He turned, then, to Zolani. Before either man could speak, another crash and clatter made the building shake, and he could hear the screaming of voices through the thick walls, and the screaming of other things—could they be the angry souls of the eighteen sleepers who had been mysteriously attacked and could not return to their dwelling-places?

"One of my men must have gotten away—and managed to communicate with the nearest town, which is only ten miles from here!" Zolani hissed. "You know what the ignorant mob mind is capable of—fanatics and fools! They have heard a tale of my putting men to sleep and incarcerating their bodies in my dormuary above. They have made of it a tale of wholesale murder, and come to wreak revenge. Explain to them, convince them? It would be hard to do as much to a body of savants, unprepared for my stupendous discoveries—impossible to a herd of yokels. No! One thing there is that terrifies me, as some men are stricken out of themselves with horror by great heights, or fire, or water. The thing that makes me less than a man with fear, is—a mob! Once I suffered at the hands of a mob——"

He covered his face with his shaking hands. Then, leaping forward, Donald strove to tear those hands from the count's face, seeing that in the palm of one was held a small vial full of a black fluid, which, even as Donald stared in horror, disappeared down the throat of the count. Zolani dropped his hands, then, and stared blankly at Donald, with a horrid, empty smile. His body, Donald knew, was tenantless, before it crumpled slowly to the floor, and to it there would be no returning of the banished spirit, for the very lips were blackened and burned with the poison which had brought instant and strangely painless death.

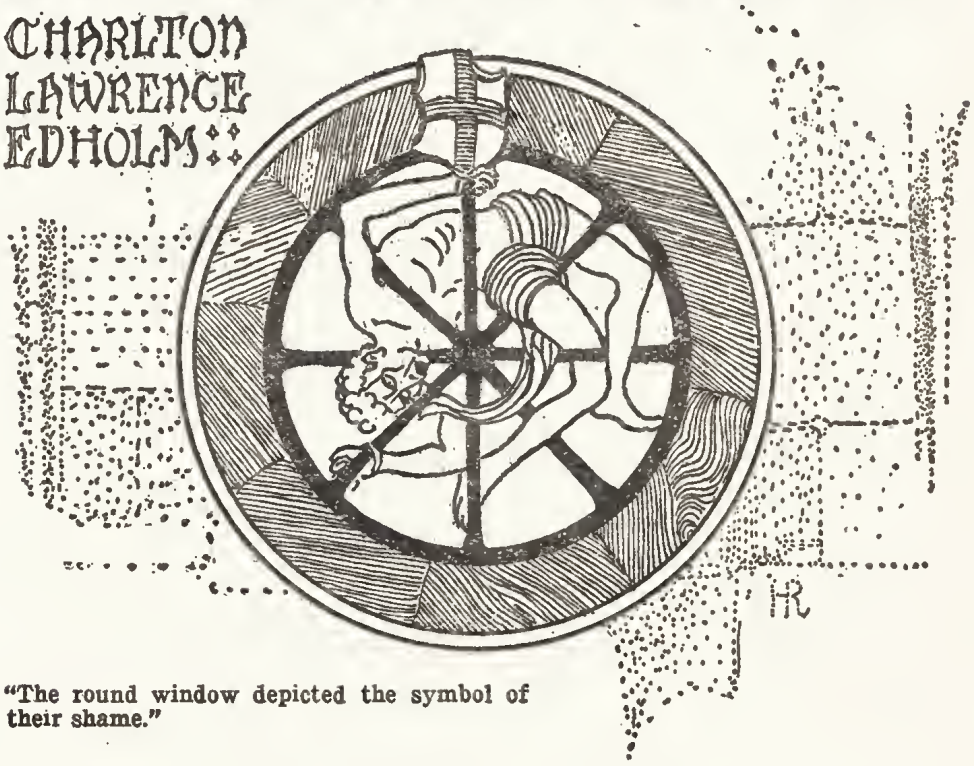
An overpowering impulse seized then upon Donald—an impulse to catch up Dorothy in his arms and make his escape with her—to get her away from this room of death, and away from the confusion and rioting which he could hear from above stairs and from without. Zolani had been right—there were shouts of men mingled with sounds of violence, and again that other shrieking which seemed to touch Donald's heart with a strange horror. He turned hastily to Dorothy now, but made no move to touch her; before he had the right to take her away, there was work to be done. To his relief, her eyes were open, and she smiled.

"Don't be afraid, my darling—I will be back at once," he reassured

(Continued on page 285)

The Rose-Window

by Charlton Lawrence Edholm



"The round window depicted the symbol of their shame."

FOREWORD

THE tottering old man with long white hair and red-rimmed eyes, who but a few years ago was a familiar figure in the streets of the South Side, the German quarter of St. Louis, bequeathed me the following history as he lay sick with a fever. He insisted that it was his death-bed confession and it turned out that he was right, for the disease took an unexpected turn for the worse and finished him. He told me what he had never confided to anyone else, that he had fled from Stuttgart where he had a shop of his own (he was a wood-carver, did altars and things for churches), left his business and a girl whom he cared for, because he was in terror of arrest and decapitation on account of the murder. Doubtless the truth of it is that his head had been turned by too much brooding over some philosophy of reincarnation, and I dare say the gargoyles and other medieval grotesques of which he was such an eager student and copyist added their share to his weird imaginings.

In going over the manuscript, I have retained the rather formal diction which marks its German authorship, rather than risk losing the atmosphere of the narrative by recasting it:

IN THE little city of Tuebingen, renowned for its university, stands the old church of St. George, which

is less interesting for any purely architectural beauties, though it is no mean example of the Gothic style, than for its many curious and bizarre stone carvings, among them the splendid monuments of the early rulers of Wuertemberg, Duke Ulrich, Eberhard the Bearded and other mighty wielders of the two-handed sword, who lie in the choir, full-armored, stark and rigid with watchful, wide-open eyes.

It was late in the afternoon when I entered the church, dusty and warm as I was from the parched highway, for, knapsack a-shoulder, I had walked from Stuttgart that day; —yes, I could foot it with the best in my wander years and still be fresh for sightseeing at the journey's end.

Strangely enough for a Protestant church, it was not close-locked, and a small door admitted me into the dusky choir. An old woman with a dust-brush was shuffling among the pews in an obscure corner, but I was in no mood to be led from one sight to another by a garrulous guide eager for a fee, so I moved noiselessly among the tombstones and memorial tablets, admiring those quaint art works of a more simple, more pious and far more artistic age.

The high windows on the north side interested me particularly because of an idea in ornament that I had not seen elsewhere. In their pointed arches was Gothic carving, of course, but it was not the variation of the trefoil and quatrefoil such as the medieval sculptors delighted to elaborate, but figures of saints skilfully graven with decorative effect so that they filled with credit the place of more conventional designs. The stained glass was fitted around their contours so that they stood silhouetted in a many-colored halo.

The figures, as I remember them, represented the Blessed Virgin, Saint Martin dividing his cloak with the beggar, and Saint George slaying the dragon. I had been told of another, a rose window, said to represent the martyrdom of the knightly George, but I did not find it at once for there was much else to attract the eye of a journeyman wood-carver; for instance the grim aspect of those old bishops sculptured on the choir benches, who scowled defiance at their arch-enemy, Dr. Luther, a jovial, smiling face carved on the organ loft. I remember also a sinister device on one of the many tombstones against the wall. In the dim light this appeared at first to be the common design of a helmet surmounting a blazoned shield and bearing a winged crest, but looking closer I saw that the helmet was a polished skull through whose eye-sockets a serpent writhed, the crest a flying hour-glass, and the coat of arms that of the most unchivalrous, relentless and invincible of warriors, Time.

I know not how many hours had elapsed in studying and sketching such details when the heat and quiet rendered me drowsy and I stretched out at length in a pew of the northern aisle. The hum from the market-place without, like the droning of flies on the pane, lulled me to sleep.

It was an eldritch dream, a confusion of menacing sounds of darkness and of blood. I have a recollection, too, of seeing the church, but it was as a building uncompleted; on its eastern front yawned a great black hole where a round window was to be built in the wall. Strangest of all was that, while everything was changed, it should be so familiar.

Many instances I can not remember connectedly, but there remains a vivid impression of some enemy who had from the beginning of things haunted me, as dream enemies do, and blighted my every hope; the fortune I was to inherit he had a later but a better claim to, for I was

merely the foster-child after he, the true son, was born; the maiden I desired, loved him because he was a goodly youth and fairer to look upon than I.

To learn the goldsmith's trade he went away, far away, and when years had passed without tidings, I believed him lost or, better still, dead, and I dared to hope that the yellow gold and the other priceless treasure which would have gone to him might yet be mine.

I was walking in the fields not far from the city (so my dream continued). It was evening; in the tavern garden near the crossroads sat two young men, drinking. I had been indulging my vain hopes when I saw the pair. "My God! he has returned!" I exclaimed, and I swiftly resolved: "He must not reach home!"

I found a secret place to hide among the bushes where the roads parted, one to Tuebingen, one to my native city, Reutlingen.

It was late twilight when he passed like a shadow in the gloom, but light enough for me to drive the knife deep into his back, light enough for me to drag him under the trees with averted face, and then, ah, far too still and far too dark for me to stay and bury the dead alone in those somber aisles.

Fearful and exultant I fled homeward, but by a circuitous route, sought my foster-father's fireside—and found there the man I had tried to murder! Yes, there he sat, rosy with the wine he was drinking, a table spread with delicacies before him.

My brain was benumbed by this unaccountable horror. Had I lost my reason? Was the whole ghastly affair in the woods—the treacherous blow, the blood on my hands—all the work of witchcraft? I shuddered. Then, like a serpent, the cold, slimy suspicion crept into my mind that I had struck down a stranger in the dark woods. I had dealt a death blow, foul and profitless, to an unoffending man. God knew who he might be.

Certain it was that my foster-brother, whom I hated and had sought to destroy, was there before my eyes, boasting and laughing about his travel adventures, flushed with meat and drink. His parents, overjoyed at his return, were filling his cup and plate afresh, meanwhile plying him with questions till he could scarcely find time to eat. And the girl whom I loved sat close beside him caressing his hand, her eyes full of adoration.

I must have swooned at the sight (if one can swoon in a dream), for it seemed days before his happy parents told me of how he had returned, and how they had almost fainted with joy at the sight of their son. But their joy was presently turned to apprehension, for a charge of murder was laid against him.

Things moved swiftly to a tragic climax. The city of Tuebingen sent an armed deputation to seize his person and hold him for trial. One of their citizens, a young man returning from his travels in Italy, had been found at the cross-roads slain with a stab in the back. My foster-brother was accused by the landlord of the near-by tavern. "They had been traveling together," said he, "for they drank brotherhood and farewell after the manner of young journeymen until long after sunset; then the victim went his way; after an interval the murderer followed, and the rest had no witness but the eye of God."

When I heard that, I *knew* that I had done murder in vain.

Horrible it was, that dream of my treachery, of how when the city of Reutlingen refused to deliver up her son, it was I who plotted and

planned with the spies of Tuebingen. Enough, it was my hand that unbolted my foster-father's door at midnight; it was I who led the stealthily treading soldiers to his bed-chamber; it was I who helped bind and gag him, all in the interest of justice, so I explained to the men of Tuebingen. A wagon loaded with hay stood in our street not too far from the door. In that we concealed him.

In the morning he had dispeared, no one in the city knew whither. The wagon loaded with hay had also gone from our street.

We could only guess at the mystery of his fate. None knew it, until the day when it was made a public spectacle. On that day I stood among the crowd in the marketplace of Tuebingen; above our heads loomed a black structure of beams and planks; the "poor sinner's bell" wailed incessantly in my ears and I saw—from the horror of that sight I started, awoke from the dream in which I had dreamed this ghastly crime and found myself lying cramped and chilled in the church of Tuebingen where I had fallen asleep. But as my eyes opened they fell upon the uncanny Thing of which I had dreamed.

It hung, black in a circle of pallid light, high on the stone church wall. How can I describe it? Its outline was somewhat like that of an enormous spider, from whose shapeless body as a center reached eight horrible radii to the circumference. It was, I could discern, the semblance of a human form, broken and tangled in the spokes of a huge wheel of torture.

Like a row of tall specters in the darkness of the church loomed the pale Gothic windows of the choir, but through the rose window poured baleful light as from a waning moon and cast upon my face the mottled shadow of the Thing. In bewilderment and terror, I struggled to rise, but my body lay quite rigid, nor could I so much as turn my head, try though I would. I felt as if I were drowning in a black and silent sea.

The straining and creaking of ropes over the wheels in the tower told me that the bell was about to strike. Thank God, I could be assured of one tangible fact! To know the hour were a plank on this vague sea of darkness and uncertainty. The first quarter chimed; how it dragged! Deliberately the second blow fell; would it never be done? The third stroke echoed sullenly through the vault; its vibrations rang on and on into infinity. What hour of the night it was, now three-fourths spent, I knew not.

I waited for the echoes to cease, but my ears were sharpened to every gradation of silence, as my eyes were sensitive to the shades of black about me, and I listened, as it seemed, for hours, to the quivering of the bell like deep and distant music of a great organ, as it became fainter and more intangible until at last I perceived it only with some latent sense.

To have broken this tremulous silence with a cry for help would have tortured my spanned nerves. I shuddered at the mere thought of it. With my gaze fixed upon the luminous orb that glared into the void like an evil eye, silent I lay for what seemed years and years of agonizing suspense, and listened.

I listened, and out of the unquiet stillness grew a rustling like that of leaves withered on the branch, as they complain in the wintry gusts; and out of the rustling grew a whispering as from a thousand parched throats, inarticulate, intermittent, now hoarse, now shrill, like the voices of conscience or of memory, attuned only to my ear that strained at first to hear, then heard but too well and too soon understood.

But why should this voice sound like one I had known for a lifetime? Why, though it was as familiar as my own utterance, did I strive in vain to associate it with some person, time or place?

It was from this voice that I heard the ending of the story in my dream.

* * * * * * *

THE body, broken on the wheel, hung in the marketplace until the sun had shriveled it to a mummy. The men of Reutlingen soon heard of this outrage of secret trial and judgment, and I was one of the armed band which sallied forth and, although beaten back from the walls of Tuebingen, left a breach in the fortifications that we took care should not be mended.

Then upon a cloud-laden night (and I remember now that it was a year from the night when I had lain in wait at the cross-roads), seven sons of Reutlingen stole through that ill-guarded opening and cautiously passed through dark alleys to the marketplace and there, while four of us kept watch, the other three disentangled the dried and broken limbs from the spokes and huddled them into a sack, and together we fled through the unlighted streets, through the broken wall, through the dark woods, like a flock of frightened shadows.

It was the fool's cunning of fear that had made me join them. Who would have suspected me of delivering my foster-brother over to his enemies even had I *not* been the most clamorous to recover his body and one of the first to volunteer in the mad expedition? With beating heart, I cursed the timidity that had made me reckless beyond my power of endurance. Why had I not stayed snug at home, clasped in the arms of my bride for whose possession I had done the black deed?

As we fled, one after another shifted the burden to his shoulders; five times had the sack been taken up and each time I had trembled lest I should be called upon next. But what folly to shudder at touching the enemy whom I had rendered harmless! That a corpse will bleed when its murderer lays even a finger upon it, I knew to be true enough, for I had seen it tested in the open court of justice, but a mummy with every drop of its blood burned out by the sun, *that* could never accuse me! I laughed aloud, made foolish speeches and whistled many a tavern catch to drive away the thought.

Lightning flashed in the west and threw its white glare upon us from time to time, and once, far in the depths of the wind-stirred forest, I saw and heard things too fearful for human minds to bear: souls of murdered men, unshriven, who yelled amid their torments for vengeance; souls of murderers dying impenitent, bearing ever upon them a grievous burden of sin, in all eternity never to be shaken off.

My companions, I could see, pretended to have heard nothing of this, but they drew aside from me when I sang shrilly and brandished my dagger, gathering silently about him who bore the load.

Why did they cluster so about that accursed burden? What did they see, what did they hear that was not meant for me? Had the malignant victim opened his withered jaws? Was he moving those grinning lips? Was he whispering with scorched and blackened tongue that it was I, I who had murdered his friend, here on this selfsame spot at the cross-roads; that it was I who had given him up to be tortured and slain for my crime; that it was I, wretched creature, who had stolen his life, his heritage and his bride, all unpunished?

"He shall not whisper so! They are lies, all lies! I will stop his mouth with dirt!" I screamed. "Give me the sack!"

As I took it upon my back, the heavens opened; they were full of fire, and I stood revealed in such light as flashes before the judgment throne, dabbled with innocent blood.

With a mighty roar demons bore me to the earth and plucked out my soul. From hand to hand, from star to star they tossed it whirling through space.

Presently they forced me to look down and I saw my unconscious body lying in the forest; I saw the sack bursted by a thunderbolt and the shriveled limbs of the dead embracing mine. My companions had fled; I realized that the Hand which had felled me had written out my guilt plainly for all men to read.

In obedience to the judgment of God, my lifeless body was bound to the wheel on the marketplace of Reutlingen and left to burn in the sun, and when all was known to the citizens of Tuebingen and they realized that they had dealt death unjustly the city fathers and the good Duke Eberhard resolved that the town should do penance for all time. In the unfinished church they built a round window depicting as a symbol of their shame the figure of a man perishing on the wheel.

The sculptor was sent to Reutlingen and it was from my body, exposed on the marketplace, that he modeled the memorial of my victim.

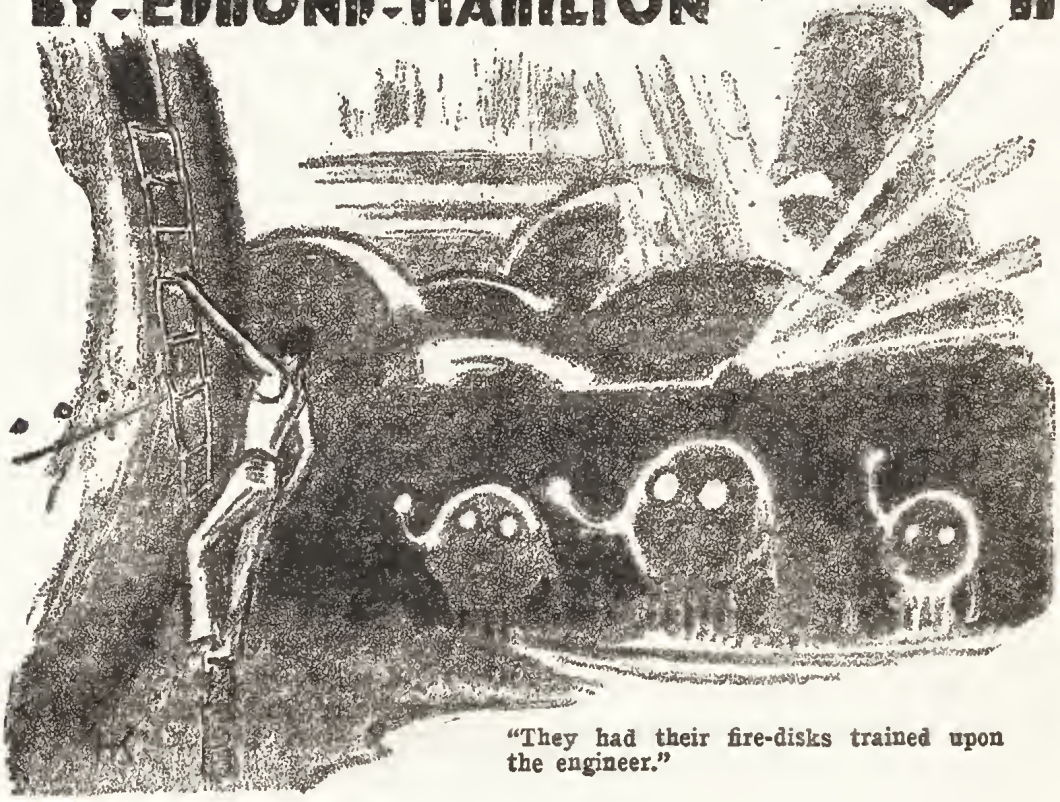
THE morning-gray that precedes the dawn glazed and chilled the awful eye from which perforce I had not removed my own.

While the voice had spoken I constantly questioned: When had I heard that intonation? Was it years ago? It seemed hundreds of years ago. Was it in my earliest childhood? Was it in this life or in another existence until now forgotten? Was it the voice of one living or of one who was dead? Or of the dead returned to life?

As the light waxed I scanned anxiously the form suspended in endless torture, for a horrible suspicion grew as I watched, but not until the dawn tinged the face of suffering and I saw it as one sees his face in a mirror did I know with certitude that memory, asleep for centuries, had awakened: *The voice was my own.*

CRASHING SUNS

BY EDMOND HAMILTON



"They had their fire-disks trained upon the engineer."

AS THE control-levers flashed down under my hands our ship dived down through space with the swiftness of thought. The next instant there came a jarring shock, and our craft spun over like a whirling top. Everything in the conning-tower, windows and dials and controls, seemed to be revolving about me with lightning speed, while I clung dizzily to the levers in my hands. In a moment I managed to swing them back into position, and at once the ship righted herself and sped smoothly on through the ether. I drew a deep breath.

The trap-door in the little room's floor slid open, then, and the startled face of big Hal Kur appeared, his eyes wide.

"By the Power, Jan Tor!" he exclaimed; "that last meteor just grazed us! An inch nearer and it would have been the end of the ship!"

I turned to him for a moment, laughing. "A miss is as good as a mile," I quoted.

He grinned back at me. "Well, remember that we're not out on the Uranus patrol now," he reminded me. "What's our course?"

"Seventy-two degrees sunward, plane No. 8," I told him, glancing at the dials. "We're less than four hundred thousand miles from Earth, now," I added, nodding toward the broad window before me.

Climbing up into the little conning-tower, Hal Kur stepped over be-

side me, and together we gazed out ahead.

The sun was at the ship's left, for the moment, and the sky ahead was one of deep black, in which the stars, the flaming stars of interplanetary space, shone like brilliant jewels. Directly ahead of us there glowed a soft little orb of misty light, which was growing steadily larger as we raced on toward it. It was our destination, the cloud-veiled little world of Earth, mother-planet of all our race. To myself, who had passed much of my life on the four outer giants, on Jupiter and Saturn and Uranus and Neptune, the little planet ahead seemed insignificant, almost, with its single tiny moon. And yet from it, I knew, had come that unceasing stream of human life, that dauntless flood of pioneers, which had spread over all the solar system in the last hundred thousand years. 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. And it was from this Earth, a thousand centuries before, that there had ventured out the first discoverers' crude little space-boats, whose faulty gravity-screens and uncertain controls contrasted strangely with the mighty leviathans that flashed between the planets now.

Abruptly I was aroused from my musings by the sharp ringing of a bell at my elbow. "The telestereo," I said to Hal Kur. "Take the controls." As he did so I stepped over to the telestereo's glass disk, inset in the room's floor, and touched a switch beside it. Instantly there appeared standing upon the disk, the image of a man in the blue and white robe of the Supreme Council, a life-size and moving and stereoscopically perfect image, flashed across the void of space to my apparatus by means of etheric vibrations. Through the medium of that projected image the man himself could see and hear me as well as I could see and hear him, and at once he spoke directly to me.

"Jan Tor, Captain of Interplanetary Patrol Cruiser 79388," he said, in the official form of address. "The command of the Supreme Council of the League of Planets, to Jan Tor. You are directed to proceed with all possible speed to Earth, and immediately upon your arrival there to report to the Council, at the Hall of Planets. Is the order heard?"

"The order is heard and will be obeyed," I answered, making the customary response, and the figure on the disk bowed, then abruptly vanished.

I turned at once to a speaking-tube which connected with the cruiser's screen rooms. "Make all speed possible to reach Earth," I ordered the engineer who answered my call. "Throw open all the left and lower screens and use the full attraction of the sun until we are within twenty thousand miles of Earth; then close them and use the attraction of Jupiter and Neptune to brake our progress. Is the order heard?"

When he had acknowledged the command I turned to Hal Kur. "That should bring us to Earth within the hour," I told him, "though the Power alone knows what the Supreme Council wants with a simple patrol-captain."

His laugh rumbled forth. "Why, here's unusual modesty, for you! Many a time I've heard you tell how the Eight Worlds would be run were Jan Tor of the Council, and now you're but 'a simple patrol-captain!' "

With that parting gibe he slid quickly down through the door in the floor, just in time to escape a well-aimed kick. I heard his deep laughter bellow out again as the door clanged shut behind him, and smiled to myself. No one on the cruiser would have permitted himself such familiarity with its captain but Hal

Kur, but the big engineer well knew that his thirty-odd years of service in the Patrol made him a privileged character.

As the door slammed shut behind him, though, I forgot all else for the moment and concentrated all my attention on the ship's progress. It was my habit to act as pilot of my own cruiser, whenever possible, and for the time being I was quite alone in the round little pilot-house, or conning-tower, set on top of the cruiser's long, fishlike hull. Only pride, though, kept me from summoning an assistant to the controls, for the sun was pulling the cruiser downward with tremendous velocity, now, and as we sped down past Earth's shining little moon we ran into a belt of meteorites which gave me some ticklish moments. At last, though, we were through the danger zone, and were dropping down toward Earth with decreasing speed, as the screens were thrown open which allowed the pull of Neptune and Jupiter to check our progress.

A touch of a button then brought a pilot to replace me at the controls, and as we fell smoothly down toward the green planet below I leaned out the window, watching the dense masses of interplanetary shipping through which we were now threading our way. It seemed, indeed, that half the vessels in the solar system were assembled around and beneath us, so close-packed was the jam of traffic. There were mighty cargo-ships, their mile-long hulls filled with a thousand products of Earth, which were ponderously getting under way for the long voyages out to Uranus or Neptune. Sleek, long passenger-ships flashed past us, their transparent upper-hulls giving us brief glimpses of the gay groups on their sunlit decks. Private pleasure-boats were numerous, too, mostly affairs of gleaming white, and most of these were apparently bound for the annual Jupiter-Mars space-races. Here and there through the confusion dashed the local police-boats of Earth, and I caught sight of one or two of the long black cruisers of the Interplanetary Patrol, like our own, the swiftest ships in space. At last, though, after a slow, tortuous progress through the crowded upper levels, our craft had won through the jam of traffic and was swooping down upon the surface of Earth in a great curve.

In a panorama of meadow and forest, dotted here and there with gleaming white cities, the planet's parklike surface unrolled before me as we sped across it. We rocketed over one of its oceans, seeming hardly more than a pond to my eyes after the mighty seas of Jupiter and the vast ice-fringed oceans of Neptune; and then, as we flashed over land again, there loomed up far ahead the gigantic white dome of the great Hall of Planets, permanent seat of the Supreme Council and the center of government of the Eight Worlds. A single titanic structure of gleaming white, that reared its towering dome into the air for over two thousand feet, it grew swiftly larger as we raced on toward it. In a moment we were beside it, and the cruiser was slanting down toward the square landing-court behind the great dome.

As we came to rest there without a jar, I snapped open a small door in the conning-tower's side, and in a moment had descended to the ground by means of the ladder inset in the cruiser's side. At once there ran forward to meet me a thin, spectacled young man in the red-slashed robe of the Scientists, an owlish-looking figure at whom I stared for a moment in amazement. Then I had recovered from my astonishment and was grasping his hands.

"Sarto Sen!" I cried. "By the Power, I'm glad to see you! I

thought you were working in the Venus Laboratories."

My friend's eyes were shining with welcome, but for the moment he wasted no time in speech, hurrying me across the court toward the inner door of the great building.

"The Council is assembling at this moment," he explained rapidly as we hastened along. "I got the chairman, Mur Dak, to hold up the meeting until you arrived."

"But what's it all about?" I asked, in bewilderment. "Why wait for *me?*"

"You will understand in a moment," he answered, his face grave. "But here is the Council Hall."

By that time we had hastened down a series of long white corridors and now passed through a high-arched doorway into the great Council Hall itself. I had visited the place before —who in the Eight Worlds has not? —and the tremendous, circular room and colossal, soaring dome above it were not new to me, but now I saw it as few ever did, with the eight hundred members of the Supreme Council gathered in solemn session. Grouped in a great half-circle around the dais of the chairman stretched the curving rows of seats, each occupied by a member, and each hundred members gathered around the symbol of the world they represented, whether that world was tiny Mercury or mighty Jupiter. On the dais at the center stood the solitary figure of Mur Dak, the chairman. It was evident that, as my friend had informed me, the Council had just assembled, since for the moment Mur Dak was not speaking, but just gazing calmly out over the silent rows of members.

In a moment we had passed down the aisle to his dais and stood beneath him. To my salute he returned a word of greeting only, then motioned us to two empty seats which had apparently been reserved for us. As I slipped into mine I wondered, fleetingly, what big Hal Kur would have thought to see his captain thus taking a seat with the Supreme Council itself. Then that thought slipped from my mind as Mur Dak began to speak.

"Men of the Eight Worlds," he said slowly, "I have called this session of the Council for the gravest of reasons. I have called it because discovery has just been made of a peril which menaces the civilization, the very existence, of all our race—a deadly peril which is rushing upon us with unthinkable speed, and which threatens the annihilation of our entire universe!"

He paused for a moment, and a slow, deep hum of surprize ran over the assembled members. For the first time, now, I saw that Mur Dak's keen, intellectual face was white and drawn, and I bent forward, breathless, tensely listening. In a moment the chairman was speaking on.

"It is necessary for me to go back a little," he said, "in order that you may understand the situation which confronts us. As you know, our sun and its eight spinning planets are not motionless in space. Our sun, with its family of worlds, has for eons been moving through space at the approximate rate of twelve miles a second, across the Milky Way. You know, too, that all other suns, all other stars, are moving through space likewise, some at a lesser speed than ours and some at a speed inconceivably greater. Flaming new suns, dying red suns, cold dark suns, each is flashing through the infinities of space on its own course, each toward its appointed doom.

"And among that infinity of thronging stars is that one which we know as Alto, that great red star, that dying sun, which has been steadily drawing nearer to us as the centuries have passed, and which is now nearest to us of all the stars. It is but little larger than our own sun, and as you all know, it and our own

sun are moving toward each other, rushing nearer each other by thousands of miles each second, since Alto is moving at an unthinkable speed. Our scientists have calculated that the two suns would pass each other over a year from now, and thereafter would be speeding away from each other. There has been no thought of danger to us from the passing of this dying sun, for it has been known that its path through space would cause it to pass us at a distance of billions of miles. And had the star Alto but continued in that path all would have been well. But now a thing unprecedented has happened.

"Some eight weeks ago the South Observatory on Mars reported that the approaching star Alto seemed to have changed its course a little, bearing inward toward the solar system. The shift was a small one, but any change of course on the part of a star is quite unprecedented, so for the last eight weeks the approaching star has been closely watched. And during those weeks the effect of its shift in course has become more and more apparent. More and more the star has veered from the path it formerly followed, until it is now many millions of miles out of its course, with its deflection growing greater every minute. And this morning came the climax. For this morning I received a telestereo message from the director of the Bureau of Astonomical Science, on Venus, in which he informed me that the star's change of course is disastrous, for us. For instead of passing us by billions of miles, as it would have done, the star is now heading straight toward our own sun. And our sun is racing to meet it!

"I need not explain to you what the result of this situation will be. It is calculated by our astronomers that in less than a year our sun and this dying star will meet head on, will crash together in one gigantic flaming collision. And the result of that collision will be the annihilation of our universe. *For the planets of our system will perish like flowers in a furnace, in that titanic holocaust of crashing suns!*"

MUR DAK'S voice ceased, and over the great hall there reigned a deathlike silence. I think that in that moment all of us were striving to comprehend with our dazed minds the thing that Mur Dak had told us, to realize the existence of the deadly peril that was rushing to wipe out our universe. Then, before that silence could give way to the inevitable roar of surprize and fear, a single member rose from the Mercury section of the Council, a splendid figure who spoke directly to Mur Dak.

"For a hundred thousand years," he said, "we races of man have met danger after danger, and have conquered them, one after another. We have spread from world to world, have conquered and grasped and held until we are masters of a universe. And now that that universe faces destruction, are we to sit idly by? Is there nothing whatever to be done by us, no chance, however slight, to avert this doom?"

A storm of cheers burst out when he finished, a wild tempest of applause that raged over the hall with cyclonic fury for minutes. I was on my feet with the rest, by that time, shouting like a madman. It was the inevitable reaction from that moment of heart-deadening panic, was the uprush of the old will to conquer that has steeled the hearts of men in a thousand deadly perils. When it had died down a little, Mur Dak spoke again.

"It is not my purpose to allow death to rush upon us without an effort to turn it aside," he told us, "and fortune has placed in our hands, at this moment, the chance to strike out in our own defense. For the last three years Sarto Sen, one of our most brilliant young scientists,

has been working on a great problem, the problem of using etheric vibrations as a propulsion force to speed matter through space. A chip floating in water can be propelled across the surface of the water by waves in it; then why should not matter likewise be propelled through space, through the ether, by means of waves or vibrations in that ether? Experimenting on this problem, Sarto Sen has been able to make small models which can be flashed through space, through the ether, by means of artificially created vibrations in that ether, vibrations which can be produced with as high a frequency as the light-vibrations, and which thus propel the models through space at a speed equal to the speed of light itself.

"Using this principle, Sarto Sen has constructed a small ten-man cruiser, which can attain the velocity of light and which he has intended to use in a voyage of exploration to the nearer stars. Until now, as you know, we have been unable to venture outside the solar system, since even the swiftest of our gravity-screen spaceships can not make much more than a few hundred thousand miles an hour, and at that rate it would take centuries to reach the nearest star. But in this new vibration-propelled cruiser, a voyage to the stars would be a matter of weeks, instead of centuries.

"Several hours ago I ordered Sarto Sen to bring his new cruiser here to the Hall of Planets, fully equipped, and at this moment it is resting in one of the landing-courts here, manned by a crew of six men experienced in its operation and ready for a trip of any length. And it is my proposal that we send this new cruiser, in this emergency, out to the approaching star Alto, to discover what forces or circumstances have caused the nearing sun to veer from its former path. We know that those forces or those circumstances must be extraordinary in character, thus to change the course of a star; and if we can discover what phenomena are the causes of the star's deflection, there is a chance that we might be able to repeat or reverse those phenomena, to swerve the star again from the path it now follows, and so save our solar system, our universe."

Mur Dak paused for a moment, and there was an instant of sheer, stunned silence in the great hall. For the audacity of his proposal was overwhelming, even to us who roamed the limits of the solar system at will. It was well enough to rove the ways of our own universe, as men had done for ages, but to venture out into the vast gulf beyond, to flash out toward the stars themselves and calmly investigate the erratic behavior of a titanic, thundering sun, that was a proposal that left us breathless for the moment. But only for the moment, for when our brains had caught the magnitude of the idea another wild burst of applause thundered from the massed members, applause that rose still higher when the chairman called Sarto Sen himself to the dais and presented him to the assembly. Then, when the tumult had quieted a little, Mur Dak went on.

"The cruiser will start at once, then," he said, "and there remains but to choose a captain for it. Sarto Sen and his men will have charge of the craft's operation, of course, but there must be a leader for the whole expedition, some quick-thinking man of action. And I have already chosen such a man, subject to your approval, one whose name most of you have heard. A man young in years who has served most of his life in the Interplanetary Patrol, and who distinguished himself highly two years ago in the great space-fight with the interplanetary pirates off Japetus: Jan Tor!"

I swear that up to the last second I had no shadow of an idea that Mur Dak was speaking of me, and when he

turned to gaze straight at me, and spoke my name, I could only stare in bewilderment. Those around me, though, pushed me to my feet, and the next moment another roar of applause from the hundreds of members around me struck me in the face like a physical blow. I walked clumsily to the dais, under that storm of approval, and stood there beside Mur Dak, still half-dazed by the unexpectedness of the thing. The chairman smiled out at the shouting members.

"No need to ask if you approve my choice," he said, and then turned to me, his face grave. "Jan Tor," he addressed me, his solemn voice sounding clearly over the suddenly hushed hall, "to you is given the command of this expedition, the most momentous in our history. For on this expedition and on you, its leader, depends the fate of our solar system. It is the order of the Supreme Council, then, that you take command of the new cruiser and proceed with all speed to the approaching star, Alto, to discover the reason for that star's change of course and to ascertain whether any means exist of again swerving it from its path. Is the order heard?"

Five minutes later I strode with Sarto Sen and Hal Kur into the landing-court where lay the new cruiser, its long, fishlike hull glittering brilliantly in the sunlight. A door in its side snapped open as we drew near, and through it there stepped out to meet us one of the six blue-clad engineers who formed the craft's crew. "All is ready for the start," he said to Sarto Sen in reply to the latter's question, standing aside for us to enter.

We passed through the door into the cruiser's hull. To the left an open door gave me a glimpse of the ship's narrow living-quarters, while to the right extended a long room in which other blue-clad figures were standing ready beside the ship's shining, conelike vibration-generators. Directly before us rose a small winding stairway, up which Sarto Sen led the way. In a moment, following, we had reached the cruiser's conning-tower, and immediately Sarto Sen stepped over to take his place at the controls.

He touched a stud, and a warning bell gave sharp alarm throughout the cruiser's interior. There were hurrying feet, somewhere beneath us, and then a loud clang as the heavy triple-doors slammed shut. At once began the familiar throb-throb-throb of the oxygen pumps, already at work replenishing and purifying the air in our hermetically sealed vessel.

Sarto Sen paused for a moment, glancing through the broad window before him, then reached forth and pressed a series of three buttons. A low, deep humming filled the cruiser's whole interior, and there was an instant of breathless hesitation. Then came a sharp click as Sarto Sen pressed another switch; there was a quick sigh of wind, and instantly the sunlit landing-court outside vanished, replaced in a fraction of a second by the deep, star-shot night of interplanetary space. I glanced quickly down through a side window and had a momentary glimpse of a spinning gray ball beneath us, a ball that dwindled to a point and vanished even in the moment that I glimpsed it. It was Earth, vanishing behind us as we fled with frightful velocity out into the gulf of space.

We were hurtling through the belt of asteroids beyond Mars, now, and then ahead, and to the left, there loomed the mighty world of Jupiter, expanding quickly into a large white-belted globe as we rocketed on toward it, then dropping behind and diminishing in its turn as we sped past it. The sun behind us had dwindled by that time to a tiny disk of fire. An hour later and another giant world flashed past on our right, the icy planet Neptune, outermost of the

Eight Worlds. We had passed outside the last frontier of the solar system and were now racing out into the mighty deeps of space with the speed of light on our mad journey to save a universe.

2

AN HOUR after we had left the solar system Hal Kur and I still stood with Sarto Sen in the cruiser's conning-tower, staring out with him at the stupendous panorama of gathered stars that lay before us. The sun of our own system had dwindled to a far point of light behind us, by that time, one star among the millions that spangled the deep black heavens around us. For here, even more than between the planets, the stars lay before us in their true glory, undimmed by proximity to any one of them. A host of glittering points of fire, blue and green and white and red and yellow, they dotted the rayless skies thickly in all directions, and thronged like a great drift of swarming bees toward our upper left, where stretched the stupendous belt of the Milky Way. And dead ahead, now, shone a single orb that blazed in smoky, crimson glory, a single great point of red fire. It was Alto, I knew, the sullen-burning star that was our goal.

It was with something of unbelief that I gazed at the red star, for though the dials before me assured me that we were speeding on toward it at close to two hundred thousand miles a second, yet except for the deep humming of the craft's vibratory apparatus one would have thought that the ship was standing still. There was no sound of wind from outside, no friendly, near-by planets, nothing by which the eye could measure the tremendous velocity at which we moved. We were racing through a void whose very immensity and vacancy staggered the mind, an emptiness of space in which the stars themselves floated like dust-particles in air, a gulf traversed only by hurtling meteors or flaring comets, and now by our own frail little craft.

Though I was peculiarly affected by the strangeness of our position, big Hal Kur was even more so. He had traveled the space-lanes of the solar system for the greater part of his life, and now all of his time-honored rules of interplanetary navigation had been upset by this new cruiser, a craft entirely without gravity-screens, which was flashing from sun to sun propelled by invisible vibrations only. I saw his head wagging in doubt as he stared out into that splendid vista of thronging stars, and in a moment more he left us, descending into the cruiser's hull for an inspection of its strange propulsion apparatus.

When he had gone I plunged at once into the task of learning the control and operation of our craft. The next two hours I spent under the tutelage of Sarto Sen, and at the end of that time I had already learned the essential features of the ship's control. There was a throttle which regulated the frequency of the vibrations generated in the engine-room below, thus increasing or decreasing our speed at will, and a lever and dial which were used to project the propelling vibrations out at any angle behind us, thus controlling the direction in which we moved. The main requisite in handling the craft, I found, was a precise and steady hand on the two controls, since a mere touch on one would change our speed with lightning swiftness, while a slight movement of the other would send us millions of miles out of our course almost instantly.

At the end of two hours, however, I had attained sufficient skill to be able to hold the cruiser to her course without any large deviations or changes of speed, and Sarto Sen had confidence enough in my ability to leave me alone at the controls. He departed down the little stair behind me, to give a few minutes' inspection

to the generators below, and I was left alone in the conning-tower.

Standing there in the dark little room, its only sound the deep humming of the generators below and its only lights the hooded glows which illuminated the dials and switches before me, I gazed intently through the broad fore-window, into that crowding confusion of swarming suns that lay around us, that medley of jeweled fires in which the great star Alto burned like a living flame. For a long time I gazed toward the star that was our goal, and then my thoughts were broken into by the sound of Sarto Sen reascending the stair behind me. I half turned to greet him, then turned swiftly back to the window, stiffening into sudden attention.

My eyes had caught sight of a small patch of deep blackness far ahead, an area of utter darkness which was swiftly expanding, growing, until in less than a second, it seemed, it had blotted out half the thronging stars ahead. For a moment the sudden appearance of it dumfounded me so that I stood motionless, and then my hands leaped out to the controls. I heard Sarto Sen cry out, behind me, and had a glimpse of the darkness ahead, obscuring almost all the heavens. The next moment, before my hands had more than closed upon the levers, all light in the conning-tower vanished in an instant, and we were plunged into the most utter darkness which I have ever experienced. At the same moment the familiar hum of the vibration-generators broke off suddenly.

I think that the moment that followed was the one in which I came first to know the meaning of terror. Every spark of light had vanished, and the the silencing of the vibration-generators could only mean that our ship was drifting blindly through this smothering blackness. From the cruiser's hull, below, came shouts of fear and horror, and I heard Sarto Sen feeling his way to my side and fumbling with the controls. Then, with startling abruptness, the lights flashed on again in the conning-tower and through the windows there burst again the brilliance of the starry heavens. At the same moment the vibration-generators began again to give off their deep humming drone.

Sarto Sen turned to me, his face white as my own. Instinctively we turned toward the conning-tower's rear-window, and there, behind us, lay that stupendous area of blackness from which we had just emerged. A vast, irregular area of utter darkness, it was decreasing rapidly in size as we sped on away from it. In a moment it had shrunk to the spot it had been when first I glimpsed it, and then it had vanished entirely. And again we were racing on through the familiar, star-shot skies.

I found my voice at last. "In the name of the Power," I exclaimed, "what was *that?*"

Sarto Sen shook his head, musingly. "An area without light," he said, half to himself; "and our generators—they, too, could not function there. It must have been a hole, an empty space, in the ether itself."

I could only stare at him in amazement. "A hole in the ether?" I repeated.

He nodded quickly. "You saw what happened? Light is a vibration of the ether, and light was non-existent in that area. Even our generators ceased to give off etheric vibrations, there being no ether for them to function in. It's always been thought that the ether pervaded all space, but apparently even it has its holes, its cavities, which accounts for those dark, lightless areas in the heavens which have always puzzled astronomers. If our tremendous speed and momentum hadn't brought us through this one, the pull of the different stars would have slowed us down and stopped us, prisoning us in that dark area until the end of time."

I shook my head, only half-listening, for the strangeness of the thing had unnerved me. "Take the controls," I told Sarto Sen. "Meteors are all in the day's work, but holes in the ether are too much for me."

Leaving him to his watch over the ship's flight, I descended to the cruiser's interior, where the engineers were still discussing with Hal Kur the experience through which we had just passed. In a few words I explained to them Sarto Sen's theory, and they went back to their posts with awed faces. Passing into the ship's living-quarters myself, I threw myself on a bunk there and strove to sleep. Sleep came quickly enough, induced by the generators' soothing drone, but with it came torturing nightmares in which I seemed to move blindly onward through endless realms of darkness, searching in vain for an outlet into the light of day.

When I awoke some six hours later, the position of the ship seemed quite unchanged. The steady humming of its generators, the smooth, onward flight, the legions of dazzling stars around us, all seemed as before. But when I ascended again to the conning-tower, to relieve Sarto Sen at the controls, I saw that already the star Alto had increased a little its brilliance, dimming the stars around and behind it. And through the succeeding hours of my watch in the conning-tower, it seemed to me almost that the red orb was expanding before my sight, as we hurtled on toward it. That, though, I knew to be only an illusion of my straining eyes.

But as day followed day—sunless, dawnless days which we could measure only by our time-dials—the crimson star ahead waxed steadily to greater glory. By the time we marked off the twentieth day of our flight Alto had expanded into a moon of crimson flame, whose sullen splendor outrivaled the brilliance of all the starry hosts around us; for by that time we had covered half the distance between our own sun and the dying one ahead, and were now flashing on over the last half of our journey.

Days they were without change, almost without incident. Twice we had sighted vast areas of blackness, great ether-cavities like the one we had first plunged through, but these we were fortunate enough to avoid, swerving far out of our course to pass them by. Once, too, I had glimpsed for a single moment a colossal black globe which flashed beside our path for an instant and then was left behind by our tremendous speed. Only a glimpse did I get of this dark wanderer, which might have been either a runaway planet or burned-out star. And once our ship blundered directly into a vast maelstrom of meteoric material, a mighty whirlpool of interstellar wreckage spinning there between the stars, and from which we won clear only by grace of Sarto Sen's skilful hands at the controls.

Except for these few incidents, though, our days were monotonous and changeless, days in which the care of the generators and the alternate watches in the conning-tower were our only occupations. And a strange stillness had seized us as we fled onward, a brooding silence that fastened itself upon my friends even as upon myself. Something from the vast, eternal silence through which we moved, some quality out of those trackless infinities of space, seemed to have entered into our inmost souls. We went about our duties like men in a dream. And dreamlike our life had become to us, I think, and still more remote and unreal and dreamlike had become the life of the eight worlds that lay so far behind us.

I had forgotten, almost, the mission upon which we sped, and through the long watches in the conning-tower my eyes followed the steady largening

of the red sun ahead with curiosity only. Day by day its fiery disk was creeping farther across the heavens, until at last everything in the cruiser was drenched by the crimson, blood-like light that streamed in through our sunward windows. Then, at last, my mind came back to consideration of the work that lay before us, for over thirty days of our journey had passed and there remained less than a hundred billion miles between Alto and ourselves.

I gave orders to slow our progress, then, and at a somewhat slackened speed our cruiser began to slant up above the plane of the great sun, for it was my plan to gain a position millions of miles directly above the star and then hover there, accompanying it on its race through space and using the powerful little telescopic windows in the conning-tower for our first observations. So through the next two days the giant sun, a single great sea of crimson fire to our eyes, crept steadily downward across the skies as we slanted over it. Our outside instruments showed us that its heat was many times less than that of our own sun, for this was a dying star. Even so it was necessary to slide special light-repelling shields over all our windows, so blinding was the star's glare.

ON THE fortieth day of our journey we had reached our goal. Gathered in the conning-tower, Sarto Sen, Hal Kur and I gazed down through its circular, periscopic under-window at the mighty star beneath. We had reached a spot approximately twenty million miles above the sun and had turned our course, so that we now raced above it at a speed that matched its own, like a fly hovering over a world. Below us there lay only a single vast ocean of crimson flame, that reached almost from horizon to horizon, all but filling the heavens beneath us. It was in an awed silence that we gazed down into this tremendous sea of fire, knowing as we did that only the power of the ship's generators kept it from plunging downward.

"And we are expected to investigate—*that!*" said Hal Kur, gazing down into the hell of flame below. "They talk of turning *that* aside!"

I looked at him, hopelessly. Then, before I could speak, there came a sudden exclamation from Sarto Sen, and he beckoned me to his side. He had been staring out through one of the powerful little telescopic windows set in the conning-tower's wall, and as I reached him he pointed eagerly through it, out beyond the rim of the fiery sun beneath. I gazed in that direction, straining my eyes against the glare, and then glimpsed the thing that had attracted his attention. It was a little spot of dun-colored light lying beyond the crimson sun, a buff-colored little ball that hung steady behind the great sun at a distance of perhaps a hundred million miles and that accompanied it on its flight through space.

"A planet!" I whispered, and he nodded. Then Hal Kur, who had joined us, extended his hand too, with a muttered exclamation, and there, thrice the distance of the first from Alto, there hung another and smaller ball. In a few minutes, using the powerful inset glasses, we had discovered no less than thirteen worlds that spun about the sun beneath us and that accompanied it on its tremendous journey through space. Most seemed to revolve in orbits that were billions of miles from their parent sun, and none of the others was as large as that inmost planet which we had first discovered. It was toward this largest world that we finally decided to head first; so with Sarto Sen at the controls we slanted down again from our position over the great sun, arrowing down at reduced speed toward the inmost world.

Its color was changing from buff to pale red as we neared it, and its

apparent size was increasing with tremendous speed as our craft shot down toward it. Gradually, though, Sarto Sen decreased our velocity until by the time we reached an altitude of a few hundred miles above this world our ship was moving very slowly. And now, from outside, came a thin shrieking of wind, a mounting roar that told us plainly that we were speeding through air again, and that this world had at least an atmosphere. None of us remarked on that, though, all our attention being held by the scene below.

Drenched in the crimson light of the sun behind us, if was a crimson world that lay beneath us, a lurid world whose mountains, plains and valleys were all of the same bloodlike hue as the light that fell upon them, whose very lakes and rivers gave back to the sky the scarlet tinge that pervaded all things here. And as our cruiser swept lower we saw, too, that the redness of the planet beneath was no mere illusion of the crimson sunlight but inherent in itself, since all of the vegetation below, grassy plains and tangled shrubs and stunted, unfamiliar trees, were of that same red tinge that was the color-keynote of this world.

Strange and weird as it appeared, though, there seemed no sign of life on the broad plains and barren hills beneath us, and abruptly Sarto Sen headed the ship across the planet's face, speeding low over its surface while we scanned intently the panorama that unrolled beneath us. For minutes our straining scrutiny was unrewarded; and then, far ahead, a colossal shape loomed vaguely through the dusky crimson light, taking form, as we sped on toward it, as a tremendous, soaring tower. And involuntarily we gasped as our eyes took in the hugeness of its dimensions. It consisted of four slender black columns, each less than fifty feet in thickness, which rose from the ground at points a half-mile separated, four mighty pillars which slanted up into the crimson sunlight for fully ten thousand feet, meeting and merging at that distance above the ground and combining to support a circular platform two hundred feet in diameter. Our ship was hovering a few thousand feet above this platform, and on it we could see the shapes of what appeared to be machines, and other shapes that moved about them, though whether these last were human or not could not be distinguished from our height. And then, as my gaze fell toward the mighty tower's base, my cry brought the eyes of the others to follow my pointing finger. For gathered beneath and around the tower and extending away into the surrounding country were the massed buildings of a city. Low and flat-roofed and utterly strange in appearance were those buildings, and the narrow streets that pierced their huddled masses were all of the same smooth blackness as the tower itself—black, deep black, the roofs and streets and walls, laced with crimson parks and gardens that lay against their blackness like splashes of blood. And looming over all, its four tremendous columns rearing themselves above the streets and roofs and gardens like the limbs of a bestriding giant, the mighty tower soared into the crimson sunlight.

Sarto Sen flung an arm down toward the tower's platform, beneath us, and toward the shapes that moved on that platform. "Inhabited!" he cried. "You see? And that means that Alto's change in course was——"

He broke off; uttered a smothered cry. A spark of intense white light had suddenly broken into being on the platform beneath us, a beam of blinding light that stabbed straight up toward us, bathing the cruiser in its unearthly glow. And suddenly our ship was falling!

Sarto Sen sprang to the controls, wrenched around the power-lever.

"That ray!" he cried. "It's attractive!—it's pulling us down!"

Our ship was vibrating now to the full force of its generators, but still we were falling, plunging headlong down toward the round platform beneath. I glimpsed Sarto Sen working frantically with the controls, and heard a hoarse cry from Hal Kur. There was a blinding glare of light all around us, now, and through the window I saw the platform below rushing up toward us with appalling speed. It was nearer, now . . . nearer . . . nearer . . . *crash!*

3

I THINK that in the minute after the crash no one in the conning-tower made a movement. The blinding ray outside had vanished at the moment of our crash, and we were now lying sprawled on the little room's floor, where the shock of the collision had thrown us. In a moment, though, I reached for a support and scrambled to my feet. As I did so there came shouts from the hull beneath us, and then a loud clang as one of the cruiser's lower doors swung open. I sprang to the window, just in time to see our six engineers pour out of the hull beneath me, emerging onto the platform on which our ship rested, and gazing about them with startled eyes.

I ripped open the little door in the conning-tower's side, to shout to them to come back, and even as I did so saw one of the men run back into the cruiser as though in fear. The others were staring fixedly across the broad platform, and in that moment, before I could voice the warning on my lips, their doom struck. There was a quick sigh of wind, and from across the platform there sprang toward them a tiny ball of rose-colored fire, a ball that touched one of the men and instantly expanded into a whirlwind of raging flame. A single moment it blazed there, then vanished. And where the five men had stood was—nothing.

Stunned, stupefied, my eyes traveled slowly across the surface of the great platform. Strange, huge machines stood close-grouped upon it, great shining structures utterly unfamiliar in appearance. At the center of this group of mechanisms stood the largest of them, a great tube of metal fully a hundred feet in length, which was mounted on a strong pedestal and which pointed up into the sky like a great telescope. It was none of these things, though, that held my attention in that first horror-stricken moment of inspection. It was the dozen or more grotesque and terrible shapes which stood grouped at the platform's farther edge, returning my gaze.

They were globes, globes of pink, unhealthy-looking flesh more than a yard in diameter, each upheld by six slender, insectlike legs, not more than twelve inches long, and each possessing two similar short, thin limbs which served them as arms and which projected at opposite points from their pink, globular bodies. And between those arms, set directly in the side of the round body itself, were the only features—two round black eyes of large size, browless and pupilless, and a circle of pale skin which beat quickly in and out with their breathing.

Motionless they stood, regarding me with their unhuman eyes, and now I saw that one, a little in advance of the others, was holding extended toward me a thin disk of metal, from which, I divined instantly, the destroying fire had sprung. Yet still I made no movement, staring across the platform with sick horror in my soul.

I heard a thick exclamation from Hal Kur, behind me, as he and Sarto Sen came to my side and gazed out with me. And now the grouped creatures opposite were giving utterance to sounds—speech-sounds with which

they seemed to converse—low, deep, thrumming tones which came apparently from their breathing-membranes. They moved toward us, the fire-disk still trained upon us, and then one stopped and motioned from us to the platform on which he stood. He repeated the gesture, and its meaning was unmistakable. Slowly we stepped out of the conning-tower and descended by the ladder in the cruiser's side to the platform itself.

Our captors seemed to pause for a moment, now, and I had opportunity for a quick inspection of our ship. Sucked down as it had been by the attractive ray of those strange creatures, it had yet fallen on a clear space on the platform and seemed to have suffered no serious injury, for it was stoutly built and our fall had been short. The lower door in its side was still open, I saw, and now a half-dozen of the globe-creatures entered this, scurrying forward like quick insects on their six short legs. They disappeared from view inside the cruiser's hull, returning in a moment with their fire-disks trained upon the single engineer who had run back into the ship and escaped the doom of his fellows. This man, Nar Lon by name, had been the chief of the six engineers, and as his guards herded him to our side his face was white with terror. Finding us still alive, though, he seemed to take courage a little.

Now the thrumming conversation of the creatures about us broke off, and one turned to the edge of the platform, touching a stud in the floor there. At once a circular section of the metal floor, some ten feet across, slid aside, revealing a round dark well of the same diameter, which apparently extended down into one of the great tower's four supporting columns. At the top of this shaft hung a small, square metal cage, or elevator, and into this we were shepherded at once, two of our captors entering the cage with us and keeping their fire-disks trained still upon us. There was the click of a switch, then a sudden roar of wind, and instantly the cage was shooting downward with tremendous speed. Only a moment we flashed down through the roaring darkness, and then the cage came to rest and a section of wall beside it slid aside, admitting a flood of dusky, crimson light. At once we stepped out, followed by our two guards.

We were standing at the foot of a mighty column down which we had come, standing on the floor of a great, circular, flat-roofed room, in and out of which were moving scores of the globe-creatures. From the very center of the room, behind us, rose the fifty-foot thickness of the huge pillar, soaring up obliquely and disappearing through the building's roof, two hundred feet above. Except for the pillar and the hurrying figures around us the great room was quite bare and empty, lit only by high, narrow slits in its walls which admitted long, shafting bars of the crimson sunlight. I heard Hal Kur muttering his astonishment at the titanic scale on which all things in this strange world seemed planned, and then there came a thrumming order from our guards, who gestured pointedly toward a high doorway set in the room's wall opposite us. Obediently we started across the floor toward it.

Passing through it, we found ourselves in a long, narrow corridor, apparently a connecting passage between another building and the one we had just left. There were windows on its sides, circular openings in the walls, and as we passed down the hall I glimpsed through these the city that lay around us, a vista of black streets and crimson gardens through which thronged other masses of the globe-creatures. Then, before I could see more, the corridor

ended and we passed into a large anteroom occupied by a half-dozen of the globe-men, all armed with fire-disks which they trained instantly upon us.

There ensued a brief conversation between our guards and these, and then they stood aside, allowing us to pass through a narrow doorway into a smaller room beyond. Its sides were lined with shelves holding what seemed to be models of machines, all quite unfamiliar in appearance. At the far end of the room stood a low, desklike structure whose surface was covered with other models and with white sheets of stiff cloth or paper covered with drawings and designs, and behind this sat another of the globe-men, a little larger than any we had yet seen. As we halted before him he inspected us for a moment with his large, unwinking eyes, then spoke in deep, thrumming inflections to our two guards. The latter answered him at length, and again he considered us.

During the moments that we stood there I had noted that Sarto Sen, beside me, seemed intensely interested in the models and design-covered sheets which lay on the desk before us. Now, as the creature behind the desk seemed to pause, my friend moved forward and picked up one of the sheets, and a metal pencil which lay beside it. In a moment he was drawing on the sheet some design which I could not see, and this done he handed it to the monster behind the desk. The latter reached for it, inspected it closely, and then raised his eyes to Sarto Sen with something of surprize apparent even on his unhuman features. He uttered a short command, then, and instantly one of the two guards motioned Sarto Sen aside, while the other herded Hal Kur, Nar Lon and me again toward the door. As we passed out of the room I glanced back and saw Sarto Sen, still under the watchful eyes of his guard, bending over the desk, intensely interested, sketching another design.

Again we were in the anteroom, in which there lounged still the guard of armed globe-men. Instead of returning to the corridor through which we had come, though, we were conducted through a door on the room's opposite side, and passed down a similar long hall, halted at last by our guard before a low door in its side. This he flung open, motioning us to enter, and as the death-dealing disk in his grasp was trained full upon us we had no choice but to obey, and passed into a square, solid-walled little room which was but half-lit by a few loopholes in one of its sides. Behind us the door slammed shut, its strong bolts closing with a loud grating of metal. We were prisoners—prisoners on the planet of a distant star.

And now, looking back, it seems to me that the days of imprisonment which followed were the most terrible I have ever known. Action, no matter of what sort, gives surcease at least from mental agony, and it was agony which we suffered there in our little cell. For with the passing of every day, every hour, the crimson sun above was drawing nearer toward our own by millions of miles. And we, who alone had power to find the cause of the red sun's deflection—we lay imprisoned there in the city of the globe-men, watching doom creep upon our universe.

HOUR followed hour and day followed day, remorselessly, while we lay there, hours and days which we could measure only by the steady circling of the sunlight that slanted through our tiny windows. With each night came cold, a bitter cold that penetrated to our bones, and for all the red splendor of the dying sun above, the days were far

from warm. Twice each day the door opened and a guard cautiously thrust in our food, which consisted of a mushy mixture of cooked vegetables and a bottle of red-tinged, mineral-tasting water.

We spoke but little among ourselves, except to wonder as to the whereabouts of Sarto Sen. We had heard nothing of him since we had left him and could not know even whether our friend was alive or dead. What our own fate was to be we could not guess, nor, in fact, was even that of much interest to us. A few months longer and we would meet death with all on this planet, when Alto and our own sun crashed together. Whether or not we lived until then was hardly a great matter.

Then, ten days after our capture, there came the first break in the monotony of our imprisonment. There was a rattle of bolts at our door; it swung open, and Sarto Sen stepped inside. As the guards outside closed the door my friend sprang toward me, his face eager.

"You're all right, Jan Tor?" he exclaimed quickly. "They told me you were unharmed, but I worried——"

A phrase in his speech struck me. "They told you?" I repeated. "*They?*"

He nodded, his eyes holding mine. "The globe-men," he said, simply.

We stared at him, and he stepped swiftly to the door, tried it and found it fast, then came back and sat down beside us.

"The globe-men," he repeated solemnly, "those children of Alto, those creatures of hell, who have turned their parent sun from its course to send it crashing into our own, to wipe out our universe."

At our exclamations of stunned surprize he was silent, musing, his eyes seeming to gaze out through somber vistas of horror invisible to us. When he spoke again it was slowly, broodingly, as though he had forgotten our presence.

"I have found what we came here to learn," he was saying; "have discovered the reason for the deflection of this star. Yet even before, I guessed. . . . If a star have planets and those planets inhabitants—inhabitants of supreme science, supreme power—would they not use that science and that power to save themselves from death, even though it means death for another universe? And that is what they have done, and what I suspected before.

"It was that suspicion that stood me in good stead when we were examined there by the chief of the globe-men. I had glimpsed on his desk sheets with astronomical designs on them, and so I took a sheet myself and drew on it a simple design which he understood immediately, a design which represented two suns colliding. It convinced him of my knowledge, my intelligence, so that when he sent the rest of you to this cell he retained me for questioning. And for hours afterward I drew other sketches, other designs, while with gestures he interrogated me concerning them. It was slow, fumbling communication, but it was communication, and gradually we perfected a system of signs and drawings by which we were able to exchange ideas. And through the succeeding days our sign-communication continued.

"I informed him, in this way, that we were visitors from another star, but I was too cautious to let him know that we were children of the sun into which Alto was soon to crash. Instead I named Sirius as our native star, explaining that we had come from there in our vibration-cruiser for purposes of exploration. It was the cruiser which interested him most, evidently. The scientists of the globe-people had been examining it, he told me, and he now asked me innumerable ques-

tions concerning its design and operation. For though the globe-men have gravity-screen ships, like our own old-fashioned ones, in which they can travel from planet to planet, they have no such star-cruisers as this one of ours. Hence his questions, which I evaded as well as I could, turning the subject to the coming collision of the two suns, which I stated had been foreseen by the astronomers of my own universe. And as I had expected, my news of the coming collision was no surprize to him. For, as he casually explained, that collision was being engineered in fact by his own people, the globe-men, for their own purposes.

"For ages, it seems, these globe-men have dwelt on the planets of Alto. First they had inhabited the outermost planet, billions of miles from Alto itself, but which was yet warm enough for existence because of their sun's titanic size and immense heat. There they had risen to greatness, had built up their science and civilization to undreamed-of heights. But as the ages passed, that outermost world of theirs was growing colder and colder, since Alto, like all other suns, was slowly but steadily cooling, shrinking and dying, radiating less and less heat. At last there came a time when the planet of the globe-men was fast becoming too cold for existence there, and then their scientists stirred themselves to find a way out. Spurred on by necessity, they hit upon the invention of the gravity screen and with it constructed their first interplanetary space-ships. These they made in vast numbers, and in them the globe-people moved *en masse* to the next innermost planet, which still received enough heat from Alto to support life. There they settled, and there their civilization endured for further ages.

"But slowly, surely, their sun continued to cool and die, and with the terrible, machinelike inevitability of natural laws there came a day when again their world had grown too cold for their existence. This time, though, they had the remedy for their situation at hand, and again there took place a great migration from their cold planet to a warmer inner one. And so, as the ages passed, they escaped extinction by migrating from planet to planet, moving ever sunward as their sun waned in size and splendor, creeping closer and closer toward its dying fires.

"At last, though, after long ages, there drew down toward them the doom which they had averted for so long. Alto was still shrinking, cooling, and now they were settled upon its warmest, inmost planet, and had no warmer world to which to flee. But a short time longer, as they measured time, and their planet would become a frozen, lifeless world, for their sun would inevitably cool still further until it was one of the countless dark stars, dead and burned-out suns, which throng the heavens. It seemed, indeed, that this time there was to be no escape.

"But now there came forward a party among them which advanced a proposal of colossal proportions. They pointed out that Alto was moving steadily toward another sun, one much the same size as their own but flaming with heat and life, which it would pass closely within a short time. But if, instead of passing each other, the two suns should meet, should crash into each other, what then would be the result? It would be, of course, that the collision would form one new sun instead of the former two—one titanic, flaming sun whose heat would be sufficient to support life on any planet for countless ages. The inmost planets of Alto's system, and virtually all the planets of the other sun's system, would be annihilated by the collision, of course, would perish in

that flaming shock of suns. But the outermost planets of Alto, which lay in orbits billions of miles from it, would be safe enough and would take up their orbits around this great new sun in place of Alto. And on these planets the globe-people could exist for eons, supported by the heat of the great new sun. It was a perfect plan, and required only that their own sun, Alto, be swerved from its path just enough to make it crash into the other sun instead of passing it.

"To accomplish this, to swerve their star from its course, the globe-men made use of a simple physical principle. You know that a round, spinning body, moving across or through any medium, changes its direction if the rate of its spinning is changed. A ball that rolls across a smooth table without spinning at all will move in a straight line. But if the ball spins as it rolls it will move in a curved line, the amount and direction of curve depending upon the amount and direction of spin. Now their sun, which had rotated at the same rate for ages, had rolled through the ether for ages on the same great course, never swerving. And so, they reasoned, if their sun's rate of spin or rotation could be increased a little it would curve aside a little from its accustomed course.

"The problem, then, was to increase their sun's rate of spin, and to accomplish this they gathered all their science. A mighty tower was erected over their city, on whose great top-platform were placed machines which could generate an etheric ray or vibration of inconceivable power, a ray which could be directed at will through the great telescopelike projector which they had provided for it.

"This done, they waited until the moment calculated by their astronomers, then aimed the great projector-tube at the edge of their sun that was rotating away from them, and turned on the ray. This was the crucial point of their scheme, for now they were risking their very universe. It was necessary for them to increase their sun's rate of spin just enough to make it swerve aside, but if the rate of spin were increased just a little too much it would mean disaster, since when a sun spins too fast it breaks up like a great flywheel, splits into a double star. It is that process, the process of fission, which has formed the countless double stars and bursted suns in the heavens around us, since each was only a single star or sun which broke up because of its too-great speed of rotation, or spin. And the globe-men knew that it would require but very little increase in their own sun's rate of spin to make it, too, split asunder. So they watched with infinite care while their brilliant ray stabbed up toward the sun's edge, and when, under the terrific power of that pushing ray, the star began to spin faster, they at once turned off the ray, which was used for a short time only. But it had been effective; for now, as their sun spun faster, it began to swerve a little from its usual course, and they knew that now it would crash into the other approaching sun instead of passing it. So their end was achieved, and so they began their preparations for their great migration out to Alto's outermost planets, a migration which would take place just before the collision. And then —we came.

"We came, and now we have discovered that for which we came, the reason for Alto's change in course. For it was the science and will of the globe-men that turned their sun aside, that threatens now the annihilation of the Eight Worlds. Doom presses upon them, and to escape

that doom they are destroying our sun, our planets, our very universe!"

4

I DO not remember that any of us spoke, when Sarto Sen's voice had ceased. And yet, stunned as we were by the thing he had told us, our knowledge was in some ways a relief. We had discovered, at least, what had swerved Alto from its course, and if science and intelligence alone could cause the sun to veer from its path, science and intelligence might steer it back into that path.

When I said as much to Sarto Sen his face lit up. "You are right, Jan Tor!" he exclaimed. "There's a chance! And even as Mur Dak predicted, that chance depends on us. For if we can escape from here and get back to the Eight Worlds, we can come back with a greater force and crush these globe-men, and use their own force-projector to swerve their sun out of its present path."

"But why go back to the Eight Worlds?" objected Hal Kur. "Why not get up to that platform, if we escape, and use the projector ourselves?"

Sarto Sen shook his head. "It's impossible," he told the big engineer. "If we escape from here at all it will be by night, for by day the rooms and corridors outside are thronged with globe-men. And by night we could do nothing, for Alto, the sun itself, would not then be in the sky. Nor could we wait for its rising, there on the platform, since our escape would soon be discovered, and we should be attacked there. Our only chance is to get out of here by night, make our way up to the platform, and make a dash for our ship. If we can do that we can flash back to our own universe and get the help we need to crush these globe-people."

"But when shall we make the attempt?" I asked, and my heart leaped at Sarto Sen's answer. "Tonight! The sooner we get out the better. A few hours after dark we'll try it."

He went on, then, to unfold his plan for escape, and we listened intently, while big Hal Kur's eyes gleamed at the prospect of action. Our plan was simple enough, and likely enough to fail, we knew, but it was our only chance. What course we would follow after getting free of our cell we did not even discuss. There was nothing for it but to make our break and trust to luck to bring us through the thousand obstacles that lay between us and the tower-platform which held our ship.

The remaining hours of that day were the longest I have ever experienced. The slanting shafts of light from the loopholes seemed to move across the room with infinite slowness, while we awaited impatiently the coming of night. At last the light-bars darkened, disappeared, as the dying crimson sun sank beyond the rim of the world outside. Darkness had descended on that world, now, and here and there among the buildings and streets of the weird city outside flared points of red light. Still we waited, until the vague, half-heard sounds of soft movement and thrumming speech outside had lessened, ceased, until at last the only sound to be heard was an occasional shuffling movement of the guard outside the door.

Sarto Sen rose, making to us a signal of readiness, and then threw himself flat on the floor of the room's center. At the farther side of the cell lay Hal Kur and Nar Lon, as though sleeping, with a thick roll of garments between them which resembled another sleeping figure. These preparations made, I stepped to the door and stationed myself directly inside it, to one side, my heart pounding now as the moment for action approached.

All was ready, and seeing this, Sarto Sen began his part. Lying there on the floor he gave utterance to a low, deep groan. There was silence for a moment, and then another low moan arose from him, and now I heard a shuffling movement outside the door as the guard there approached to listen. Again Sarto Sen groaned, terribly, and after a moment's pause there came a rattling of bolts as the guard slid them aside. I flattened myself back against the wall, and in a second the door opened.

Even in the darkness, glancing sidewise, I could make out the round, globular form of the guard, his eyes peering into our cell and his fire-disk held out in cautious readiness. A moment he paused, peering at the three dim figures lying across the room; then, as if satisfied, turned his eyes back upon Sarto Sen, at the same moment taking a step inside the door. And with a single bound I was upon him.

OF ALL the fights in my career I place that struggle there in the darkness with our globe-man guard as the most horrible. I had leaped with the object of wresting the deadly fire-disk from him before he could make use of it, and fortunately the force of my spring had knocked it from his grasp. His short, thin arms clutched at me with surprizing power, though, while the insect-like lower limbs grasped my own and pulled me instantly to the floor. A moment I rolled there in mad combat, striving to gain a hold on my opponent's smooth, round body, and then a thing happened the memory of which sickens me even now. For as my hands clutched for a hold on the sleek, cold, globular body, that body suddenly collapsed beneath my weight, breaking like a skinful of water and spurting out a mass of semi-liquid, jellylike substance which flowed across the floor in a shining, malodorous mass. Flesh-like as they were in appearance, these creatures were but globular shells of ooze.

Sick to my very soul I rose to my feet, looking wildly at the others, who had rushed to aid me. There had been no cry from our guard during that moment of combat and the silence around us was unchanged. Sarto Sen was already at the door, peering down the corridor, and in a moment we were out of the cell and making our way stealthily down the long hall. As we left the cell, though, my foot struck against something, and reaching down I picked up the little fire-disk of our guard. As we crept down the long corridor I clutched it tightly in my hand.

The long hall, dimly lit by a few red flares set in its walls, seemed quite deserted. Ahead, though, shone a square of brighter light, and we knew this to be the spot where the corridor crossed the anteroom of the guards. Nearer we crept toward it, ever more stealthily, until at last we crouched at the edge of the open doorway, staring into the bright-lit anteroom.

There were but four of the globe-men guards in it now, and three of these were apparently sleeping, resting with closed eyes on a long, low seat against the wall. The other, though, was moving restlessly about the room, the deadly fire-disk in his grasp ready for action. We must cross this room, I knew, to reach the hall of the great pillar, yet it would mean instant death to attempt it beneath the eyes of this creature.

A moment we crouched there, undecided whether or not to chance all in a rush for the one wakeful guard, when the entire matter was suddenly taken out of our hands. The globe-man, in his pacing about the room, had come within a few feet of the doorway outside which we crouched, and at that very mo-

ment the silence around us was shattered by a sound which came to my ears like the thunder of an explosion. Hal Kur had sneezed!

With the sound the pacing guard wheeled instantly and confronted us, uttering a thrumming cry which brought the other three instantly to their feet. We were evenly matched, four to four, and before they had time to use their deadly disks we were upon them. The next moment was one of wild confusion, a whirling of men and globular bodies about the little room, a babel of hoarse shouts and thrumming cries. Clinging desperately to one of the slippery creatures I had a momentary glimpse of Hal Kur raising one of the guards bodily into the air and crashing him down on the hard floor like a smashed egg. Then a powerful twist of my opponent flung me sidewise out of the combat.

I staggered to my feet and saw that one guard lay broken and dead on the floor while the other three had slipped from our clutches and were retreating through the doorway by which we had come. Abruptly they paused, and the arm of one came up with a fire-disk trained full upon us.

In that moment I became aware of something in my hand to which I had clung through all the mêlée, something round and thin and hard, with a raised button on its side. Instinctively, entirely without thought, I raised the thing toward the three guards opposite, pressing the button on its side. A little ball of rosy fire seemed to leap out from my hand with the action, flicking sighingly through the air and striking the group of globe-men squarely. There was a roar of flame, a moment's flaring up of raging pink fire, and then flame and guards alike had vanished.

I turned, staggered with my friends toward the door. From far behind, now, we heard deep, thrumming cries, and the shuffle of quick feet. Our escape was discovered, we knew, and our only chance lay in reaching the great pillar and its cage-lift before we were cut off, so we raced on down the corridor with our utmost speed, sparing no breath for speech. The cries behind were growing swiftly louder and nearer, and somewhere near by there was a sudden clamor of gongs. But now we were bursting recklessly into the great hall, finding it quite empty, its deep shadows dispelled only by a few feeble points of light. Into the upper darkness loomed the vast bulk of the great, slanting column, and with the last of our strength we reeled across the floor toward it.

The door in the pillar's side was open, and through it we tumbled hastily into the little cage-elevator inside. The clamor of pursuit was growing rapidly in volume, now. Frantically I fumbled with the studs in the cage's side, with which I had seen our captors operate it. There was a moment of heart-breaking delay, and then, just as the uproar of pursuit seemed about to burst into the great hall, a switch clicked beneath my fingers and instantly our cage was shooting up the shaft with tremendous speed, toward the platform above.

A moment of this thundering progress and then the car slowed, stopped. We were in absolute darkness, but before sliding aside the section of platform over us I whispered tensely to the others. "There will be guards on the platform," I told them, "but we must make away with them at once and get to the ship. It's our only chance, for there must be cage-lifts in the other pillars too, and they'll come up those after us."

With the words I touched the lever which swung aside the section of floor above us, and instantly it slid back with a metallic jarring sound that made my heart stand

still. There was no sound of alarm, though, from above, so after a moment of tense waiting we rose silently from the cage and stepped out upon the platform itself.

We were standing near the edge of the platform, which was partly illuminated by splashes of ruddy light from a few flares suspended over it. Far below in the darkness lay the city of the globe-men, outlined only by a sparse peppering of twinkling crimson lights. Above stretched the splendid, star-jeweled skies, in which I could discern the brilliant yellow orb that was the sun of the Eight Worlds. And now I turned my attention back to the platform, and glancing beyond the dark, enigmatic mechanisms which loomed around us, I saw the long, gleaming bulk of our cruiser, lying still in the clear space where it had fallen. Beside it a suspended flare poured down its red light, and under that light were gathered three of the globe-men, examining intently some small mechanism on the floor.

I wondered, momentarily, whether these creatures had yet discovered the secret of our cruiser's design and operation, and then forgot my wonder as we began to creep stealthily toward them. As we crawled past a little heap of short, thick metal bars, each of us grasped one, and then crept on again. In a moment we were within a dozen paces of the unsuspecting globe-men, and at once we sprang to our feet and charged down upon them with uplifted maces.

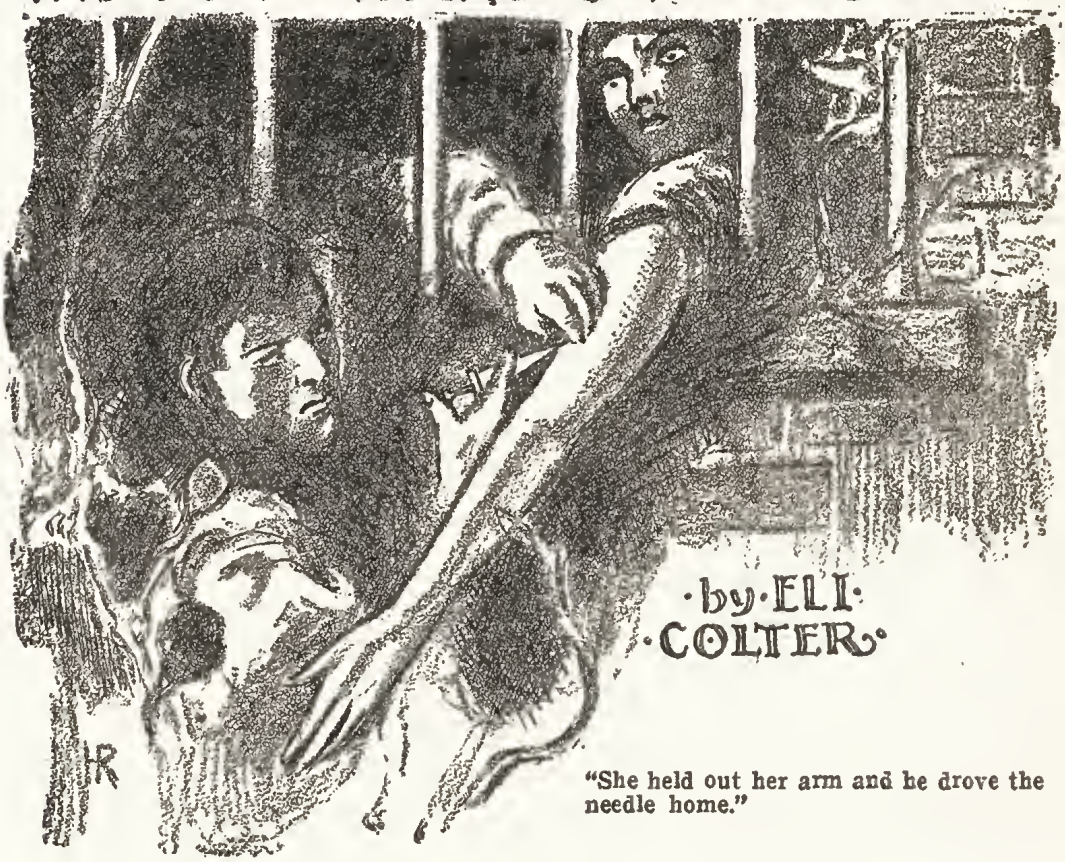
So unexpected and so swift was our attack that the three had time only to turn toward us, half-raising their fire-disks, and then our heavy clubs had crashed down through their round, soft bodies, sending them to the floor in a sprawling, oozing mass. We dropped our weapons and sprang toward the cruiser.

Its lower door was open, and instantly we were inside it. At once Sarto Sen sprang up the stair toward the conning-tower, while Hal Kur and Nar Lon raced into the generator-room. I paused to slam shut the heavy door, its closing automatically starting the throbbing oxygen pumps, and then hastened up the stair also. Even as I did so there began the familiar humming of the vibration-generators, droning out with swiftly gathering power. And now I had reached the conning-tower, where Sarto Sen was working swiftly with the controls.

At the moment that I burst into the little room there came a sudden harsh grating of metal from outside, and then a score of high-pitched, thrumming cries. I sprang to the window, and there, across the red-lit platform, a mass of dark, globular figures had suddenly poured up onto the platform's surface, from another of its pillar-lifts. They ran toward us, heard the humming of the cruiser's generators, and then stopped short. Their fire-disks swept up and a dozen balls of the destroying flame leapt toward us. But at the moment that they did so there was a swift clicking of switches beneath the hands of Sarto Sen, a sudden roar of wind, and then the red-lit platform and all on it had vanished from sight as our ship flashed out again into the void of space.

The stupendous events that followed the return to the Solar System and the tremendous cataclysm that ensued will be narrated in the thrilling chapters that bring this story to a conclusion in next month's WEIRD TALES.

The·MAN·in·the·GREEN·COAT·



·by·ELI·
·COLTER·

"She held out her arm and he drove the needle home."

GRANT THORPE lounged comfortably in a big easy chair and looked across at Myron Tobin, his host. They two were alone in the big library of Tobin's palatial home, smoking a sociable cigar and drinking an after-dinner cocktail before the massive fireplace. Tobin saw the unveiled curiosity in the gray eyes of Grant Thorpe, and he had an idea he knew the cause of it. But he said nothing. He turned his gaze on the leaping flames in the grate and continued smoking in silence. Thorpe was bluntly outspoken. When his curiosity began to ride him hard enough he would come out with it baldly.

Thorpe was mulling over in his mind the thing that had aroused his curiosity. There had been a large and impressive reception in Tobin's huge house that evening, and after the departure of the guests Thorpe and his host had gravitated naturally to the library with their liquor and cigars. The two men had been friends for twenty years, but for eight years they had seen nothing of each other. When they had parted eight years before, Thorpe had gone to Egypt on a little private business of his own. He had left the United States harboring not a little concern over his old friend Myron Tobin.

Tobin, at that time, was decidedly down on his luck, which was nothing at all unusual for Tobin. He hadn't a cent in the world, and he had as little prospect for the future as he

had money. He had ever been very much of a dreamer, cherishing the hope of sometime stumbling upon a formula, concerning no matter what, that would bring him wealth, set the world by the ears and make him famous. He had fiddled along ineffectually with chemicals and metals, accomplishing precisely nothing. Thorpe had bade him good-bye rather sadly. He liked Tobin. He hated leaving him poverty-stricken with hunger, lean with futile hopes, but too stubbornly wedded to his dreams to desert them for any more practical method of achieving wealth and fame. But he knew Tobin. So he shook his hand, sighed, shrugged and went on his way.

And eight years later Thorpe returned from Egypt, to find Tobin as wealthy and famous as he had ever painted himself in his wildest visions. Tobin had found his formula, and it had set the world by the ears right enough. No one knew what it was, and no one was ever likely to know. It was guarded rigidly. But it had brought him fabulous wealth, and the very secrecy attached to it had served to thrust Tobin's name willy-nilly into the notice of the world.

But it was nothing of this that had aroused Thorpe's curiosity. That which had caught and held Thorpe's attention and puzzled him to the point of irritation was a man. Tobin had a host of moneyed and influential friends. The house had been full of them that evening. But among them, moving about and making himself at home with an ease of manner that was distinctly noticeable, was the mysterious man who had held Thorpe's eye and baffled his brain.

He was a small man, with a thin, dried-up body and a great knob of a head as ugly and repellant as the head of a mummy. His long, narrow eyes, as hard as granite and as gray, seemed to be everywhere at once. His lank, drab hair fell over his forehead continually, in a peculiarly offensive fashion. He was conspicuous in the throng of correctly dressed men and women for the fact that he wore a bright green coat that fell to his knees. Thorpe could not have told what other garments clothed the man. Shirt, vest, trousers and shoes were rendered unworthy of notice by that spotted and worn vivid green coat.

The guests paid no attention to him, and he paid none to them. Thorpe had seen a few people address politely perfunctory remarks to him. He had made no reply; in fact, he did not speak at all. He moved in and about among the rest of the guests with an oddly proprietary manner, as though he belonged there. He gazed upon the magnificent appointments of the room, the statuary, the murals on the walls, the great shining grand piano, with an air of personal pride in them.

But the most conspicuous thing about him was his absorption in Tobin's strinkingly beautiful wife. Whenever his long, hard eyes fell upon her, his ugly face lit with a passion of worship as intense as it was unmistakable. Thorpe frowned upon it, inwardly. He wondered if it were possible that Tobin was unaware of the violent affection lavished upon his wife by the man in the green coat. But no, he couldn't be. Impossible. And Thorpe resented it. It was unlike Myron Tobin to allow anything like that to be so blatantly paraded before his guests and under his eyes. There was something hidden about it that made Thorpe uneasy. He moved restlessly in the chair and asked bluntly:

"Who is the man in the green coat?"

Tobin had been waiting for that question. He knew the explanation would have to come to Thorpe. That he conceded, in view of their years-long close friendship. So far as anyone else was concerned, those who didn't like the man in the green coat

could go to the devil. And they could stay away from Tobin's house. His guests and associates had long since learned to tacitly ignore the man's presence. But Thorpe was different. Tobin wanted Thorpe to know.

"Have you ever looked up the word 'gratitude' in the dictionary, Grant?" Tobin asked softly. "To the man in the green coat I owe everything I am and have today. He comes and goes as he will. I never know when to expect him, never can tell when he may suddenly walk in and greet me with that flashing smile of his. Did you notice his smile? How it changes and softens his face? He knows how welcome he is; knows that no matter who is here, no matter what I am doing or what the hour, the door is always open to him and his place in my home unquestioned and assured forever. You may have noted, too, that he never speaks. He is dumb.

"AFTER you left the United States for Egypt, I was deucedly down in the mouth. Not new for me, eh? But it was worse than ever with you gone. Nothing seemed to go right. Not that anything ever had. But then, I was always expecting it to, and your companionship had always helped me to keep my own faith. I got moody when I didn't have you to spill all my grief to any more. I took to going out by myself for long walks in the woods. I didn't know then what was directing me. I do now. So will you before I'm done talking.

"The way I went habitually led down an old road winding off into the trees and seemingly going nowhere. Every time I went I followed it a little farther. And I came finally one day to a clearing in the depth of the forest, surrounding an old deserted house. I stopped short in surprize. You know how old deserted houses have always held a fascination for me. I stood and stared at this one. It was an ancient building, almost covered with vines, half hidden under huge old elm trees. But it was still in a fair state of preservation, although I could see it had been abandoned for a long time. Its doors and windows were still intact, and not a pane was broken.

"There was an air of mystery about it. Perhaps there is always that about deserted houses. I guess there is. But there was a different tone here. The mystery in the air was sinister, warning. I didn't just like it. Yet I was drawn to it. I stood there trying to analyze that sinister atmosphere. It was so powerful as to be almost tangible. It seemed to pervade even the trees. Then I noted an odd thing. The place lacked that shroud of mold, of disintegration and decay that seems indigenous to abandoned habitations. Everything was flourishing there.

"The trees were monstrous, healthy and green. The weeds and grass that had claimed the clearing, had grown wildly over everything, were virile, alive. There could never have been flowers in that place, for there were none left to tell the tale, and they couldn't have died there. You couldn't imagine anything *dying* there. Nothing was tumbled down but the old picket fence enclosing house, yard and elms. Nothing was out of place but the old gate dragging in the rank weeds on one rusty hinge.

"Drawn by something irresistible —curiosity, interest; call it what you will, it was stronger than I was—I turned in the gate and approached the house. I went up on the porch and tried the front door. It was locked. I tried the two front windows. They were locked also. I descended from the porch and started around the house, making my way with difficulty through the grass and wild vines. Every window and door

opening into the house was locked, and I could see nothing of the interior through the thick folds of the curtains drawn close across the windows and the dusty panes.

"I decided I might as well leave with my curiosity unsatisfied, and turned to go, when I noticed an odd enclosure in the yard quite a way to the rear of the house. It, too, was surrounded by a picket fence, but this fence was in better repair than the other. It was plain to be seen that it had been put up years later than the fence surrounding the yard. The space it enclosed was perhaps eight by ten feet, and was hidden from me at that distance by brush and vines.

"My interest aroused afresh, I walked toward it. And when I reached that fence I stopped a good deal shorter than I had done when I first sighted the house, for squarely in the center of that enclosure was a grave. It had been there a long time, and I couldn't help thinking to myself that it seemed decidedly out of place. It simply wasn't conceivable that *anything* should die there. Yet, there was the grave. The earth was sunken in on top, and the plain granite headstone was stained and covered with moss. I could see there was some kind of inscription on the stone, but the moss rendered it illegible. The gate in this fence hung squarely. I passed through it, leaned over the stone and scraped the moss away. I read this:

> Here lies the body of Lona Bennares.
> Nobody knows and nobody cares.

"That inscription itself was odd enough to arrest attention. But still more arresting was the fact that the two lines had not been placed there by the same hand. The first line was in script, beautifully chiseled by expert fingers. The second line had been crudely printed, and had been done with some blunt and unsuitable instrument. I scraped the moss from the entire face of the stone, but nothing else was there. No date—nothing. Only those two strange lines. I stood there puzzling over it for a long time. But conjecture was useless. I could make nothing of it, of course, and I turned for the second time to go away. But as I rounded the corner of the house I halted in my tracks.

"Somebody was coming in the front gate. It was the man in the green coat. He saw me standing there, gave me a sharp, scrutinizing look, as though he were measuring me, then averted his eyes and walked up the steps to the front porch. He took a key from his pocket, unlocked the door and went in, leaving it open behind him. Actuated by a curiosity whose control was far beyond my capacity, I followed him up the steps and peered through the door at him.

"To my astonishment the house was fully furnished. Carpets on the floor and pictures on the walls were exactly now as they had been left. The chairs scattered about were in the careless array of chairs lately used. Yet dust was over everything. It was a long time since anyone had lived there. The thought struck me that the whole place had the look of having been forsaken hurriedly, at the instigation of some compelling impulse—or fear. I wondered if the house and grounds belonged to the man in the green coat. He certainly acted as though they did.

"He must have known I was watching him, I thought, but he paid no attention to me. He had removed some small books from his pocket. Note-books they were. He selected from them one with a mottled gray cover, and went to an old desk in a corner of the room. He opened the desk, removed some faded papers from its central drawer, sat down at the table by the window and began to compare the papers with notes in the gray book. He was after some specific thing, and it didn't take him long to find it. He gave a little nod

of satisfaction, got to his feet, replaced the papers in the desk, closed it and thrust the note-book back into his pocket with the others. Then he came briskly toward the door.

"I made no attempt to conceal myself. I wanted him to see me. I wanted to force him to speak to me. I stepped aside as he emerged from the house and paused to lock the door behind him. He glanced at me but made no offer to speak. My curiosity had me in a strangle-hold by this time, and I wasn't going to let him get away from me so easily.

" 'How do you do?' I said politely.

"Without looking at me, he pulled one of the books from his pocket, tore out a page, scribbled something on it, thrust the paper abruptly into my hand and hurried down the steps. Completely mystified and astonished, I looked at the sheet of note-paper. On it he had written, 'I am dumb. How do you do?'

"In spite of myself I grinned. Evidently my presence there was of no concern to him. I chuckled as I crumpled the paper in my hand and thrust it into my pocket. But I was enormously curious still, and I knew that my curiosity would never let me rest until I learned what important notes the man in the green coat kept hidden in that old desk in that deserted house out in the trees, miles from anywhere. I turned to glance after the man in the green coat. He was just disappearing down the old road beyond the picket fence.

"WITH a sneaking feeling of meddling in something that was none of my business, I decided to go to the nearest village and see what I could find out about that forsaken house and the man in the green coat. I lost no time in getting there. There is always one man in a small village who is very apt to know more about everybody in the village than they themselves know—the postmaster. Acting on that premise I headed for the dinky post-office, housed in a little one-story frame building down the main street. Besides being the post-office, it was drug store, candy store and grocery store combined, and it was presided over by a tall, lank individual with a cadaverous face and deep-set near-sighted eyes. He greeted me with the curiosity and interest a stranger is accorded in a small village and asked me what I would have. I said I was hungry from a long walk, which was pretty much the truth, and would take some cheese and crackers and eat them there if he didn't mind. He was loquacious enough, and was only too glad to have someone about whom he could talk to a standstill.

"I mentioned casually that it was just possible I might buy a place in the village and come to live there—if I found the villagers to my fancy. That was enough to launch him into the family history of every inhabitant, save one. He did not mention anyone by the name of Bennares. I had to get him started in that direction somehow, so I said I had been hiking about over the countryside to see how it would suit me. From which it was easy to lead up to the deserted house in the woods.

"The postmaster glanced at me with a slightly startled expression, then he said rather shortly, 'That's a pretty good place to stay away from, Mister. You couldn't hire a soul in this town to set foot in that yard. That place was owned by Sam Bennares some years ago, and still is for all I know. I'm certain nobody else wants it. Sam deserted it after his girl Lona died.'

"He halted a moment, as though not having any intention to let his tongue run away with him. He shot me a shrewd, appraising glance, as though wondering how much he'd better tell. I asked him half jestingly if the place was haunted. That

fired his pride in what was perhaps the village's one authentic legend. He answered darkly, trying to be very mysterious.

"'It's haunted, right enough, but not by the spirit of Lona Bennares. By another kind of spirit, Mister. The spirit of something hidden and ugly. Lona died under funny circumstances.'

"He halted again, and after waiting patiently for a moment, I prodded him on.

"'Yes? How so?" I asked. 'What was the cause of her death?'

"'That's what nobody knows.' The postmaster scowled and leaned toward me confidentially. 'There was something mysterious and secretive about it, Mister. Sam was a doctor, and it was him that tended her and him what signed the death report. She died uncommon sudden, that's what. One day we seen her here on the street as live as anybody, and the next day she was dead. Sam give out her funeral notice, but he kept the coffin closed and wouldn't let nobody see the body. Then, instead of burying her in the churchyard by her mother as was right and proper, he got a permit and buried her in his own back yard. There wasn't a thing to which we could rightly point a finger and lay no suspicion of foul work on anybody.

"'But all of us begun to remember queer things. We remembered that for the last week or two Lona had acted like she was scared of something. And we remembered, too, that when she was in town the day before she died she wasn't ailing. No sir, not none. She was just as well as she'd ever been. Sam put up a picket fence around her grave. Next thing we knew, Sam was gone. And he never come back, only once a year. Folks think he comes to visit the grave, that there's something on his conscience. He never has nothing to say to anybody, and he always goes right away again. He ain't showed up lately, though. Not for about three years.'

"'Yes, I think I've seen him,' I put in. 'He wears a bright green coat, doesn't he?'

"'No.' The postmaster stared at me, an odd look in his near-sighted eyes. 'So you seen *him*, eh, Mister? H'm, he's as bad as Sam. The fellow that wears the green coat is an inventor, an old crony of Sam's. Awful queer fellow he is. He lived there with Sam for about a year before Lona died so sudden. Folks always thought he was pretty much in love with Lona, but he was ugly as sin and you couldn't imagine her as fancying the man in the green coat. Lona was right pretty. When Sam went away, the fellow in the green coat went with him. Folks have seen him around these parts once in every few months ever since. But what him and Sam find so interesting around that old house, unless it's Lona's grave, is more than anybody can figure.

"'I'm telling you, Mister, there's something mighty queer about the whole business. If one of them two men didn't have something to do with Lona's death, I'm a poor guesser. One of them made away with her, that's what everybody thinks. But they's no way to prove it. Look here, Mister. If that girl died all right and proper, and they wasn't nothing ugly about it, why wouldn't Sam open the coffin? Why wouldn't he let nobody see her? And if he had any good reason for not letting nobody see her, why didn't he come out with it? But, no, sir, nothing like that. Sam just refused to let anybody look at the body and shut up like a clam, and he looked so funny and mad-like that everybody was afraid to ask him any questions. Even I was. And I'm mighty cur'us, Mister. When I'm afraid to ask anybody questions, you can bet there's something wrong.'

"'Yes, I imagine so.' I returned dryly. 'It certainly does look as though you had a real first-class mystery here. But if I decide to buy in the village, I assure you your mystery will not deter me in the least.'

"I had finished my crackers and cheese. I had gotten from the postmaster about all the information I was likely to get, so I bade him goodbye and took my leave.

"You can easily see that my curiosity, already uncomfortably active, would now be rendered almost unbearable. I simply had to find out why those two men kept coming back to that old house, and what they were after. And, if possible, which of them had killed the girl, if the postmaster was right in his sinister insinuation. I watched the house in the woods for several days, intending to spy upon the man in the green coat and follow him into the house. I had no idea what I would do when I got there. I was simply determined to get into that house. But the man in the green coat did not reappear, and I couldn't stand it any longer. I took a bunch of pass keys and tried the front door. To my surprize, though I don't know why I should have been surprized, I had no trouble turning the lock.

"I entered the house, locked the door behind me and went directly to the old desk. I knew exactly which drawer he had opened, and I pulled it out. There lay the papers which the man in the green coat had been comparing in his note-book. I picked them up with a good deal of eagerness.

"What do you think I found, Grant? You'd never guess in a million years. I found a formula for transmuting all base metal to gold—everything from lead to steel. I read it over carefully. It was written in a stilted hand, and it did not bear the name of any person. But it was easily legible, and I studied it minutely with growing interest. So this was the thing that brought those two men back to the old house so persistently. Had it anything to do with the strange death of Lona Bennares? I decided right then and there to determine just what value the formula had; I copied it in a note-book of my own, replaced the papers in the desk drawer exactly as I had found them, and let myself out of the house.

"For the next two weeks I spent every waking minute experimenting with that formula. I tried it on a half-dozen metals, but the result was always the same. It transmuted the metal all right, to some strange composition infinitely finer, of a dirty greenish yellow—but not to gold. Then, unexpectedly, what little gray matter I have got on the job and I saw what was wrong. The formula lacked one important ingredient. I sat in my chair scowling at it, wondering if there were some other copy of that formula more complete. Perhaps all the formula papers worked out by the man in the green coat were not in that one drawer. I kicked myself for an ass, for not going through the whole desk, but I consoled myself with the knowledge that I could easily enough go back to the house the next day.

"And I guess I don't need to tell you that I was there as soon as it became daylight. I searched that old desk from top to bottom, but there were no other papers in it concerning the formula. I slammed all the drawers shut, peevishly, and stood there scowling at the old desk, wondering if that one lacking ingredient was hidden somewhere in the house. If so, was that the thing the two men were trying to find? Which one of them hid it, and which knew where it was? Or had the man who had hidden it forgotten where he put it?

"I started at the plausibility of a sudden thought. Maybe it was the

girl who had hidden it. The postmaster said the ugly little inventor had been in love with her, and that she was right pretty. I could picture her rather easily. A light-headed, vain little small-town belle, who might find the attention of the man in the green coat very obnoxious. I could picture her spying upon the inventor, and upon her father who inevitably would have become interested in the marvelous formula concocted by his old crony. I could see her gloating over the discovery of that one important ingredient which the inventor doubtlessly had omitted purposely from the written formula. His reason for omitting it would be very clear. He was taking no chances of anyone's stealing that formula, not even trusting his old friend and host.

"I could see Sam Bennares spying, too, trying to discover where the man in the green coat kept notes on that missing ingredient. I visioned the girl locating its hiding-place, and changing the notes to some place she alone knew, then by a sly word here and there setting the two men at each other, causing the inventor to suspect that her father had stolen the notes, egging her father to indignant denial. And her motives, also, would be very clear. A right pretty small-town belle would go farther than that to engineer a quarrel between the two men, inveigle her father into ordering the inventor out of his house, and so rid herself of the presence of a man whose attentions were offensive to her. And it might very well have been that she had failed in her design, drawn their combined anger down on herself, and paid for her meddling with her life.

"Having settled this in my own mind as being a very reasonable hypothesis, I began trying to conjecture as to what would be the most likely place for the girl herself to hide the notes. But there I was baffled. My understanding of women was precisely nil. About the only thing I could do was search the entire house. I had just decided to give the whole day to that search, and began it immediately, when I heard the door open behind me.

"Startled, I whirled to face the door. There stood the man in the green coat.

"ODDLY enough, he did not seem at all surprized to find me there. He smiled slightly, that strange smile that so lights his ugly face, and I had an uncomfortable feeling that *he* had been spying upon *me*. That he had known I was there all the time. I'll go farther than that. I felt that for some obscure reason he had been waiting and watching, hoping that my curiosity would bring me back there.

"He stood and eyed me for a moment, then abruptly advanced to the table. Then, while I stood staring at him inanely, he took out one of his note-books, rapidly scribbled something on a page, tore out the page, laid it on the table, turned around and walked out of the house. I stood gazing after him, wondering what the deuce he was up to, then stepped over to the table and looked at the scribbled message. And I felt my eyes nearly pop out of my head. This is what he had written:

Lona Bennares is not dead. Buried in that grave is a hundred thousand dollars gold, transmuted from lead. Leave it alone. Lona was put out of the way by her father. The story is too long to tell here. I have been waiting and watching for someone like you. If you will seek Lona out, and free her from her living death in the asylum at Wentworth, I will give you the complete formula for transmuting base metal to gold. You will thereby become wealthy, with an absolutely unlimited supply, and at your death will add to the world's scientific discoveries. I must request that you keep the formula secret as long as you live. Too common knowledge of it would be disastrous. No answer is necessary. I will be watching to see what you do.

"Well, you may be able to imagine faintly how I felt. If the queer old

inventor had told the truth, I was a mile off in my hypothesis. If there was a hundred thousand dollars worth of transmuted gold in that grave, no wonder both of the two men kept watch of that house. But why in the devil did Bennares go to such extremes to make it appear that the girl had died, to put her out of the way and bury that gold, representing it as her body? And why did the inventor let him get away with it? And why should he want to put the girl out of the way, anyhow? The mysterious muddle was getting worse every minute, and I decided to waste no more time in vague hypotheses. I began to wonder what I was going to do about that note.

"I read it again and roamed about the room scowling and thinking it over. For a moment, I will admit, I toyed with the idea of digging that hundred thousand dollars out of that grave and ducking out of the country, but on second thought was ashamed of myself for it. If the queer old crank in the green coat was telling the truth, and if he really had completed and proved that formula, and if he would keep his word and turn it over to me for merely finding some way of releasing the girl, there was no question as to the course I should pursue. *If!* But what the devil would he do with the girl, granted that she was in the asylum, alive and well, and I could succeed in getting her out? That, however, was none of my business. But if he really had such a formula, why pass it on to me? Of course, he would have it, too, and he demanded that I keep it secret. I figured he must think a lot of that girl.

"Well, of course, it was inevitable that I should take him up. The prospect of owning that formula, of reaching all in a breath my lifelong desire, was too great a temptation. I got out of there, carrying the note in my pocket, and seeing that the house was securely locked behind me.

"WENTWORTH was little less than a hundred miles away. I was there before noon the next day. I went directly to the asylum, representing myself as a visitor, but admitting confidentially to the superintendent that I was looking for an old friend who had disappeared seven years ago. Lona Bennares had been 'dead' for seven years. The superintendent told me he had but three inmates who had been there that exact length of time, two women and a man. The man wasn't to be considered, and the first of the two women to which he took me was immediately eliminated by her white hair and seventy years of age. The moment I laid eyes on the other woman, I began to put some credence in what had been said by the man in the green coat. I thought of what the postmaster had said—that she was a right pretty girl. I would have liked to knock him down. And yet she was exactly the type that would be so designated by a small-town fellow with no standards by which to judge.

"I suppose that nothing short of yellow hair, doll features and china blue eyes could have appealed to him as beauty. Who could have expected him to realize any proper appreciation of her tall, erect, goddesslike figure? Of her high-bred, medieval features? Features that, with the high rounded forehead, deep-set black eyes, slender Roman nose, finely curved mouth and pointed chin above the long, slim neck, would have driven Raphael post-haste to his palette and brushes. No wonder the man in the green coat had been mad about her. He, at least, was not without standards. But I looked in her face, and temporarily I was as dumb as the inventor. What should I say to her, and how should I begin? The superintendent addressed her as Miss Jane, and told her that I was merely one of their infrequent visitors. She looked at me intently, holding

herself in a kind of calm dignity and with an inscrutable expression worthy of the Mona Lisa. But very clearly in her eyes I saw a sadness, a deep, settled despair. Whether or not she was Lona Bennares, she was obviously a very beautiful woman of about my own age, without hope, without desire to live. The resignation mingling with the despair in her deep eyes vouched for the fact that rebellion had long since withered and died within her.

"I turned abruptly to the superintendent and asked to be allowed to talk to her alone. He hemmed and hawed a bit, stared first at her, then at me, protested that it was somewhat irregular, but finally acceded grudgingly to my request. He said, as though to warn me that any collusion with her would be impossible, that she was dumb, and could answer no questions I might intend to ask her. Then he went out and left me alone with her. Dumb—dumb! Why was everybody dumb? She stood looking at me with a slight expectancy, and I was fudging around for some diplomatic opening. But I could find none.

"Finally I blurted out, baldly: 'Are you Lona Bennares?'

"There was no perceptible change of expression on her face, but I felt that something moved in her eyes. I stepped closer to her and lowered my voice.

" 'Listen,' I said. 'I am here as a friend. I had not heard that you were dumb. Are you?'

"Still there was no change of expression. The black eyes stared back at me unwinking. But now I was certain of the expectancy there, and it was growing. I went on swiftly.

" 'If you are Lona Bennares, and can signal to me, and will do so, in answer to my questions, it may be that I can get you out of here,' I said. 'I have not come impelled in any way by curiosity, nor with the intent to meddle in your affairs. I come only to be of assistance, if that assistance is desired. I was sent by the man in the green coat.'

"And then indeed did her expression change, so suddenly that it startled me. Her eyes widened, incredulously, mirroring an unmistakable flash of fear. She backed from me abruptly, staring, then suddenly dropped into the one chair in that cell-like room, and burst into tears.

"I was utterly nonplussed. Had I done the wrong thing in mentioning him? That swift fear in her eyes was a thing about which there could be no doubt. I wondered, with a startled sense of uneasiness, if it were the man in the green coat who was responsible for her being here. Yet if that were so, what was it that drove him now to seeking her release? And I pondered over something that had puzzled me before. Why didn't he try to accomplish her release himself? But I had no time to be standing there wasting precious moments in hopeless conjecture. I knew well enough that the superintendent would not leave me alone with her any too long. So I stepped closer and ventured to lay a sympathetic hand on her shoulder.

" 'Please listen,' I urged, striving to draw her attention. 'What is it you fear? I will be frank with you. I realize I am an utter stranger, but you have no cause to doubt my motives in seeking you out. I repeat, I come as a friend. I don't know any too much about this affair myself, but I will tell you what I do know, since I believe it is your right. I happened to make the acquaintance of the man in the green coat. He told me about you, and claimed that your father had put you here to get you out of the way. He offered me a pretty big reward if I would come here and get you out. That is all there is to it. I am here. I know nothing more, nor do I need to know. If you are unjustly incarcerated in this place, any man with a grain of

humanity would do his utmost to secure your release, reward or no reward. As a matter of fact, having been of service to you would be reward enough. There, I have laid my cards on the table. I can do nothing more unless you choose to co-operate with me.'

"She had controlled her tears, but that was the only change in her attitude. She still sat with her head bowed in her hands, not paying the least attention to the touch of my fingers on her shoulder. Feeling uneasy, baffled, I dropped my hand, stepped back a pace and stood looking down at her.

"Was it possible after all that she was mad? Was the man in the green coat mad? Was I mad? Was the whole world mad? I began to suspect it. Yet hers were not the eyes of a mad woman. I frowned, annoyed at the time that was passing, wondering what step to take next. Then she suddenly raised her head and looked at me. No, those were not the eyes of a mad woman. Many expressions mingled there for me to read. Confusion, wonder, grief, hope, suspicion and fear—but not madness. And then to my utter astonishment she spoke.

" 'No, I am not dumb—any more. I *am* Lona Bennares, yes. I am not known here by that name. Lona Bennares is dead.' She halted there, with a grimace of bitterness, then asked abruptly: 'When and where did you see the man in the green coat?'

"All doubt of that man had left me the moment she spoke. Whatever his motives in wanting her released, whether they were selfish or altruistic, he had told me the truth concerning her whereabouts, and I had a swift intuition that he had told me the truth all the way. I stepped closer to her again, and my blood hammered in my heart. Oh yes, I was gone, all right. Head over heels. Had been from the moment I stepped in the doorway of her cell-like room and looked in her face. I answered her question eagerly.

" 'I saw him yesterday, in the old deserted house where you used to live. I stumbled on the place several days ago, and saw him going in there. I also saw him comparing notes in a book he carried in his pocket to some papers in that old desk in the front room. That aroused my curiosity. I went back to the house, got in with a pass key and looked at those papers. You'll know what I found. I'll admit I was wildly excited about it. I copied the formula and tried it out, but it lacked one important ingredient, as you must also know. I went back there again to see if he had left any notes containing that ingredient. He came in while I was there, wrote this note, left it on the table, and walked out.'

"The strange fear in her eyes grew, wavered and grew again as I talked. As I withdrew the note from my pocket, unfolded it and handed it to her, she cried out strangely, and shuddered even as she accepted it. Then her eyes glued to it, unbelieving, and she looked up at me with an incredulous stare as she returned it and spoke.

" 'Yes, I believe you. I *must* believe you. I don't understand. But that is unquestionably his handwriting. This is a terrible place for a sane woman. I wonder at myself that I *am* sane after everything that has happened. The superintendent will be back any minute. I must talk quickly. My father and the man in the green coat quarreled over the formula. Father wanted it. The inventor would not give it to him. He said it would not be good for him, that he was not a big enough man to handle it. They came to blows. Father proved that he would stop at nothing to get the formula. When I was asleep, he injected into my veins some strange fluid that would render me dumb for five or six years. Then

he brought me here. He represented me as his sister, and placed me here under the name of Jane Allen. Then he devoted all his time in an effort to procure that full formula. Two years ago he was found dead in his laboratory. News of it reached me, and I gave up all hope of ever leaving this place. There is much more I could tell you. There is neither time to do so now, nor wisdom *in* doing so.'

"'Your father rendered you dumb by the use of something injected into your veins?' I interrupted, struck with a sudden thought. 'Then—was the man in the green coat——?'

"'Yes,' she interrupted in turn. 'He was made dumb by the same process. He refused to give my father the name of the missing ingredient, to *tell* him, I should say, since he had never written it down. And my father injected into his veins that hideous fluid. I fear—I fear that my father must have become something of a fiend, mentally unbalanced by the visions of what that formula could bring a man. He could regulate the period of dumbness he inflicted by the strength of the injection. He only intended making me dumb for a few years, but I heard him tell the man in the green coat that he was making him dumb forever. He said that if he would not tell him that missing ingredient, he would see that no other man ever got it. The man in the green coat had taken a vow never to write it down.'

"She ceased speaking, and I stood lost in thought for a moment. If he was rendered dumb forever, the man in the green coat would be compelled to break his vow and write that ingredient's name down for me. Or had he some idea whereby he hoped to break that long silence of his? That passed through my head more in a sense of detached curiosity than anything else.

"I was on the point of speaking to her again, when I heard the superintendent returning. I said, hastily, under my breath, 'Trust me, Miss Bennares, if you can trust a stranger after those nearest to you have treated you so inhumanly. I haven't time to say more. I shall go straight to the man in the green coat, and see what he has to suggest. I'll see you again as soon as possible.' Then I heard the steps drawing nearer, and I raised my voice to a casual, perfunctory remark. 'I'm sorry you can't speak, Miss. But I guess you wouldn't know anything about my friend, anyway. I fancy you wouldn't remember.'

"'She remembers nothing,' the superintendent put in, suavely, with something of satisfaction on his face. 'I told you it would do no good to talk to her. If you care to come along with me, we have a very interesting case down the hall a few doors.'

"I wanted to tell him that I wasn't interested in anything else in the world right then but Lona Bennares, and I wanted to knock his impudent tongue down his throat. But I had to keep my mouth shut and follow him out of there, knowing that Lona's eyes were following me, half frantically, afraid to hope, desperately trying to keep herself from hoping. Once down the hall with him, I studied him and tried to estimate the likeliest way of reaching him. He was inclined to be suspicious of everyone, which might have been natural to a man in his place. I don't know. But he was also one of those men whose vanity is rather easily touched. And when he asked me if he hadn't called the turn about the uselessness of talking to Lona, I lied like a trooper.

"'Yes, you certainly did,' I admitted, and I didn't have to dissemble in putting on a long face, either. I felt gloomy enough inside. 'She doesn't know me at all—showed not the least sign of recognizing me. So I pretended to be looking for some-

one else, to avoid exciting her. But she is the girl I was trying to find. We were to have been married, years ago. I left the United States on business, and when I came back she had disappeared. I've been looking for her ever since. I find her—here.'

"'Well, now, I want to know!' He looked at my sympathetically, and waited to see what else I was going to say. I didn't leave him wondering long.

"'Yes,' I said, with the idea of planting a few seeds where they would flourish and do the most good. But what I said now was true enough. 'It's very sad for me to find her this way, and sadder still to think of leaving her here. You're a man of discernment, you can see that. And I imagine you must be a man with a great deal of influence in the right quarters. Couldn't you use that influence to help me get her out and into my personal care?'

"'No. No, sir, Mister, I can't. I'm sorry.' And I believe he really was. My flattery had hit home, exactly as I intended it should, and he thawed to me, his voice half apologetic as he went on in explanation. 'You see, it's like this. When her brother brought her here he seemed very much upset and grieved over her condition. He paid her keep here for six months, and came back once or twice to see her. The last time he came we had quite a long, confidential talk. I could see that merely the sight of her was too much for him. He told me he didn't think he could stand it to come back again. So he gave me a perfectly enormous sum of money, on the written agreement we were to care for her here until her death, and under no conditions allow anyone at any time to take her out. So you see, I am duty bound to fulfil my obligation. That Mr. Allen has since died in no way lessens my duty toward him or Miss Jane. But I *can* appreciate your position. And I say again—I'm sorry.'

"Well, that was that. Old Sam Bennares had certainly sewed the whole thing up. And he'd sewed it tight. It looked like a blank wall to me. I want to tell you, Grant, I packed a pretty heavy heart as I walked out of that asylum and headed back to the old deserted house to keep my rendezvous with the man in the green coat.

"As I half expected, he was waiting there for me when I arrived the next afternoon. And the expression of my face must have been rather glum, for he scrutinized me sharply, waved me to a chair, scribbled something on a paper and thrust it in front of my face. I read: 'Don't be so down-hearted. There's always some way out of everything. You've seen her. What did you find?'

"'Yes,' I admitted calmly, rather wearily. 'I've seen her, and she admitted her identity to me. But apparently that's about all the good it'll ever do—just my having seen her.' And then I went on to recount to him, verbatim, all that had passed between Lona and me, and between the superintendent and me.

"HE LISTENED with a perfectly stoical face until I had finished. He had taken a chair facing me. And then he sprang to his feet and began pacing back and forth across the room, his face livid with rage. I watched him in silence, wondering if there were any possible way out for Lona. Then suddenly he turned and darted out of the room, into the rear of the house, and I heard him running pell-mell up the stairs to the rooms overhead. I heard him scurrying around up there, and very shortly he came tearing back down again at the same breakneck pace. He raced into the room and, before my wondering eyes, he planked down on the table a small bottle half filled with some milky brown fluid, and a

small hypodermic syringe. He pulled his indispensable note-book from his pocket, tore out a leaf, and began writing on it with feverish haste.

"I waited in silence, watching him; this time his message seemed rather lengthy. When it was finished he made no move to give it to me, but backed from the table, and stood perfectly motionless, his strange eyes darting back and forth from the note he had written to the objects on the table, and to me. After a long moment his gaze glued to mine, and if I ever saw desperation, hope and supplication in human eyes, I saw them then in his. He made a queer little half-threatening gesture, darted by me and rushed out of the house.

"I sat there and stared at that bottle and syringe like a fool, half afraid to go and see what he had written. But my eagerness and my own desperate desire for action were stronger than my fear. I got abruptly to my feet, stepped to the table and bent to read the note:

There is only one way out. She is right. Sam grew to be a terrible fiend. He was my friend, and I would have let him have the formula if he had been a bigger man, and if I hadn't known for what purpose he wanted unlimited wealth. He was dabbling in black magic; he had the house littered with potions and serums. Lona never knew what they were. Had I given him that formula I would have loosed a destroying fiend on the world. He is gone now, driven to a far plane, and held there by the reaction of his own dark sorcery. We can forget him. But some of his own evil knowledge may now be the thing that will make possible a solution for us to this tangle.

You have seen Lona, and your face tells me that you have loved her, even as I have done. She could never care for a hideous thing like me. Even my attempts at kindness were repellent to her. It seems irony now that it should rest solely upon me to release her from that horrible prison into which her fiend of a father put her. But all I ask of eternal life is to be allowed the privilege of doing that thing. And no reward is too great for the man who will aid me. If I could see her free, see her your contented and beloved wife, as I know you are seeing her already in your imagination, I would be content.

Here, then, is what you must do. To get her out of there, we must have her die temporarily. In that bottle is a solution Sam distilled. Injected into the veins, it produces a coma that so closely simulates death that no physician can tell it from death. You must get to her secretly, inject this into her arm, and call the next day to see her. You will be told she is dead, and you must claim the body. But you must get her away quickly. She will wake from the coma in thirty-six hours. This is what remained of the same fluid Sam used to place her in a state of coma when he took her away. In the name of God, I ask you to act.

"I backed from the table with an involuntary shiver as I finished reading what had been written by the man in the green coat. I had to hold on to myself rigidly, that I might consider it sanely. I was repelled by it, yet I was touched by it, too. Touched by his devouring and hopeless passion for her, and his honest realization of his own repugnant appearance. I thought of his little dried-up body, his great mummylike head, his hard gray eyes and ugly features—and I thought of her. Yes, I could pity him. But it was going to take all the will-power I possessed to drive myself to do the thing he asked.

"And yet I knew it was the only way we should ever get her out of there; I knew now how utterly selfless was his motive toward her. Loving her as he did, he asked only to see her released from what must be torture to her sensitive spirit. To procure her release, he could contemplate seeing her the wife of another man, could even be contented at the sight. That, if I knew anything about it, was a brand of love to which I could take off my hat. I knew even as I stood there that I would do as he asked. But a thousand things ran through my mind and turned me cold as I contemplated it. Suppose the solution might be weakened or changed after standing all these years. Suppose it would

not send her into a coma. Suppose it would send her into a coma from which she would never wake. Even so, reason argued, eternal sleep would be infinitely better than the living death she now knew. Whatever the chances, ghastly as they were, I had no choice. It was the one way open to me, and I must take it.

"The next night, well after 11 o'clock, I stealthily approached the asylum. I blessed the crescent moon that gave me barely enough light to get my bearings, yet left enough of shadow to conceal me effectually, as I stood looking up at the grim building. It was entirely dark. Everyone within it was long since asleep. Fortune favored me in one thing. Her room was on the ground floor. When I had finally located it, I slipped warily up to the window and tapped on the bars. I dared not make too much noise. And I had about despaired of waking her when I finally heard a stir in the room, and saw her face gleaming whitely at me from within. The window was partway open, and I placed my mouth close to the bars as I spoke to her. When she saw it was I, I heard her give a little indrawn breath of relief. Rapidly I explained to her what had taken place, and what had been proposed by the man in the green coat. I added my plea to his, and told her then and there that I asked no greater privilege than to free her and make her my wife.

"For a long time she was silent, and I wondered what was going on in her mind. Then she abruptly slipped the window up a little farther, and held her arm close to the bars. It was I who caught my breath then. I've never been a coward, but it took all the courage I had to fill that needle with that unknown solution and raise it toward that white arm. The drive of the needle must have hurt her, but she gave no sign. And if I ever prayed in my life, I was certainly praying desperately as I drove that plunger home. She gave a little gasp and backed from the window, and I turned and stumbled away like a blind man.

"I don't think I care to try to describe the rest of that night, Grant. In Peking there is an edifice called the Temple of Seventeen Hells. By the time morning came I think I could have told the Chinese how to build a temple of twice seventeen hells. I didn't know what I had done, nor how it would end. I was, still like a blind man, trusting desperately in the word of the man in the green coat.

"By daylight, my nerves in rags, I found myself pacing restlessly about in a grove perhaps a mile from the asylum. It was all I could do to control my fevered impatience, and the moments dragged like hours. Along near noon I turned my steps toward the asylum. When I presented myself, the moment I looked into the superintendent's face, I knew the desperate plan had succeeded in part at least. He sighed regretfully, greeting me before I had a chance to speak.

"'I have sad news for you, my friend,' he said. 'The young lady died very suddenly last night. She hadn't been ailing that we know of. The doctor says that her heart simply stopped.'

"I don't know how I retained enough of coherence to go ahead with things. Certainly I had no need to simulate shock and grief. I was feeling upset enough without any dissembling. And, barring a little red tape, I had no trouble in getting him to allow my claiming the body.

"There was no doubt in my mind as to where I should take her. To the old house, of course, till she revived and we could make plans for the immediate future. It was ghastly business for me, driving a closed car up to the side door, and with his aid carrying her out to the car. She was so cold and white, so utterly life-

less in appearance, that I was ridden by panic lest she should be really dead.

"I MANAGED somehow to exist through that long drive away from Wentworth to the old house in the woods. I drove steadily, but not too swiftly, and reached my destination along about 10 o'clock that evening. The man in the green coat was there waiting for me, with a single light burning and the shades drawn. I wish you could have seen the way his face lighted up when I carried her in and placed her on the old divan beyond the desk. He could not speak, and I had no desire to do so. There was nothing to be said, anyway. Each of us understood the other. Strangely—yet not so strangely after all, perhaps—I was beginning to feel a genuine affection for the queer little man in the green coat. In a tense, racking silence we sat there all night, guarding her and waiting. Daylight came, but still we sat there, unmoving. As the hours dragged by and noon approached, each moment seemed more unbearable than the last.

"The hands of my watch had just passed 12, when she stirred slightly and opened her eyes. She looked up at me, and then her gaze went on to the man in the green coat. She started, shrank back, and cried out.

" 'You!' she gasped. Then her gaze darted to me. 'I don't even know your name,' she said to me. 'You forgot to tell me. But unless I'm very mad indeed, my prayers are answered and that awful nightmare is over. How can I ever be grateful enough to you?'

" 'More to him than to me,' I answered, nodding to the ugly little man who was worshiping her with his eyes. 'If it hadn't been for him——'

"I didn't finish the sentence. But she knew what I meant. She winced; her eyes traveled to him, and then back to me.

"Her next words were little more than a whisper. 'When you first came to me—oh, what is your name? How can I talk to you properly when I don't know your name?'

"I told her what it was. She thanked me and went on. 'As I started to say, Mr. Tobin, when you first came to me there and said he had sent you, I thought *you* were the mad one. But I guess I can sum it all up when I say I was so desperate that I would have taken any chance for release that presented itself, even when it came through a man who was mad.'

" 'And that is why you were afraid?' I put in quickly, in a flash of enlightment. She nodded soberly. 'But why,' I asked, 'should you think I was mad?'

" 'Because—the man in the green coat is dead.' Her eyes were on him, wide and staring. 'My father killed him, in rage, because he would not give up the formula. It is his body that is buried out there in the yard, was buried there seven years ago.'

"She saw the shock and disbelief in my eyes and turned to him. 'Isn't it so?'

"He nodded.

" 'Shall I tell him everything?' she asked, and he nodded again.

" 'That was why my father put me away. He knew I was horrified, sickened by what he had done. He was afraid I'd tell. He rendered me dumb so I couldn't tell. Then he put me in the madhouse, where, if I attempted to write down what I knew, my keeper would only pity me and consider that I was where I belonged. Certainly had I attempted to write the truth it would have seemed mad enough to the average person. In the grave with him my father buried for safe keeping a large amount of gold made by the formula. He came back from time to time and carried it away, knowing well enough the villagers would stay away from here.

He gave a large part of it to the superintendent of the asylum to insure my being kept there. I think there is nothing more to tell.'

"And, Grant, there is little more for me to tell you. You have seen my wife. You know the position I have attained through my secret formula. You have seen him. You will understand now why my house is open to him no matter when he chooses to come, and no matter who is here."

As Tobin ceased speaking, Thorpe sat staring at him with horrified eyes. His blanched face and startled expression were evidence of the shock he had received as Tobin's story had drawn to a close. He drew a long breath, and shook his head, like a man who can in no wise credit what he has heard.

"Do you mean to tell me," he demanded, "that the man in the green coat, the man I saw here this evening, is a *ghost?*"

"You may call him what you will," Tobin answered quietly. "Ghost, disembodied spirit, or materialized astral being. I only know what I have told you. I only know that he has been dead for fifteen years—that he came back from beyond the grave, God knows at what cost—to pass on to me information that only he could give. I only know that he was the means of rescuing my wife from a living death. No matter who or what he is, he has shown me more than one priceless formula. He has shown me what ingredients it takes to make a noble man, a gentleman unafraid. And that's enough for me."

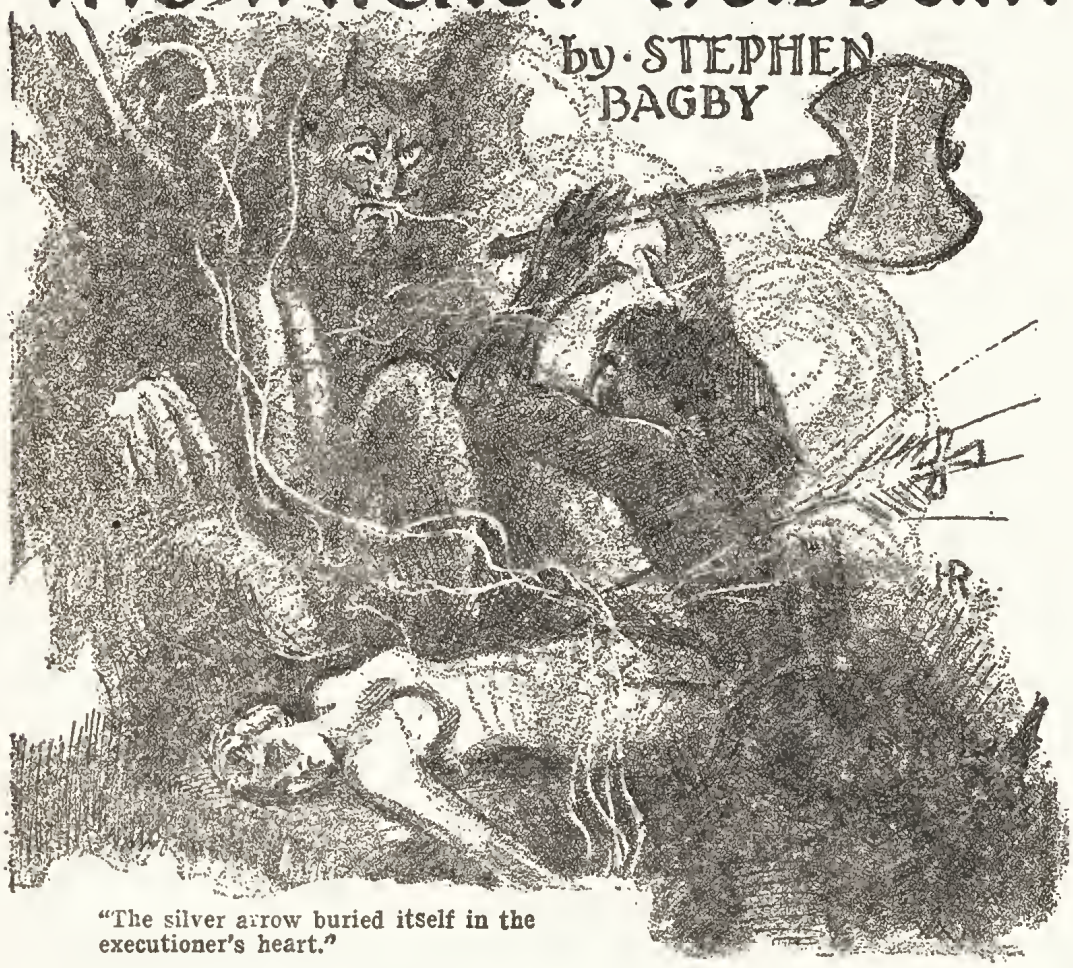
5. *The Grip of Evil Dream*

There were great cobwebs hanging everywhere,
  And awful things were lying all around—
  Wan hands and heads that had no trace of wound,
Foul nightmare creatures peering through the air;
And from a dusky corner came the stare
  Of some white form that made a rattling sound;
  And there were living, ancient mummies bound
In gummy cloths of long and human hair.

These charnel horrors made me sick and weak,
And yet I could not move. There came a creak,
  And then I felt a tongue or talon stroke
  My neck, and heard a husky gurgling choke
As of a yellow corpse about to speak. . . .
  How glad I was that I at last awoke!

The Witches' Sabbath

by STEPHEN BAGBY



"The silver arrow buried itself in the executioner's heart."

The Story Thus Far

RUTHERFORD, an American traveling from Spain to France, blunders into the medieval fortress-town of the Vaudois on May Eve, when the Satanists are holding the Black Mass. Recognized as the reincarnation of Benedicte, one of the chiefs of the devil-worshipers in the Dark Ages, he is drawn by occult influences into the pernicious rites and then allowed to proceed to London, guarded by a familiar, and ordered to return for the Witches' Sabbath on the next May Eve. In London his friend Kincaid enlists the aid of Dr. Littlejohn, a noted psychic, to release Rutherford from his possession and detach him from his familiar; but Rutherford falls under the domination of Le Voyen, the Hermit of the Vosges, who forces him to break his engagement to Helen Leonard after an attempt to kidnap her and turn her over to Le Voyen has failed. Helen, disguised as a boy, pursues the pair into the city of the Satanists in the Pyrenees Mountains, and is captured there by Rutherford and Le Voyen. Meanwhile Littlejohn and Kincaid have arrived to try to save Rutherford from the possession which is imperiling the young American's soul. They are recognized, and ordered before Vermilyea, Queen of the Satanists, who was Rutherford's lover in a former incarnation. Meantime the city has filled with devil-worshipers.

CALM on the surface, it seemed that the narrow thoroughfare through which they passed was teeming with a subdued bustle and excitement; yet nowhere was there a light, or even the slightest break in the desolation of shuttered houses along the way. A tangle of side streets, and then the party emerged into a more spacious promenade.

The four guards had increased the pace. Littlejohn and Kincaid found themselves hustled through the courtyard of an immense building. Into its dark recesses they moved, until, at length, they halted in what Kincaid felt certain was the audience

This story began in WEIRD TALES for July.

hall, described previously by Rutherford. It was lighted by a single huge lamp, suspended from invisible beams aloft. The rays were lost in space, making it difficult to form an idea of the hall's dimensions.

Suddenly a deep bass voice sounded behind them.

"English pilgrims, ye are most welcome to this city and its ancient religion," it said.

The Americans, turning about, saw a tall, distinguished-looking man, past middle age, arise from a high, carved chair and step forward with outstretched hand.

"Dumaine!" thought Kincaid, as the high priest greeted him. He recalled now how Rutherford had described the primate, that day in London. He noted his host's dark hair, streaked with gray, the strongly aquiline nose, and, above all, the dark, glistening eyes. There was a resemblance between the alchemist and the landlord, Tabelard, except that the latter's features were less intelligent and crafty. Plainly, Dumaine was capable of anything.

The primate chatted with Littlejohn in the Basque tongue, but the conversation was too rapidly spoken to permit the chemist to catch the words. He surmised, however, that it was an exchange of civil compliments.

A rustle in the darkness denoted the arrival of someone else. It proved to be a young woman, clad in a rich gown of dark velvet. The robe was carelessly draped, revealing an alluring expanse of white shoulder.

Dumaine made a low bow and dropped to one knee.

"Thy Majesty, the guests are here," he murmured; "the English pilgrims."

She regarded them with half-closed eyes and smiled dreamily, bewitchingly, extending her hand, which the two Americans pressed to their lips, in turn. Both men felt the magnetism of this beautiful girl, and the almost erry sensation that came with the touch of her fingers.

"I am Vermilyea," spoke the girl in low tones of perfect English. "The hospitality of this palace is yours. Our old city has its charms. I perceive you have observed these with approbation. We would like you to know more of the city—of its faith—and remain here, if you will."

The Americans made graceful response to her greeting.

The queen turned her eyes toward Kincaid, who approached nearer, as Dumaine and Littlejohn drew aside in conversation.

Nearness to Vermilyea was intoxication itself, the chemist found. Her figure was slender, yet well-rounded, and of perfect mold. Her features were of a firm delicacy, as if chiseled to perfection, and made more glorious still by the wealth of soft black tresses that crowned a classic head.

Kincaid stood for a minute, gripped in the spell of her loveliness; yet there was about her an influence that roused a vague alarm. With an effort, he lowered his eyes, avoiding those gray-black ones that seemed to fathom his soul.

"I am so glad," she whispered to Kincaid, aside, "that thou hast come. Thou wilt like our town—wilt like us—and become one of us. Thou wilt stay, because thou likest me; because I desire thee to?"

The sense of her loveliness, the perfume of her breath upon his cheek, seemed to rob him of his senses.

"*Mademoiselle,*" breathed Kincaid hoarsely, "as if any man could refuse your bidding! I would do anything—obey the slightest wish—were it you who asked it! I—I——"

The arrival of a hooded majordomo saved the situation, when Allan Kincaid was on the verge of rash promises. Dinner was served.

VERMILYEA and Kincaid led the way. Dumaine and Littlejohn followed them through a maze of lofty hallways, paneled in ancient

oak, and emerged into an olden banquet hall, where, in the distant center, rested a table, set with viands.

"Truly an immense palace, within, gives lie to its outward appearance," thought Littlejohn, as he seated himself to the left of the queen. Kincaid had the place to her right. Dumaine took an extra seat beside the scientist.

The head of the table was vacant. The queen sat facing that place, where a great, regal chair stood empty and waiting.

It was a strange meal. Kincaid seized a filled wine goblet by his plate, but caught a warning glint in Littlejohn's eye. He slowly set it down, untouched, remembering the psychist's warning about strange potions.

"Does not Your Highness expect another guest?" queried Kincaid, aside, gazing from Vermilyea to the great, vacant chair at the head of the table, where the dishes rested unused.

"Yes," replied Vermilyea, giving him a strange look. "We expect him, always—the Host—for perhaps, he will come!"

"Of whom do you speak?" asked the chemist, curiously. "The Host——?"

"The Master!" breathed the queen, strangely. "The Great One!"

The glitter in her gray-black eyes held him spellbound, horrified, and he shrank back, involuntarily.

Dumaine, who had halted several times, apparently on the verge of communicating startling things to the scientist, suspected something. He was pressing Littlejohn with pointed questions, endeavoring, it seemed, to pin him down. The psychologist foiled, and was parrying neatly, when the tall figure of a man, in doublet and girdle of gold, entered the hall and strode swiftly toward the table.

The Americans glanced up, quickly, and perceived a contorted face—an evil, gloating countenance—that they instantly recognized.

It was that of Le Voyen!

The clairvoyant stepped beside Dumaine, clutching the latter's sleeve.

"Enemies, sire!" he yelled, leveling an accusing finger at each of the Americans. "Impostors! God-fearing spies! Zey are Americans, not English, my lord! Ha, zey mean to betray Her Highness—ze queen! Eet ees ze truth! Seize ze dogs! Keel zem!"

Vermilyea screamed hysterically. Seizing a silver goblet, she hurled it with all her force against a suspended gong. The bell woke the echoes of the hall, as the queen slipped into the shadows and disappeared.

A horde of armed monks streamed forth from the corridors and entered the dining-hall.

"I need no proof!" thundered Dumaine, glaring at the Americans. "I haf known from ze first! Torture for spies and God-fearing dolts!"

Sensing their peril, Littlejohn and Kincaid closed in, and prepared to fight their way out. Hardly had they done so than the lights expired, leaving the hall in blackness.

Before they could move to safety, the floor gave way beneath their feet, and the two men felt themselves plunging into an abyss, with their hands clutching the empty air. Faster and faster they dropped, until rushing space drowned all consciousness. A gloating laugh rang out somewhere over the dark chasm. It was a fiendish cry of joy and triumph.

WHEN Littlejohn slowly regained his senses, he struggled to recall what had happened. He rolled over in the darkness, fumbling for his pocket lamp. He found it several feet away from his body, where it had fallen from his pocket. Lighting the wick, the psychist gazed about him.

A few feet away lay the body of Kincaid. A hasty examination dis-

closed him still breathing. Then the doctor saw why they had escaped a much worse fate. A huge pile of rotting mattresses and cushions had broken the fall, which must otherwise have plunged both men to death.

Littlejohn knelt beside Kincaid's form and applied a liquor flask to the younger man's lips. Finally the chemist opened his eyes and rose to a sitting position.

"Easy, there! Easy! warned the psychist. "Don't exert yourself. We've had a terrific fall, but those mattresses saved us. No broken bones? You'll be all right presently."

"Guess it's all up with us, sir," groaned Kincaid. "Those fiends will torture us, now, and no mistake. Dumaine won't stop at anything, Doctor. Too bad, but Le Voyen certainly timed his coup to a nicety. Where are we?"

Littlejohn warned Kincaid to keep his voice lowered.

"We're in a dungeon," he whispered. "We're marked for death, and are being carefully guarded. We must think fast, for time is short."

The doctor gathered up his felt bag and a number of other objects that had dropped from his pockets and were lying atop the mattress pile. His spectacles, which had survived the fall, were dangling, unbroken, on his waistcoat ribbon. He hurriedly adjusted these.

"Look at this," he urged Kincaid, holding aloft a curiously shaped stone figure that he had just picked up.

"Our death warrant," he observed. "It was thrown into the pit after the trap was sprung. It calls for torture first, and a slow death afterward. We've got to get out of here, son."

Littlejohn lowered his voice, and resumed the conversation in whispers.

"We are to be sacrificed at the Sabbath, tonight," he added, "unless we make our escape."

"Tonight?" cried Kincaid, in astonishment. "What time is it?"

"It's just past noon, May Eve," replied the scientist, glancing at his watch. "Why, man, we've been unconscious sixteen hours! Drugs in the food, and the fall, you know. Watch that trapdoor in the vaulting above you. Warn me, if you see any light."

The psychist moved about the dungeon, tapping the walls with a loose stone. In ten minutes' time he had discovered a hollow spot in the masonry. He moved back to Kincaid's side, indicating a rusty bar of iron, pulled from beneath the mattress pile.

"A branding-iron!" he explained. "Probably here since the inquisition. But this thing of torture will be the means of our salvation! There's a blocked-up tunnel in those walls, and I'm going to make a breach. Look sharp for the guards."

While Kincaid watched the trapdoor, Littlejohn inserted the edge of the bar into the crumbling mortar of the stonework. He worked it deeper and deeper between the slabs, and in a short space had pried loose three blocks. He lifted these down and attacked the second layer. Another furious effort and he had penetrated the barrier. A tunnel lay exposed.

A warning signal from Kincaid caused the scientist to replace the inner blocks hurriedly.

"Keep down!" muttered the scientist, as he flung himself alongside Kincaid. "Pretend death, or unconsciousness. If the keepers come down, we'll seize them."

A slight rumbling sound, above, betokened the opening of the trap. The Americans, lying on their backs, could see a torch being lowered, far overhead, by a chain. The glare revealed a row of brown cowls, and the white of eyeballs staring down the aperture.

A voice called sharply. It called again and again through the open-

ing, but neither of the prostrate men stirred. Puzzled looks crept over the swarthy faces, and excited whispers were exchanged.

The faces vanished for an instant, only to reappear.

A long rope ladder was being lowered into the pit.

No sooner had the bottom rung touched the mattress pile than brown-robed figures came swarming down. The torch glare disclosed that the monks were carrying murderous-looking swords between their teeth.

"Four of 'em," whispered the scientist. "Two apiece, boy! Take this in your hand, and pull the trigger when you 'see the whites of their eyes.'"

Littlejohn pressed a small watch-pistol into Kincaid's open palm. The latter's fingers closed over it.

The jailers stepped cautiously, one by one, from the ladder. Four powerfully built men advanced, halting beside the still forms of the Americans.

The scientist signaled Kincaid with a pressure of his boot tip as the cowled faces bent over them.

Both Americans leaped together, locking their arms about the necks of the nearest monks and dragging them down to the mattress pile.

Their hoarse yells were cut short by the almost simultaneous explosions of bulb guns in the hands of the prisoners; two subdued pops, accompanied by white, hissing spurts of smoke, which struck squarely in the swarthy faces. The two torturers dropped like logs.

The other pair, springing back, gripped their blades and prepared to send them home into the bodies of the two Americans.

Littlejohn, with a deft motion, hooked his left foot into the heels of one swordsman and brought him tumbling down. The fellow leaped back to his feet instantly, and crouched to regain his fallen weapon.

As he did so, the psychist pressed the chemical pistol within an inch of the killer's face and pulled the trigger. Another muffled report, and the third man dropped in his tracks.

Kincaid, weighted by the fallen body of his first adversary, could not recover himself quickly enough to dodge the descending blade. As the razor-sharp edge hissed down, the chemist with almost superhuman quickness thrust the body of the fallen man over his own. A sickly thud told that the sword had bitten deep into the human shield.

Before the frothing fiend could strike again, Littlejohn had sent two bursts of smoke into the flashing teeth. The last man crashed down, rolling like a sack of meal from the pile of cushions.

"Three of these chaps will wake up two days hence, none the worse," puffed Littlejohn, red from exertion. "The fourth won't wake at all."

He indicated the body of the torturer, almost cleft by his companion's weapon.

"Come," spoke the psychist calmly. "The way is clear, but it is only a matter of minutes before our escape will be discovered. Every moment counts."

LITTLEJOHN pried out the loosened blocks hastily. He wriggled through easily enough, and stood inside the tunnel while Kincaid passed the stones through from the dungeon side of the wall.

Kincaid's larger body came through the breach with difficulty, but, with the aid of the scientist, it was accomplished. Littlejohn then replaced the blocks and wiped his hands.

"It will fool them long enough to help us get away," he remarked, holding his pocket lamp aloft.

They were now moving down a damp, moldy corridor, evidently unused for hundreds of years. They had gone a distance of probably a

half-mile, when they emerged into the depths of a deep, black rotunda.

"I believe this to be a wing of the cathedral," whispered Littlejohn. "It will slow us up some, I'm afraid, but that can't be helped. The influences here are dangerously strong. Throw off all suggestion."

The pocket light expired. Noxious, invisible wings swished by their faces as they advanced across the rotunda, driving back by force of will the forces that seemed trying to beat them, crush and conquer them. Kincaid was seized with faintness and terror, but the scientist's steadying words braced him.

"Fight it off, Kincaid! Fight with your thought! Steady! Steady!" cautioned the psychologist, stumbling through the inky blackness, still holding the deadened lamp.

Littlejohn was leading the way, slowly; "feeling out" the atmosphere before him, when suddenly he flung himself back on Kincaid, gripping the younger man's arm tightly, as he stumbled in semicircular direction, toward the left.

A fetid rush of air told Kincaid why. They had just missed stepping into a great pit that lay concealed in the darkness! By the fraction of an inch the Americans had missed a black and frightful death.

"This place is honeycombed with such traps," warned the little scientist, "yet we must find an exit. We must hide out during the sabbath, tonight. Drugs brought here by Le Voyen will spur these people to madness. We'll be slain like dogs if we are caught."

More invisible objects struck their faces. The rotunda seemed alive with some malignant power, which threatened to overwhelm the fugitives.

Kincaid broke forth babbling, but was quickly roused by a sharp blow on the back. Littlejohn had been forced to strike him.

"Beware of illusions," the psychist told him. "This entire place is accursed! Here, follow me; this way."

They found themselves at the bottom of a flight of winding stairs. Both men started the ascent shakily, still fighting off the onslaught of malevolent influences. They plodded up, round and round the spiral flight, and by degrees forged upward through the moldy shaft.

Two thousand steps and more; the Americans lost track of the number. They were conscious of low openings, from time to time—openings to what? They did not know. A musty, unholy medley of odors exhaled from these, a smell of fire and brimstone.

At last—a dim white glow above; a blinding glare of light at the next turn, and the fugitives reeled against the shaft, exhausted. Through the slotted windows, their dimmed eyes gazed across valley and mountain rim, where, far in the distance, loomed a streak of pale yellow—of sand dunes, lining the coast—and beyond, the almost imperceptible flash of the sea.

They were near the peak of the great cathedral tower! They continued to climb, within the frame of stonework, until the steps came abruptly to an end amid a pile of blocks and mortar. From slab to slab they picked a path, until at length they stood atop the jagged turret, with its crest of curving satyr's horns.

A sound of excited voices was wafted from afar. Gazing out across the dark-tiled roofs to the streets below, they observed a large body of brown-robed men, engaged in a furious hunt. The cries of these hooded ones rose like those of wolves in search of prey.

"Our escape is discovered," said the scientist, in low tones. "The knaves are seeking us. But we are fairly safe."

"You mean this tower, Doctor?" inquired Kincaid anxiously. "It

seems like a rather bad sort of trap. Are you sure that it is safe?"

"Yes," replied the scientist. "The crest, where we are standing, is a sanctuary, an evil shrine, where not even the high priest may come. Therefore I feel that we need have no fear."

The guard, in the thoroughfares, had moved away from the marketplace. The hue and cry grew fainter, as twilight softly fell.

Kincaid discovered a new activity farther off in the distance, where dark forms were streaming from the city gates across the gorge. It reminded him, forcefully, of a flowing horde of rats.

"Late arrivals," said Littlejohn. "Pilgrims, you know. The town is seething with them, and the Sabbath hour is near."

Down in the square, where, hundreds of years before, thousands had been burnt for sorcery, silent, muffled figures were scurrying in every direction. Other forms slithered along the crenelated ramparts of the town, and slid around the base of the cathedral; creatures of human semblance one minute, and of animal the next. Kincaid's startled eyes could be certain neither of the form nor sex of these beings.

The chemist cried out sharply, as his gaze shifted suddenly to the effigy towering above them. The scientist, peering up, noted that the satyr's features were now bathed in a red, unearthly light, which dripped from the horns, like blood!

A whir of machinery shook the tower, as, from somewhere beneath them, deep croaking horns poured forth a flood of hideous notes. The assembly prelude! The thought flashed through Littlejohn's mind of the hour, and of its meaning to "the faithful."

Something stirred far back in the scientist's mind; a dim memory of centuries ago, when Christian bells in this very tower caused peaceful prayer among the mountain folk, instead of terrified pleas for deliverance from a croaking of witches' horns.

LITTLEJOHN stripped himself to the waist and commanded Kincaid to do likewise. He applied a salve from a silver box to the torsos of both; then seized a phial, uncorking it, and offered it to the chemist.

"Drink!" ordered the psychist, offering a short prayer to the Holy Trinity.

Replacing their waistcoats, the two men descended from the top of the tower, going slowly down the spiral flight. At length they turned off in a passage, just under the ground level.

Against the walls leaned the statues of horned creatures; disembodied demons of the underworld, and horrible, disfigured effigies that seemed ready to spit and claw. Dull red and green shafts of light intermingled, bathing the place with a ghastly light.

Kincaid clutched the scientist's sleeve, pointing between the moss-grown stone benches, where satyrs moved back and forth, with characteristic jerky movements. There were other forms that hovered in air over the great, empty theater—invisible beings, who pawed the two Americans and gouged at their eyes, gloating fiendishly.

"Familiars," the psychist whispered, "waiting to be attached."

They moved slowly to the pit of the auditorium, where the sight of the entire rear, shrouded in dark curtains, aroused Kincaid's curiosity. Evidently these curtains concealed some sort of a platform, and he started ahead to investigate.

He felt himself jerked suddenly back, and Littlejohn's hand gripping his shoulder.

"Don't go near those curtains," commanded the psychist, excitedly. "It would cost you your life. Stand

steady, now, and remain close to me. We're in peril every minute, here."

The scientist pointed to a small flight of stairs in the wall of the auditorium. They ascended these and found themselves in a cupola, level with the balcony and overlooking the entire assembly place. The front of the cupola was closed, except for a narrow, horizontal slot, through which one might watch proceedings, unseen.

" 'Tis said that à King of France, from this cupola, witnessed the Sabbath revels, many years ago," asserted Littlejohn. "In this spot he reveled in privacy at the May Eve orgies, and received Black Mass for his especial benefit. It was here that a war with England was hatched, at the Satanic command."

He took Kineaid's arm.

"We shall watch, from this spot, the Sabbath revel tonight!" added Littlejohn. "It is now almost time for the assembly. Let us slip outside hastily, but, as you value your safety and mine, stay close to the cathedral walls. Don't let yourself be seen."

They moved stealthily out of the building, until they reached the portal of the belfry. They crept over the stone flagging and dropped like shadows, close to the entrance portals.

Around the corners of the marketplace, figures rushed, with remarkable speed. Some seemed flying through the air—human forms actually soaring over the rooftops, while the crouching Americans gasped. Other creatures dropped from housetops and window-ledges, leaping from level to level with the agility of cats. The bodies of these creatures shone with the faint luminosity of witches' ointment, which tinged their features, their hands and bodies. Figures of men and women became those of animals with muzzles, snouts and claws. In the distance arose a chorus of howling, which trailed off like the mournful wailing of wolves.

An old crone, imbued with catlike activity, flew through the air as if on wings and flopped down at the feet of the crouching Americans. She tugged at the form of Kineaid, in a frenzy of zeal.

"E-yai! Hetan! Emen Hetan!" she screamed. "Anoint and fly! The Sabbath is here!"

Kineaid thrust the snarling, clawing creature away from him. With a howl the hag leaped into the air and was away like a flash, joining an aerial procession of crazed creatures, in whose wake flew a stream of familiars. The air seemed alive with forms, speeding like bullets, in every direction. The whole square was filled with an eddying host of beings.

The deep, guttural bellow of the tocsin sounded again from the Cathedral of Horns.

An answering chorus of wails arose, stretching from one end of the city to the other, in the awful crescendo of the Sabbath cry. The gorge had turned into a seething inferno; great billows of flame and lurid mists mounted from its depths and soared high over the housetops. The flames were reflected on a horde of dark bodies, flying over the chasm.

Both Kineaid and Littlejohn darted quickly toward the wide entrance, in an effort to regain the cathedral. But as they reached the portal, a vanguard of heavy, thudding creatures shot from the air, like meteors, and landed beside them. Faster and faster they came, until the portal was choked with naked torsos, smeared with burning witches' salve. They flopped down on the flagging, seeming to assume the forms of animals as they rushed into the cathedral on all fours. The night was filled with the cries of wolves and panthers.

"E-yai! Hetan! Emen Hetan! Sabat! Sabat!" screamed the frenzied ones, foaming at the mouth.

"The cry of the Witches' Sabbath," muttered the scientist, tugging at Kincaid. "Back inside, or it will be too late!"

The two Americans, thus far unobserved, pushed their way through the fighting worshipers. They darted to the right, where the tower passage lay, and ran through the corridor, into the auditorium. Littlejohn and Kincaid reached the cupola stairway without detection. They rested, lying on the floor of their vantage place, panting from exertion.

A shrieking crowd seethed into the auditorium, fast filling it up. Far overhead, the vaulted ceiling was obscured by smoke, shot with streaks of unholy fire.

Through the air came the rain of "faithful" to the rendezvous. Everywhere in the place, familiars fought, bit and yelled, demoniacally.

In a halo of reddish flame, a great figure sailed through the air and plumped down on the central dais. With a fiendish cry, it leaped, like a cat, into the bishop's chair of carved stone. It crouched low before the altar, a square, sacrificial block, and then rose to full length with a scream. It spun around, and then the Americans saw its face.

It was Dumaine!

"The High Priest! The High Priest!" acclaimed the swaying throng of worshipers.

His voice broke forth in a sonorous chant, surely the music of a weird mass, the huge, majestic rhythm of which was swelled by a chorus of demented voices.

From somewhere in the great cathedral the tones of a great organ broke forth. Its booming notes were unlike anything Littlejohn had ever heard before. The peal seemed to jar the atmosphere like thunder. It was the beginning of some frightful stage in the rites, the watchers were convinced.

And then, they saw her! Her body seemed to swoop down upon the dais, apparently from nowhere.

Vermilyea! The two Americans gasped.

"The Queen! The Queen!" screamed the worshipers. "Her Majesty comes! Hail, hail Her Majesty!"

VERMILYEA'S eyes were agleam with a wild light; her flying dark hair was crowned with oak leaves, her slender body half-clad in tattered garments of brown, her bare knees revealed by a short, ragged skirt. Her whole body was glowing and shrouded with lurid mist.

Le Voyen and Rutherford suddenly appeared, spinning down from the air and leaping to the dais. They knelt before the queen and flung themselves prostrate, with sharp cries.

"It is the Hermit—the Hermit!" roared the audience. "It is Le Voyen, the seer of the Vosges! Give him the Bishop's miter! He is qualified."

Le Voyen leaped up, facing the worshipers, and flung his arms wide. He chanted a sentence to the throng, and held his powerful right hand aloft. He knelt again at Vermilyea's feet.

Dumaine's face went black as night, at this bid for popularity. Plainly, Le Voyen had captured pilgrim fancy, and, as Dumaine knew, the seer was a formidable rival.

From their vantage point the watchers saw the high priest turn his contorted face aside and struggle for control. He succeeded with an effort.

Vermilyea descended from the throne, flinging her body in low obeisance before the great, dark curtain in rear of the cathedral, and began the slow, sinuous movements of a ritual dance.

A deeper note from the great organ reverberated through the auditorium. The dark curtains stirred and slowly drew apart, exposing a huge, gilded throne. The upper part was shrouded in mist.

"The hour of midnight draws near," chanted Vermilyea, repeating a series of strange words in rapid succession. Dumaine, Rutherford and Le Voyen chanted an accompaniment to the Black liturgy; the lay priests took up the strain, and then the frenzied audience joined in the evil chorus, with a crashing din.

A sensuous, weird strain, like nothing in Christian worship, broke forth from the organ. The milling assemblage gave an answering shout. Everywhere upon the floor rolled the worshipers, beating their breasts in ecstasy. Crouching men and women tore the clothing from their bodies, and the next instant had assumed the forms of animals, with eery wailings and growls.

Littlejohn saw two lay priests, with brutal faces, bear up the unconscious body of a young woman through a trapdoor in the dais. The scientist reeled back as from a blow when he saw her features.

"Helen Leonard!" he gasped. "My God! They've captured her! How did she ever find her way to this damnable place? Kincaid, we've got to act! Stand ready."

They saw the lay priests deposit the limp form of the girl at the foot of the altar block, and wait with folded arms.

Vast changes were now being wrought in the auditorium, where the play of unseen forces was beginning to crackle like lightning. Dumaine had raised his voice in a high, singsong pitch, and was prostrating himself before the parted curtains, where now a column of gray vapor was beginning to rise and billow out. Le Voyen and Rutherford were kneeling in worship before the swaying mist that hung before the throne, vibrating, terrible and threatening.

Kincaid, with rising hair and shivering limbs, was fast falling under the grip of the spell. He clutched the arm of the psychist, while beads of perspiration streamed from his face.

Vermilyea, wildly beautiful in the frenzy of witch ointment, had quickened the pace of her dance; her feet flew, and her body seemed to leap forward and soar to the cadence of the deep, mournful swell of pagan music. There was something alluring, seductive, wicked, in the measure, something unhallowed in the lithe play of muscle and limb.

The Black ceremony had thoroughly seized the worshipers. With the rise and fall of the odious chorus the atmosphere seemed alive with the countenances of lost and beaten souls. Features contorted by untold suffering writhed and babbled and shrieked in the thickening column of mist.

Vermilyea whirled and fell with arms outstretched before that shapeless gray cloud, already turning black and shot with a thousand tongues of flame.

A sound, like the rushing of meteors through space, rose and alternated with that of rumbling volcanoes. The very cathedral shook.

"Hail Lucifer!" screamed the mad unison of voices. "Hail, All-powerful Dark One! Satanus! Satanus! He comes! He comes!"

The walls of the cathedral receded; the interior disappeared, except the dais, between the groveling throng and the distant throne. Thunderous forces shattered the air, jarring, it seemed, the very earth.

Against the sky loomed the monstrous form of a steel-clad warrior, enveloped in gray smoke. It seemed to blot out the very stars that hung over a black and barren world.

"Hide the eyes, so that the faithful shall not be stricken by the radiance of the Master!" shrieked Dumaine, as the great form moved nearer amid a rain of blood from the atmosphere and a rushing of demon forces through all space.

"Hail, mighty Prince of Darkness!" sereamed the lay priests. "Thy subjeets pay tribute to thy glory!"

The worshipers writhed upon the ground, with bodies eonvulsed in the Great One's presence.

"In the blaek rites of the saered ritual, prepare to elevate the Host!" sereamed Dumaine.

"To the glory of the majestie Presence, let us make ready the willing saerifiee," eehoed the under priests. "Let the honored twain quaff the glorious eommunion potion with the Master!"

"*Sanctus!*" bellowed Dumaine.

Two lay priests knelt before Le Voyen and Rutherford, extending to eaeh a Blaek Communion ehaliee.

The guards unfolded their arms and lifted the form of Helen Leonard upon the saerifical stone. They tore away her garments, and bound her white limbs firmly to the bloek.

A figure in medieval eostume—half of yellow, half of red—stepped forward beside the girl. It was the exeeutioner. He slowly raised the ax of saerifiee.

In that instant, the two horrified Amerieans in the eupola saw the faee of the monstrous figure on the throne.

It was immense, horrible, as it stared forth stonily upon the seene before it. The gray lips were drawn baek over tightly elenched fangs; the countenanee was eut deep with eruel, sardonic lines, and erested with a pair of thiek, blaek horns. The feet had ehanged to eloven hoofs. A great spear tail slid, snakelike, from the throne.

Littlejohn knelt down before the slotted aperture. With a lightning-like motion he fitted a silver arrow to the bow and drew baek the tautened string. The headsman's ax glittered on high, poised for the fatal stroke.

The scientist tensed the thong with all his foree and released its twanging length! Swift as thought, the barb sang through the air, and with a muffled burst of flame buried itself in the exeeutioner's heart. The yellow and red figure went crashing to the floor.

Almost at the same time, a seeond arrow left the psychist's bow. It struck squarely between Rutherford and Le Voyen, exploding with a brilliant flash. Their terror-strieken hands let drop the ehaliees, as they leaped baek in surprize.

Littlejohn struek Kineaid in the faee to break the ehain of influenees seeking to possess the younger man.

"Quiek! Quiek!" he breathed. "Control yourself! To the reseue! Come!"

The seientist plunged down the eupola stairs and rushed into the auditorium.

"Give way—damn you!" shouted Kineaid, striking right and left, as he ran beside the psyehist.

They dashed straight for the dais, beating a path through the welter of bodies.

Littlejohn's voiee rose in the strain of a swift ineantation. He made a mystie sign and leaped onto the dais. Snateling a knife from the dead exeeutioner's belt, he slashed the bonds that held Helen's form to the bloek, and eovered the girl with a robe.

Without pausing in the staeeato, whiplike ehant, the seientist raised his bow and affixed a great, golden arrow. It was shaped like a erueifix. With a mighty twang, the thong released the heavy dart, and the eross shot straight toward the Dark One on the throne. A bright burst of golden light, through the mist, illumined the whole auditorium, as clouds rolled down over the eringing warrior in the gilded seat.

A deafening erash rolled forth as the arrow struck. A terrible ery arose from the mists, and again the booming of voleanoes filled the air. The sounds gradually died away, and blackness eovered the throne. The eurtains elosed with a rush.

The Gray One had disappeared!

THE confusion in the assembly hall was ghastly. Littlejohn's body hovered stiffly erect in the center of the dais, his lips uttering a new jargon of mystic passages, in a deeper pitch. His arm, gripping an oddly shaped, flat vessel, whirled swiftly over his head, sending a cloud of powdered substance into the air.

A blinding circle of white flame roared and crackled in the atmosphere, surrounding the psychist, Kincaid, Vermilyea and Helen with protective force. The flaming hoop threw terror into the mad worshipers, who shrieked and fought to escape the fire.

"A priest of God is here!" rose the frantic cry. "A bright avenger! A sorcerer of power! Fly for your lives! Fly!"

The audience was in wild stampede. Littlejohn seized the huddled form of Vermilyea in his arms, and motioned Kincaid to lift Helen. Grasping their burdens, the Americans plunged down from the dais and moved toward the cathedral entrance. The magic circle of flame moved with them, mowing a lane through the ranks of the frenzied "faithful."

"Seize them! Slay them!" bellowed Dumaine. "Tear them apart! Burn them!"

The cry was taken up by the under priests, who crowded and frothed at the edge of the blazing ring, impotent to break through it. Armed monks, clutching their razor-sharp broadswords, found it impossible to raise them. Their arms were paralyzed, and, in foaming helplessness, they watched the retreat of the invaders.

Littlejohn, finding the cathedral doors locked, plunged up the first flight of steps he encountered, in the front wall, clasping his burden fast. He was followed by Kincaid, bearing the form of Helen.

They found themselves in the great organ-loft, with the flaming circle dying out and the bloodthirsty mob closing in.

"Take Helen—outside—to safety!" called the scientist to Kincaid. "The crowd is locked inside! I'll stand them off, at the stairs!"

The spell was broken.

Kincaid darted through a passage in the wall of the loft. Littlejohn lowered Vermilyea's body to the floor, just in time to block a furious onrush of a crazed being.

It was the organist. The scientist felled the creature with a terrific blow, and seizing its body, flung it, with the strength of desperation, into the faces of the monks now crowding up the stairs.

The rage of the devil-worshipers knew no bounds. It was plain that nothing short of vengeance would satisfy them. A lay priest leaped up the flight of stairs and sought to grapple with Littlejohn. But again the scientist used his fist with good effect and sent the follow spinning to the bottom of the flight.

He drew forth his silver bow, but found, to his dismay, the thong had snapped. He hurled the useless weapon aside and seized a low, heavy stool, laying it right and left upon the heads of stalwart men-at-arms attempting to storm the stairs. He then whipped forth a phial from his pockets and hurled it down into the crowd below. Flames burst out over the entire staircase, cutting off attack from that direction.

How Tabelard got into the organ-loft, Littlejohn never afterward knew. The gaunt form of the innkeeper rushed in behind the psychist with such force that the latter was hurled forward across the organ bench. His outstretched arms thrashed wildly over the three banks of organ keys, and his feet sprawled over the pedals. A crashing chord of thunder and high notes rushed forth from the pipes of the great organ.

Tabelard, thinking to press his advantage, rushed again, but Littlejohn

planted his heel in the pit of the wretch's stomach so forcefully that the latter doubled up with pain. Before the innkeeper could recover, the scientist had seized the wooden stool and brought it down over the swarthy skull. Tabelard dropped like a poled ox.

A new terror had spread among the milling worshipers below. Although there was now no pressure on the keys or pedals, the thunderous chord of the organ still swelled forth, filling the entire auditorium. Nothing, it seemed, could stop it.

The cathedral swayed and rocked. A wrench of sundering masonry smote the psychist's ears, and as he glanced aloft he noted with alarm that a fine stream of dust and stone was pouring down from the vaulted roof.

Then blocks of stone came hurtling down, followed by whole sections of masonry, as the howling worshipers scattered in every direction.

The vibration of the organ notes had shaken loose the roof!

Littlejohn knew there was not a second to lose. Snatching up Vermilyea's body, he staggered along the passage, with the prolonged organ roar still in his ears, and at length emerged into the dawn now breaking over the market-place.

A jarring boom told of the collapse of the entire west wall. The scramble of worshipers fleeing through the breach filled the air, as Littlejohn laid the form of the unconscious Daughter of the Dusk upon the sward.

In the center of the square, he turned just in time to see the whole cathedral totter. The roar of the witch organ, in some manner, had set the machinery of the tower in motion, and the bellowing of horns was added to the monstrous requiem.

His ears filled with noise, Littlejohn saw the horned crest of Lucifer, and the rest of the jagged tower, plunge downward. The cathedral walls bulged outward for a moment, and then the entire structure went down with a jarring crash. A column of dust rose high above the spot, veiling it like a pall.

The Cathedral of Horns was gone!

A low, wailing sound pervaded the city and died away into the distance. The streets were silent and empty. But, far away, Littlejohn thought he could still hear the diminishing shrieks of the Satanists.

He knelt beside the beautiful Daughter of the Dusk. He made a mystic sign and placed a hand upon her brow. Her eyelids fluttered open. She screamed as the psychist uttered a series of cabalistic words and ended his droning chant with a prayer to the Creator.

With a sharp cry, Vermilyea fell back. Her body writhed in the throes of convulsions. Her whole frame jerked spasmodically, as the psychist sprinkled the contents of a golden phial over her face, her limbs and body. She fell into a deep swoon, as the scientist prayed again, and suddenly a flash of scarlet light shot from Vermilyea's body and vanished in the air.

VERMILYEA recovered consciousness to face Littlejohn's kindly smile.

"Where, oh where am I?" she murmured, as her eyes gazed wildly over the scene. There was no light of recognition in them, Littlejohn observed.

"In safe hands," he said gently. "The spell is broken, and you, my dear child, are now redeemed!"

He lifted her to an old stone bench and pillowed her head with his coat. She sank silently into sleep.

At that moment Kincaid rushed up, a feverish light shining in his eyes. He placed a dark red box upon the ground, and rushed to the spot where the psychist stood, to throw his arms about Littlejohn.

"Thank God, you're safe!" groaned Kincaid. "I feared you had been crushed in that accursed cathedral."

"A close call," replied Littlejohn, "but I got Vermilyea out in time. Where is Helen Leonard?" The scientist gave a start of apprehension.

"A prisoner in the hands of Le Voyen and Rutherford!" cried Kincaid despairingly. "Kidnaped! Stolen, in front of my very eyes!"

"Where—how—did it happen?" demanded the scientist, struggling for control.

The chemist spoke, almost in tears: "I rushed out of the cathedral, with Helen in my arms. I laid her on the flagging, and then dashed back to help you fight off those devils."

"Yes, yes! Go on!" urged the psychist, in consternation.

"Rutherford and Le Voyen sped past me like phantoms. Before I could prevent it, they had snatched up Helen and were racing away with her. I followed them through the streets, and was gaining, when they darted into a passageway. The chase led into a huge workshop——"

"Dumaine's alchemy!" muttered Littlejohn.

"It was," said Kincaid, excitedly. "I rushed toward the pair, but as I did so, Dumaine came rushing out of the shadows with an upraised sword. I snatched up an iron bar and warded off the thrust. I lunged toward the sorcerer, but he had leaped through a window and begun a retreat across a flying buttress, to another wing of the building.

"I hurled the bar with all my force. It struck Dumaine across the back, sending him off his balance. His arms thrashed the air for a moment, in a desperate attempt to save himself. In vain! He plunged from the buttress, and then went, shrieking, into the chasm below. In the meantime, Helen's captors had made off with her."

Littlejohn stifled a cry. The fact had hit him hard.

"I found these in the sorcerer's den," announced Kincaid disconsolately, prodding the crimson box with his foot.

Littlejohn stooped and whipped off the cover. Inside lay two wax Vaudois effigies, of the same type that Le Voyen had made in London.

One of the statues was a lifelike image of Le Voyen; the other, that of Rutherford.

"Humph!" exclaimed the scientist. "Pretty well done, at that! So, old Dumaine was jealous, eh? Looks as if he was using witchcraft to settle a score."

"It seems that way, indeed," answered Kincaid, gravely, as he watched the psychist make minute examination of both the small figures.

"No sign of a curse," Littlejohn murmured, shaking his head. "I don't think Dumaine had time to cast it! But, in order to protect Rutherford, we'd better bring the effigies with us, since exorcism of an unknown quantity is too perilous to be undertaken at this time. Dumaine might have used a curse of elementals."

"But what about Helen Leonard, Doctor?" asked Kincaid, miserably. "Poor girl! I'd give my life to save her."

"We're going right after those fiends," snapped Littlejohn. "Let's get out of this damnable city at once."

Vermilyea, leaning on Littlejohn's arm, accompanied them, with the trustfulness of a child, as they passed rapidly through the ancient city. It seemed that, when they had passed over the gorge, and were glancing back at the frowning battlements, they could hear the cries of lost souls rise from smoldering abysses below.

From the peasant cottage, they were driven to the railway town, where a makeshift wardrobe was obtained for Vermilyea, and the Americans collected their luggage.

"I only hope we're starting pursuit in the right direction," said Kincaid, dismally, when the Paris ex-

press had gathered speed and was moving north.

"Paris is our one chance," declared the scientist, "and we are forced to take it."

A muffled sob sounded in the compartment occupied by the three. Both men gazed around to see Vermilyea's slender body shaken by sobs. She was weeping brokenly.

"Have no fear, my child," consoled the scientist. "We are your friends. Nothing can harm you now."

"Oh, it isn't that! it isn't that!" she cried, in phraseology altogether changed from that she had used in her queenly state. "I realize that you have saved me from some terrible fate. It is like waking from a nightmare, where details are vague, but horror is poignant."

"You must forget this! You must!" declared Kincaid, earnestly.

"But, my friends, you have called me Vermilyea!" she breathed in perplexity. "That is not my name."

"It isn't?" queried the scientist, in pretended surprize. "What is it, then, my child?"

"My name is Angie Adamson," she answered, without hesitation. "I'm an American, of course; a New York girl."

The gray-black eyes were troubled as she perceived the effect her words had produced on her companions.

"Not the Angie Adamson who vanished so mysteriously from Paris?" inquired Kincaid. "Not the heiress for whom the whole world is being searched?"

"Perhaps I am," she laughed, through her tears. "The name is mine! And—I am an heiress. Does the description fit?"

"Not the slightest doubt about it," exclaimed Littlejohn, drawing an old newspaper clipping from his traveling-bag. "I discovered your identity quite by accident, in that strange city."

"Won't you tell us how it happened, Miss Adamson?" asked Kincaid, kindly.

Littlejohn's steady eyes were peering at her over his spectacles.

"I remember very little," she said slowly, "except that I had been accustomed to visit an out-of-the-way book stall in Paris. One day I became aware that a strange bearded man was following me with his eyes staring at me fixedly. His face was unutterably villainous, with its swarthiness and its great, burning eyes.

"I was frightened. I ran hurriedly up the street, and reached home, exhausted. I thought I had seen the last of him, but no! One day I plucked up my courage, and, crossing the Luxembourg, entered a side street. The bearded man stepped suddenly from an alley and blocked my path. I tried to scream, but his eyes burned into mine. Everything went black."

"Mesmerism!" exclaimed Littlejohn. He handed her a photograph of Dumaine. "Was this the man?" he asked.

Angie screamed and hid her eyes.

"Yes, yes!" she cried. "That is the bearded man—the very same individual! When—how long ago—did it happen?" Her voice faltered, strangely.

"Five years!" answered Littlejohn. "It happened when you were eighteen. You see, my dear, I am an inveterate reader of newspapers, and the case attracted my attention. But come; cheer up! It hasn't been your fault, at all, but it is the result of ancestral sins. Young people with 'family trees'—like yourself and Jack Rutherford—should be careful about exposure to weird influences. Why, there are some of us whose forebears, in the far distant past, avowed the evil faith! There was one of mine, for instance."

"You mean," queried Angie, in puzzled tones, "that someone in my family history——?"

The scientist nodded.

"You, my dear, are the counterpart of your beautiful great-great-

great-great grand aunt. She was a queen of the Vaudoisie," he said softly, at length, "just as you, yourself—your other self, Vermilyea—were, a queen. Dumaine knew your history. He realized that the title was yours, and that, once in that weird city, your other self—Vermilyea—would be in thorough rapport with the influences. He followed you, but he saw that Angie Adamson would never go willingly. Therefore, mesmerism——"

Angie shuddered, and fell silent, as faint memory stirred within her.

THE express drew onto the Quai D'Orsay, almost before the travelers were aware that Paris was at hand. The three alighted from the coach and went immediately to the De Tourneur mansion.

The countess embraced Angie, whose mother she had known in girlhood.

"We must avoid publicity," cautioned the psychist, outlining the story. "There are certain formalities to be gone through with, but, you understand, with absolute discretion!"

Celestine De Tourneur agreed. She murmured something about a telegram, and left the room. She returned with a blue envelope in her hand, and passed it to Littlejohn, who ripped it open.

He whistled in surprize.

"Quick work," he exclaimed. "Sir Herbert Downes, of Scotland Yard, thinks he has Rutherford in custody. No trace though, of Le Voyen or Helen."

"I believe they're still in Paris," declared Kincaid.

"Good hunch, my boy," spoke the psychist. "Go, at once, to the Palais de Justice, and put the gendarmes to work. In the meantime, I must go to London. Rutherford must be saved!"

In his bedroom upstairs, Littlejohn hauled forth his traveling-bag and opened it. He gave a start, when he sighted the effigies, which had been packed upon the bottom.

The image of Rutherford had been shattered in transit. Littlejohn gathered the pieces together, and went through the process of exorcism, as a precaution. The statue of Le Voyen he laid intact upon the mantelpiece, and hurriedly repacked the valise.

In London, Littlejohn took a taxicab, and was soon whirled through the gates of Scotland Yard. He was ushered immediately before Sir Herbert Downes, the chief, who, besides being an old friend, was deeply interested in the psychic.

Sir Herbert greeted the scientist warmly, a pleased smile hovering in the corners of his shrewd eyes.

"——a psychic crash," concluded the psychist, outlining the story. "A temporary unbinding, a tipping of mental balance. It can be corrected, through exorcism."

Sir Herbert nodded. He had a vast respect for Littlejohn's powers.

He arose and motioned Littlejohn toward a passage between the cell blocks. He halted suddenly, farther on, in front of a comfortably fitted cell, where a man's figure pressed against the bars.

"This is the man," exclaimed the chief in a low tone, pressing a key into the scientist's hand.

It was Rutherford. His yellow orbs glared hate and his body strained against the grill as Littlejohn approached, fixing those calm, penetrating eyes upon him. Sir Herbert watched, silently, a short distance away.

The subject's lips writhed, shouting threats to tear them both to pieces.

"I am J'Adon!" he rasped, in deep bass tones. "I am J'Adon, the strong right arm of Attila, the Hun—Attila, the Great—the favored of Lucifer! I have slain thousands, and was, myself, slain! Aye, but I shall slay thee, too! Only open the door!"

"Thou canst not harm me," spoke the scientist, never removing his eyes from the yellow ones. "Thou shalt be exorcised! Thine ancient nemesis speaks."

"Ha! Thou canst?" screamed the fiend. "I defy—curse—laugh at thee!"

"Speak, fiend!" thundered Littlejohn, advancing with body erect. "Confess thou hast stolen a body, in defiance of God!"

"Aye," grated the fiend, "but thou canst not deprive me of it!"

The eyes smoldered greenishly; the lips babbled in spite of themselves. The hoarse voice spoke: "I was one of the disembodied, called back to earth, when the war began. I weltered in the blood of battlefields, wallowed in clouds of deadly gas, and reveled over the bodies of the dead. I danced in triumph with Le Voyen, Hermit of the Vosges.

"He offered me the fine young body of Benediete, my reincarnated foe, when the soul emerged from its sheathing for a minute. With Le Voyen's aid, I possessed it and reassumed my princely title. Le Voyen was to have the wealth of Benediete, as well as that of the golden-haired girl, whom he intended to make his slave. With this wealth, he would have spread the religion of the Vaudois over the earth.

"I was to have made Vermilyea, the queen, my chattel, and reigned as king of the faithful!"

Sir Herbert's knees sagged. He was almost overcome by the play of influences. He recovered himself with difficulty, as the psychist began the age-old rites of exorcism.

Littlejohn's arms raised and descended swiftly, chanting a Runic prayer. He held aloft a shining crucifix; his lips still moved, and his eyes burned deep into the creature's.

It seemed now that the cell block was being swept by a cyclone. High winds moaned and shrieked about the three figures, as the light began to fade.

Sir Herbert saw the figure of Verdelet, the medieval satyr, crouch waiting, in the cell. The walls of the cell block receded and dissolved. To Sir Herbert, it seemed that he stood on a vast desert, watching the scientist pray, in a gathering curtain of mist.

With rising hair, he saw two figures, so massive that the heads were lost to view, loom through the fog. They surrounded the form of Rutherford, lying there on a dais of rock, and touched him on the breast.

A brilliant scarlet flash leaped forth and vanished. The great forms moved, lifting high a swooning, cloudy shape, and placed it on the body.

The two forms merged, instantly. A soft white glow hovered over the body for several minutes, and then expired. The scene went dark.

Sir Herbert had dropped to the flags unconscious. He awoke to find Littlejohn bending over him, chafing his wrists. He arose, unsteadily, and walked slowly to the end of the cell block, accompanied by the psychist.

"You were swept into the fourth dimension," whispered the scientist. "But what you saw was very real! Rutherford's soul has returned, and now he is forever free. The satyr was hovering near to resume the satanic attachment, but it was exorcised. The curse is wholly broken."

He paused a moment, then continued: "Rutherford's case has descended through many generations of ancestors. Centuries ago lived one of his forebears, to whom he bears an astonishing likeness. That Rutherford, a prince of the Vaudois, was burned at the stake by inquisitors. It happened in that very same town where we found this descendant of the name. Thus, you see, when the young man came within the influence of the place, he became *en rapport* with forces he couldn't resist. These influences, as you have seen, have only now been dissipated."

"This only shows what peril is threatening civilization," spoke Sir Herbert, with gravity. "If the world but realized how many suicides, sudden mysterious deaths, murders, and other crimes, are due to evil possession, there'd be a cry of deliverance, overnight. People don't pray enough, Littlejohn."

The scientist fixed his shining eyes upon his friend's, and nodded.

"How true! How true!" he replied, earnestly. "How clearly you see it, Sir Herbert! You are one of the few high police officials who understand that the wrongdoer is more to be pitied than scorned. Human suffering, and earthly tragedy! In every case, a psychic reason is to blame. Even the best of us are not immune."

The detective chief placed his hands upon the shoulders of the little psychologist, and gazed at him in admiration.

"Ah, my friend," he declared, with feeling, "how blind I was, until you taught my eyes to see! How unselfish is your aim to bring the light to all!"

Littlejohn modestly expressed his thanks, and quickly changed the subject.

The two elderly men moved slowly through the open cell door and stood beside the stirring form of Rutherford. What a change there was in him! The eyes that opened now, and stared about in confusion, were the soft gray of old, and not the blazing yellow orbs of the possessed.

Rutherford's memory was restored. There was no need to bind Sir Herbert to secrecy.

When the embassy man had quite recovered, the three men walked out to a waiting cab, where the chief bade them good-bye.

LITTLEJOHN unfolded the story, bit by bit, as he and Rutherford were traveling back to Paris.

They repaired immediately to the De Tourneur mansion, on reaching the French capital. Half an hour later, Kincaid telephoned Littlejohn an important piece of news. Helen Leonard had been rescued, and was, at that moment, on the way to the mansion.

The scientist heard the details through the receiver. Kincaid had scoured the city, after the psychist's departure for London, in the hope of finding Helen. It was only after he had gone back to the mansion by accident that he received a telephone message from the little valet.

"Seddons covered himself with glory as a detective," laughed Kincaid over the wire. "He followed us to Paris, and here lost the trail. He couldn't find out where we'd gone. He spent his time pacing the railway platforms at Quai D'Orsay, and it happened, while he was thus engaged, that he observed Le Voyen and Rutherford carry Helen from a train and ride away in a taxicab.

"The cockney, in another machine, trailed them to the Latin Quarter, where he located the building, and even the apartment, they had entered. He called the police. Rutherford and the clairvoyant escaped, but Helen was found, unharmed, in the apartment. She was taken to a hospital, where she remained several days, to recover.

"They are still searching Paris for Le Voyen," added Kincaid. "Seddons is leading the chase. He declares he has a score to settle with the magician, and wants to settle it quickly."

"I should say he has!" declared Littlejohn, giving briefly the details of what had happened to Rutherford in London, and of his complete recovery.

The meeting of Rutherford, Helen and Kincaid was, indeed, a joyous one, a short while later, in the De Tourneur drawing-room. But that between Rutherford and Angie Adamson was formal, even strained. Both apparently felt the influence of the ancient bond between them, yet

neither could explain it, nor recall what had taken place in that strange city of the hills.

A kindly, quizzical smile passed over Littlejohn's face. Even he found it difficult to identify the wild, semi-barbaric beauty of the witch priestess with the calm loveliness of this American girl whom he gazed upon. Nor was it quite easy to compare the raging, possessed body of John Rutherford with that of the cultured embassy man in that drawing-room.

IT WAS after luncheon the following day that Helen Leonard came shyly up to Dr. Littlejohn, as he stood gazing at the children at play on the green carpet of Pare Monceau.

"Dear Doctor," she spoke earnestly, softly, with tears welling in her eyes, "to you and Allan Kincaid, I owe everything. You have saved not only Jack Rutherford's life, but my own. I am in lifelong debt to you."

"Now, now, my child," said the psychologist, "I am already repaid. Why, the very privilege of bringing you two young people together again is surely enough to satisfy an old stager such as myself."

Littlejohn coughed a trifle hard, as if trying to hide a suspicious moisture in his eyes.

"But, my dear girl," he asked in mock severity, peering over the tops of his spectacles, "what, in the name of heaven, caused you to visit that godless mountain town, with its unholy Cathedral of Horns?"

Helen lowered her eyes.

"Something seemed to draw me there, irresistibly," she answered, at length. "I discovered a checked map that you had left behind, and through that I found the place. It seemed cowardly to let you two men take all of the risk."

Littlejohn mopped his brow with a handkerchief.

"Whew!" he breathed. "That does, indeed, explain it! But sinister influences, together with your determination to aid, exposed you to a fate that might have been worse than death for you! But who will say that women haven't analytical minds? At any rate, I certainly missed that map!"

He threw back his head and laughed merrily.

"Oh, Doctor—you're making fun of me!" she admonished. "If anything had happened to you or to Allan——"

"Aha! Allan?" inquired Littlejohn with wide-eyed surprize. "Why, my dear, why not Jack Rutherford? Wasn't his salvation, after all, of greatest importance to you?"

"Oh yes, of course," added Helen hastily, blushing in confusion; "of course it was! But——"

"But——?" echoed the scientist.

"Well, Mister Curiosity, since you must know, it's like this," said Helen in pretty consternation: "I do care for Jack, but only as a girl would care for her brother. Ah, Doctor, but I love Allan! Oh, I know I'm engaged to Jack, and that Allan is his best friend! I feel terribly mean. And, yet it isn't fair to Jack——"

"Or yourself, is it?" added the scientist. "All right! Now, suppose that you tell this to Rutherford, at once, and then tell it to the whole world; you and Allan!"

"But, Doctor, I don't understand!" exclaimed Helen in perplexity.

Littlejohn beamed. He slapped his knee, laughing and shaking his finger, waggishly.

"Why, my dearest Helen," he explained, "only a few minutes ago John Rutherford and Angie Adamson came to me with a similar story, themselves. They are deeply in love, too! But, like you and Allan, they thought it wouldn't be right."

A HASTY summons by Littlejohn brought the four young people together in the drawing-room. Restraint gave way to happiness when the scientist had explained just how

matters stood. Arm in arm, the quartet left the mansion, debating upon the most effective method of reaching the bureau of marriage licenses.

"You shatterer of illusions—fy!" scolded Celestine De Tourneur, her dark eyes dancing with suppressed laughter. "Your swift denouement of the lovers' paradox was brutal! It should have been more dramatic and long drawn out, and the solution more prolonged. Ah, you would have spoiled everything for a Frenchwoman! You Americans are so direct."

Littlejohn laughed.

"You perennial darling of my youth!" he exclaimed, sighing, in spite of himself. "Celestine!"

"Arthur Littlejohn!" said the countess, pretending to be shocked. "I really do believe you're growing sentimental!"

Her dark eyes twinkled, belying her seriousness.

Littlejohn would have said more, but at that moment one of the housemaids entered the drawing-room and approached her mistress.

"*Madame,*" began the girl, hanging her face, in embarrassment. "Pardon me!"

"Yes, Renée?" inquired the countess, in kindly tone, raising her eyebrows. "What is it?"

"Oh, *Madame,* it was so unfortunate!" explained the girl, tearfully. "But, at the stroke of noon, today, I was busily dusting the mantel in *Monsieur* the doctor's room. My arm, by accident, brushed from the shelf that wax doll; the black-bearded image of a man——"

"Yes, yes, go on," encouraged her mistress.

"*Madame,* before I could rescue it, the doll had fallen into the flames! It burned up right before my eyes! It happened so quickly that I couldn't prevent it. Oh, I assure *Madame* and *Monsieur* the doctor, it was an accident!"

"Of course, Renée," put in the scientist, hastily. "It is all right; the doll was of no consequence."

The maid sighed with relief, and curtseyed as she withdraw.

Celestine De Tourneur, regarding Littlejohn closely, saw his brow knit, anxiously, as if something were puzzling him.

"You are sure?" she asked. "About the doll?"

"Of course! Of course!" he assured her instantly, his expression brightening. "Egad, Celestine, I'm afraid I'm getting to be a day-dreamer, looking worried when I'm not."

Renée had reappeared in the drawing-room. She held out a card to the countess. She passed it to Littlejohn, who nodded.

General La Roque, chief of the Paris police, was shown in. He entered the drawing-room, gallantly doffing his gold-crested chapeau to the countess, and seizing the hand of Littlejohn, who had stepped forward to meet him.

La Roque seated himself between them. He was a handsome figure of a military man, whose strong features were enhanced by his short-cropped hair, just beginning to turn gray.

"I may speak in the presence of *Madame?*" inquired La Roque, deferentially, glancing from the countess to the psychologist.

"Of course, *Monsieur le General,*" smiled Celestine De Tourneur; "unless, of course, it is best that I withdraw."

"It is not necessary, *Madame,*" added Littlejohn, quickly.

The general nodded.

"This valet, Seddons," began the officer, "is a detective genius! He trapped this devil, Le Voyen, very neatly, this morning."

"What?" exclaimed the scientist. "Le Voyen caught?"

"Yes," replied the chief; "by fate itself, it seems. Seddons sighted him on the Seine embankment, and notified my men. They gave chase. Le

Voyen ran, like a deer, toward the Pont Varennes, but, finding it closed for repairs, dashed across the wooden structure paralleling it, which is being used temporarily to divert traffic.

"He had just passed the center of the bridge, when—pouf!—the draw is swung open to permit a boat to pass. My men could not cross the gap, and were forced to see Le Voyen go toward liberty, with further pursuit foiled. The gendarmes dared not shoot because of the crowd. They watched him move away."

"And——?" interrupted the scientist.

"It was most strange, *Monsieur,*" continued the general, "but Le Voyen had gone only a few steps of his flight when he threw up his hands and uttered a terrible scream. Flames shot from his clothing and wrapped about his body, as fire does a resinous fagot!

"A roaring pillar, a human torch of fire, Le Voyen staggered back to the open draw and leaped into the Seine below. My men rushed back and got boats, but in vain. It was too late. Le Voyen was dead. His body was burnt to a crisp. Zounds, *Monsieur,* but I can not understand it!"

"What time did this take place?" asked the psychologist, tensely.

"Exactly at noon," replied the Frenchman. "My men heard the bells of Notre Dame strike, just as Le Voyen burst out into flames. But why, *Monsieur,* do you ask?"

"Out of curiosity," exclaimed Littlejohn, sinking back into his chair; "out of mere curiosity, that's all."

[THE END]

DIRGE

By LEAVENWORTH MACNAB

Cold, gray and drizzly drifts the dreary day—
  Drifts to the gloom-girt shores, within the West—
And cowering sinks before Night's spectral sway
  To troubled rest.

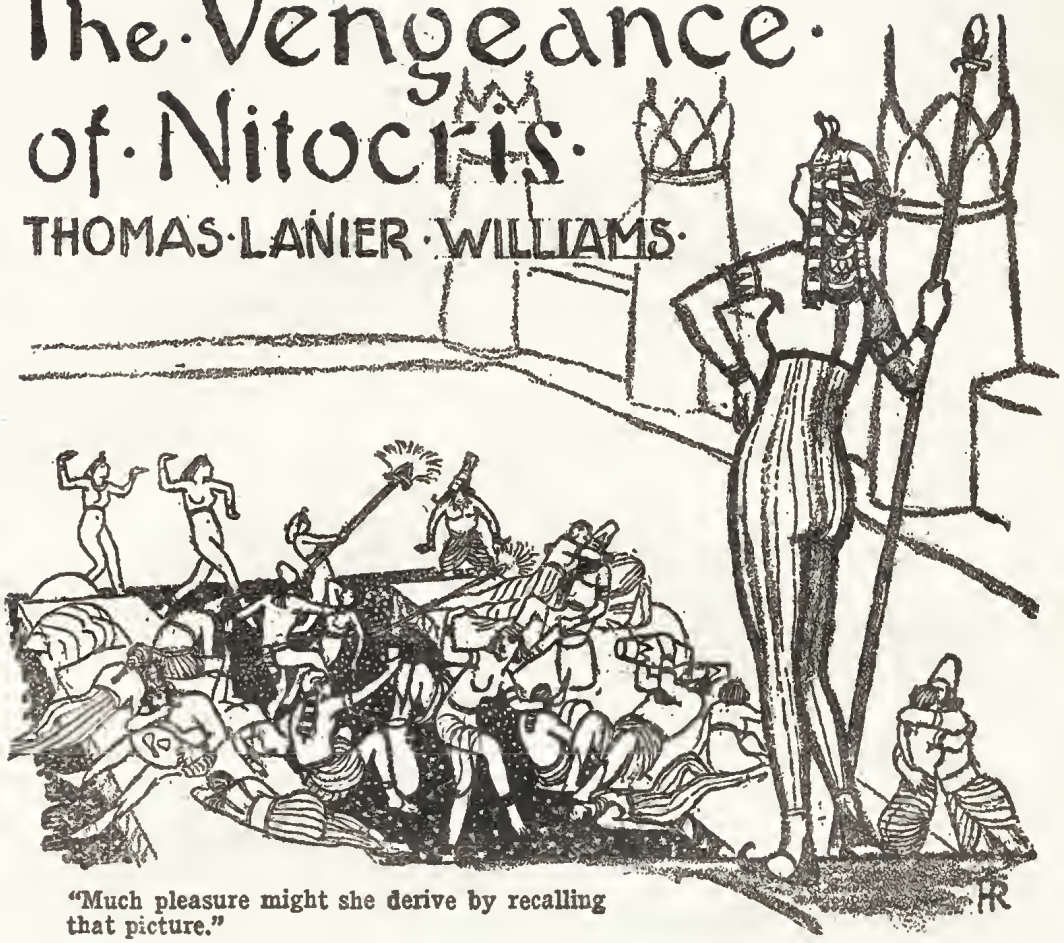
The lowering heaven lends no guiding light;
  Wild, black-winged shades her flickering beams debar;
Save in the East there gleameth, coldly bright,
  One lonely star,

Shedding its tearful beams aslant thy grave
  Where sear and shivering droop wind-blighted flowers
That, like death plumes, above my lost love wave
  Through dragging hours.

O cloud-bound night and naked, sighing trees!
  O wailing winds and mad waves making moan!
Thy wo-tuned voices chant her litanies—
  Love, Life is flown.

The Vengeance of Nitocris

THOMAS LANIER WILLIAMS



"Much pleasure might she derive by recalling that picture."

1. Osiris Is Avenged.

HUSHED were the streets of many-peopled Thebes. Those few who passed through them moved with the shadowy fleetness of bats near dawn, and bent their faces from the sky as if fearful of seeing what in their fancies might be hovering there. Weird, high-noted incantations of a wailing sound were audible through the barred doors. On corners groups of naked and bleeding priests cast themselves repeatedly and with loud cries upon the rough stones of the walks. Even dogs and cats and oxen seemed impressed by some strange menace and foreboding and cowered and slunk dejectedly. All Thebes was in dread. And indeed there was cause for their dread and for their wails of lamentation. A terrible sacrilege had been committed. In all the annals of Egypt none more monstrous was recorded.

Five days had the altar fires of the god of gods, Osiris, been left unburning. Even for one moment to allow darkness upon the altars of the god was considered by the priests to be a great offense against him. Whole years of dearth and famine had been known to result from such an offense. But now the altar fires had been deliberately extinguished, and left extinguished for five days. It was an unspeakable sacrilege.

Hourly there was expectancy of some great calamity to befall. Per-

haps within the approaching night a mighty earthquake would shake the city to the ground, or a fire from heaven would sweep upon them, a hideous plague strike them or some monster from the desert, where wild and terrible monsters were said to dwell, would rush upon them and Osiris himself would rise up, as he had done before, and swallow all Egypt in his wrath. Surely some such dread catastrophe would befall them ere the week had passed. Unless—unless the sacrilege were avenged.

But how might it be avenged? That was the question high lords and priests debated. Pharaoh alone had committed the sacrilege. It was he, angered because the bridge, which he had spent five years in constructing so that one day he might cross the Nile in his chariot as he had once boasted that he would do, had been swept away by the rising waters. Raging with anger, he had flogged the priests from the temple. He had barred the temple doors and with his own breath had blown out the sacred candles. He had defiled the hallowed altars with the carcasses of beasts. Even, it was said in low, shocked whispers, in a mock ceremony of worship he had burned the carrion of a hyena, most abhorrent of all beasts to Osiris, upon the holy altar of gold, which even the most high of priests forbore to lay naked hands upon!

Surely, even though he be pharaoh, ruler of all Egypt and holder of the golden eagle, he could not be permitted to commit such violent sacrileges without punishment from man. The god Osiris was waiting for them to inflict that punishment, and if they failed to do it, upon them would come a scourge from heaven.

Standing before the awed assembly of nobles, the high Kha Semblor made a gesture with his hands. A cry broke from those who watched. Sentence had been delivered. Death had been pronounced as doom for the pharaoh.

The heavy, barred doors were shoved open. The crowd came out, and within an hour a well-organized mob passed through the streets of Thebes, directed for the palace of the pharaoh. Mob justice was to be done.

Within the resplendent portals of the palace the pharaoh, ruler of all Egypt, watched with tightened brow the orderly but menacing approach of the mob. He divined their intent. But was he not their pharaoh? He could contend with gods, so why should he fear mere dogs of men?

A woman clung to his stiffened arm. She was tall and as majestically handsome as he. A garb of linen, as brilliantly golden as the sun, entwined her body closely, and bands of jet were around her throat and forehead. She was the fair and well-loved Nitocris, sister of the pharaoh.

"Brother, brother!" she cried; "light the fires! Pacify the dogs! They come to kill you."

Only more stern grew the look of the pharaoh. He thrust aside his pleading sister, and beckoned to the attendants.

"Open the doors!"

Startled, trembling, the men obeyed.

The haughty lord of Egypt drew his sword from its sheath. He slashed the air with a stroke that would have severed stone. Out on the steep steps leading between tall, colored pillars to the doors of the palace he stepped. The people saw him. A howl rose from their lips.

"Light the fires!"

The figure of the pharaoh stood inflexible as rock. Superbly tall and muscular, his bare arms and limbs glittering like burnished copper in the light of the brilliant sun, his body erect and tense in his attitude of defiance, he looked indeed a mortal fit almost to challenge gods.

The mob, led by the black-robed priests and nobles who had arrived at the foot of the steps, now fell back before the stunning, magnificent defiance of their giant ruler. They felt like demons who had assailed the heavens and had been abashed and shamed by the mere sight of that which they had assailed. A hush fell over them. Their upraised arms faltered and sank down. A moment more and they would have fallen to their knees.

What happened then seemed nothing less than a miracle. In his triumph and exultation, the pharaoh had been careless of the crumbling edges of the steps. Centuries old, there were sections of these steps which were falling apart. Upon such a section had the gold-sandaled foot of the pharaoh descended, and it was not strong enough to sustain his great weight. With a scuttling sound it broke loose. A gasp came from the mob—the pharaoh was about to fall. He was palpitating, wavering in the air, fighting to retain his balance. He looked as if he were grappling with some monstrous, invisible snake, coiled about his gleaming body. A hoarse cry burst from his lips; his sword fell; and then his body thudded down the steps in a series of wild somersaults, and landed at the foot, sprawled out before the gasping mob. For a moment there was breathless silence. And then came the shout of a priest.

"A sign from the god!"

That vibrant cry seemed to restore the mob to all of its wolflike rage. They surged forward. The struggling body of the pharaoh was lifted up and torn to pieces by their clawing hands and weapons. Thus was the god Osiris avenged.

2. A Pharaoh Is Avenged.

A WEEK later another large assembly of persons confronted the brilliant-pillared palace. This time they were there to acknowledge a ruler, not to slay one. The week before they had rended the pharaoh and now they were proclaiming his sister empress. Priests had declared that it was the will of the gods that she should succeed her brother. She was famously beautiful, pious, and wise. The people were not reluctant to accept her.

When she was borne down the steps of the palace in her rich litter, after the elaborate ceremony of coronation had been concluded, she responded to the cheers of the multitude with a smile which could not have appeared more amicable and gracious. None might know from that smile upon her beautiful carmined lips that within her heart she was thinking, "These are the people who slew my brother. Ah, god Issus grant me power to avenge his death upon them!"

Not long after the beauteous Nitocris mounted the golden throne of Egypt, rumors were whispered of some vast, mysterious enterprise being conducted in secret. A large number of slaves were observed each dawn to embark upon barges and to be carried down the river to some unknown point, where they labored throughout the day, returning after dark. The slaves were Ethiopians, neither able to speak nor to understand the Egyptian language, and therefore no information could be gotten from them by the curious as to the object of their mysterious daily excursions. The general opinion, though, was that the pious queen was having a great temple constructed to the gods and that when it was finished, enormous public banquets would be held within it before its dedication. She meant it to be a surprize gift to the priests who were ever desirous of some new place of worship and were dissatisfied with their old altars, which they said were defiled.

Throughout the winter the slaves repeated daily their excursions.

Traffic of all kinds plying down the river was restricted for several miles to within forty yards of one shore. Any craft seen to disregard that restriction was set upon by a galley of armed men and pursued back into bounds. All that could be learned was that a prodigious temple or hall of some sort was in construction.

It was late in the spring when the excursions of the workmen were finally discontinued. Restrictions upon river traffic were withdrawn. The men who went eagerly to investigate the mysterious construction returned with tales of a magnificent new temple, surrounded by rich, green, tropical verdure, situated near the bank of the river. It was a temple to the god Osiris. It had been built by the queen probably that she might partly atone for the sacrilege of her brother and deliver him from some of the torture which he undoubtedly suffered. It was to be dedicated within the month by a great banquet. All the nobles and the high priests of Osiris, of which there were a tremendous number, were to be invited.

Never had the delighted priests been more extravagant in their praises of Queen Nitocris. When she passed through the streets in her open litter, bedazzling eyes by the glitter of her golden ornaments, the cries of the people were almost frantic in their exaltation of her.

True to the predictions of the gossipers, before the month had passed the banquet had been formally announced and to all the nobility and the priests of Osiris had been issued invitations to attend.

The day of the dedication, which was to be followed by the night of banqueting, was a gala holiday. At noon the guests of the empress formed a colorful assembly upon the bank of the river. Gayly draped barges floated at their moorings until preparations should be completed for the transportation of the guests to the temple. All anticipated a holiday of great merriment, and the lustful epicureans were warmed by visualizations of the delightful banquet of copious meats, fruits, luscious delicacies and other less innocent indulgences.

When the queen arrived, clamorous shouts rang deafeningly in her ears. She responded with charming smiles and gracious bows. The most discerning observer could not have detected anything but the greatest cordiality and kindliness reflected in her bearing toward those around her. No action, no fleeting expression upon her lovely face could have caused anyone to suspect anything except entire amicability in her feelings or her intentions. The rats, as they followed the Pied Piper of Hamelin through the streets, entranced by the notes of his magical pipe, could not have been less apprehensive of any great danger impending them than were the guests of the empress as they followed her in gayly draped barges, singing and laughing down the sun-glowing waters of the Nile.

The most vivid descriptions of those who had already seen the temple did not prepare the others for the spectacle of beauty and grandeur which it presented. Gasps of delight came from the priests. What a place in which to conduct their ceremonies! They began to feel that the sacrilege of the dead pharaoh was not, after all, to be so greatly regretted, since it was responsible for the building of this glorious new temple.

The columns were massive and painted with the greatest artistry. The temple itself was proportionately large. The center of it was unroofed. Above the entrance were carved the various symbols of the god Osiris, with splendid workmanship. The building was immensely big, and against the background of green foliage it presented a picture of almost breath-taking beauty.

Ethiopian attendants stood on each side of the doorway, their shining black bodies ornamented with bands of brilliant gold. On the interior the guests were inspired to even greater wonderment. The walls were hung with magnificent painted tapestries. The altars were more beautifully and elaborately carved than any seen before. Aromatic powders were burning upon them and sending up veils of scented smoke. The sacramental vessels were of the most exquisite and costly metals. Golden coffers and urns were piled high with perfect fruits of all kinds.

Ah, yes—a splendid place for the making of sacrifices, gloated the staring priests.

Ah, yes indeed, agreed the queen Nitocris, smiling with half-closed eyes, it was a splendid place for sacrifices—especially for the human sacrifice that had been planned. But all who observed that guileful smile interpreted it as gratification over the pleasure which her creation in honor of their god had brought to the priests of Osiris. Not the slightest shadow of portent was upon the hearts of the joyous guests.

The ceremony of dedication occupied the whole of the afternoon. And when it drew to its impressive conclusion, the large assembly, their nostrils quivering from the savory odor of the roasting meats, were fully ready and impatient for the banquet that awaited them. They gazed about them, observing that the whole building composed an unpartitioned amphitheater and wondering where might be the room of the banquet. However, when the concluding processional chant had been completed, the queen summoned a number of burly slaves, and by several iron rings attached to its outer edges they lifted up a large slab of the flooring, disclosing to the astonished guests the fact that the scene of the banquet was to be an immense subterranean vault.

Such vaults were decidedly uncommon among the Egyptians. The idea of feasting in one was novel and appealing. Thrilled exclamations came from the eager, excited crowd and they pressed forward to gaze into the depths, now brightly illuminated. They saw a room beneath them almost as vast in size as the amphitheater in which they were standing. It was filled with banquet tables upon which were set the most delectable foods and rich, sparkling wines in an abundance that would satiate the banqueters of Bacchus. Luxurious, thick rugs covered the floors. Among the tables passed nymphlike maidens, and at one end of the room harpists and singers stood, making sublime music.

The air was cool with the dampness of under-earth, and it was made delightfully fragrant by the perfumes of burning spices and the savory odors of the feast. If it had been heaven itself which the crowd of the queen's guests now gazed down upon they would not have considered the vision disappointing. Perhaps even if they had known the hideous menace that lurked in those gay-draped walls beneath them, they would still have found the allurement of the banquet scene difficult to resist.

DECORUM and reserve were almost completely forgotten in the swiftness of the guests' descent. The stairs were not wide enough to afford room for all those who rushed upon them, and some tumbled over, landing unhurt upon the thick carpets. The priests themselves forgot their customary dignity and aloofness when they looked upon the beauty of the maiden attendants.

Immediately all of the guests gathered around the banquet tables, and the next hour was occupied in gluttonous feasting. Wine was unlimited and so was the thirst of the

guests. Goblets were refilled as quickly as they were made empty by the capacious mouths of the drinkers. The songs and the laughter, the dancing and the wild frolicking grew less and less restrained until the banquet became a delirious orgy.

The queen alone, seated upon a cushioned dais from which she might overlook the whole room, remained aloof from the general hilarity. Her thick black brows twitched; her luminous black eyes shone strangely between their narrow painted lids. There was something peculiarly feline in the curl of her rich red lips. Now and again her eyes sought the section of wall to her left, where hung gorgeous braided tapestries from the East. But it seemed not the tapestries that she looked upon. Color would mount upon her brow and her slender fingers would dig still tighter into the cushions she reclined upon.

In her mind the queen Nitocris was seeing a ghastly picture. It was the picture of a room of orgy and feasting suddenly converted into a room of terror and horror; human beings one moment drunken and lustful, the next screaming in the seizure of sudden and awful death. If any of those present had been empowered to see also that picture of dire horror, they would have clambered wildly to make their escape. But none was so empowered.

With increasing wildness the banquet continued into the middle of the night. Some of the banqueters, disgustingly gluttonous, still gorged themselves at the greasy tables. Others lay in drunken stupor, or lolled amorously with the slave-girls. But most of them, formed in a great, irregular circle, skipped about the room in a barbaric, joy-mad dance, dragging and tripping each other in uncouth merriment and making the hall ring with their ceaseless shouts, laughter, and hoarse song.

When the hour had approached near to midnight, the queen, who had sat like one entranced, arose from the cushioned dais. One last intent survey she gave to the crowded room of banquet. It was a scene which she wished to imprint permanently upon her mind. Much pleasure might she derive in the future by recalling that picture, and then imagining what came afterward—stark, searing terror rushing in upon barbaric joy!

She stepped down from the dais and walked swiftly to the steps. Her departure made no impression upon the revelers. When she had arrived at the top of the stairs she looked down and observed that no one had marked her exit.

Around the walls of the temple, dim-lit and fantastic-looking at night, with the cool wind from the river sweeping through and bending the flames of the tall candelabra, stalwart guardsmen were standing at their posts, and when the gold-cloaked figure of the queen arose from the aperture, they advanced toward her hurriedly. With a motion, she directed them to place the slab of rock in its tight-fitting socket. With a swift, noiseless hoist and lowering, they obeyed the command. The queen bent down. There was no change in the boisterous sounds from below. Nothing was yet suspected.

Drawing the soft and shimmering folds of her cloak about her with fingers that trembled with eagerness, excitement and the intense emotion which she felt, the queen passed swiftly across the stone floor of the temple toward the open front through which the night wind swept, blowing her cloak in sheenful waves about her tall and graceful figure. The slaves followed after in silent file, well aware of the monstrous deed about to be executed and without reluctance to play their parts.

Down the steps of the palace into the moon-white night passed the weird procession. Their way led them down an obviously secreted

path through thiek ranks of murmuring palms which in their low voices seemed to be whispering shocked remonstrances against what was about to be done. But in her stern purpose the queen was not susceptible to any dissuasion from god or man. Vengeance, strongest of passions, made her obdurate as stone.

Out upon a rough and apparently new-constructed stone pier the thin path led. Beneath, the cold, dark waters of the Nile surged silently by. Here the party eame to a halt. Upon this stone pier would the object of their awful midnight errand be accomplished.

With a low-spoken word, the queen commanded her followers to hold back. With her own hand she would perform the act of vengeance.

In the foreground of the pier a number of fantastic, wandlike levers extended upward. Toward these the queen advaneed, slowly and stiffly as an exeeutioner mounts the steps of the scaffold. When she had eome beside them, she grasped one upthrust bar, fiercely, as if it had been the throat of a hated antagonist. Then she lifted her face with a quick intake of breath toward the moonlightened sky. This was to her a moment of supreme ecstasy. Grasped in her hand was an instrument which could release awful death upon those against whom she wished vengeance. Their lives were as securely in her grasp as was this bar of iron.

Slowly, lusting upon every triumph-filled second of this time of ecstasy, she turned her face down again to the formidable bar in her hand. Deliberately she drew it back to its limit. This was the lever that opened the wall in the banquet vault. It gave entrance to death. Only the other bar now intervened between the banqueters, probably still reveling undisturbed, and the dreadful fate which she had prepared for them. Upon this bar now her jeweled fingers clutched. Savagely this time she pulled it; then with the litheness of a tiger she sprang to the edge of the pier. She leaned over it and stared down into the inky rush of the river. A new sound she heard above the steady flow. It was the sound of waters suddenly diverted into a new channel—an eager, plunging sound. Down to the hall of revelry they were rushing—these savage waters—bringing terror and sudden death.

A cry of triumph, wild and terrible enough to make even the hearts of the brutish slaves turn cold, now broke from the lips of the queen. The pharaoh was avenged.

And even he must have considered his avenging adequate had he been able to witness it.

AFTER the retiring of the queen, the banquet had gone on without interruption of gayety. None noticed her absence. None noticed the silent replacing of the stone in its socket. No premonition of disaster was felt. The musicians, having been informed beforehand of the intended event of the evening, had made their withdrawal before the queen. The slaves, whose lives were of little value to the queen, were as ignorant of what was to happen as were the guests themselves.

Not until the wall opened up, with a loud and startling erunch, did even those most inclined toward suspicion feel the slightest uneasiness. Then it was that a few noticed the slab to have been replaced, shutting them in. This discovery, eommunicated throughout the hall in a moment, seemed to instill a sudden fear in the hearts of all. Laughter did not cease, but the ring of dancers were distraeted from their wild jubilee. They all turned toward the mysteriously opened wall and gazed into its black depths.

A hush fell over them. And then became audible the mounting sound

of rushing water. A shriek rose from the throat of a woman. And then terror took possession of all within the room. Panic like the burst of flames flared into their hearts. Of one accord, they rushed upon the stair. And it, being purposely made frail, collapsed before the foremost of the wildly screaming mob had reached its summit. Turbulently they piled over the tables, filling the room with a hideous clamor. But rising above their screams was the shrill roar of the rushing water, and no sound could be more provoking of dread and terror. Somewhere in its circuitous route from the pier to the chamber of its reception it must have met with temporary blockade, for it was several minutes after the sound of it was first detected that the first spray of that death-bringing water leapt into the faces of the doomed occupants of the room.

With the ferocity of a lion springing into the arena of a Roman amphitheater to devour the gladiators set there for its delectation, the black water plunged in. Furiously it surged over the floor of the room, sweeping tables before it and sending its victims, now face to face with their harrowing doom, into a hysteria of terror. In a moment that icy, black water had risen to their knees, although the room was vast. Some fell instantly dead from the shock, or were trampled upon by the desperate rushing of the mob. Tables were clambered upon. Lamps and candles were extinguished. Brilliant light rapidly faded to twilight, and a ghastly dimness fell over the room as only the suspended lanterns remained lit. And what a scene of chaotic and hideous horror might a spectator have beheld! The gorgeous trumpery of banquet invaded by howling waters of death! Gayly dressed merrymakers caught suddenly in the grip of terror! Gasps and screams of the dying amid tumult and thickening dark!

What more horrible vengeance could Queen Nitocris have conceived than this banquet of death? Not Diablo himself could be capable of anything more fiendishly artistic. Here in the temple of Osiris those nobles and priests who had slain the pharaoh in expiation of his sacrilege against Osiris had now met their deaths. And it was in the waters of the Nile, material symbol of the god Osiris, that they had died. It was magnificent in its irony!

I WOULD be content to end this story here if it were but a story. However, it is not merely a story, as you will have discerned before now if you have been a student of the history of Egypt. Queen Nitocris is not a fictitious personage. In the annals of ancient Egypt she is no inconspicuous figure. Principally responsible for her prominence is her monstrous revenge upon the slayers of her brother, the narration of which I have just concluded. Glad would I be to end this story here; for surely anything following must be in the nature of an anticlimax. However, being not a mere story-teller here, but having upon me also the responsibility of a historian, I feel obliged to continue the account to the point where it was left off by Herodotus, the great Greek historian. And therefore I add this postscript, anticlimax though it be.

The morning of the day after the massacre in the temple, the guests of the queen not having made their return, the citizens of Thebes began to glower with dark suspicions. Rumors came to them through divers channels that something of a most extraordinary and calamitous nature had occurred at the scene of the banquet during the night. Some had it that the temple had collapsed upon the

(Continued on page 288)

Three Poems in Prose

By CHARLES BAUDELAIRE

(Translated by Clark Ashton Smith)

L'Irréparable

I

CAN we stifle the old, the long Remorse, who lives and moves and twists and turns, and feeds upon us like the worm upon the dead, or like the caterpillar upon the oak? Can we stifle the implacable Remorse?

In what philtre, in what wine, in what magistral, may we drown this ancient enemy, gluttonous and destructive like the courtezan, patient like the ant? In what philtre?—in what wine?—in what magistral?

Tell it, fair sorceress, oh! tell, if thou dost know, to a spirit crushed with anguish, and like to one who is overwhelmed by mortal wounds and bruised by the hoofs of horses; tell it, fair sorceress, oh! tell, if thou dost know, to this dying wretch whom the wolf already smells, and whom the crow surveys; to this broken soldier who must needs despair of having his cross and his tomb; this dying wretch whom the wolf already smells!

Can one illuminate a black and muddy sky? Can one tear apart the darkness more dense than pitch, without morn and without even, without stars, without funereal lightnings? Can one illuminate a black and muddy sky?

Our hope, that burned in the panes of the tavern, is blown out, is dead forever! Without moon and without rays, to find where lodge the martyrs of an evil road! The Devil has put out all the panes of the tavern!

Adorable sorceress, dost thou love the damned? Say, dost thou know the irretrievable? Dost thou know Remorse, with the envenomed darts, for whom our heart serves as target? Adorable sorceress, dost thou love the damned?

The Irreparable gnaws with its accursed teeth; it gnaws our soul, a piteous monument, and often, like the termite, it attacks the edifice by the foundation. The Irreparable gnaws with its accursed teeth.

II

I have seen, sometimes, in the midst of a common theater, enkindled by the sonorous orchestra, a Fay who relumes a miraculous dawn in an infernal sky; I have seen, sometimes, in the midst of a common theater, a Being, wholly made of light and gold and gauze, who casts to the earth an enormous Satan; but my heart, forever unvisited by ecstasy, is like a theater where one awaits in vain, always in vain, the Being with the wings of gauze!

Les Sept Vieillards

SWARMING city, city full of dreams, where the phantom in full day picks up the passer! Mysteries flow everywhere like sap in the narrow ducts of the mighty Colossus.

One morning, while in the sad street the houses, whose height was increased by the fog, resembled the two quays of a fallen river, and a foul and yellow mist had inundated space, —a setting like the soul of an actor,— I went forth, stiffening my nerves like a hero and debating with my soul already tired, to follow the streets of

the suburb shaken by heavy dust-carts.

All at once, there appeared to me an old man whose yellow tatters imitated the colors of the watery sky, and whose aspect would have brought down a rain of alms without the malignity that glittered in his eyes. One would have said that his pupils were drenched in gall; frost sharpened his regard, and his beard of long hairs, stiff as a sword, projected like the beard of Judas.

He was not bowed but broken, his spine making a perfect right angle with his leg, so that his walking-stick, which served to complete the picture, gave him the figure and the awkward pace of an infirm quadruped or a Jew with three feet. He went on, impeded by the snow and the mire, as if he crushed the dead beneath his worn-out shoes; hostile to the universe rather than indifferent.

His double followed him; beard, eye, back, stick, tatters, nothing distinguished this centenarian twin, who had come from the same hell; and these baroque specters walked with the same pace toward an unknown goal.

To what infamous complot was I then exposed, or what evil chance humiliated me thus? For I counted seven times, from minute to minute, this sinister old man who multiplied himself before me!

Let him who laughs at my disquietude, him who has never been seized by a fraternal shudder, know well that despite so much decrepitude these seven hideous monsters had the air of eternal things!

Could I, then, without dying, have contemplated the eighth, inexorable, ironic and fatal double, disgusting Phœnix, the son and father of himself?—But I turned my back to the infernal cortège.

Exasperated like a sot who sees double, I returned; I closed my door, terrified, ill and benumbed, my spirit feverish and troublous, wounded by mystery and by absurdity!

Vainly my reason wished to cross the bar; the playing storm defeated all its efforts, and my soul danced and danced, an old barge without masts, upon a monstrous sea that had no shores.

Une Charogne

REMEMBER, my soul, the thing we saw on that beautiful morning of sweet summer: beside the path an infamous carrion on a couch sown with pebbles, its legs in the air like a lascivious woman burning and sweating her poisons, laid open in a cynical and nonchalant manner its belly filled with exhalations.

The sun shone down upon this putrefaction, as if to cook it to a turn, and render back a hundredfold to great nature all that she had joined together; and the sky saw the superb carcass unfold like a flower. The fetor was so powerful that you believed you would swoon on the grass.

The flies hummed on the putrid belly, where issued black battalions of larvæ that flowed along these living tatters like a thick liquid. All these descended and mounted like a wave, or darted forth in sparklings; one would have said the body lived and multiplied, swollen by a vague breath. And this world gave forth a strange music, as of wind and running water, or the grain that a winnower agitates and turns with his fan in rhythmic movements.

The forms withdrew and faded, and were no more than a dream, an outline that is slow to arrive on the forgetful canvas, and is finished by the artist from memory alone.

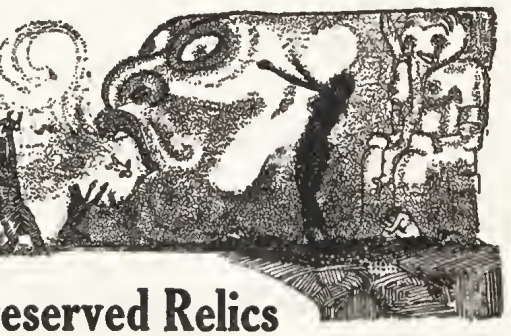
Behind the rocks a restless bitch regarded us with an angry eye, watching for the moment to retrieve from the skeleton a morsel she had let fall.

——And still you will be like this ordure, this horrible infection, star of my eyes, and sun of my being, you, my angel and my passion! Yes, such

you will be, O queen of graces, after the final sacraments, when you have gone, beneath the grass and the rich flowers, to mold among the bones of the dead.

Then, O my beauty! say to the worms who will devour you with kisses, that I have kept in memory the form and the divine essence of my decomposed loves!

Folks Used to Believe



by ALVIN F. HARLOW

Wonderfully Preserved Relics

THE zeal of the early and medieval Christians, and the yearning for some tangible souvenir of the founders of the religion, coupled with the general childlike belief in rumor, brought about the preservation of a quantity of relics, great numbers of which could not have been other than spurious. For example, there would be skulls in several churches, all claimed to have been originally in the head of the same saint; and in some cases, enough bones of a single saint were scattered over Europe to have made up several complete skeletons.

The famous Iron Crown of Lombardy was said to contain one of the nails used in the Crucifixion, though the actual history of the crown can be traced no farther back than the Ninth Century. Gregory of Tours said that another of the nails was thrown into the Adriatic by Queen Radegunda, rendering it therewith one of the safest seas in the world to navigate.

One church in Rome claimed a tooth of St. Peter, another of St. Paul, a part of the chemise of the Virgin Mary, a part of Christ's girdle, a piece of Moses' rod, some of the earth on which Christ prayed, the reed and sponge used at the Crucifixion, three spines of the Crown of Thorns, a part of the towel with which Christ washed His disciples' feet, part of the swaddling clothes in which He was wrapped at His nativity, and a part of the shroud in which He was buried. One of the Savior's tears was formerly preserved at Vendome, France.

D'Aubigné tells us that in the Church of All Saints at Wittenberg were shown a fragment of Noah's Ark, some soot from the Babylonian furnace in which the three Hebrew children, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, were so miraculously preserved, and nineteen thousand other relics. At Schaffhausen was kept the breath of St. Joseph, which Nicodemus had received in his glove! Wurttemberg had a feather from the wing of the Archangel Michael. St. Augustine (354-430 A. D.) said that in his day people were still going to see the dung-heap on which Job had sat—although the Book of Job was written at least seven to ten centuries before his time.

A Grim Tale of Torture Is

THE JUSTICE OF THE CZAR

By CAPTAIN GEORGE FIELDING ELIOT

DIMITRI MININ, chief executioner of the prison of St. Peter and St. Paul, rose from his seat as an imperative knock clattered at the door of his quarters, high in the north tower.

"Be at ease, Tasia," he said to his wife, who had also started up. "I have many a summons lately, since this conspiracy against the holy person of His Majesty has been discovered. Doubtless it is but some wretched boyar to be put to the question."

He flung open the door. In the shadows of the stair-landing the light of a guard lantern gleamed on the accouterments of a sergeant of the Praeobajensky Regiment.

"To the lower dungeons, butcher!" snapped the soldier. "Quickly—you are wanted!"

"Dog!" retorted Minin. "Is it thus that you address an official of the Czar's household? Perhaps—you would like to feel the butcher's hands at work on you?"

He extended his long, powerful, sinewy hands toward the man, opening and closing the fingers suggestively.

"With the hot pincers, eh?" he added.

The soldier shuddered visibly. "No, no, good Dimitri!" he said. "I but spoke in haste. Yet come quickly, for it is the governor's own order!"

Dimitri nodded.

"I come," he said, and flinging a black cloak round his shoulders he stepped out on the landing.

"I think I shall not be long, Tasia," he said. "Have a bit of soup warm against my return—those dungeons are chill enough, all of them, but the lower dungeons especially!"

He closed the door behind him and followed the sergeant down the narrow, winding stair.

DOWN, down through the heart of the grim prison-fortress, past the guardroom, past the doors opening into the great hall, down to the cellars; then past a little iron door leading to the upper dungeons, and still the stair descended into black, dank chill—along a corridor, lit only by a single torch guttering in the cold air; then another iron door. Here Dimitri knocked, with a peculiar sequence; and instantly chains and bolts rattled within, the door was flung open, and Dimitri stepped into a vaulted chamber, lit by a dozen flaring lamps. A harsh voice—that of the prison governor—dismissed the sergeant.

The door clanged shut behind Dimitri as he bowed low to the governor.

The scene within was familiar enough to the executioner, and yet this night it had some novel features. There was the governor, and the slender, dark-clad figure of the prison physician. There, hanging from the ceiling of oft-used chains, was the naked figure of the victim: a slender white body, apparently that of a young man, his wrists high

above his head in the grip of the iron bracelets, his ankles locked to the floor by the stocks provided for that purpose.

But—and this was strange to Dimitri—the victim's face and head were hooded and concealed by a black sack, drawn over the head and secured about the man's neck by a stout cord. It was the first time that Dimitri had ever seen this done, and he wondered.

One of his assistants silently glided forward from a corner and handed Dimitri a knout. Dimitri gripped the heavy oaken handle of the terrible whip in practised fingers—ran through his hands the long knotted thongs, with their cruel steel goads at the ends. He nodded.

"A good knout, Paul," he said, and turned expectantly toward the governor.

He was ready to begin.

But the governor was not looking at Dimitri. He was staring across the room—staring at a little group of men standing at the farther side, out of the direct glare of the lamps.

The governor's face was white beneath the brim of his fur hat; the eyes which had looked unmoved on so much torture and death were filled with a strange emotion.

Was it—fear? Dimitri, accustomed to reading the expressions in men's eyes, felt a sudden unaccountable dread clutch at his heart.

If his Excellency the Governor of St. Peter and St. Paul—known far and wide in Holy Russia as Black Nikolai—was *afraid:* Black Nikolai *afraid!*—ah, then common men might well look to themselves. God! what business was this?

Dimitri followed the governor's gaze.

There were five men at the far side of the dungeon—no, there were more; for in one corner were half a dozen Tartar troopers of one of the newly raised regiments of irregular horse, which the Czar had recruited in the south. Brutish, pig-eyed fellows these, short and squat and bow-legged: in stolid silence they watched the scene before them. A block stood there also, and a Tartar ax—and Dimitri thought he understood.

Here was quick release for the victim—after the knout had ripped his secrets from his quivering body! Dimitri had had experience of such methods.

But the silent group of five in the other corner—one in a long red cloak and hat drawn well down over his eyes, the others officers of the Imperial Guard in military cloaks, booted and spurred—why were they so silent? Were they witnesses—were they——? Again, unaccountably, Dimitri felt the icy grip of that strange fear.

The man in the red cloak suddenly inclined his head.

The governor bowed; turned to Dimitri. "Begin," he said in low tones.

Dimitri, in silence, stepped forward into the center of the floor, placing himself with practised deliberation at exactly the proper distance from his prey. He flung off his cloak, tossed it to his assistant; removed also his tunic, and stood bared to the waist, his tremendous muscles rippling under his hairy skin, his splendid torso like a figure of some pagan god there in the flickering lamplight.

He swung the knout experimentally; the thongs whistled through the air; the naked man in chains shrank at the sound, as well he might. Dimitri, his strong hands gripping the handle of the awful knout, stepped back, poised for the first stroke——

"Wait!"

Surprized, Dimitri turned. It was the man in the red cloak who had spoken. Some great one, this, without a doubt; for instantly the governor confirmed with a sharp word the order given.

The red-cloaked one looked over the muffling edge of his cloak at the trembling victim.

"One last word, Alexis," said he. "The knout is ready—you have heard the whine of its thongs—will you speak? The names of your accomplices—of those who have led you into this conspiracy! The names! Speak—and a swift and merciful death shall be your reward!"

And then for the first time the masked one spoke. One word, muffled by the black hood, yet firm, resolute, determined: "Never!"

The eyes of the man in the red cloak glared with a rage truly infernal. "By the bones of Saint Andrew!" he swore, grinding out the words between his teeth; "ere this night is over, you will speak, and gladly. Proceed, executioner!"

Again Dimitri took his stance; poised; swung back the knout. The thongs whizzed through the air and bit deep into the back of the naked man.

A scream rang out—a terrible scream, the scream of a man who has never before known physical pain; it echoed away through the arches of the vaulted roof, those grim old arches which had echoed so many screams of agony.

Across the white back of the victim were now seven red weals as the thongs fell away—weals dotted with larger spots of red, where the knots had torn little gouts of flesh from the quivering back as with practised hand Dimitri jerked them aside.

Again the knout swung back—forward—whined and struck home—again—again—and all the time the screams rang through the dungeon, till the Guard officers turned away their heads and even the stolid Tartars muttered in a vague distress which was as near to pity as they could come.

TWENTY strokes of the knout had fallen; now the back of the naked man was one great mass of raw, pulsating flesh. No skin at all remained, save a few strips still hanging precariously here and there. And still the pitiless red whip rose and fell.

The screams were not so loud, now; they lost their piercing quality, sank into mere moans of unutterable agony. And at last even these were silent.

Dimitri paused in his dreadful task. "I think he has fainted, sir," he said to the physician.

"Revive him, and continue," grated the man in the red cloak, at the governor's inquiring—almost shuddering—glance.

The physician gave low-voiced instructions to the assistants; a bucket of water was flung over the poor bleeding body hanging there by its wrist-chains. It washed away some of the blood, some of the loose flesh; not only the back had suffered, for in front, on the stomach and chest, the flesh had been torn to ribbons by the steel tips of the thongs as they curved round the body at the conclusion of each stroke.

Another bucket of water; now the physician was forcing brandy between the clenched teeth of the victim—teeth which had at the last met and fixed themselves in the lower lip. There was a low moan—a choking sob; the torn body moved a little.

"Will you speak, Alexis?" demanded the inexorable voice of the man in the red cloak.

And again, from the depths of that black hood, faintly now but still with that ring of deathless resolution, came one word: "Never!"

The red-cloaked one snarled wordlessly; motioned with his arm; the governor spoke.

Again the knout rose and fell, rose and fell, rose and fell; now at every blow blood and flesh spurted forth, spattered the walls, reddened and

soaked into the earthen floor beneath the victim, where no stones had been laid, so that there might be no need to remove the blood of countless poor wretches who suffered there.

The physician whispered to the governor.

"What is that?" snapped the red-cloaked one.

"He is saying, lord," replied the governor, "that a few more strokes will kill."

"So be it!" exclaimed the other, savagely. "Go on, executioner; finish your work!"

"To the death?" asked Dimitri, panting from his exertions, while the red thongs of the knout trailed their horror on the floor.

"To the death!"

The voice of the man in the red cloak seemed to break for a moment, but he spoke no more; the governor nodded, and the knout was at work again.

Swiftly now the strokes fell. Dimitri charged from one side to the other, shifting the knout from his right hand to his left. Long practise had made him equally dexterous with either hand, and the knout had been busy these past years.

The terrible shreds of what had been a strong and vigorous youth hung limply from the wrist-irons. No cries, no moans; not a sound save the whistle of the lash, the deep breathing of Dimitri, and the sodden thud of the blows.

Again the physician whispered to the governor.

"Enough!" said Black Nikolai.

Dimitri ceased his horrible exertions; stood aside, silent, waiting.

The physician stepped forward to the bloody thing that had once been human. A moment—then he bowed his head on his breast.

"It is done, lord," he said; and suddenly turned, sprang to the door, tore open the bolts and was gone. They could hear his footsteps clattering up the stone stair in mad haste.

An assistant executioner, at a sign from the governor, loosed the chains from their ring and lowered the body to the ground.

The man in the red cloak stepped forward to its side, moving slowly, almost wearily. Long he looked down at it in silence; then with a sudden motion tore the cloak from his shoulders and flung its ample scarlet folds over the horror on the floor, not less scarlet.

"Come!" he cried in a great voice to the Guard officers. "Come! Take up the body of His Imperial Highness, the Crown Prince Alexis Petrovitch Romanoff, and bear it with all fitting honors to the chapel of the fortress!"

He raised his head—his burning eyes seemed to shrivel Dimitri's very soul.

It was the Czar—Peter the Czar, surnamed the Great!

For a moment he stared at the executioner; then slowly his terrible eyes traveled downward to the hands which still gripped that bloody knout. There they rested for a long moment.

"Go, Nikolai, and see that all is done well!" said the Czar, choking on the words. Already the Guard officers were lifting, as gently and carefully as they could, the torn remnants of the Crown Prince of Russia. In silence they bore the body from the room; the governor followed.

"Dismiss your assistants," ordered the Czar; and Dimitri, still wondering, still with that chill of fear at his heart, obeyed.

The Czar took a step back.

It was over, thought Dimitri; his mind turned from the dreadful scene that had been to the hot soup that Tasia would have waiting for him in the tower. God! He would need a measure of brandy first, after this!

He glanced furtively at the lowering figure of the Czar; that burning gaze again was fixed on his hands—on the knout.

The Czar was trembling. Suddenly, with an indescribably violent movement—almost as though it required a terrific effort to tear his eyes from those blood-stained hands and that scarlet whip—the Czar turned away. His eyes fell on the silent Tartar troopers, on the block and ax that were to have been the instruments of his imperial mercy.

The Czar took a step forward—paused——

"Seize him!" he cried in a terrible voice, pointing at Dimitri.

The Tartars sprang forward in instant obedience; Dimitri, his blood congealing in his veins, felt their strong fingers grip his arms.

"To the block with him!" cried the Czar. "Strike off those hands—those hands that have torn the life from my son—ah, God! my son! my son!"

The Czar turned toward the stair; the last sound that came to Dimitri's ears as the Tartars dragged him toward the corner where waited the block and the ax was that despairing cry: "Ah, God! my son! my son!"

Then the door closed on the horror that remained.

The Demoiselle d'Ys

By ROBERT W. CHAMBERS

"There be three things which are too wonderful for me, yea, four which I know not:

"The way of an eagle in the air; the way of a serpent upon a rock; the way of a ship in the midst of the sea; and the way of a man with a maid."

THE utter desolation of the scene began to have its effect; I sat down to face the situation and, if possible, recall to mind some landmark which might aid me in extricating myself from my present position. If I could only find the ocean again all would be clear, for I knew one could see the island of Groix from the cliffs.

I laid down my gun, and kneeling behind a rock lighted a pipe. Then I looked at my watch. It was nearly 4 o'clock. I might have wandered far from Kerselec since daybreak.

Standing the day before on the cliffs below Kerselec with Goulven, looking out over the somber moors among which I had now lost my way, these downs had appeared to me level as a meadow, stretching to the horizon, and although I knew how deceptive is distance, I could not realize

that what from Kerselee seemed to be mere grassy hollows were great valleys covered with gorse and heather, and what looked like scattered boulders were in reality enormous cliffs of granite.

"It's a bad place for a stranger," old Goulven had said; "you'd better take a guide;" and I had replied, "I shall not lose myself." Now I knew that I had lost myself, as I sat there smoking, with the sea-wind blowing in my face. On every side stretched the moorland, covered with flowering gorse and heath and granite boulders. There was not a tree in sight, much less a house. After a while, I picked up the gun, and turning my back on the sun tramped on again.

There was little use in following any of the brawling streams which every now and then crossed my path, for, instead of flowing into the sea, they ran inland to reedy pools in the hollows of the moors. I had followed several, but they all led me to swamps or silent little ponds from which the snipe rose peeping and wheeled away in an ecstasy of fright. I began to feel fatigued, and the gun galled my shoulder in spite of the double pads. The sun sank lower and lower, shining level across yellow gorse and the moorland pools.

As I walked, my own gigantic shadow led me on, seeming to lengthen at every step. The gorse scraped against my leggings, crackled beneath my feet, showering the brown earth with blossoms, and the brake bowed and billowed along my path. From tufts of heath rabbits scurried away through the bracken, and among the swamp grass I heard the wild duck's drowsy quack. Once a fox stole across my path, and again, as I stooped to drink at a hurrying rill, a heron flapped heavily from the reeds beside me. I turned to look at the sun. It seemed to touch the edges of the plain. When at last I decided that it was useless to go on, and that I must make up my mind to spend at least one night on the moors, I threw myself down thoroughly fagged out. The evening sunlight slanted warm across my body, but the sea-winds began to rise, and I felt a chill strike through me from my wet shooting-boots. High overhead gulls were wheeling and tossing like bits of white paper; from some distant marsh a solitary curlew called. Little by little the sun sank into the plain, and the zenith flushed with the afterglow. I watched the sky change from palest gold to pink and then to smoldering fire. Clouds of midges danced above me, and high in the calm air a bat dipped and soared. My eyelids began to droop. Then as I shook off the drowsiness a sudden crash among the bracken roused me. I raised my eyes. A great bird hung quivering in the air above my face. For an instant I stared, incapable of motion; then something leaped past me in the ferns and the bird rose, wheeled, and pitched headlong into the brake.

I was on my feet in an instant peering through the gorse. There came the sound of a struggle from a bunch of heather close by, and then all was quiet. I stepped forward, my gun poised, but when I came to the heather the gun fell under my arm again, and I stood motionless in silent astonishment. A dead hare lay on the ground, and on the hare stood a magnificent falcon, one talon buried in the creature's neck, the other planted firmly on its limp flank. But what astonished me was not the mere sight of a falcon sitting upon its prey. I had seen that more than once. It was that the falcon was fitted with a sort of leash about both talons, and from the leash hung a round bit of metal like a sleigh-bell. The bird turned its fierce yellow eyes on me, and then stooped and struck its curved beak into the quarry. At the same instant hurried steps sounded among the heather, and a girl sprang into the covert in front. Without a

glance at me she walked up to the falcon, and passing her gloved hand under its breast, raised it from the quarry. Then she deftly slipped a small hood over the bird's head, and holding it out on her gauntlet, stooped and picked up the hare.

She passed a cord about the animal's legs and fastened the end of the thong to her girdle. Then she started to retrace her steps through the covert. As she passed me I raised my cap and she acknowledged my presence with a scarcely perceptible inclination. I had been so astonished, so lost in admiration of the scene before my eyes, that it had not occurred to me that here was my salvation. But as she moved away I recollected that unless I wanted to sleep on a windy moor that night I had better recover my speech without delay. At my first word she hesitated, and as I stepped before her I thought a look of fear came into her beautiful eyes. But as I humbly explained my unpleasant plight, her face flushed and she looked at me in wonder.

"Surely you did not come from Kerselec!" she repeated.

Her sweet voice had no trace of the Breton accent nor of any accent which I knew, and yet there was something in it I seemed to have heard before, something quaint and indefinable, like the theme of an old song.

I explained that I was an American, unacquainted with Finistère, shooting there for my own amusement.

"An American," she repeated in the same quaint musical tones. "I have never before seen an American."

For a moment she stood silent, then looking at me she said: "If you should walk all night you could not reach Kerselec now, even if you had a guide."

"But," I began, "if I could only find a peasant's hut where I might get something to eat, and shelter."

The falcon on her wrist fluttered and shook its head. The girl smoothed its glossy back and glanced at me.

"Look around," she said gently. "Can you see the end of these moors? Look north, south, east, west. Can you see anything but moorland and bracken?"

"No," I said.

"The moor is wild and desolate. It is easy to enter, but sometimes they who enter never leave it. There are no peasants' huts here."

"Well," I said, "if you will tell me in which direction Kerselec lies, tomorrow it will take me no longer to go back than it has to come."

She looked at me again with an expression almost like pity.

"Ah," she said, "to come is easy and takes hours; to go is different—and may take centuries."

I stared at her in amazement but decided that I had misunderstood her. Then before I had time to speak she drew a whistle from her belt and sounded it.

"Sit down and rest," she said to me; "you have come a long distance and are tired."

She gathered up her pleated skirts and motioning me to follow picked her dainty way through the gorse to a flat rock among the ferns.

"They will be here directly," she said, and taking a seat at one end of the rock invited me to sit down on the other edge. The afterglow was beginning to fade in the sky and a single star twinkled faintly through the rosy haze. A long, wavering triangle of water-fowl drifted southward over our heads, and from the swamps around plover were calling.

"They are very beautiful—these moors," she said quietly.

"Beautiful, but cruel to strangers," I answered.

"Beautiful and cruel," she repeated dreamily, "beautiful and cruel."

"Like a woman," I said stupidly.

"Oh," she cried with a little catch in her breath and looked at me. Her

dark eyes met mine and I thought she seemed angry or frightened.

"Like a woman," she repeated under her breath; "how cruel to say so!" Then after a pause, as though speaking aloud to herself, "How cruel for him to say that!"

I don't know what sort of an apology I offered for my inane, though harmless, speech, but I know that she seemed so troubled about it that I began to think I had said something very dreadful without knowing it, and remembered with horror the pitfalls and snares which the French language sets for foreigners. While I was trying to imagine what I might have said, a sound of voices came across the moor and the girl rose to her feet.

"No," she said, with a trace of a smile on her pale face, "I will not accept your apologies, *Monsieur*, but I must prove you wrong and that shall be my revenge. Look. Here come Hastur and Raoul."

Two men loomed up in the twilight. One had a sack across his shoulders and the other carried a hoop before him as a waiter carries a tray. The hoop was fastened with straps to his shoulders, and around the edge of the circlet sat three hooded falcons fitted with tinkling bells. The girl stepped up to the falconer, and with a quick turn of her wrist transferred her falcon to the hoop, where it quickly sidled off and nestled among its mates who shook their hooded heads and ruffled their feathers till the belled jesses tinkled again. The other man stepped forward and bowing respectfully took up the hare and dropped it into the game-sack.

"These are my *piqueurs*," said the girl, turning to me with a gentle dignity. "Raoul is a good *fauconnier* and I shall some day make him *grand veneur*. Hastur is incomparable."

The two silent men saluted me respectfully.

"Did I not tell you, *Monsieur*, that I should prove you wrong?" she continued. "This then is my revenge, that you do me the courtesy of accepting food and shelter at my own house."

Before I could answer she spoke to the falconers, who started instantly across the heath, and with a gracious gesture to me she followed. I don't know whether I made her understand how profoundly grateful I felt, but she seemed pleased to listen, as we walked over the dewy heather.

"Are you not very tired?" she asked.

I had clean forgotten my fatigue in her presence and I told her so.

"Don't you think your gallantry is a little old-fashioned?" she said; and when I looked confused and humbled, she added quietly, "Oh, I like it, I like everything old-fashioned, and it is delightful to hear you say such pretty things."

The moorland around us was very still now under its ghostly sheet of mist. The plover had ceased their calling; the crickets and all the little creatures of the fields were silent as we passed, yet it seemed to me as if I could hear them beginning again far behind us. Well in advance the two tall falconers strode across the heather and the faint jingling of the hawks' bells came to our ears in distant murmuring chimes.

Suddenly a splendid hound dashed out of the mist in front, followed by another and another until half a dozen or more were bounding and leaping around the girl beside me. She caressed and quieted them with her gloved hand, speaking to them in quaint terms which I remembered to have seen in old French manuscripts.

Then the falcons on the circlet borne by the falconer ahead began to beat their wings and scream, and from somewhere out of sight the notes of a hunting-horn floated across the moor. The hounds sprang away before us and vanished in the twilight, and the falcons flapped and squealed

upon their perch, and the girl taking up the song of the horn began to hum. Clear and mellow her voice sounded in the night air:

"Chasseur, chasseur, chassez encore,
Quittez Rosette et Jeanneton,
Tonton, tonton, tontaine, tonton,
Ou, pour rabattre, dès l'aurore,
Que les Amours soient de planton,
Tonton, tontaine, tonton."

As I listened to her lovely voice a gray mass which rapidly grew more distinct loomed up in front, and the horn rang out joyously through the tumult of the hounds and falcons. A torch glimmered at a gate, a light streamed through an opening door, and we stepped upon a wooden bridge which trembled under our feet and rose creaking and straining behind us as we passed over the moat and into a small stone court, walled on every side. From an open doorway a man came and bending in salutation presented a cup to the girl beside me. She took the cup and touched it with her lips, then lowering it turned to me and said in a low voice, "I bid you welcome."

At that moment one of the falconers came with another cup, but before handing it to me, presented it to the girl, who tasted it. The falconer made a gesture to receive it, but she hesitated a moment and then stepping forward offered me the cup with her own hands. I felt this to be an act of extraordinary graciousness, but hardly knew what was expected of me, and did not raise it to my lips at once. The girl flushed crimson. I saw that I must act quickly.

"*Mademoiselle,*" I faltered, "a stranger whom you have saved from dangers he may never realize, empties this cup to the gentlest and loveliest hostess of France."

"In His name," she murmured, crossing herself, as I drained the cup. Then stepping into the doorway she turned to me with a pretty gesture and taking my hand in hers, led me into the house, saying again and again: "You are very welcome, indeed you are welcome to the Château d'Ys."

2

I AWOKE next morning with the music of the horn in my ears, and leaping out of the ancient bed, went to the curtained window where the sunlight filtered through little deep-set panes. The horn ceased as I looked into the court below.

A man who might have been brother to the two falconers of the night before stood in the midst of a pack of hounds. A curved horn was strapped over his back, and in his hand he held a long-lashed whip. The dogs whined and yelped, dancing around him in anticipation; there was the stamp of horses too in the walled yard.

"Mount!" cried a voice in Breton, and with a clatter of hoofs the two falconers, with falcons upon their wrists, rode into the courtyard among the hounds. Then I heard another voice which sent the blood throbbing through my heart: "Piriou Louis, hunt the hounds well and spare neither spur nor whip. Thou Raoul and thou Gaston, see that the *épervier* does not prove himself *niais,* and if it be best in your judgment, *faites courtoisie à l'oiseau. Jardiner un oiseau* like the *mué* there on Hastur's wrist is not difficult, but thou, Raoul, mayest not find it so simple to govern that *hagard.* Twice last week he foamed *au vif* and lost the *beccade* although he is used to the *leurre.* The bird acts like a stupid *branchier. Paître un hagard n'est pas si facile.*"

Was I dreaming? The old language of falconry which I had read in yellow manuscripts—the old forgotten French of the Middle Ages was sounding in my ears while the hounds bayed and the hawks' bells tinkled accompaniment to the stamping horses. She spoke again in the sweet forgotten language:

"If you would rather attack the *longe* and leave thy *hagard au bloc,* Raoul, I shall say nothing; for it were a pity to spoil so fair a day's sport with an ill-trained *sors. Essimer abaisser,*—it is possibly the best way. *Ça lui donnera des reins.* I was perhaps hasty with the bird. It takes time to pass *à la filière* and the exercises *d'escap.*"

Then the falconer Raoul bowed in his stirrups and replied: "If it be the pleasure of *Mademoiselle,* I shall keep the hawk."

"It is my wish," she answered. "Falconry I know, but you have yet to give me many a lesson in *Autourserie,* my poor Raoul. Sieur Piriou Louis, mount!"

The huntsman sprang into an archway and in an instant returned, mounted upon a strong black horse, followed by a piqueur also mounted.

"Ah!" she cried joyously, "speed Glemarec René! speed! speed all! Sound thy horn, Sieur Piriou!"

The silvery music of the hunting-horn filled the courtyard, the hounds sprang through the gateway and galloping hoof-beats plunged out of the paved court; loud on the drawbridge, suddenly muffled, then lost in the heather and bracken of the moors. Distant and more distant sounded the horn, until it became so faint that the sudden carol of a soaring lark drowned it in my ears. I heard the voice below responding to some call from within the house.

"I do not regret the chase; I will go another time. Courtesy to the stranger, Pelagie, remember!"

And a feeble voice came quavering from within the house, "*Courtoisie.*"

I stripped, and rubbed myself from head to foot in the huge earthen basin of icy water which stood upon the stone floor at the foot of my bed. Then I looked about for my clothes. They were gone, but on a settle near the door lay a heap of garments which I inspected with astonishment. As my clothes had vanished I was compelled to attire myself in the costume which had evidently been placed there for me to wear while my own clothes dried. Everything was there, cap, shoes, and hunting-doublet of silvery gray homespun; but the close-fitting costume and seamless shoes belonged to another century, and I remembered the strange costumes of the three falconers in the courtyard. I was sure that it was not the modern dress of any portion of France or Brittany; but not until I was dressed and stood before a mirror between the windows did I realize that I was clothed much more like a young huntsman of the Middle Ages than like a Breton of that day. I hesitated and picked up the cap. Should I go down and present myself in that strange guise? There seemed to be no help for it; my own clothes were gone and there was no bell in the ancient chamber to call a servant, so I contented myself with removing a short hawk's feather from the cap, and opening the door went downstairs.

By the fireplace in the large room at the foot of the stairs an old Breton woman sat spinning with a distaff. She looked up at me when I appeared, and, smiling frankly, wished me health in the Breton language, to which I laughingly replied in French. At the same moment my hostess appeared and returned my salutation with a grace and dignity that sent a thrill to my heart. Her lovely head with its dark curly hair was crowned with a head-dress which set all doubts as to the epoch of my own costume at rest. Her slender figure was exquisitely set off in the homespun hunting-gown edged with silver, and on her gauntlet-covered wrist she bore one of her petted hawks. With perfect simplicity she took my hand and led me into the garden in the court, and seating herself before a table invited me very sweetly to sit beside her. Then she

asked me in her soft quaint accent how I had passed the night and whether I was very much inconvenienced by wearing the clothes which old Pelagie had put there for me while I slept. I looked at my own clothes and shoes, drying in the sun by the garden-wall, and hated them. What horrors they were compared with the graceful costume which I now wore! I told her this, laughing, but she agreed with me very seriously.

"We will throw them away," she said in a quiet voice. In my astonishment I attempted to explain that I not only could not think of accepting clothes from anybody, although for all I knew it might be the custom of hospitality in that part of the country, but that I should cut an impossible figure if I returned to France clothed as I was then.

She laughed and tossed her pretty head, saying something in old French which I did not understand, and then Pelagie trotted out with a tray on which stood two bowls of milk, a loaf of white bread, fruit, a platter of honeycomb, a flagon of deep red wine. "You see I have not yet broken my fast because I wished you to eat with me. But I am very hungry," she smiled.

"I would rather die than forget one word of what you have said!" I blurted out while my cheeks burned. "She will think me mad," I added to myself, but she turned to me with sparkling eyes.

"Ah!" she murmured. "Then *Monsieur* knows all that there is of chivalry——"

She crossed herself and broke bread—I sat and watched her white hands, not daring to raise my eyes to hers.

"Will you not eat?" she asked. "Why do you look so troubled?"

Ah, why? I knew it now. I knew I would give my life to touch with my lips those rosy palms—I understood now that from the moment when I looked into her dark eyes there on the moor last night I had loved her. My great and sudden passion held me speechless.

"Are you ill at ease?" she asked again.

Then like a man who pronounces his own doom I answered in a low voice: "Yes, I am ill at ease for love of you." And as she did not stir nor answer, the same power moved my lips in spite of me and I said, "I, who am unworthy of the lightest of your thoughts, I who abuse hospitality and repay your gentle courtesy with bold presumption, I love you."

She leaned her head upon her hands, and answered softly, "I love you. Your words are very dear to me. I love you."

"Then I shall win you."

"Win me," she replied.

But all the time I had been sitting silent, my face turned toward her. She also silent, her sweet face resting on her upturned palm, sat facing me, and as her eyes looked into mine, I knew that neither she nor I had spoken human speech; but I knew that her soul had answered mine, and I drew myself up feeling youth and joyous love coursing through every vein. She, with a bright color in her lovely face, seemed as one awakened from a dream, and her eyes sought mine with a questioning glance which made me tremble with delight. We broke our fast, speaking of ourselves. I told her my name and she told me hers, the Demoiselle Jeanne d'Y's.

She spoke of her father and mother's death, and how the nineteen of her years had been passed in the little fortified farm alone with her nurse Pelagie, Glemarec René the piqueur, and the four falconers, Raoul, Gaston, Hastur, and the Sieur Piriou Louis, who had served her father. She had never been outside the moorland—never even had seen a human soul before, except the falconers and Pelagie. She did not know how she had heard of Kerselec; perhaps the

falconers had spoken of it. She knew the legends of Loup Garou and Jeanne la Flamme from her nurse Pelagie. She embroidered and spun flax. Her hawks and hounds were her only distraction. When she had met me there on the moor she had been so frightened that she almost dropped at the sound of my voice. She had, it was true, seen ships at sea from the cliffs, but as far as the eye could reach the moors over which she galloped were destitute of any sign of human life. There was a legend which old Pelagie told, how anybody once lost in the unexplored moorland might never return, because the moors were enchanted. She did not know whether it was true; she never had thought about it until she met me. She did not know whether the falconers had even been outside or whether they could go if they would. The books in the house which Pelagie the nurse had taught her to read were hundreds of years old.

All this she told me with a sweet seriousness seldom seen in anyone but children. My own name she found easy to pronounce and insisted, because my first name was Philip, I must have French blood in me. She did not seem curious to learn anything about the outside world, and I thought perhaps she considered it had forfeited her interest and respect from the stories of her nurse.

We were still sitting at the table and she was throwing grapes to the small field birds which came fearlessly to our very feet.

I began to speak in a vague way of going, but she would not hear of it, and before I knew it I had promised to stay a week and hunt with hawk and hound in their company. I also obtained permission to come again from Kerselec and visit her after my return.

"Why," she said innocently, "I do not know what I should do if you never came back;" and I, knowing that I had no right to awaken her with the sudden shock which the avowal of my own love would bring to her, sat silent, hardly daring to breathe.

"You will come very often?" she asked.

"Very often," I said.

"Every day?"

"Every day."

"Oh," she sighed, "I am very happy—come and see my hawks."

She rose and took my hand again with a childlike innocence of possession, and we walked through the garden and fruit trees to a grassy lawn which was bordered by a brook. Over the lawn were scattered fifteen or twenty stumps of trees—partially imbedded in the grass—and upon all of these except two sat falcons. They were attached to the stumps by thongs which were in turn fastened with steel rivets to their legs just above the talons. A little stream of pure spring water flowed in a winding course within easy distance of each perch.

THE birds set up a clamor when the girl appeared, but she went from one to another, caressing some, taking others for an instant upon her wrist, or stooping to adjust their jesses.

"Are they not pretty?" she said. "See, here is a falcon-gentil. We call it 'ignoble,' because it takes the quarry in direct chase. This is a blue falcon. In falconry we call it 'noble' because it rises over the quarry, and wheeling, drops upon it from above. This white bird is a gerfalcon from the north. It is also 'noble!' Here is a merlin, and this tiercelet is a falcon-heroner."

I asked her how she had learned the old language of falconry. She did not remember, but thought her father must have taught it to her when she was very young.

Then she led me away and showed me the young falcons still in the nest. "They are termed *niais* in falconry,"

she explained. "A *branchier* is the young bird which is just able to leave the nest and hop from branch to branch. A young bird which has not yet moulted is called a *sors*, and a *mué* is a hawk which has moulted in captivity. When we catch a wild falcon which has changed its plumage we term it a *hagard*. Raoul first taught me to dress a falcon. Shall I teach you how it is done?"

She seated herself on the bank of the stream among the falcons and I threw myself at her feet to listen.

Then the Demoiselle d'Ys held up one rosy-tipped finger and began very gravely, "First one must catch the falcon."

"I am caught," I answered.

She laughed very prettily and told me my *dressage* would perhaps be difficult as I was noble.

"I am already tamed," I replied; "jessed and belled."

She laughed, delighted. "Oh, my brave falcon; then you will return at my call?"

"I am yours," I answered gravely.

She sat silent for a moment. Then the color heightened in her cheeks and she held up her finger again saying, "Listen; I wish to speak of falconry——"

"I listen, Countess Jeanne d'Ys."

But again she fell into the revery, and her eyes seemed fixed on something beyond the summer clouds.

"Philip," she said at last.

"Jeanne," I whispered.

"That is all,—that is what I wished," she sighed,—"Philip and Jeanne."

She held her hand toward me and I touched it with my lips.

"Win me," she said, but this time it was the body and soul which spoke in unison.

After a while she began again: "Let us speak of falconry."

"Begin," I replied; "we have caught the falcon."

Then Jeanne d'Ys took my hand in both of hers and told me how with infinite patience the young falcon was taught to perch upon the wrist, how little by little it became used to the belled jesses and the *chaperon à cornette*.

"They must first have a good appetite," she said; "then little by little I reduce their nourishment which in falconry we call *pât*. When after many nights passed *au bloc* as these birds are now, I prevail upon the *hagard* to stay quietly on the wrist, then the bird is ready to be taught to come for its food. I fit the *pât* to the end of a thong or *leurre*, and teach the bird to come to me as soon as I began to whirl the cord in circles about my head. At first I drop the *pât* when the falcon comes, and he eats the food on the ground. After a little he will learn to seize the *leurre* in motion as I whirl it around my head, or drag it over the ground. After this it is easy to teach the falcon to strike at game, always remembering to '*faire courtoisie à l'oiseau*,' that is, to allow the bird to taste the quarry."

A squeal from one of the falcons interrupted her, and she arose to adjust the *longe*, which had become whipped about the *bloc*, but the bird still flapped its wings and screamed.

"What *is* the matter?" she said; "Philip, can you see?"

I looked around and at first saw nothing to cause the commotion which was now heightened by the screams and flapping of all the birds. Then my eye fell upon the flat rock beside the stream from which the girl had risen. A gray serpent was moving slowly across the surface of the boulder, and the eyes in its flat triangular head sparkled like jet.

"A *couleuvre*," she said quietly.

"It is harmless, is it not?" I asked.

She pointed to the black V-shaped figure on the neck.

"It is certain death," she said; "it is a viper."

We watched the reptile moving slowly over the smooth rock to where

the sunlight fell in a broad warm patch.

I started forward to examine it, but she clung to my arm crying, "Don't, Philip; I am afraid."

"For me?"

"For you, Philip,—I love you."

Then I took her in my arms and kissed her on the lips, but all I could say was: "Jeanne, Jeanne, Jeanne." And as she lay trembling on my breast, something struck my foot in the grass below, but I did not heed it. Then again something struck my ankle, and a sharp pain shot through me. I looked into the sweet face of Jeanne d'Ys and kissed her, and with all my strength lifted her in my arms and flung her from me. Then bending, I tore the viper from my ankle and set my heel upon its head. I remember feeling weak and numb,—I remember falling to the ground. Through my slowly glazing eyes I saw Jeanne's white face bending close to mine, and when the light in my eyes went out I still felt her arms about my neck, and her soft cheek against my drawn lips.

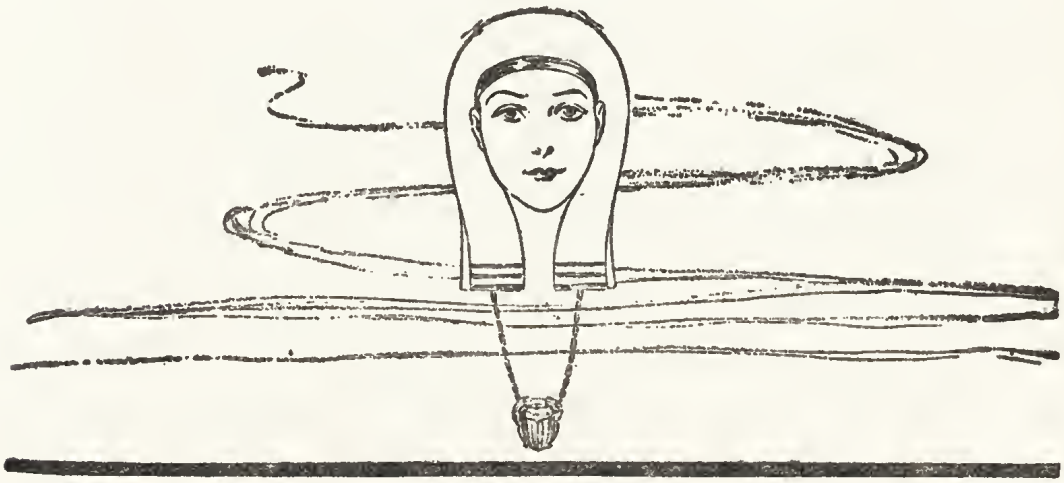
* * * * * * *

WHEN I opened my eyes, I looked around in terror. Jeanne was gone. I saw the stream and the flat rock; I saw the crushed viper in the grass beside me, but the hawks and *blocs* had disappeared. I sprang to my feet. The garden, the fruit trees, the drawbridge and the walled court were gone. I stared stupidly at a heap of crumbling ruins, ivy-covered and gray, through which great trees had pushed their way. I crept forward, dragging my numbed foot, and as I moved, a falcon sailed from the tree-tops among the ruins, and soaring, mounting in narrowing circles, faded and vanished in the clouds above.

"Jeanne, Jeanne," I cried, but my voice died on my lips, and I fell on my knees among the weeds. And as God willed it, I, not knowing, had fallen kneeling before a crumbling shrine carved in stone for our Mother of Sorrows. I saw the sad face of the Virgin wrought in the cold stone. I saw the cross and thorns at her feet, and beneath it I read:

PRAY FOR THE SOUL OF THE
DEMOISELLE JEANNE D'YS,
WHO DIED
IN HER YOUTH FOR LOVE OF
PHILIP, A STRANGER,
A. D. 1573.

But upon the icy slab lay a woman's glove still warm and fragrant.



IN ANNOUNCING a vampire story of unusual beauty and fascination by Seabury Quinn—a story wherein the reader feels pity and sympathy for the vampire instead of loathing—we hasten to reassure those of our readers who have written anxious letters asking us whether we are going to part company with the fascinating little French ghost-breaker, Jules de Grandin. This delightful personage—scientist, occult investigator and keen analyst—has built a place all his own in the hearts of WEIRD TALES readers; and when, as occasionly happens, we omit Seabury Quinn's de Grandin stories for one or two issues, we invariably receive a flood of letters from you, the readers. Some of these are worried for fear we have discontinued the de Grandin stories; others threaten us with dire penalties unless we immediately restore the Frenchman to our pages. It is a real feat to create a character in fiction so likable, so human, and so fascinating that he immediately makes himself loved by thousands of readers, and this is what Seabury Quinn has done in creating the temperamental and vivacious Jules de Grandin for your delectation.

It is our earnest hope that Jules de Grandin will continue to fascinate the readers of WEIRD TALES for many years to come. Mr. Quinn is at present working on some of the eeriest, most breath-taking adventures that the quick-tempered little Frenchman has yet encountered. And in *Restless Souls,* the vampire story in which Jules de Grandin plays the leading rôle, he has pictured a vampire woman who wins the sympathy and admiration not only of the readers, but even of the relentless de Grandin himself, so that he temporizes with duty and finally does with tears in his eyes that which is needful to do. The story will be published soon. Vampire tales are usually stories of shuddery horror; but occasionally there is written a vampire tale of fascinating beauty and loveliness. *La Morte Amoureuse* by Théophile Gautier was one; *Restless Souls* by Seabury Quinn is another.

Writes William Russell Moore, of Fulton, Missouri, in a letter to The Eyrie: *"The Dimension Terror,* by Edmond Hamilton, would have taken the lead among the stories in the June issue were it not for the competition of Mr. Seabury Quinn and his charming character, Jules de Grandin. When the

little Frenchman is between your pages, other authors should not feel slighted if their stories take second place, for de Grandin is a character so real that it does not seem possible that he does not actually exist. Whether it is the author's personality shining in his character, or just the genuineness of the created character, is not for me to say, but it is the character Jules de Grandin that gives us the good stories, and it is a safe bet that Mr. Quinn would have to work mighty hard to write a story that would surpass a typical de Grandin story. So voting first place in the June issue to *The Serpent Woman,* not so much for the plot idea as for the character Jules de Grandin, I will close; and as de Grandin himself would no doubt express it, 'I beg you hurry, make haste, step hard on the gas, and speed us another story of the so excellent de Grandin.' "

Writes N. J. O'Neail, of Toronto, Canada: "Just a word of enthusiastic commendation for WEIRD TALES from a reader of ten months' standing. Not that everything in it appeals to me, of course; but what does, DOES: particularly H. P. Lovecraft's work, which is in a class by itself. G. G. Pendarves' work is also remarkably good; I am surprized to see him receive so little honorary mention in The Eyrie. Bassett Morgan and Seabury Quinn are among my other favorites. I don't care so much for scientific stuff, but realize, of course, that thousands do. However, I won't complain along that line. Let's have as much more of Lovecraft as possible; but for heaven's sake, never run anything of his as a serial—you'd have half your readers dead of suspense before it ended."

William Randolph writes from the Infantry School at Fort Benning, Georgia: "I suppose you don't ever have a call from your soldier readers, do you? There are a few thousand of us here, and we read as a relief from the tension and strain of studying, as well as learning how best to protect the interests of our country. I for one, and practically all of my buddies, read WEIRD TALES. We fellows like the uncanny, mysterious, weird and scientific stories; for as you can well imagine, we get pretty well fed up on the ordinary."

Writes Jerry Snow, of Minneapolis: "*The Moon Terror,* that fascinating WEIRD TALES serial which you have reprinted as a book, was a marvel! Why not bring out a book of Lovecraft's stories?"

"I have been a reader of WEIRD TALES for about two years," writes Clara Espiritu, of Isleton, California, "and I wish to say that it is getting better all the time. Ghost-stories, good shuddery ones, are what I crave, although *The Bat-Men of Thorium* promises to satisfy me. *The Lurking Fear* was by far the best story in your June issue. I surely was disappointed with Jules de Grandin; he let himself be used for a common detective story. It is a dirty shame to treat such a talented man that way."

Writes Veith Dall, of Chicago: "I picked *The Lurking Fear* by Lovecraft as June's best story. And I think a lot of credit should go to Donald Wandrei for his *Sonnets of the Midnight Hours.* They are typically weird.

I never read such high-grade, high-powered stories as you publish. Each one carries a 'kick'."

J. W. Meek, of Jackson, Mississippi, writes to The Eyrie: "It has been my pleasure to read your magazine WEIRD TALES from your first issue to your issue of this month, and during this time in no issue have you printed a story that has been as interesting, weird or breath-taking as H. P. Lovecraft's story, *The Lurking Fear*. Weird tales, ghost-stories and other supernatural stories have been my hobby for years, and during this time I have made a collection of what, in my opinion, have been the best stories. Most of these stories come from your magazine WEIRD TALES, others from Poe and other writers of this nature; and I certainly intend to add to this collection *The Lurking Fear*. The thing that impressed me most was that Lovecraft actually gave a description of the Thing; he did not say as the usual run of stories do that 'no pen could describe it' or that 'it was too horrible for words'."

"*The Lurking Fear* by Lovecraft is his best so far," writes Paul Hendrickson of Lancaster, Ohio. "I like his ability to keep one uncertain as to whether the plot will end in some far abyss, or in the way it eventually did."

Writes Jack Darrow, of Chicago: "The June issue of WEIRD TALES is one of the best issues you have had for a long time. It contains your best authors—Edmond Hamilton, H. P. Lovecraft, Seabury Quinn, Bertram Russell, and Everil Worrell. I had the mumps and couldn't go out, so I spent my time reading WEIRD TALES."

Readers, what is your favorite story in this issue? The most popular story in the June issue, as shown by your votes, was *The Lurking Fear*, by H. P. Lovecraft. Your second and third choices were *The Dimension Terror*, by Edmond Hamilton, and *The Devil's Martyr*, by Signe Toksvig.

MY FAVORITE STORIES IN THE AUGUST WEIRD TALES ARE:

Story	Remarks
(1)_____	_____
(2)_____	_____
(3)_____	_____

I do not like the following stories:

(1)_____	Why? _____
(2)_____	_____

It will help us to know what kind of stories you want in Weird Tales if you will fill out this coupon and mail it to The Eyrie, Weird Tales, 450 E. Ohio St., Chicago, Ill.

Reader's name and address:

_____

_____

_____

You Can't Kill a Ghost

(Continued from page 170)

cover that Henriquez had been shot through the chest. He was a sly dog, was Henriquez. *And his wound didn't bleed!* Even the captain did not suspect. But he collapsed in the arms of the mate when he attempted to leave the ship."

"He died?" I asked.

Talbot threw away his cigar and laughed. "Nothing could kill Henriquez—not even a bullet. But I never saw him again. He slipped overboard that night and swam ashore."

"Did the president forgive him?" I asked.

Talbot grunted. "Henriquez *was* the president," he replied.

I stared.

"But that isn't all of my story," he continued. "I said nothing could kill him. You can't kill a ghost. Henriquez was assassinated before I escaped from prison. You may have read about him in the papers."

"And you mean to say——?" I stammered.

"A rather unusual story, isn't it?" grinned Talbot. "Of course none of the conventional magazines would take it. They detest the unusual and amazing in fiction. But you can mention my name and perhaps some civilized editor will run it. You know, it's beastly exhilarating to be carried on the back of a ghost!"

Coming Soon—

The

SHADOW KINGDOM

By **ROBERT E. HOWARD**

Another weird tale by the author of "Red Shadows"

Red Shadows

(Continued from page 164)

those doing homage to N'Longa. How could he know the craft and hatred in that dusky, slanting skull that had led the negro, escaping the vengeance of his tribesmen, to trail down the only man he had ever feared? The Black God had been kind to his neophyte; had led him upon his victim helpless and unarmed. Now Gulka could kill his man openly—and slowly, as a leopard kills, not smiting him down from ambush as he had planned, silently and suddenly.

A wide grin split the negro's face, and he moistened his lips. Kane, watching him, was coldly and deliberately weighing his chances. Gulka had already spied the rapiers. He was closer to them than was Kane. The Englishman knew that there was no chance of his winning in a sudden race for the swords.

A slow, deadly rage surged in him —the fury of helplessness. The blood churned in his temples and his eyes smoldered with a terrible light as he eyed the negro. His fingers spread and closed like claws. They were strong, those hands; men had died in their clutch. Even Gulka's huge black column of a neck might break like a rotten branch between them—a wave of weakness made the futility of these thoughts apparent to an extent that needed not the verification of the moonlight glimmering from the spear in Gulka's black hand. Kane could not even have fled had he wished—and he had never fled from a single foe.

The gorilla-slayer moved out into the glade. Massive, terrible, he was the personification of the primitive, the Stone Age. His mouth yawned in a red cavern of a grin; he bore himself with the haughty arrogance of savage might.

Kane tensed himself for the struggle that could end but one way. He strove to rally his waning forces. Useless; he had lost too much blood. At least he would meet his death on his feet, and somehow he stiffened his buckling knees and held himself erect, though the glade shimmered before him in uncertain waves and the moonlight seemed to have become a red fog through which he dimly glimpsed the approaching black man.

Kane stooped, though the effort nearly pitched him on his face; he dipped water in his cupped hands and dashed it into his face. This revived him, and he straightened, hoping that Gulka would charge and get it over with before his weakness crumpled him to the earth.

Gulka was now about the center of the glade, moving with the slow, easy stride of a great cat stalking a victim. He was not at all in a hurry to consummate his purpose. He wanted to toy with his victim, to see fear come into those grim eyes which had looked him down, even when the possessor of those eyes had been bound to the death stake. He wanted to slay, at last, slowly, glutting his tigerish blood-lust and torture-lust to the fullest extent.

Then suddenly he halted, turned swiftly, facing another side of the glade. Kane, wondering, followed his glance.

AT FIRST it seemed like a blacker shadow among the jungle shadows. At first there was no motion, no sound, but Kane instinctively knew that some terrible menace lurked there in the darkness that masked and merged the silent trees. A sullen horror brooded there, and Kane felt as if, from that monstrous shadow, inhuman eyes seared his very soul. Yet simultaneously there

came the fantastic sensation that these eyes were not directed on him. He looked at the gorilla-slayer.

The black man had apparently forgotten him; he stood, half crouching, spear lifted, eyes fixed upon that clump of blackness. Kane looked again. Now there was motion in the shadows; they merged fantastically and moved out into the glade, much as Gulka had done. Kane blinked: was this the illusion that precedes death? The shape he looked upon was such as he had visioned dimly in wild nightmares, when the wings of sleep bore him back through lost ages.

He thought at first it was some blasphemous mockery of a man, for it went erect and was tall as a tall man. But it was inhumanly broad and thick, and its gigantic arms hung nearly to its misshapen feet. Then the moonlight smote full upon its bestial face, and Kane's mazed mind thought that the thing was the Black God coming out of the shadows, animated and blood-lusting. Then he saw that it was covered with hair, and he remembered the man-like thing dangling from the roof-pole in the native village. He looked at Gulka.

The negro was facing the gorilla, spear at the charge. He was not afraid, but his sluggish mind was wondering over the miracle that brought this beast so far from his native jungles.

The mighty ape came out into the moonlight and there was a terrible majesty about his movements. He was nearer Kane than Gulka but he did not seem to be aware of the white man. His small, blazing eyes were fixed on the black man with terrible intensity. He advanced with a curious swaying stride.

Far away the drums whispered through the night, like an accompaniment to this grim Stone Age drama. The savage crouched in the middle of the glade, but the primordial came out of the jungle with eyes bloodshot and blood-lusting. The negro was face to face with a thing more primitive than he. Again ghosts of memories whispered to Kane: you have seen such sights before (they murmured), back in the dim days, the dawn days, when beast and beast-man battled for supremacy.

Gulka moved away from the ape in a half-circle, crouching, spear ready. With all his craft he was seeking to trick the gorilla, to make a swift kill, for he had never before met such a monster as this, and though he did not fear, he had begun to doubt. The ape made no attempt to stalk or circle; he strode straight forward toward Gulka.

The black man who faced him and the white man who watched could not know the brutish love, the brutish hate that had driven the monster down from the low, forest-covered hills of the north to follow for leagues the trail of him who was the scourge of his kind—the slayer of his mate, whose body now hung

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from the roof-pole of the negro village.

The end came swiftly, almost like a sudden gesture. They were close, now, beast and beast-man; and suddenly, with an earth-shaking roar, the gorilla charged. A great hairy arm smote aside the thrusting spear, and the ape closed with the negro. There was a shattering sound as of many branches breaking simultaneously, and Gulka slumped silently to the earth, to lie with arms, legs and body flung in strange, unnatural positions. The ape towered an instant above him, like a statue of the primordial triumphant.

Far away Kane heard the drums murmur. The soul of the jungle, the soul of the jungle: this phrase surged through his mind with monotonous reiteration.

The three who had stood in power before the Black God that night, where were they? Back in the village where the drums rustled lay Songa—King Songa, once lord of life and death, now a shriveled corpse with a face set in a mask of horror. Stretched on his back in the middle of the glade lay he whom Kane had followed many a league by land and sea. And Gulka the gorilla-slayer lay at the feet of his killer, broken at last by the savagery which had made him a true son of this grim land which had at last overwhelmed him.

Yet the Black God still reigned, thought Kane dizzily, brooding back in the shadows of this dark country, bestial, blood-lusting, caring naught who lived or died, so that he drank.

Kane watched the mighty ape, wondering how long it would be before the huge simian spied and charged him. But the gorilla gave no evidence of having even seen him. Some dim impulse of vengeance yet unglutted prompting him, he bent and raised the negro. Then he slouched toward the jungle, Gulka's limbs trailing limply and grotesquely. As he reached the trees, the ape halted, whirling the giant form high in the air with seemingly no effort, and dashed the dead man up among the branches. There was a rending sound as a broken projecting limb tore through the body hurled so powerfully against it, and the dead gorilla-slayer dangled there hideously.

A moment the clear moon limned the great ape in its glimmer, as he stood silently gazing up at his victim; then like a dark shadow he melted noiselessly into the jungle.

Kane walked slowly to the middle of the glade and took up his rapier. The blood had ceased to flow from his wounds, and some of his strength was returning, enough, at least, for him to reach the coast where his ship awaited him. He halted at the edge of the glade for a backward glance at Le Loup's upturned face and still form, white in the moonlight, and at the dark shadow among the trees that was Gulka, left by some bestial whim, hanging as the she-gorilla hung in the village.

Afar the drums muttered: "The wisdom of our land is ancient; the wisdom of our land is dark; whom we serve, we destroy. Flee if you would live, but you will never forget our chant. Never, never," sang the drums.

Kane turned to the trail which led to the beach and the ship waiting there.

Vulture Crag

(Continued from page 186)

her. "Can you wait alone here for just a little while?"

The girl nodded. Her eyes seemed full of a strange dream, but they were clear and calm.

Donald rushed through the door which, after all, Zolani had not thought it necessary to lock, and up a winding stairway. As he burst into the entrance hall of the building, he heard the crackling of flames: the building had been fired by a thrown torch, so that the upper portion was burning before the lower part took fire. And now those eery screeches were no longer mystery, but horrible fact. Around the gloomy mansion the vultures were wheeling; in and out through broken window-panes they flew, and one bore in his talons something at which Donald could not look. . . .

HE FLUNG open the outer door and faced the mob. A shower of missiles seemed about to descend around him; the mob, after the manner of mobs, had gone berserk, and the light in the eyes of its leaders was not the light of reason. And yet, by some miracle of perils escaped and vital need, Donald made them listen—made them believe.

"The man you came to find is dead," he shouted above the din, and they heard him. "The man who rebuilt this house—the man who filled it with corpses, as you think. *Men!* That man was about to murder me—I escaped death at his hands because you came. Now there is barely time to avert—to *try* to avert—a horrible tragedy. I can explain later, not now. The bodies you thought were dead bodies are about to be burnt here, as though this whole house were a funeral pyre. Worse still, these horrible birds——"

(Continued on page 286)

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Donald felt a responsive shudder run through the crowd.

"It is worse than you think. These men——"

He stopped suddenly. He had been about to tell them that these men were not dead, but sleeping. But to say such a thing to these farmers and small shopkeepers would be to brand himself as a madman. Moreover, even if Count Zolani's apparatus could yet be saved from the flames, he was not sure that he knew how to operate it. And if it could not be operated, the sleepers would sleep on. He wondered, miserably, just when that sleep would become grim, literal death. And, even as he wondered, he flung out his hands in a gesture of entreaty. He dared not identify himself with the count's great experiment, if he were to preserve a hope of attempting to complete it.

"Carry out the bodies! Save them!" he begged.

He rushed back, then, to rescue Dorothy. There were enough of those others to carry the eighteen helpless bodies of men out of the lockers of the "dormuary," which had become more sinister than its name, borrowed from the name of an abode of death. There were enough, and they were responding to his appeal. Would there be time? And could the basement laboratory be saved?

When he fought his way back through suffocating fumes to the open air, one of the leaders of the mob whose face bore the recent mark of an angry burn, sought him humbly.

"We have added horror to horror," he confessed, sadly. "We made our way inside—we found that dreadful locker room, like the locker room of a morgue. *What has been going on here?* Well, though the foreigner we heard of who conducted this establishment is dead, we may solve that problem later. But—I can not tell you of the condition in which we found those bodies. Before the flames drove them away, the vultures——"

He covered his face with his hands. And in that moment, the very air seemed shattered, and a burst of flame and smoke belched from the broken, yawning windows. Already the structure was falling.

On the grass there lay the body of one man. Donald had caught sight of it—it seemed the only one the men had carried out.

"The flames were getting to them, and it seemed *better to leave them,*" the man beside him said then with a shudder. "*This* one was in much better condition than any of the others."

Looking, Donald saw that vultures first attack the eyes of an unconscious victim. Even though they had not finished their work, never, as long as he should live, would he be able to look upon a vulture without the dreadful feeling of nausea creeping over him which overcame him now. In that moment, he abandoned all hope of saving the laboratory. Even knowing what *he* knew, he agreed with the villager who had said "better to leave them."

DOROTHY and Donald were cared for in the village. There was an investigation, and later another, for all of the eighteen had been important men. The story the two survivors had finally to tell was converted by scientists who walk in beaten paths, into other terms. Zolani had been making hypnotic experiments, and most of his victims, or dupes, had died. That was the version which was accepted.

Terrors outlived together bind closer the ties of love and affection, and Donald and Dorothy were married before they left the village. And not until then did Donald question

Dorothy as to the things which had befallen her absent spirit, during the brief hour of its wandering.

"I had thought that I, like the others, was to be left without my body for two weeks," she said musingly. "And it was such a little while—only an hour you say, Donald. Well! Perhaps that is why I have so little to tell, because the time was so short—and yet that hour, though empty, seemed an eternity. It seemed as though there is no time to a disembodied spirit—as though in one instant there is eternity. Besides that feeling, there was another—of great emptiness, of space, I suppose, and a feeling of being alone there, as a star is alone in space. And really, Donald—that is all. I think there will be more than that, in the life that comes after death. God has given me a body here on earth, and eyes to see with, and ears to hear with. Since my spirit is indestructible, I think some day He will give me another, perhaps not like this one which we know, you and I, but still a way of expressing that which I am, of comprehending in a greater or a less degree those things which are about me.

"As to the count's experiment—well, as I said, it was only an hour. But it left me with two feelings—one that of my indestructibility, and the other, a consciousness of eternity. And it left me with a conviction that though men should learn to synthesize both body and soul, only God can make them live, as He sees fit."

The Vengeance of Nitocris

(Continued from page 260)

revelers and all had been killed. However, this theory was speedily dispelled when a voyager from down the river reported having passed the temple in a perfectly firm condition but declared that he had seen no signs of life about the place—only the brightly canopied boats, drifting at their moorings.

Uneasiness steadily increased throughout the day. Sage persons recalled the great devotion of the queen toward her dead brother, and noted that the guests at the banquet of last night had been composed almost entirely of those who had participated in his slaying.

When in the evening the queen arrived in the city, pale, silent, and obviously nervous, threatening crowds blocked the path of her chariot, demanding roughly an explanation of the disappearance of her guests. Haughtily she ignored them and lashed forward the horses of her chariot, pushing aside the tight mass of people. Well she knew, however, that her life would be doomed as soon as they confirmed their suspicions. She resolved to meet her inevitable death in a way that befitted one of her rank, not at the filthy hands of a mob.

Therefore upon her entrance into the palace she ordered her slaves to fill instantly her boudoir with hot and smoking ashes. When this had been done, she went to the room, entered it, closed the door and locked it securely, and then flung herself down upon a couch in the center of the room. In a short time the scorching heat and the suffocating thick fumes of the smoke overpowered her. Only her beautiful dead body remained for the hands of the mob.

"Don't make a monkey of yourself"

cried Bob as I sat down at the pian

I WAS spending my vacation with Bob when I met his cousin, Helen. It was love at first sight with me. But unfortunately she didn't seem to feel the same way about it.

"You've got nothing to worry about," Bob insisted when I told him my tale of woe. "Just leave it to me. All you need is a little publicity . . ."

The very next day he announced that he'd just had a long talk with Helen.

"Boy! What I didn't tell her about you!" he exulted. "Believe me, I boosted your stock sky high!"

"What did you tell her?"

"Well, she's crazy about music. So I conveniently forgot that you can't play a note, and told her you are *an accomplished pianist!*"

"But Bob . . ."

"Not another word! I've got you sitting pretty, now. If you're asked to play—just say you've sprained your wrist."

That very night we were all invited to the Carews' party. On the way over, I sensed a big difference in Helen—a difference that made my heart beat fast with a new hope.

* * *

I Am Asked to Play the Piano

A little later in the evening we were all gathered around the piano.

"I've heard so much about your talent!" cried Helen. "Won't you play something for us?"

"Yes!" "Yes!" "Please!" came from all sides.

With a smile I bowed low . . . and replied that *it would be a pleasure!*

Bob's grin changed to amazement. Calmly ignoring his frantic signals I walked over to the piano. Quick as a flash he followed me.

"For the love of Pete get away from that piano," he whispered excitedly. "Don't make a monkey of yourself. If Helen ever hears you play she'll think everything else I told her is bunk, too!"

Turning to the guests, Bob announced, "Perhaps we should wait until some other time. His wrist was slightly sprained in tennis this afternoon and . . ."

"Oh, that's nothing!" I broke in, and without any further hesitation I began the first notes of Irving Berlin's famous "Russian Lullaby"! The tantalizing, irresistible strains seemed to throw a spell over the guests.

I forgot Bob's astonishment—forgot the glow of admiration in Helen's eyes. On and on I played—losing myself in my music—until thunderous applause shook the room.

That brought me to myself with a start. For the rest of the evening I was the lion of the party.

Bob could hardly restrain his curiosity until we were safely home.

"Why didn't you tell me you knew how to play? When did you learn?"

"You never asked whether I knew how to play," I countered.

"Of course not! Last summer you didn't know one n from another—how was I to gu you'd blossomed into an accomplisl pianist overnight?"

"Not overnight, exactly!" I smil "Although it almost seemed tl way! Remember that Free Dem stration Lesson in music I sent last summer? Well, when it came a I saw how easy it was to learn wi out a teacher I sent for the compl course. It's great! Why, almost bef I knew it, I was playing simple tun I can play *anything* now.

"So you real'y *are* an 'accomp'ish pianist! The joke's on me, all righ

"Oh, I wouldn't say 'accomplished I laughed. "But enough of a pian to get a lot more fun out of life th I used to!"

* * *

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