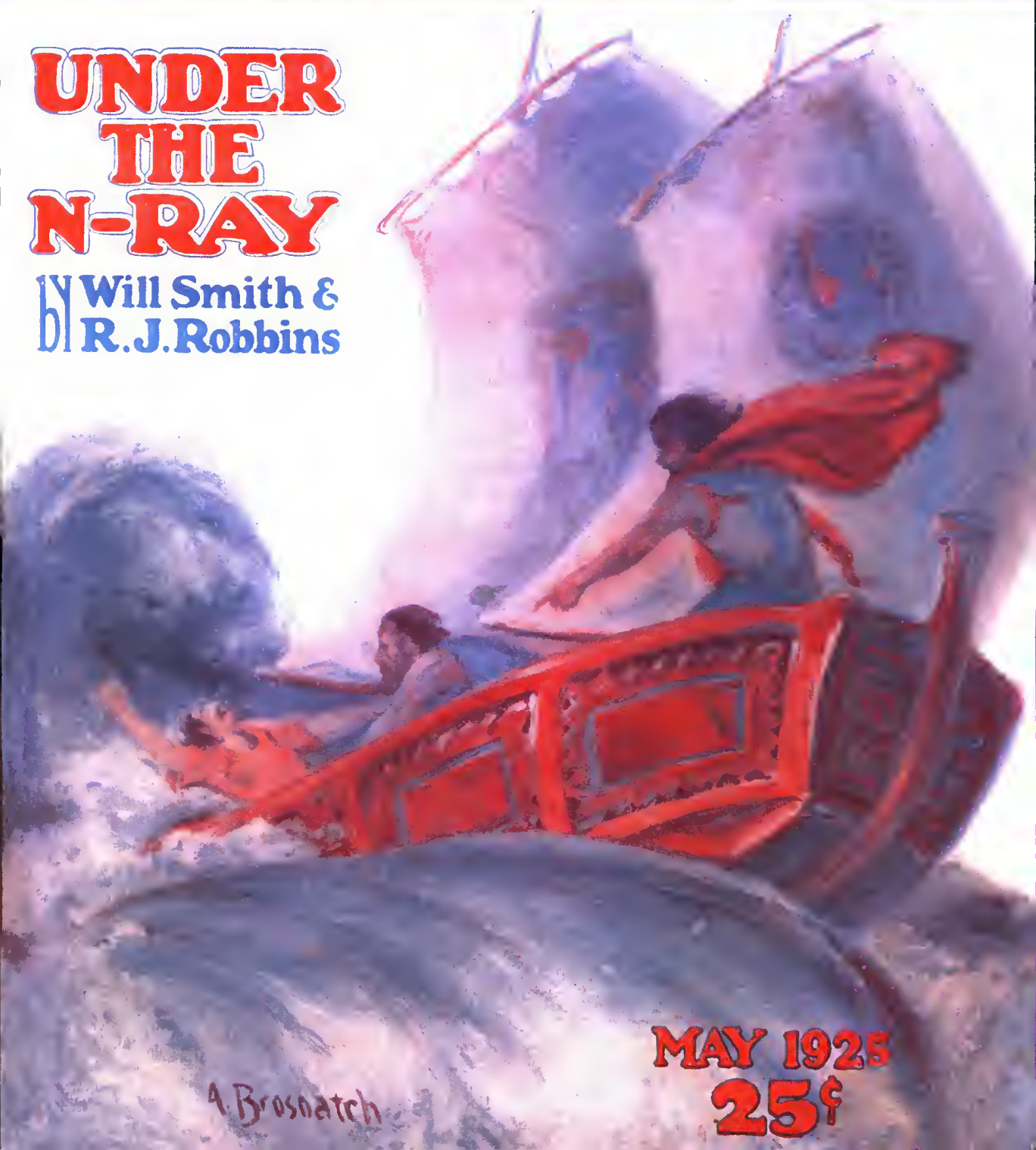
Weird Tales

THE UNIQUE MAGAZINE

UNDER THE N-RAY

by Will Smith & R. J. Robbins



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"I CAN'T say the little party sounds alluring, or even interesting," said Hodge, with some obvious attempt to sidetrack the invitation. "I have attended these affairs before and invariably found them to be but repetitions of the time-honored table-walking and spirit-rapping that seem to be the medium's stock in trade. Can't you have a heart, Doc, and tell Madam What's-her-name that I have an important assignment slated for tonight and can't possibly make it?"

"I could do that very thing, Hodge; but I'm not going to. I made Madam Losieva a very definite promise that you would be present, and that settles it. Furthermore, I can assure you that her demonstration of the psychic forces will be vastly different from what you expect. It should provide you with some wonderful 'copy' for your paper—if you can obtain her permission to publish the details."

I was smiling, but insistent. Hodge made an impatient gesture, following it up with a characteristic shrug of resignation.

"Well, I suppose I'm elected to accompany you, though the Lord in heaven knows I'm fed up on such truck. Anyone else going along?"

The young reporter for the *Clarion* asked the question listlessly. I almost relented when I sensed his point of view. He so clearly expected a dry, uninteresting evening. Had I known the fearful termination it was to have I would have done all in my power to keep him away.

Poor Hodge! For twelve long years he was my crony, and I find it difficult to speak of him without emotion. In a way, I feel responsible for what came about, even though I did not set in motion directly the forces which wrecked his mind and transformed him into a beast.

Just how two men of such differing temperaments and tastes could get along so well together has always been a mystery to me. It is a solemn fact, however, that I have dragged him, time after time, into my library and talked Einstein, psychanalysis or some other abstruse subject into him by the hour; and only rarely would he make a break of some kind to indicate his complete ignorance of the subject on which I was expatiating. My turn generally came swiftly enough, though. He was ever liable to tire of my line and ask me abruptly

my opinion as to the probable outcome of the Haley-Brennan bout, or if the Giants had a chance for the pennant this season. Or it might be that the conversation would turn to cars. We both had them—he a speedster, while I made use of a more dignified vehicle befitting my calling as a physician.

"Unless I am greatly mistaken, you will find yourself in rather select company," I had answered his query. "Let's see. Besides ourselves Madam Losieva has invited Professor Johnson, the psychologist; Olean Davies, the radio expert; Dr. Wilbur Holmes; Amos Cronkhite, the astronomer, and his young assistant, Larry Dinsmore; Homer Day, editor of the *Argus;* and thirty or forty others whose names I can't recall. I think those I have mentioned will make it obvious enough that this is no ordinary spiritualistic performance. I understand there will be a few ladies present, and needless to say you are to be on your best behavior. I am well acquainted with your propensities where the fair sex is concerned."

"You said a real mouthful then, Doc," approved the irrepressible reporter, grinning. Unblushingly he helped himself to one of my private cigars.

"I forgot to tell you," I said, "that our friend Roger Norton is going to attend—at the insistence of his daughter, Emily—so you will have someone to talk to while the program is on."

"Aha!"

"Madam Losieva is carrying out this experiment in collaboration with a Professor Ember, who is unknown locally. Just what the nature of the work is to be she refuses to divulge, but from the hints of my colleagues it will be a sensation. Be here promptly at 8:15. I shall be waiting for you, and Madam Losieva is apt to be annoyed if we are not punctual."

"I'll be on the dot, Doc. That is, if—well, you know."

YES; I knew. He would be prompt unless—it rained. When that happened, no promise was binding on Jack Hodge. All the galoshes in Christendom could not tempt the man to step out into the mildest drizzle. If his house were on fire I honestly believe he would burn to death rather than go out into a shower—unless firemen should play the hose near him. In that case—well, he would seek the location most remotely removed from water.

Hodge never drank water; he never bathed in water without first coloring it enough to make it look like something else; he would not cross a bridge over water without keeping his eyes tightly shut; the sight of a boat made him feel faint.

The *Clarion* people used at first to chaff him about his weakness; then they threatened. Hodge used to try honestly to conquer it, but his attempts always ended in nervous nausea followed by a fit of patently genuine illness. He gave up trying long ago. Being normal in every other way and a crackerjack news getter withal, the reporter held his job. The newspaper people at last recognized Hodge's morbid dread of water for the uncontrollable thing it was. As Hodge's physician, I called it congenital hydrophobia.

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I SHALL not soon forget the peculiar sensation that came over me as I took my seat well to the front of the steadily growing assemblage in the séance chamber. Whether it was the atmosphere of strained expectancy that hung over all, or whether it was the weird aspect of the place, I cannot tell. The atmosphere was somber in the extreme, reminding me of that of certain radio broadcasting stations

I had visited. The walls were hung on all sides with heavy draperies of black cloth, which effectually excluded all sight and sound of the world outside. The only illumination was furnished by a single bulb in the center of the black ceiling. The rays from this, filtering through a glass dome of a beautiful pearl tint, cast a pale glow over the assemblage. Involuntarily my mind took in the stage management of the experiment, and I found myself admiring its simplicity.

Directly in front of the audience was a small, slightly raised platform, obviously of temporary construction, on which was nothing more than two ordinary-looking chairs. On the wall beyond this stage was a large white screen somewhat similar to those to be found in moving picture theaters.

I had not long to wonder at my surroundings, for I was shortly aroused by a commotion at the rear.

Madam Losieva had entered. She was accompanied by a slight, wiry man of rather more than the medium height, quietly but expensively dressed, and plainly of a nervous mien. I had never set eyes on this man before, and I surveyed his features with an eager curiosity. Though I never saw him again after that tragic night, I still remember vividly the wide-set eyes reduced to minute dots by the immense, deeply concave spectacles he wore; the quick, darting glances he bent here and there as he scanned the faces of those present, and the impressive appearance created by a small, well-kept goatee which from time to time he stroked in abstraction.

And what of Madam Losieva herself? Just how can I give an adequate description of this colossus of mentality, this woman who has amazed the scientists of two continents with her exploits in the occult? To begin with, I may say her whole figure and personality belied the impression one had gained from reading of her accomplishments and methods. Where I expected a tall, stately woman, I beheld the exact antithesis.

The psychic was rather small in stature and well formed, and might reasonably have been of any age from twenty-eight to thirty-five. Her hair was the jet black so common in women of her race, and was done up in the simplest manner, parted exactly in the middle and combed out perfectly straight. The strands had been gathered up in two large knots, worn pendent over either ear. The features were quite strongly Russian, although a strange line of the eyes—was it the slightest bit of a slant?—hinted at a strain of the Mongolian. And what eyes they were!

As she passed down the aisle she swept the gathering with a single all-embracing glance; and as her eyes met mine for the briefest fraction of a second I involuntarily shivered. It was as if I had recognized a will mightier than my own; or was it a flashing premonition of what was to come? At any rate she exercised somewhat the same effect on all those present. Of a sudden the sounds of whispered conversation died out. The silence of the place became absolute.

At the rear Professor Ember—for it was he who had entered with Losieva—was busying himself with a complicated piece of apparatus completely covering a large, specially constructed table. The thing combined all the more salient features of a modern radio receiving set with those of a moving picture machine. Some features even brought to mind the apparatus used in taking X-ray pictures. Just how that conglomeration of wires, switches, bulbs and dials functioned to produce the extraordinary results I am about to chronicle, a good many of the scientists there present would give much to know. But the secret is locked in the bosom of Professor Ember; and that gentle-

man, though doubtless alive, is keeping well out of sight.

THE hush that had come over the assemblage remained unbroken as the great Losieva began a few preliminary words of explanation.

"Friends, the select few to whom I have extended invitations are present tonight to witness an epoch-marking experiment—a demonstration which, if successful, will cause a complete revision of our ideas on certain subjects. For instance, what do we know of the possibility of life in the hereafter? What is the connection, if any there be, between those now living and those dead? What do we know of our previous cycles of existence? Of what transcendent heights of accomplishment is the human brain capable?

"Has any of us lived in another period? You answer, no. But are you positive that your brain cannot, under a sufficiently powerful stimulus, be made to remember strange things? With Professor Ember, who has kindly agreed to collaborate, I shall endeavor to disprove several fallacies of science which have long been regarded as indisputable facts.

"Perhaps one of the most fascinating of the dreams which sometimes come to us is that of an apparatus to bridge the gap separating us from the remote past. To the possessor of such a wonderful contrivance nothing that has ever happened could be hidden. The solutions to the world's most ancient secrets would become common knowledge.

"The mystery of life, the lost tribes of Israel, the wonder of the early ages of the earth, the secrets of the mighty empire of the Incas—nothing could escape our eyes. The hideous monsters of the Reptilian Age would flash before our gaze, not as pictures painted by some highly imaginative artist, but rather as flesh-and-blood realities.

"Although the future may hold the solution, in the light of present-day discoveries we must brand this dream as impossible of accomplishment in its entirety. However, we have a substitute offered us even now. This is made possible through the untiring labors of Professor Ember. The secret of his invention cannot yet be made public, and I may not give details as to its operation. Suffice it to say that the apparatus has a dual identity. It consists of a manufactory for the N-ray, which stimulates the memory, and the thought projector to make the mind pictures visible to spectators.

"With the kind permission of all present we will give a demonstration which will convince the most skeptical of the absolutely authentic results obtained. Professor Ember!"

The pearl-colored dome died swiftly, and amid a chorus of subdued exclamations the room became blackness. At once a ray of unearthly light leapt into being, piercing the darkness like a great sword. The shaft was of no tint that I can name. The word "unearthly" to my mind quite accurately describes it. As it swung hither and yon, the brilliant beam played on the head of one, then another of the spectators. Finally it came to rest on an aspiring young chemist at my right, a fat fellow named Chester Tubbs.

WHAT followed was the most curious effect I have ever seen, though phenomena perhaps similar have been noted by experimenters with radium rays. We are told by such scientists that practically all substances are radioactive in some degree, but it would have taken considerable argument to convince me that Chet Tubbs' anatomy could come under this category. Yet the bald fact remains that no sooner had the mysterious ray struck upon the fat gentleman's head than that member took on a most peculiar appearance.

Could it be that Tubbs' hair was standing stiffly on end? But hair does not grow to a length of a foot on the head of the average male American. How, then, to account for the pale streamers of light which emanated from the skull in all directions? The rising and dimming brilliance of the aura suggested the familiar aurora borealis. The young man seemed to sense something wrong, although as yet the incident meant nothing to him but the playing of strong light upon the back of his head.

The psychic again addressed the crowd.

"You have seen the peculiar effect of Professor Ember's N-ray," she began, speaking from the darkness. It was evident the thing was only beginning. "Now, if the gentleman will kindly step to the front a moment I shall ask him to be a martyr, in a way of speaking, to the thought projector. But it is only to the extent of acting as my subject for a few moments. No, Mr. Tubbs, you are not going to be mesmerized."

Somewhat doubtfully the chemist got to his feet and moved down the aisle. Guided by Professor Ember, the ray continued to play on his cranium. Many were the titters from the women, and from several of the male element came chuckles of amusement at the ludicrous pictures.

Tubbs reached the stage, and at a word from the psychic took a seat at the side of the screen.

"Mr. Tubbs, you are doubtless still under the impression I am going to mesmerize you. Please rid yourself of the idea, for all that I desire to do at this time is demonstrate the workings of Professor Ember's thought projector. I shall ask you to concentrate for a moment on that which is now uppermost in your mind. Pay no attention to me or anyone else."

As she finished a second ray of light went stabbing across the blackness toward the white screen. This became fully illuminated, and of all things I had expected to find depicted thereon—! For a brief instant there was a complete silence; then came a roar of laughter from the crowd, in which even Tubbs had to join. On the screen was a perfect picture—a close-up view of a snowy-white expanse of table cloth, a confusion of dishes and silverware, and a great, heaping platterful of corned beef and cabbage!

This was practically the only laugh during the whole program. The rest was serious enough, heaven knows.

Now the preliminary demonstration was over; and, amid considerable chaffing from his friends, the young chemist resumed his seat. The real séance was about to commence.

Right here I began to get nervous, half wishing I had remained at home myself. I began to sense impending trouble, if not a downright disaster. I cannot say just what caused this feeling—call it presentiment if you will—but remember that of a sudden I felt a wild desire to bolt the place. Turning slightly in my seat I nudged my companion. As I had expected, he was already engaged in a whispered conversation with a pulchritudinous blond—Emily Norton, whom I have mentioned previously. She was on very intimate terms with Hodge, and my existence was for the nonce a subject of total indifference. I turned away and gave myself up to the rest of the program.

"We are now in a position to continue the experiment," Madam Losieva was saying. "As I mentioned before, we have no apparatus that will enable us to plunge into the past directly; but by means of certain forces which I control in conjunction with the thought projector and through a voluntary subject, we can reproduce on this screen various incidents of the subject's past cycles of existence. These will appear almost exactly as in the ordinary moving picture, with the exception that all

details will be in their natural colors. Of course no films or slides will be used. The original vibrations from which the pictures are created are supplied solely from the subconscious mind of the subject. In order to get this effect in any degree, we have found it necessary to put the energizing brain into a state of hypnosis. In such a condition and under proper manipulation there seems to be no demand to which the mind will not respond. The brain best suited to our purpose we must select by a scientific test. It is hoped that no one of those present will object to becoming the subject if called upon to do so.

"To those who have qualms in the matter let me give assurance that no harm can possibly attend your entrance into the hypnotic state. However, to make sure of no accident I shall ask Dr. Maugridge, who is known to all of yon, to keep a sharp observation of the pulse and respiration throughout the duration of the experiment."

She paused expectantly as if she thought possibly some voice would be raised in protest. I thonght of objecting to the part in the proceedings she had so coolly assigned to me. But I had no tangible reason. The silence continued unbroken. Losieva gave a signal to her assistant.

AGAIN the N-ray came flashing through the gloom. This time I noticed it was rapidly dancing around the head of everyone in the room, resting momentarily on each one, but ever passing on. Again I endeavored to assign some definite color to it. All I could think of was possibly green, or au allied tint. Or was it pink? No, it wasn't that; nor was it green after all. It was not white light; assuredly it had a color. I have often thought that if I knew the color of evil I could name the color of that shaft.

The infernal radiance was swinging toward my side of the room. At times the corona effect would spring up from certain heads, but thus far the only one to produce a really noticeable aura was that of Chet Tubbs. Apparently even he had not satisfied Losieva, for still the ray searched and searched. . . .

I thought of vaudeville shows where I had seen the spotlight thrown upon singers and other performers. Was I to be the star actor in this particular show? I had not long to ponder, for now the baleful ray swept directly toward me. It came nearer—nearer. . . . I became conscious of an impending panic within myself. I sought to avoid coming under the all-searching glare by leaning sidewise in my seat. Too late! I felt my countenance bathed by the hateful effulgence. At once I began to experience most peculiar sensations.

The séance hall, the crowd, Hodge and all faded swiftly from my field of vision. I was for the moment in a different world. For one thing, I could have sworn that I was standing at the curb of a curiously paved street—a street totally different from any with which I was acquainted. I cannot explain where I got my impressions, as the whole experience lasted but a second. But I can state definitely that it was one in a vastly different period of time. I remember that I received a glimpse of several persons on horseback. And I will take my oath they were soldiers in *armor!*

The next moment the ray had darted to another spot, and the spectral scene vanished. What was the meaning of this strange vision? Was it a sudden lapse into a previous life, a reversion to some long forgotten ego? Who knows? Professor Ember never explained the properties of the N-ray to me for the very good reason that he never had the opportunity. And now I don't want to know.

The beam had found another victim. With a tingling along my spine I saw that it rested on the head

of Jack Hodge. But with what a different result! An exclamation of utter awe burst from the whole assemblage.

As the ray touched the reporter's countenance it seemed as if a peculiar aura of green-shot purple burst into being all about his head. It reminded me of the effect sometimes obtained from high tension apparatus such as Tesla coils, or the familiar Oudin resonators. Beside the present display the aura given off by the chemist's brain shrank into insignificance. I realized as I beheld it that the psychic would look no farther for her subject.

The next instant I turned and laid restraining hands on my companion. Evidently the ray had had somewhat the same effect upon him as upon me. Almost with the instant it flashed full upon him, he gave vent to a most inhuman growl, and his face became strangely contorted. Remembering the vision that had come to me during the time the ray had played about my brain, I did not hesitate in acting. For the space of several seconds I experienced the sensation of struggling with a madman or with an ape. Perspiration broke out all over me. The reporter's strength under this unnatural stimulus was tremendous.

Now the N-ray had disappeared; Hodge relaxed limply in my hands and staggered to his chair. "Lord, Doc; I could have sworn—" Before he could finish the thought half uttered, the bulb in the ceiling flashed on, and the great medium was speaking.

"The test is ended; we believe we have located a subject who will react favorably. His brain aura under test shows great sensitivity and response to the psychological manipulations which are so necessary to a really successful demonstration. Of course any person in the audience would make a passable subject; that is, we could always get some results. But it is a lamentable fact that in most cases a subject picked at random could progress backward but one or two cycles before the pictures on the screen would become very indistinct.

"I should explain here, perhaps, that my control extends beyond the subject's physical brain to the astral double of that brain. And on that double are impressed undimmed the experiences of the ego through all its cycles of existence. But not all subjects have so close a connection between the physical brain and the astral.

"In the case of Mr. Hodge I hope to show you five or six cycles of his life periods before his mental effort weakens—or my control ceases. The balance of the program depends on his willingness to undergo a half hour or so under hypnosis."

This last was addressed more to Hodge than to the general assemblage. I looked at the unlucky reporter. Clearly he was still in somewhat of a daze, and I felt a nameless kind of pity for him. Yes, I had to admit it to myself; Hodge, the man who held a reputation as the most aggressive reporter on the *Clarion's* staff, was giving every evidence of going into a blue funk!

I had anticipated some sort of scene from him, but the reporter remained meek and inert. Madam Losieva was talking to him in a smoothly modulated tone which was having an oddly quieting effect upon him. He was drinking in her every word with an intenseness almost ludicrous. And as she talked on, the voice took on a peculiar monotony of cadence—a singsong tone if you will—and I rather fell under its spell myself.

Of a sudden I gave a start as I gazed at Hodge. Was he getting popeyed? That queer glint as the light struck his eyeballs and reflected into my own! The light? It was that of

the N-ray. The other light—that from the pearly dome—was all but gone.

That stare—Losieva's voice has sunk to a barely perceptible murmur. The silence is intense—it is a palpable thing—Hodge's head is still held stiffly upright, but his eyes—the psychic has directed them to the dying glow in the ceiling—they are rolling upward—.

"Sleep, sleep—you are to dream of the past;—deep, deep slumber—. Sleep with your eyes on your dreams —deep— sleep— deep— deep— sleep —" The chamber was swept by the long, soughing aspirations of the drugged.

Too easily I can recall that dread scene—the tense little throng of spectators—the slight, sinuous figure of the mystic—the weird light of the N-ray—the unconscious form of my poor friend. Dimly seen, the huddle suggested not a living thing, but a statue of pitch-black clay. The eyes gleamed out as gray-white sculptures, gazing at that which statues see.

3

"I SHALL require a little assistance from one or two gentlemen. I desire that Mr. Hodge be placed in a chair on the left hand end of the stage, in a sitting position."

Norton and I volunteered for the service, and shortly the subject was so placed as to be dully perceptible to the whole assemblage. Taking a position near by, I noted the pulse and respiration. Beyond a barely noticeable decrease in the rise and fall of the abdomen, I could not thus far detect any abnormal conditions. I was thoroughly alive to the possibilities of the situation, however. As I resumed my chair I resolved there should be no unnecessary risks.

Certain grating and rustling sounds coming from the rear of the chamber told me that Professor Ember was making further adjustments to his apparatus. The inevitable sound of excited whispers came from all directions. The voice of Madam Losieva could be heard softly addressing the subject. Hodge remained immovable, rigid, as the baleful effulgence continued to scintillate in minute pinpoints of ghastly radiance. The reporter's colorless countenance, bathed and aureoled by the brilliancy, gave a grotesque suggestion of the man in the moon. But no one laughed.

"You may start the projector now if you wish, Professor Ember." The medium still used the monotonous quality of voice that had overcome the reporter. Was the tone used merely to preserve the general atmosphere of the séance, or was it that Losieva feared her subject's awaking? I do not know. Certain it is that no telltale tremors of the reporter's body were transmitted to my fingers as I touched him gingerly. His was the stiffness of the dead. Better had my friend been dead in actuality.

I was aroused to a realization that things were happening, by chorused exclamations from all sides. I glanced in the direction of the screen. A hazy something was slowly but definitely taking form before us. Nebulous and indistinct, it wavered and flickered, every moment growing clearer. Finally it resolved itself into the image of a human being. It was a very lifelike reproduction of the medium herself.

For a moment I had an idea that the operator might be making use of a slide, in some final adjustment to his mechanism, but on glancing in the direction of the machine I found that the professor was nowhere near it. Evidently satisfied that the apparatus would take care of itself for the time being, he had taken a seat among the lookers-on. The movement on the screen suddenly quieted and the form of Losieva stood out sharply, limned on dazzling white. Perhaps the most

curious feature of the picture was its total lack of any background.

"The picture before you," began the great psychic, "is not a stereopticon slide as some of you may think, but rather is a picture that exists in the brain of the subject. As you can perceive, he is under complete hypnosis. Although conscious in one sense of the word, he is unable to move a muscle or perform any of the ordinary functions of life without controlling suggestions. His brain is now in such a condition that it can entertain but one thought impulse at a time. At present his mind is completely given over to one image, which is necessarily uppermost—the picture of myself. This picture will remain stationary until I cause him to exert his mind in other directions. Even though the ramifications of the average human brain are almost limitless, I hope to show very shortly that Mr. Hodge's mental power is quite exceptional.

"Please do not be surprized at times if the subject talks aloud and in unknown tongues. As far as I know he is unacquainted with any language other than English, but we may hear strange things. The subject's present ego is of the American nationality, but who can tell what the previous ones have been?

"The fact that there is no background shown on the screen while the image of myself is quite clear, indicates that the mind of the subject has no conception of his present surroundings. Yet it retains a sharply defined image of the agency which caused his state of suspended animation.

"John Hodge," addressing the still form in the chair, "do you know where you are?"

"Yes," came the answer in a dead, colorless voice. I shivered.

"Where?"

"In the séance chambers of Losieva, the psychic."

As he spoke there was a slight, a very slight, tremor of the aura about his head. Simultaneously the picture on the screen dimmed slightly, and other things began to come into view—a table, a chair, and a very good likeness of myself and of one or two of the other persons present who had happened to come under the reporter's attention.

An embarrassed little exclamation escaped from the magnate's daughter and chuckles emanated from several of the older persons present as Emily Norton's picture suddenly flashed conspicuously into view. Momentarily it outshone even the previously predominant image of the medium. The latter evidently feared loss of control over her subject, for she (rather hastily it seemed to me) began to voice a series of questions. The subject answered them all in the same lifeless tone.

As he made his answers, scene after scene slithered into view before us, remained for an instant, and as swiftly faded as new ideas were continually introduced. The strain was beginning to tell on the relentless psychic. Occasionally, when a desired answer was not immediately forthcoming, her voice would break with impatience. As she continued her apparently aimless interrogations it slowly dawned on me that she was striving to call to the subject's mind events of years before.

I REMEMBER one scene reproduced very vividly, one which I noted with more than casual interest. It dealt with a boyhood quarrel in which Hodge was badly beaten by a much bigger boy. I was little stronger or older than he, but I remember of injecting my presence—and fists—into the conflict to such good effect that the enemy finally beat an inglorious retreat. I was startled to see this scene re-enacted with absolute distinctness and fidelity of detail, even

to school buildings aud neighborhood fences.

"You may wonder," interpolated Losieva, "why, if these are really pictures that the subject's eye has imprinted upon his brain—why tho scenes do not appear as he actually saw them. You see, when Mr. Hodge was knocked down in the fight we have witnessed, he did not see himself go down. He saw, rather, the ground come up—or perhaps his eyes were really closed, aud he saw nothing. But in retrospect we picture events as we believe they occurred, casting our own figure in with the other actors. In other words, these are scenes not as registered by the subject's physical eye at the time of enactment, but rather as seen by his mental eye at this moment.

"This psychological bent is most fortunate for our experiment. Without it, we should be unable to see the subject himself on the screen—our point of vantage would always be the subject's eyes. As it is, we are given the point of view of an entirely detached spectator—or of a motion picture camera."

The medium may have said more, but if so I did not hear it. My mind was elsewhere. I was being entertained, to my consternation, by a very realistic repetition of my own wedding—at which I got most gloriously drunk. This scene was greeted by a ripple of laughter. Most of the audience were personal acquaintances and could appreciate the humor of the situation—for them. I remember a feeling of intense gratification at the extreme darkness of the room.

I shall not attempt to mention all the scenes that followed. There passed several of relative unimportance, and then came the most remarkable one so far. This one gave us a passing glimpse of an infant lying in bed beside the quiet form of Hodge's mother. The child could not have been more than two days old. The woman was easily recognized. And Mrs. Hodge had but one child!

I gasped. By no other means could all this have been produced save by exercise of an abnormal stimulus over the man's own memory. If his memory could be sent back so far as this, what of the man's life before birth? Did the ego extend back beyond that? Did the subconscious brain hold memories of a former ego? If so, then—. I shuddered for the hundredth time.

Losieva's voice became audible, her words uncannily in line with my thoughts. The voice was now soft, crooning.

"You are now but the embryo of a man, without material brain or incarnation. The present cycle, the eleventh of human existence, has become as nothing to you. Back, now, to the tenth cycle. I desire to know your identity and under what circumstances you lived in that cycle. Think; think, and allow no detail to escape you in this—. Ah-h-h!"

The screen became a confused blur as seemingly thousands of indistinct, shadowy images flitted past us like gray ghosts in a fog. Some would be startlingly vivid for a brief instant, then flash away as quickly as they had appeared. At one time I seemed to perceive the reporter in all the regalia of an Indian chieftain; again he appeared in the guise of a printer in a very ancient-looking establishment; still another—no more than a flash this time—showed us a densly packed mass of struggling men, of which the subject was the center of interest. By the uniforms worn by the contending forces and by the comparatively ancient type of weapons, it was a scene which took place during the Civil War.

"Come, come, Mr. Hodge!" the medium snapped. "These scenes are too indistinct to be genuine. Your material brain is struggling with the astral. Forget the physical brain—it

cannot hold memories of events before your birth. It is trumping up scenes now that have been impressed on it only yesterday—things of the history books John Hodge has read. Let the astral memory have sway. That's it!"

THE visions so rapidly flitting by had suddenly crystallized into a picture of cameo distinctness. This one was far different from any of its predecessors and quite clearly indicated a period of remotest antiquity. Indeed, from evidence gleaned from later developments, I should judge it to be laid in the time of King Arthur.

The scene depicted the interior of a room, or cell. From the pronounced concavity of the walls and the rough stonework I concluded that it was the interior of a fairly large castle tower. The furniture reminded me strongly of pieces I had encountered in museums. The room, untenanted at first view, suddenly became occupied. So quickly had the new picture flashed into being that I was given no opportunity to see just how the emaciated man seated at the table had entered.

One look at this fellow was sufficient. The whole form showed the ravages of starvation; the cheeks were sunken, the arms wasted away. Tattered raiment hung on the feeble frame like the vestments of a scarecrow. But for all this I knew the man in such evil case to be Jack Hodge.

Dropping horrified eyes to the flagged floor, I noted another distressing fact. I was sure now that this was the interior of a prison cell, for shackled to the prisoner's leg was a massive iron ball which he was forced to roll in order to move about. The point of view shifting rapidly, I got fleeting glimpses of a small, square window set high in the concave wall and well protected by both vertical and horizontal bars. Clearly, escape from such a place was hopeless.

The prisoner was spending most of his time at the table, working with quill and parchment. Feverishly he worked, ever and anon casting anxious glances in the direction of a heavy oaken door, the one entrance. A parchment filled, he would move with laborious haste to the window and, having made the scroll into as tight a package as possible, throw it into the outer air. In most cases the wind would catch it and whirl it away. What his object could be I could not fathom, unless he were endeavoring to acquaint persons outside with his whereabouts.

Picture after picture came into being only to fade into obscurity. I judged the series to cover a considerable space of time. All the scenes showed the hapless captive ever toiling at his parchments. It could be seen that hope was failing him. Before our eyes he grew more and more feeble and emaciated.

There came a time when the oaken barrier slowly opened, and a file of men in armor entered, carrying huge swords and battleaxes. They removed the ball from the wretch's ankle and dragged him, struggling in feeble strength, down a winding stairway. At length the frenzy of despair subsided, and the man allowed himself to be led along unprotesting.

I watched the execution party—such I felt it to be—proceed down flight after flight of worn stone stairs. Such a multitude of flights there were, indeed, that I began to wonder. Why did they not reach the ground level? Downward and ever downward they went; I wished I had counted the flights. The prison cell must have been the topmost room in a veritable Tower of Babel, or—. Or had the party passed the ground level long ago? I believed the passage they now entered was one of a system of subterranean corridors.

There was nothing to confirm this belief except perhaps the rough

masonry everywhere in evidence. That told little, however, being illuminated fitfully at best by the guards' torches. Evidently in a hurry to get the thing over with as soon as possible, the soldiers strode along at a great pace. At length they came to the end of the corridor and stepped quite without warning into broad daylight. I now saw that the passage was indeed a tunnel, ending in the side of a rocky hill. The entranceway was protected against attack by a large, heavily barred gate, on each side of which stood a sentry in armor. As the party passed through this portal, both sentries raised their right hands stiffly in salute, then slammed the gate shut.

Finding himself in the bright daylight that had so long been denied him, the captive renewed his struggles to escape, once succeeding indeed in wrenching himself free. But upon finding himself surrounded by relentless warriors he gave up sullenly and was dragged into the mouth of another tunnel close at hand.

This one proved to be shorter than the first and terminated in a small, cylindrical chamber with a domelike roof. The flare of several torches held in cressets here and there showed the set, grim faces of two men who stood silently awaiting the doomed man. They were dressed in the coarse black robes worn by the ancient monks. What sect they represented I cannot guess; but surely such evil faces could belong to no Christian priests. As I surveyed the sinister pair I shuddered. Their aspect was in complete accord with their surroundings. I hope never to witness another such spectacle as I shortly was to see.

Upon entering the death chamber, the leader of the armed men performed the customary salute and signaled to the two soldiers who held the prisoner in an iron grip. At his word they dragged the cowering wretch forward and flung him down before the two somber ones. One of these advanced a single step and rapidly administered the last rites of his religion—whatever that religion was. Meanwhile the other made certain preparations. A table of unusual length and with ponderously heavy legs he ordered dragged forward and placed in the center of the room. One at each corner of the table and fastened securely to the legs by means of heavy staples, were four iron rings. A torture table!

At a word from the leader, four men leapt upon the shrinking victim and once more bore him to the floor. I boiled at this utterly unnecessary cruelty. Surely the man's meager reserve of strength was about exhausted. Nevertheless he struggled in futile desperation until might prevailed, and he was placed, writhing and twisting, upon the horrible table

The séance audience gave signs of a growing uneasiness. More than once the psychic had to speak sharply to insure absolute silence, explaining that it was in the interests of the subject. Indeed he was being subjected to a terrific strain, his life forces taxed to the uttermost.

THE rest of the ghastly drama of the tenth cycle I shall record as quickly as possible. Even now, as I recall it, I feel a deadly nausea overcoming me. Let me get it over with, once and for all.

The prisoner was laid flat on his back; his limbs were drawn out and down to the four iron rings and lashed there with rawhide thongs. His face, contorted by fear and realization of the inevitable, became a thing of horror. Several soldiers withdrew, each to return bearing a bucket of water. One of the priests removed from a peg in the wall a huge metal funnel, which he examined for a moment with an evil smile. Now, being careful to keep out of the victim's limited field of vision, he crept up toward the table.

My God! How can I go on?

Before I had time to shudder, the prisoner's jaws were sprung wide apart—by a deft pressure of finger tips on certain nerve centers in the face—and the horrible funnel thrust between the teeth. The writhings of the doomed man now commenced anew; the black-robed executioner had some ado to maintain the nnusual instrument of death in position. A soldier came forward and, standing close, glared into the prisoner's eyes with the gleeful hate of a maniac. Suddenly he reached down, grasped a brimming pail and thrust it high over his head. A moment he poised it there; then slowly, carefnlly, he lowered the forward edge. Without spilling so much as a drop, he poured the whole of the great bucketful into the trembling funnel. This man's expertness bespoke long, loving service of a similar nature, for most of the several others to pour bungled the job badly. One man spilled half a pailful in his nervousness.

As the water forced its relentless way into the victim's body, his eyes bulged wildly from their sockets, and his fettered limbs became as flails. Another pail was raised on high—the priest holding the funnel with both hands now in a deadly grip—another pail—my God!—the pictures became but a mass of throbbing, pulsing waves of shadow—or was it?—I had fainted.

4

EVIDENTLY my brief lapse had not been observed in the general gloom of the place. As I came to I heard as from a distance the voice of Madam Losieva.

"Deeper, deeper," she was saying, "into the ages. Tell me what you see in your ninth cycle. You are going back—back—. Think deeply, sleep deeper—. Now—."

The pictures were again rushing by at a tremendous rate, presenting for the most part a confused blur. But after a time they began to slow down as before, until finally they could be followed fairly well.

"Doctor Maugridge!" Losieva called out sharply.

The anxiety in her tone cleared the last of my brain fog. She pointed, and I hastened to see to the subject. He was breathing stertorously, but the heart action still appeared normal. I nodded a reluctant okeh—I had no really sensible reason to disapprove—and was about to resume my seat when I noted that Hodge's lips were moving. Wondering if he were not struggling against his mental fetters, I pointed mutely at his face to draw Losieva's attention.

"Speak, if in that way you can more readily recall the past," she suggested to the tranced form. "The effort is great, but you are equal to it and more. You are now existing in your ninth cycle, before the days of the water torture."

At this suggestion a visible tremor passed over Hodge's body.

"Ah-h—. Slower please; we cannot follow you at all. Fine!"

Almost upon the heels of the suggestion to speak enunciated by the medium, the reporter did a thing I have never been able to explain satisfactorily to myself or anybody else. He raised himself slightly on one elbow and passed his hand—which before had been rigid as so much stone—before his eyes, clearly in an effort to think.

At once he began to talk, but in an absolutely unknown jargon. The pictures simultaneously became more vivid and coherent, and it was not difficult to form a fairly good connection between them. From time to time Professor Ember at the machine made slight adjustments calculated to keep the N-ray at full intensity on its object. The weird aura continued to stream unabated from Hodge's head.

Clearly the ninth cycle had been spent in a far different clime than the tenth. In place of the English castle with its torture room and horrible black-robed priests was a picture of a tropical region. In the immediate foreground could be seen a sharply sloping river bank covered with lush vegetation. Farther back, the soil had a sandy aspect, and here and there protruded a boulder badly eroded from centuries of contact with the elements. A number of lofty palms in the distance completed the picture.

The point of view must have been located on the river itself. As the scene clarified I made out the outlines of a galley; now the lines of the deck planking became apparent. Soon about a score of people of both sexes were to be seen aboard. Some were walking along the deck, but the greater part lolled on the profusion of many-colored cushions in attitudes of indolent ease. Some of them strummed idly on peculiar stringed instruments, while others wove garlands of beautiful blossoms with which they gayly bedecked each other.

The center of attraction was a young woman who reclined languidly under a striped canopy. Like the others her skin was dark, although it was not black like that of her scantily clad Nubian slaves which were in some evidence. Rather it might have been termed a light olive. Her hair, of a jetty black, was smooth and silky, and dressed in the familiar bobbed mode of the ancient Egyptians. Her form was slight but willowy, and the contour of beautifully rounded breasts and wide hips partially revealed aroused all the artistic instinct within me.

At her side lolled a handsome youth. While most of those in the party suggested in costumes and facial expression the ancient people of the Nile, this youth was clearly of a different race. His skin was nearly pure white, and his robes suggested nothing of the Egyptian. Rather was he a Greek, or mayhap a Roman. Yes; surely that was it. Those severely plain accouterments were reminiscent of High School days when I, finding my Latin study period too long for concentrated thinking, had amused myself by looking at the colored illustrations. Well I remembered that short toga or tunic, the sandals and the shortsword.

Did I neglect to say the man's face was identical with that of Jack Hodge? I had noted the fact without surprize.

I did feel a pang at having to be a mere spectator while my crony made love to Cleopatra. I felt not the slightest doubt that the lovely creature in the center of the screen was that wicked queen. Which one of her lovers Jack had been I cannot guess. History has perpetuated the names of several of these unfortunate gentlemen, but not their likenesses; and just what this youth's full name was I never knew. Marius, the name shortly repeated by the subject, could have been only a given name.

A DEEPER hush had descended upon the assembled crowd. The reporter was again speaking, sometimes in the peculiar jargon before alluded to, sometimes in clean-cut Latin. The Roman was evidently endeavoring to carry on a conversation with the dark siren, and, owing to the imperfect knowledge each had of the other's tongue, was experiencing some difficulty. My knowledge of Latin being imperfect, and of ancient Egyptian nil, I will not attempt to reproduce the actual words. Suffice it to say that the conversation seemed to consist mostly of impassioned marriage proposals and smiling, cool refusals. Though of course no actual word of the fair Egyptian could be heard, in most cases her gestures and Marius' subsequent words made her part of the talk fairly clear.

At length the young fellow gave over his efforts and allowed his gaze to wander disconsolately shoreward. There was little in the dreary landscape to inspire him, however, and all attempt at conversation ceased. Once, though but for a fleeting instant, I could have sworn that a sinister expression distorted the queen's face—one in which struggled both fear and hatred. Had Marius, the Roman, perceived it, mayhap he would have been more on his guard later on.

However, the fellow's subjugation at the hands of the dusky houri had been quite complete. Plainly he had no thought of danger from the fair creature leading him on thus shamelessly. After witnessing the abrupt end of this cycle I for one can understand why history speaks so scornfully of this woman.

For several minutes the scenes shifted so rapidly that their trend could not coherently be followed. Presently a curt word from the psychic slowed down the temporary activity of the subject's mind, and Professor Ember adjusted the N-ray to a greater brilliance. Stimulation thus increased, Hodge's memory continued the orderly progress of the cycle as before, and the finale of this ancient drama was presented for the last time.

The galley had reached a good-sized cove, stalwart rowers had leapt ashore and by their combined efforts were dragging the craft through the bulrushes to a secure landing place. There was a general rush to the side, and one by one the youths and maidens leapt to the ground. All seemed imbued with the spirit of a modern picnic party, and with signs of hilarity proceeded up the bank. As they walked, the ground rose in a succession of terraces until finally they came out on a barren plateau which extended, sand-swept and dreary, to the horizon.

The Sahara! Into the sea of sand they plunged under the leadership of the queen and her companion. For what seemed to me endless miles the revelers traveled, until a final turn around a particularly high sand dune revealed a tremendous object directly ahead of them and not a hundred yards away. A pyramid it was, and truly a thing of wonder. In awe I gazed at the thousands of huge blocks of roughly dressed stone piled here solely by the physical strength of sweating slaves. My gaze darted here and there in vain search for an entranceway, but at every hand naught save a solid front of rough stone met my eye. Evidently, I thought, the builders had some well-defined motive for concealing the method of ingress into the royal sepulchers. Though the entrances to several of the pyramids had been discovered by modern investigators, I knew this was not accomplished easily.

The queen and her companions came to a halt at the foot of the pile. For a brief space a whispered colloquy took place with Cleopatra, Marius and a huge, ebony-black Ethiopian. It became evident to me that the greater part of the company was to be left behind, the black having doubtless been chosen to go along as a guard. This man was a gigantic fellow, with great rippling muscles and the form of a god. He was unadorned except for the loin cloth worn by most male slaves of the period. He carried no weapon except a dagger which depended from a strap at his waist, and as far as I could see he had no need of that. His terribly strong hands looked an all-sufficient protection.

Signing to the two others to follow, the queen began to skirt the pyramid. She, apparently, was the only one who knew their destination. Soon the fair guide began to climb the rough side of the pile, making easy work of the natural staircase afforded by the out-jutting blocks. The others, being

made of heavier stuff, followed at a rather more laborious pace. As the trio made their way upward, the picture changed continually, eventually omitting all view of the ground. Occasionally I would get a glimpse of the desert stretching off in endless desolation until finally the dun sky seemed to blend into it. Once I got a flashing view of a cluster of palm fronds in the distance waving gently in response to the hot breath of the Sahara.

AT LAST the climb came to an end. Cleopatra had led the two men well-nigh to the summit of the huge man-made mountain before locating her goal. How she knew the exact stone was a mystery to me. My puzzled eyes could detect nothing to distinguish the block beside which she paused from the thousands she had passed by.

Under the queen's direction the men inserted their fingers into certain tiny crevices and exerted their strength in a mighty heave. A small stone came outward a few inches, only to stop as if held by a concealed protuberance. The black unsheathed his knife and pried about the stone here and there. Again he and the Roman heaved, and this time succeeded in dislodging the stone. Motioning the others aside, Cleopatra thrust her arm into the opening. What movement she made with her hand I can never say. All I can remember is a general gasp from my companion spectators at what she accomplished. Whether the queen had actuated the mechanism of a pneumatic or hydraulic lift, or whether it was simply a crude form of lever, is a mystery. At any rate a seeming miracle was worked.

A gigantic section of the pyramid's surface, weighing probably hundreds of tons, slid slowly, smoothly downward and disappeared into the body of the pile! Both men leapt back affrighted.

The woman waited coolly enough for the entrance to yawn fully open and then stepped in, motioning for the others to follow. The black was plainly demoralized by fear, and his eyes rolled wildly. The young Roman, in spite of the well advertised valor of his race, seemed strangely ill at ease. There ensued a period in which the evil queen's plan threatened to fail of its sinister purpose. Both men had evidently refused to enter the Stygian tunnel before them. The Ethiopian, doubtless smarting at the remembrance of tortures undergone in the past for hesitating at the queen's orders, finally agreed to go on. Marius still hanging back, Cleopatra changed her tactics from pouting and pleading to tempestuous scorn and ridicule for his courage. This the Roman could not endure. He shrugged, and without a word turned and led the way into the tunnel. At once the screen before us became night black.

I stooped over the body of my friend. Without a reasonable doubt the blackness was but a reproduction of the inside of the tunnel, but—who could say what moment the subject might crack under the strain imposed upon him? And even though the reporter's physique could bear up under the psychic's mental flail, how could I be sure that she herself might not break down? Suppose she left him stranded in some far past epoch! At thought of this most terrifying of possibilities a cold sweat broke out all over me, and I felt what I honestly believe was a premonition.

I found the subject's heart action and respiration to be somewhat slower than normal, and I seized upon this not alarming condition as an excuse to have the unwholesome affair ended. I turned to Losieva.

"Madam, I must protest against this thing being carried farther. It is dangerous. I believe we are all satisfied with the success of your ex-

periment. May not the séance be closed now, and our friend brought back to present-day life?"

The psychic addressed the subject.

"I wish you to return to the eleventh cycle of your ego. Back—to—the—present. Now! Answer me! Who are you?"

"John Hodge."

It was the same lifeless tone, but what a thrill of joy it sent through me. Good old Hodge brought back to life!

A relieved murmur ran through the audience. I raised my eyes to where the pearly dome should directly be glowing. I was consumed with impatience: why didn't they light the place up? And for heaven's sake, why not shut off that ghastly ray?

But there the thing still streamed, its vicious radiance even growing in intensity; there still danced about Hodge's inert head that most unholy, glaring halo.

5

"You have just finished your second glassful, Mr. Hodge. Go easy, or your friends will have to pilot you home. What, another? You are going too far with the stuff. No more—too late! For shame, sir!"

Damn the woman, what was she up to now?

Of a sudden, the hazy pictures thrown by the thought projector became slightly less blurred, and I saw. The screen was filled with a vision of distinctly pre-meddling days—a wild jumble of jugs, bottles and glasses, some of them overturned and varicolored liquids flowing out of them. I remember distinctly that one spilling bottle bore the label, "Johnny Walker". Tears came to my eyes—being caused by the eye-torturing wavering, teetering and increasing blurriness of the picture. Finally the jumble became altogether unintelligible. A smacking and gurgling came from the reporter's lips.

"Drunk, Mr. Hodge; shame on you! Don't you realize the stuff you are imbibing will have an unpleasant effect on your heart? It is pumping now like mad, and see how your respiration has speeded up! Why, if you—put down that glass, sir, and listen to me."

Losieva's voice became a dreary monody.

"You are falling into a drunken, fevered stupor—your drink-fired brain will torment you with nightmares—you will dwell in other days—back in the ninth cycle—the days of Marius—and Cleopatra—and the visit to the tomb—the tomb of Rameses the Second. Back—"

A clear-cut picture springing to the screen and a great burst of incoherent Latin from the subject told us he was indeed back. I was torn between disappointed anger and real admiration. The woman had induced an artificial drunkenness in my friend, either by recalling to him some spree in his immediate past or by suggesting a wholly fictitious orgy. Venomously I wondered, if the scene had been trumped up out of her own mind, where she got the material for all the lifelike stage properties.

At any rate, the trick had succeeded so far as she was concerned. My examination showed Hodge's heart action greatly stimulated, his body filled with a new vitality. Should I allow the experiment to progress? How could I prevent it, if the psychic was determined? And I repeat—I fling in the faces of those who have condemned me—I had no tangible, physical reason to do so. I—I let the morbid business go on.

The scene now vouchsafed us showed Cleopatra, the Roman and the slave in a small chamber of stone, their faces when visible presenting a weird aspect in the flare of a torch held by the queen. Marius was pale,

but his face was set in a grim determination to see the thing through. The woman showed a buoyancy of spirit bordering on the hysterical. As for the negro, he looked quite frankly near to a collapse. His eyes stuck out in a most grotesque fashion, reflecting the fitful light of the flare like two lambent, white globes.

The three were bending over a roughly rectangular object which occupied the center of the crypt. The illumination was so poor that at first I was unable to identify the thing. But presently the queen held the torch directly over it, and the flesh writhed on my bones.

They had unwrapped and were pawing over the shriveled body of a mummy!

An increasingly loud coughing and choking sound forcing itself on my consciousness, I looked to my charge. The spasms were not dangerously violent, however, and reluctantly I kept silent. And on glancing at Hodge's counterpart on the screen I immediately perceived the cause of the trouble. Marius was racked by coughs timed exactly with those of Hodge. Cleopatra was plainly struggling for breath and wiping her eyes constantly, while tears streamed unchecked down the contorted face of the black. Strongly spiced indeed was the dust they were profaning.

It seemed the Ethiopian shortly got his fill of it. He suddenly jumped up, gasping and clutching at his throat, and staggered out of the circle of light. Cleopatra curled her lip and motioned Marius to continue to help her in her grisly labors. What the object of those labors was I understood when, the queen having brought to light a sizable excavation in the mummy's abdomen, they began to remove therefrom double handfuls of precious stones.

At a time when the couple were most engrossed, this pleasant occupation was interrupted. They had whirled about as one, to fix startled eyes on their gigantic guard. The fellow was backing slowly toward them, swinging his dagger wildly as if defending himself from a score of assailants. Eyes rolling and white teeth flashing in weird grimaces, he had evidently gone stark mad with fright. Neither I nor the noble couple on the screen could perceive a single enemy in the vault. Was the crazed blackamoor seeing some hideous guardians of the dead man's outraged spirit? The Roman grasped his shortsword in an instinctive movement to go to the slave's assistance. But at this moment the guard, as though pursued by a relentless fate, dashed wildly from the place and disappeared into the depths of the pyramid.

The others followed, Marius, sword in hand, far in the lead. Cleopatra, however, seemed in no great hurry, and soon the Roman had to stop to let her bring up the torch. She stepped calmly ahead, holding the light behind her to guide her companion. Certain it was that she was not afraid, yet it was patent that she had no interest in finding her recreant servant.

She walked onward with a sureness of step that bespoke long familiarity with these dim galleries and chambers of the dead. In spite of the torch, however, Marius stumbled constantly. The brave determination on his face gave way to an expression of grim dread as he glanced down dark branching corridors. The pair proceeded what must have been a good mile, and I decided there was no end to the honeycomb of passages and shadowy tombs. Several times they had encountered stairways, and in every instance they had gone *downward*. Could it be that they were already far below the surface of the desert? Had we long since entered the base of another pyramid? Was the work of the Pharaohs so much

more extensive than any living man had dreamed? And why was my friend being urged into such an ill-omened place?

At last came the dreadful, sickening dénouement. To this day I do not know whether the fate of poor Hodge—or Marius—should be laid at the door of Cleopatra, or whether it was but an accident. If mischance it was, it is certainly strange. Cleopatra, with her familiarity with the ground, must have known what lay at the end of that particular tunnel. Otherwise, why did she—? But I cannot conceive of it. It seems impossible that any woman, however wicked, could deliberately plan such a thing. To take her lover ostensibly on a pleasure trip only to employ him as a guard while she replenished her perennially wasted coffers—and then thank him by murdering him!

Cleopatra, several paces ahead of the Roman now, had suddenly stepped into a side passage. The screen went black, and a wild screech rent the séance chamber. I got a last flashing view of an expanse of inky, noisome water, a speck of a torch far above in the hand of that evil woman, and a dim, sprawled body hurtling down—down—down—. . . .

6

PHYSICALLY the subject was unharmed by the strain of recalling the end of the ninth cycle. His auto-suggested jag was lasting well, for all his functions were obviously still operating under a strong stimulant.

"Backward, Marius; back to when time was young," Losieva was urging the silent thing in the chair. I call the subject "thing" because somehow it is impossible for me to think of the unconscious form as my old friend. Indeed it is a question whether he was really anybody in particular, suspended as he was between identities.

A new ego shortly became his, and upon glancing at the subject's face I gave a violent start. In place of the rather decent features of Jack Hodge were those of another man—a most unkempt, uncouth, and withal fierce kind of man. This time my friend's immersion in another self must have been an extremely potent thing, strong enough to wrench his features until they matched those of the man of the eighth cycle, the man who lived before the age of Cleopatra.

The first intelligible scene was a fleeting glimpse of the ocean. It was an immense expanse, on which were riding several curious craft. At first no land was in sight, the fleet of queer ships steadily sailing toward the setting sun. The action continued considerably faster than had been the case in other cycles, for in a matter of minutes a long coast-line appeared directly ahead. On the deck of one of the boats, and staring shoreward, was a tall man whom I seemed to recognize. Yet I knew for a certainty that I had never seen him before. For some minutes I pondered these contradictory facts, and then the solution came over me. That fierce countenance was none other than that I had seen reflected on the features of Hodge at the opening of the cycle.

Evidently the control was bad, for the action alternately slowed and rushed, and the scene continually shifted. Indeed, throughout the epoch these conditions obtained, making it difficult at times to follow the thread of the story. However, there was a certain advantage in this, because it made possible the unfolding in a few hours of the events of several days.

I remember distinctly my disappointment at not seeing the ships make port, the scene having suddenly moved to land. Here the tall man was still visible, this time striding rapidly along an avenue of beautiful tropical trees. On each side could be

seen most handsome, albeit fantastic, structures. Some of them I conceived might be dwellings, others shops, and one or two had every appearance of being temples. Here and there were strolling groups of people, and only rarely a person walking with any definite destination in view. For the most part I was impressed by the lack of any apparent employment. It seemed to be a city of affluent idleness.

I noticed that the loiterers in the fierce-looking man's path made way quickly enough, and in a servile sort of manner. But as soon as he had passed, invariably they made a point of turning and bending in his direction the blackest of looks. It occurred to me that the man, judging by his unpopularity, must have a great deal of power. Possibly he was a naval commander, or some high government official. I never learned.

AGAIN the scene had undergone a complete metamorphosis. It was night. Illumined in an unearthly kind of glow, I could see a small city square, packed with thousands of struggling people. Where was their languid ease? What had stirred them to this mad activity? As if to answer my question a huge mass of fire came winging from nowhere, curved downward and dropped straight into the center of the milling multitude.

A horrible debacle took place before my eyes.

In seemingly no time the nearest of the houses had caught fire. Another enormous, flaming ball dashed itself to earth; another, and another. Everywhere there were flames and fighting, surging throngs. And in the crazed thousands, not one person stood a chance of safety; not one—. But yes, here was a man whose brute strength might yet save him.

It was our tall man of the sea. Ruthlessly he slashed through the press, tossing and trampling those who would delay him. At last he put them all behind him, and dashed toward the red-spangled sea. On the beach our man stumbled upon a comparatively light craft obscured in a multitude of heavier ones drawn up on the sand. Two sailors were vainly heaving and tugging in an effort to launch the thing before all was lost. Grasping each by a shoulder, he bundled them into the vessel. Next he had lifted the dragging prow clear of the sand, run splashing into the sea with it and then leapt nimbly aboard.

Behind him in the flame-swept street an enormous red-hot crack yawned suddenly open, to engulf a score of burning houses and a hundred writhing bodies. Tongues of flame shot hungrily skyward while the crack gaped wider. A deluge of fiery meteors fed it for a space, and then there rolled in a monstrous wave. Great billows of red steam burst from the rift, and the crumpled remains of houses and men were belched skyward.

The crack is glowing again with a dry, hot incandescence—another great wave—it has closed tight—it has *sunk*. The city—where *is* the city? There is naught here but madly lashing seas and floating things unspeakable.

Meanwhile, what of that cockle in which the three seafaring men pushed off and wildly poled away? That dancing mote in the red eye of the rising sun! Can that be our bark? Impossible, yet—*it is!*

Everywhere was a desolation of dark water. The surface was never calm, being rent and tortured by what must have been the remnant of those volcanic and subterranean forces that had destroyed the land. What a contrast was this churning sea with the picture of that proud, serene fleet sailing so majestically homeward. Instead of the clean sun-

shine of that time, the light now was a bloody glow from a smoky sun. Extending for leagues in every direction hung a dense pall that was ever blotting out the sun completely, turning scarlet day into pitch-black night.

On the ship all was nnmb despair. From time to time the leader could be heard, evidently giving listless orders. The tongue, as reproduced by the subject, was one to defy analysis by the most accomplished linguist of our time. In all the words spoken by the man of the eighth cycle, only one to us had any meaning. This was uttered several times during the cycle, each time in a voice of tenderness surprizing in one so stern—the word *Atalanti.*

What joy those four syllables must have engendered in the little group of savants present! Here was solid support of an ancient legend that was familiar even to me. Could the fair city we had just seen be that fabled metropolis said to have flourished cons before the Egyptians conceived their pyramids? On a lovely isle risen from the ocean bed that city had been built. There great kings were born, reigned and died. Mighty navies had there a home port. A civilization famed to this day for its beauty and richness had developed—and then the whole marvelous perfection was undone in a night. Volcanoes had spat, the waters had reared; and the island had been enfolded into the bosom of the broad Atlantic that had given it hirth.

That the name of the city had undergone some slight change in being handed down from survivors of the holocaust seems probable enough. The sibilant on the end of onr modern name may have been accidentally left off by Hodge in the word he repeated. but anyone present at the séance would doubt this. The name we are familiar with is "Atlantis".

AGAIN the erratic memory of the reporter raced the action ahead. The little ship was still before us; but now it was night, and tortured clouds streamed across a cold moon. All sail bravely spread, the tiny craft scudded through the foam at a terrific rate. The three men conld be seen huddled at the helm. All were looking backward to the horizon where still hung a shredded, smoky smear.

What agony must have been their thoughts! Had they been compelled to leave behind the incinerated bodies of loved ones—of wives, aud little children? Had one, perchance, been the possessor of great wealth, only to witness its total destruction before his eyes? One of the men surely gave an impression of the bereaved husband. Could any mere material loss cause snch an expression of utter nnhearting? Even as I speculated, the man darted to the side, and only by force was he restrained from jumping overhoard.

Another shift of scene disclosed the tips of two masts protruding from a smiling, sunny sea. A short distance away and playfully caressed by little lapping waves lay a sun-heated knob of rock. The knob was only as large as this table, and its rounded apex was perhaps two feet above the tranquil sea level. Nevertheless it afforded refuge for a pair of castaways. I wondered if the tide were at its height . . .

Other questions followed in quick succession. Who were these two, and how long had they been here? Were they the survivors of Atlantis? If so, why were there only two? Their forms were emaciated to the point of scarecrow thinness: that would suggest they had been here for days. Then the tide had spared them; but had there been no stormy waves? A man lying prone on his stomach lifted his face for an instant in some mnte appeal to the heavens, and in the

simple act I perceived the answer to some of my questions.

The terrible face was that of our Atlantis naval man; the features, puffed and blotched so that recognition had come slowly, had been mutilated by days of contact with hot, unclouded sun and hotter rock. One question remained to be answered: what had become of the third fugitive, who I saw must be the one whose disheartened state I have mentioned?

I remembered his suicidal tendencies. Had he succeeded in plunging overboard before the vessel was wrecked? Or had he lived through the crash and landed here with the others? In that case, supposing he should resume his attempts at suicide after a day or two here, how hard would his starving companions strive to restrain him? There was something gleaming just beneath the surface on a jagged slope of the rock. The shimmering water made the thing hard to identify—is there a species of clean, white coral?

This picture, the last of the Atlantis era, was mercifully short. For a few minutes I watched the tide creep up and up until the men were forced painfully to stand up. Then a peril I had overlooked entirely made itself manifest. Here and there little darting arcs began to describe themselves on the smooth surface. More and more joined them until there was a complete, ever changing circle. Now and then a section of the strange circumference would detach itself and launch inward toward its human center a fearsomely few feet away. The flirting lines were drawn by little triangles projecting above the water, the fins of sharks.

Many times the men must have been subjected to these same attacks and I asked myself what had held the brutes away. I remembered the shape of the rock as I had first seen it, and therein lay the explanation. The beasts could come to within four or five feet of the castaways, but nearer than that the shallowness of the water fooled them.

Ah, but here was something that could not be fooled!

The drooping men saw the thing at the same time I did, and at once were galvanized into frenzied action. A snakelike arm studded with deadly, cuplike suckers writhed from the water six feet away and rippled tentatively toward them. Our tall man hacked frantically at it with his knife, while his crazed companion clawed with palsied, futile talons of hands. Others of the slimy tubes wormed along the surface to lay the victims by the nethers. A monstrous, shapeless head, with two hideous red glaring eyes and a wicked beak, emerged from the churning water. It was joined by another and another, and the delirious denizens of a bygone deep closed in.

The picture became a confused mass of flailing tentacles—of wildly distorted human limbs—of great, horrid eyes—of gaping, pulsating craws —a scream—

High pitched, piercing, a new scream from behind me shocked me back to the present. A girl—Emily Norton—had fainted.

7

It was dawn. Over the slowly waving tops of somber pines flew a raven. Shortly followed two more, and still another. In an ever changing geometric pattern, they described weird curves and angles as they took flight across the desolate wastes. From the tangled thickets and swamps rose more birds, until a mighty escadrille had formed and streamed across the sky.

Now from a dim forest aisle stepped a youth. He wore a short tunic of a color closely resembling that of the surrounding foliage.

(Continued on page 328)

THE MUSIC OF ERICH ZANN

by H.P. Lovecraft

Author of "The Festival," "The Statement of Randolph Carter," etc.

I HAVE examined maps of the city with the greatest care, yet have never again found the Rue d'Auseil. These maps have not been modern maps alone, for I know that names change. I have, on the contrary, delved deeply into all the antiquities of the place; and have personally explored every region, of whatever name, which could possibly answer to the street I knew as the Rue d'Auseil. But despite all I have done, it remains an humiliating fact that I cannot find the house, the street, or even the locality, where, during the last months of my impoverished life as a student of metaphysics at the university, I heard the music of Erich Zann.

That my memory is broken, I do not wonder; for my health, physical and mental, was gravely disturbed throughout the period of my residence in the Rue d'Auseil, and I recall that I took none of my few acquaintances there. But that I cannot find the place again is both singular and perplexing; for it was within a half-hour's walk of the university and was distinguished by peculiarities which could hardly be forgotten by anyone who had been there. I have never met a person who has seen the Rue d'Auseil.

The Rue d'Auseil lay across a dark river bordered by precipitous brick blear-windowed warehouses and spanned by a ponderous bridge of dark stone. It was always shadowy along that river, as if the smoke of neighboring factories shut out the sun perpetually. The river was also odorous with evil stenches which I have never smelled elsewhere, and which may some day help me to find it, since I should recognize them at once. Beyond the bridge were narrow cobbled streets with rails; and then came the ascent, at first gradual, but incredibly steep as the Rue d'Auseil was reached.

I have never seen another street as narrow and steep as the Rue d'Auseil. It was almost a cliff, closed to all vehicles, consisting in several places of flights of steps, and ending at the top in a lofty ivied wall. Its paving was irregular, sometimes stone slabs, sometimes cobblestones, and sometimes bare earth with struggling greenish-gray vegetation. The houses were tall, peaked-roofed, incredibly old, and crazily leaning backward, forward, and sidewise. Occasionally an opposite pair, both leaning for-

ward, almost met across the street like an arch; and certainly they kept most of the light from the ground below. There were a few overhead bridges from house to house across the street.

The inhabitants of that street impressed me peculiarly. At first I thought it was because they were all silent and reticent; but later decided it was because they were all very old. I do not know how I came to live on such a street, but I was not myself when I moved there. I had been living in many poor places, always evicted for want of money; until at last I came upon that tottering house in the Rue d'Auseil kept by the paralytic Blandot. It was the third house from the top of the street, and by far the tallest of them all.

MY ROOM was on the fifth story; the only inhabited room there, since the house was almost empty. On the night I arrived I heard strange music from the peaked garret overhead, and the next day asked old Blandot about it. He told me it was an old German viol-player, a strange dumb man who signed his name as Erich Zann, and who played evenings in a cheap theater orchestra; adding that Zann's desire to play in the night after his return from the theater was the reason he had chosen this lofty and isolated garret room, whose single gable window was the only point on the street from which one could look over the terminating wall at the declivity and panorama beyond.

Thereafter I heard Zann every night, and although he kept me awake, I was haunted by the weirdness of his music. Knowing little of the art myself, I was yet certain that none of his harmonies had any relation to music I had heard before; and concluded that he was a composer of highly original genius. The longer I listened, the more I was fascinated, until after a week I resolved to make the old man's acquaintance.

One night, as he was returning from his work, I intercepted Zann in the hallway and told him that I would like to know him and be with him when he played. He was a small, lean, bent person, with shabby clothes, blue eyes, grotesque, satyrlike face, and nearly bald head; and at my first words seemed both angered and frightened. My obvious friendliness, however, finally melted him; and he grudgingly motioned to me to follow him up the dark, creaking and rickety attic stairs. His room, one of only two in the steeply pitched garret, was on the west side, toward the high wall that formed the upper end of the street. Its size was very great, and seemed the greater because of its extraordinary bareness and neglect. Of furniture there was only a narrow iron bedstead, a dingy wash-stand, a small table, a large bookcase, an iron music-rack, and three old-fashioned chairs. Sheets of music were piled in disorder about the floor. The walls were of bare boards, and had probably never known plaster; whilst the abundance of dust and cobwebs made the place seem more deserted than inhabited. Evidently Erich Zann's world of beauty lay in some far cosmos of the imagination.

Motioning me to sit down, the dumb man closed the door, turned the large wooden bolt, and lighted a candle to augment the one he had brought with him. He now removed his viol from its moth-eaten covering, and taking it, seated himself in the least uncomfortable of the chairs. He did not employ the music-rack, but, offering no choice and playing from memory, enchanted me for over an hour with strains I had never heard before; strains which must have been of his own devising. To describe their exact nature is impossible for one unversed in music. They were a kind of fugue, with recurrent passages of the most captivating quality, but to me were notable for the absence of

any of the weird notes I had overheard from my room below on other occasions.

Those haunting notes I had remembered, and had often hummed and whistled inaccurately to myself, so when the player at length laid down his bow I asked him if he would render some of them. As I began my request the wrinkled satyrlike face lost the bored placidity it had possessed during the playing, and seemed to show the same curious mixture of anger and fright which I had noticed when first I accosted the old man. For a moment I was inclined to use persuasion, regarding rather lightly the whims of senility; and even tried to awaken my host's weirder mood by whistling a few of the strains to which I had listened the night before. But I did not pursue this course for more than a moment; for when the dumb musician recognized the whistled air his face grew suddenly distorted with an expression wholly beyond analysis, and his long, cold, bony right hand reached out to stop my mouth and silence the crude imitation. As he did this he further demonstrated his eccentricity by casting a startled glance toward the lone curtained window, as if fearful of some intruder—a glance doubly absurd, since the garret stood high and inaccessible above all the adjacent roofs, this window being the only point on the steep street, as the concierge had told me, from which one could see over the wall at the summit.

The old man's glance brought Blandot's remark to my mind, and with a certain capriciousness I felt a wish to look out over the wide and dizzying panorama of moonlit roofs and city lights beyond the hilltop, which of all the dwellers in the Rue d'Auseil only this crabbed musician could see. I moved toward the window and would have drawn aside the nondescript curtains, when with a frightened rage even greater than before, the dumb lodger was upon me again; this time motioning with his head toward the door as he nervously strove to drag me thither with both hands. Now thoroughly disgusted with my host, I ordered him to release me, and told him I would go at once. His clutch relaxed, and as he saw my disgust and offense, his own anger seemed to subside. He tightened his relaxing grip, but this time in a friendly manner, forcing me into a chair; then with an appearance of wistfulness crossing to the littered table, where he wrote many words with a pencil, in the labored French of a foreigner.

The note which he finally handed me was an appeal for tolerance and forgiveness. Zann said that he was old, lonely, and afflicted with strange fears and nervous disorders connected with his music and with other things. He had enjoyed my listening to his music, and wished I would come again and not mind his eccentricities. But he could not play to another his weird harmonies, and could not bear hearing them from another; nor could he bear having anything in his room touched by another. He had not known until our hallway conversation that I could overhear his playing in my room, and now asked me if I would arrange with Blandot to take a lower room where I could not hear him in the night. He would, he wrote, defray the difference in rent.

As I sat deciphering the execrable French, I felt more lenient toward the old man. He was a victim of physical and nervous suffering, as was I; and my metaphysical studies had taught me kindness. In the silence there came a slight sound from the window—the shutter must have rattled in the night-wind, and for some reason I started almost as violently as did Erich Zann. So when I had finished reading I shook my host by the hand, and departed as a friend.

The next day Blandot gave me a more expensive room on the third floor, between the apartments of an aged money-lender and the room of a respectable upholsterer. There was no one on the fourth floor.

It was not long before I found that Zann's eagerness for my company was not as great as it had seemed while he was persuading me to move down from the fifth story. He did not ask me to call on him, and when I did call he appeared uneasy and played listlessly. This was always at night—in the day he slept and would admit no one. My liking for him did not grow, though the attic room and the weird music seemed to hold an odd fascination for me. I had a curious desire to look out of that window, over the wall and down the unseen slope at the glittering roofs and spires which must lie outspread there. Once I went up to the garret during theater hours, when Zann was away, but the door was locked.

What I did succeed in doing was to overhear the nocturnal playing of the dumb old man. At first I would tiptoe up to my old fifth floor, then I grew bold enough to climb the last creaking staircase to the peaked garret. There in the narrow hall, outside the bolted door with the covered keyhole, I often heard sounds which filled me with an indefinable dread—the dread of vague wonder and brooding mystery. It was not that the sounds were hideous, for they were not; but that they held vibrations suggesting nothing on this globe of earth, and that at certain intervals they assumed a symphonic quality which I could hardly conceive as produced by one player. Certainly, Erich Zann was a genius of wild power. As the weeks passed, the playing grew wilder, whilst the old musician acquired an increasing haggardness and furtiveness pitiful to behold. He now refused to admit me at any time, and shunned me whenever we met on the stairs.

Then one night as I listened at the door I heard the shrieking viol swell into a chaotic babel of sound; a pandemonium which would have led me to doubt my own shaking sanity had there not come from behind that barred portal a piteous proof that the horror was real—the awful, inarticulate cry which only a mute can utter, and which rises only in moments of the most terrible fear or anguish. I knocked repeatedly at the door, but received no response. Afterward I waited in the black hallway, shivering with cold and fear, till I heard the poor musician's feeble effort to rise from the floor by the aid of a chair. Believing him just conscious after a fainting fit, I renewed my rapping, at the same time calling out my name reassuringly. I heard Zann stumble to the window and close both shutter and sash, then stumble to the door, which he falteringly unfastened to admit me. This time his delight at having me present was real; for his distorted face gleamed with relief, while he clutched at my coat as a child clutches at its mother's skirts.

Shaking pathetically, the old man forced me into a chair whilst he sank into another, beside which his viol and bow lay carelessly on the floor. He sat for some time inactive, nodding oddly, but having a paradoxical suggestion of intense and frightened listening. Subsequently he seemed to be satisfied, and crossing to a chair by the table wrote a brief note, handed it to me, and returned to the table, where he began to write rapidly and incessantly. The note implored me in the name of mercy, and for the sake of my own curiosity, to wait where I was while he prepared a full account in German of all the marvels and terrors which beset him. I waited, and the dumb man's pencil flew.

It was perhaps an hour later, while I still waited and while the old musician's feverishly written sheets still continued to pile up, that I saw Zann start as from the hint of a horrible shock. Unmistakably he was looking at the curtained window and listening shudderingly. Then I half fancied I heard a sound myself; though it was not a horrible sound, but rather an exquisitely low and infinitely distant musical note, suggesting a player in one of the neighboring houses, or in some abode beyond the lofty wall over which I had never been able to look. Upon Zann the effect was terrible, for, dropping his pencil, suddenly he rose, seized his viol, and commenced to rend the night with the wildest playing I had ever heard from his bow save when listening at the barred door.

It would be useless to describe the playing of Erich Zann on that dreadful night. It was more horrible than anything I had ever overheard, because I could now see the expression of his face, and could realize that this time the motive was stark fear. He was trying to make a noise; to ward something off or drown something out—what, I could not imagine, awesome though I felt it must be. The playing grew fantastic, delirious, and hysterical, yet kept to the last the qualities of supreme genius which I know this strange old man possessed. I recognized the air—it was a wild Hungarian dance popular in the theaters, and I reflected for a moment that this was the first time I had ever heard Zann play the work of another composer.

Louder and louder, wilder and wilder, mounted the shrieking and whining of that desperate viol. The player was dripping with an uncanny perspiration and twisted like a monkey, always looking frantically at the curtained window. In his frenzied strains I could almost see shadowy satyrs and bacchanals dancing and whirling insanely through seething abysses of clouds and smoke and lightning. And then I thought I heard a shriller, steadier note that was not from the viol; a calm, deliberate, purposeful, mocking note from far away in the west.

At this juncture the shutter began to rattle in a howling night-wind which had sprung up outside as if in answer to the mad playing within. Zann's screaming viol now outdid itself, emitting sounds I had never thought a viol could emit. The shutter rattled more loudly, unfastened, and commenced slamming against the window. Then the glass broke shiveringly under the persistent impacts, and the chill wind rushed in, making the candles sputter and rustling the sheets of paper on the table where Zann had begun to write out his horrible secret. I looked at Zann, and saw that he was past conscious observation. His blue eyes were bulging, glassy and sightless, and the frantic playing had become a blind, mechanical, unrecognizable orgy that no pen could even suggest.

A sudden gust, stronger than the others, caught up the manuscript and bore it toward the window. I followed the flying sheets in desperation, but they were gone before I reached the demolished panes. Then I remembered my old wish to gaze from this window, the only window in the Rue d'Auseil from which one might see the slope beyond the wall, and the city outspread beneath. It was very dark, but the city's lights always burned, and I expected to see them there amidst the rain and wind. Yet when I looked from that highest of all gable windows, looked while the candles sputtered and the insane viol howled with the night-wind, I saw no city spread below, and no friendly lights gleamed from remembered

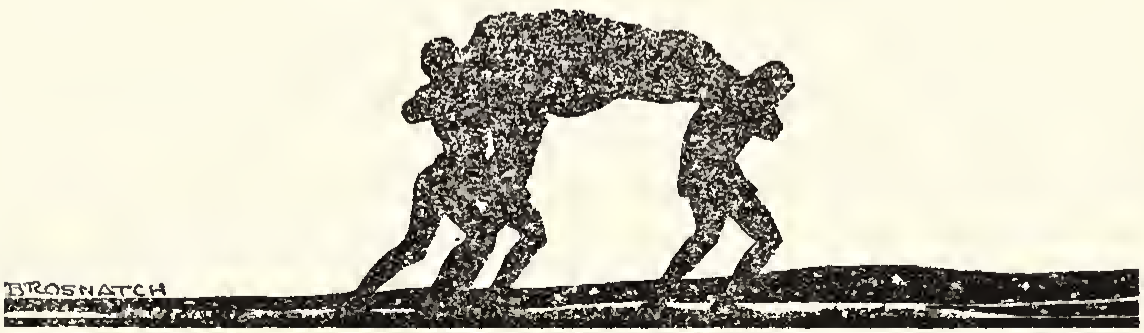
streets, but only the blackness of space illimitable; unimagined space alive with motion and music, and having no semblance of anything on earth. And as I stood there looking in terror, the wind blew out both the candles in that ancient peaked garret, leaving me in savage and impenetrable darkness with chaos and pandemonium before me, and the demon madness of that night-baying viol behind me.

I staggered back in the dark, without the means of striking a light, crashing against the table, overturning a chair, and finally groping my way to the place where the blackness screamed with shocking music. To save myself and Erich Zaun I could at least try, whatever the powers opposed to me. Once I thought some chill thing brushed me, and I screamed, but my scream could not be heard above that hideous viol. Suddenly out of the blackness the madly sawing bow struck me, and I knew I was close to the player. I felt ahead, touched the back of Zann's chair, and then found and shook his shoulder in an effort to bring him to his senses.

He did not respond, and still the viol shrieked on without slackening. I moved my hand to his head, whose mechanical nodding I was able to stop, and shouted in his ear that we must both flee from the unknown things of the night. But he neither answered me nor abated the frenzy of his unutterable music, while all through the garret strange currents of wind seemed to dance in the darkness and babel. When my hand touched his ear I shuddered, though I knew not why—knew not why till I felt of the still face; the ice-cold, stiffened, unbreathing face whose glassy eyes bulged uselessly into the void. And then, by some miracle finding the door and the large wooden bolt, I plunged wildly away from that glassy-eyed thing in the dark, and from the ghoulish howling of that accursed viol whose fury increased even as I plunged.

Leaping, floating, flying down those endless stairs through the dark house; racing mindlessly out into the narrow, steep, and ancient street of steps and tottering houses; clattering down steps and over cobbles to the lower streets and the putrid canyon-walled river; panting across the great dark bridge to the broader, healthier streets and boulevards we know; all these are terrible impressions that linger with me. And I recall that there was no wind, and that the moon was out, and that all the lights of the city twinkled.

DESPITE my most careful searches and investigations, I have never since been able to find the Rue d'Auseil. But I am not wholly sorry; either for this or for the loss in undreamable abysses of the closely-written sheets which alone could have explained the music of Erich Zann.



The Voices From The Cliff

by John Martin Leahy

Author of "Draconda"

This is a damnable and fearful fact.
—The Headsman.

1. What I Heard at the Club.

PEABODY suddenly sat up in his chair and drove one hand, clenched, into the palm of the other.

"Science!" he ejaculated. "For heaven's sake, spare us that! Science —the star hypothesis-patcher, the A Number One, the dyed-in-the-wool, the blown-in-the-bottle, the peerless, the inimitable guessologist!"

"Come again, George!" the doctor smiled.

"Well, it's so. Leave her there to explain her dust and cobwebs and her heaps of bones. That is where she belongs. But when you send for the dusty old girl to adjudicate in matters pertaining to the psychic, to things as high above these gross senses and lives of ours as the rainbow is above a frog in his puddle—oh, gosh! Why, you might just as well send a mole to judge the beauty of the Venus of Melos."

"And again, George," said the doctor. "Oxford isn't here, and so you can make up for lost time."

"Well," said Peabody, "what show have I got against *him?* All the same —and I'm glad I can give a loud blare on my trumpet at this point—I think with my own mind. And do you know what Locke says about that?"

"What does Locke say? I thought that you were going to say Blavatsky."

"Well," Peabody exclaimed, "I'm not going to shout with Aristotle that there are cattle in Phrygia that can wiggle their horns like ears; that the salamander can live in fire; that the little busy bee, when the wind is high, carries along a stone—for the same reason that a ship goes out in ballast! Oh, ain't science wonderful, though? Nor am I going to accept Kepler's belief (some more science) that the earth is an animal, the tides caused by the monster's respiration!"

"Keep on, sweet expounder!"

"No; I'll come back to Locke. Here is what Locke says: that 'we may as rationally hope to see with other men's eyes, as to know by other men's understandings.'"

"Very true," nodded the doctor, "but about as much to the point, I fancy, as Newton's 'Fishes looke one

way with one eye, ye other way with ye other.' "

"Is that so?"

"And," the doctor continued, "that reminds me of Locke's American ahorigine seeking information on architectural matters. Do you know what he was told?"

"I wonder."

"That a pillar is a thing supported by a hasis and a basis is something that supports a pillar."

"Science in a nutshell!" exclaimed Peabody.

"Not so. It wasn't science that gave Poor Lo that beautiful answer. Only the mystic, the occult, the psychic could have done that."

"Heaven help us!" Peabody said. "Science and Oxford certainly have got you fellows hypnotized—that is, all of yon except" (with a glance in my direction) "Hudsou here."

"Speaking of Oxford," I observed, "that reminds me: I haven't seen him since my return, or even heard his name spoken until now. What's his latest?"

THERE was the briefest silence. I was puzzled by that curious, barely perceptihle change of expression which came to the different faces. I said "barely perceptible", but, in one or two instances, there was a significant lift of the eyebrows and that faint, indescrihable (terrible) smile which speaks more plainly than can any words.

"Gone," Peahody said.

"Gone! Where?" I asked him. "It was time, though, for Oxford to take a vacation."

Peabody glanced at Dr. Thompson.

"Hardly a vacation, Hudson," he said, returning his look to me, "though he may call it that himself. After all, Guy Oxford is—er—well, rather eecentric, you know, and, what makes the matter worse, scientifically eccentric. He would be a puzzle, I imagine, even to his closest friend—that is, if there was such a gentleman, which there isn't. Probably you yourself, Hudson, come the nearest to that; and yet I fancy he never admitted even you to anything having the semhlance of real intimacy."

"No. He is something of a recluse, certainly. But his investigations, yon know—the requisite intense mental application!"

"All the more reason," retnrned Peahody, "why he should relax at times and be human. And all those cold-blooded, materialistic ideas of his! 'Tis enough to freeze the heart and the soul of a man. Why, if an angel were to come down from heaven, Guy Oxford wonld merely glance arouud and say that the movie people were somewhere on the job!"

"And so," said I, "he has gone: but where to?"

"To Timbuctoo, or Shanghai, or somewhere; and *on a windjammer!*"

"What!" I exclaimed.

"Just so, Hudson: on a schooner, a yawl, a barkentine, a brig, a catamaran, or whatever they call the *Shadow* in their confounded nautical lingo."

He turned to Donohue.

"What is she, Cap?"

"Bark," returned Donohue, who was somewhat of a yachtsman, "bound for Sydney."

"Great Neptune!" said I. "What put that kind of a voyage into his head. Sea-dogs and Guy Oxford! It seems, somehow—well, incongruous, you know."

"Incongruous—yes, rather."

"Still," I told him, "I don't understand."

"You see," explained Peabody, "it was Miss Maitland—or, rather, Mrs. Dirk."

"And Mrs. Dirk is who?"

"And who," put in Donohue, "would have imagined that one so unemotional as Oxford—about as romantic, apparently, as the Sphinx or an iceberg—would have been hit so hard?"

"Simply smashed him," said the doctor. "I never expected anything like that from Oxford."

"And what," Donohue queried, "do you really think of that queer business out there at Alta Vista?"

Alta Vista, I well knew, was the old summer home—grandly picturesque with its wild sea setting—of the Maitlands; or, rather, of Clara Maitland (now Mrs. Dirk) for of that proud and once numerous family she was (had been, I soon learned) the sole surviving member.

"And this Dirk?" I queried, forgetting for the moment Donohue's remark. "Who is the fellow, anyway? Anything like his name?"

"One of these gay young birds—of good connections but penniless and yet somehow a high-sailer," returned Peabody. "Heaven only knows why such things happen; but Dirk caught the girl's fancy, she gave Oxford the mitten, and in a few days (all too few indeed!) she was Mrs. Dirk—and not so happy, it was soon whispered, as a bride should be."

"And ere long," said the doctor, "lay stiff and cold in death."

He turned to me.

"Found, a crushed and gory thing, on the stones and seaweed of the beach."

"What was it—murder?"

"Murder," nodded the doctor. "It happened on the night of Wednesday last—at that pretty place called Cupid's Tryst."

"But," interposed Donohue, "what should take a woman to *that* place all alone in the hours of darkness?"

"I wonder," returned the doctor, "how many have asked that very question. However, there she was—either alone or with the murderer."

He turned his look back to me as he reverted to the story:

"The body was found in the twilight of dawn by a beachcomber—crushed and mangled on the stones below. The cliff, you will remember, in that place drops down sheer for two hundred feet or more. They say every bone in her body is broken. In the Cupid's Tryst were found plain signs of a violent struggle, but neither an examination of the place nor the autopsy has shown whether the victim met her death in that spot or whether she was hurled alive over the edge."

"Where," I asked, "was the husband that night?"

"At home—so he says. Oh, Dirk has a good story. And yet—is it so good a story after all?"

"Well, it works," put in Peabody: "coroner, coroner's jury, sheriff, deputy sheriffs, and detectives—all seem to think the man as innocent as a lamb."

Doctor Thompson nodded.

"It is one of those cases," said he, "which makes you think ugly things—but where is your proof? And a man is innocent, you know, until you prove him to be guilty."

"As for proofs, there, for instance, is that penknife," said Peabody.

"Dirk explained that," returned the doctor. "You see, Hudson, the only thing found at the scene of the struggle was a penknife—Dirk's own."

"That looks bad."

"The explanation, however, is very simple: his wife borrowed it and forgot to return it to him."

"And another is the quarrel," Peabody said.

"No proof. Points an accusing finger at the man, it would seem, but that is all: it proves nothing. Dirk

readily admitted that quarrel, did not seek in any way to minimize the fact that it had been a violent one—and over money."

"How could he?" queried Peabody. "Two of the servants heard it."

"His disgraceful speech and conduct, however," added the doctor, "brush aside, as it were, that accusing finger."

"How is that?" I exclaimed.

"Why, the bereaved husband, almost prostrated (according to these sob-reporters) keeps crying:

" 'Oh, if I could only have told Clara how sorry I was!' "

"Then," demanded Peabody, a little vehemently, I thought, "why didn't he go and tell her? Instead, what does the man do? He goes to his room (so he tells us) sleeps sweetly (so he says) until awakened in the morning to learn that his wife, who (so he would have us believe) he thought was all this time in her room, is a crushed and gory corpse."

There was a brief pause.

"You see, Hudson," remarked the doctor, "the case does present some sinister features."

"Probably," I suggested, "if Guy Oxford were here—"

Peabody and the doctor smiled a little.

"Rather out of his line, don't you think?" the doctor queried.

"He solved the Bradshaw mystery," I reminded him, "and that when all those crack detectives had ignominiously failed."

"He did. But that was a coldly scientific proposition, Hudson — a mystery insoluble to any man save one with Guy Oxford's deep and peculiar scientific attainments. But this —well, this is different."

"Quite so," concurred Peabody.

"No, Hudson," he added; "for my part, I am glad that the man who lost is out there at sea. He doesn't know."

2 *Statement of James X. Hendryx, First Mate of the Shadow.*

I THINK it well to set down, while memory of it is still vivid, an account of this strange business. That something terrible happened is clear. But where? And, in heaven's name, how did Mr. Oxford, standing there on the deck of the *Shadow*, by the weather mizzen-shrouds — in God's name, I say, how was that sudden, awful intelligence borne to him there?

For I was present, within a few yards of the man, and I heard nothing, absolutely nothing—save, that is, the soft sighing of the wind and the eternal wash of the sea. 'Tis true, the man at the wheel thinks he heard voices *in the air*, as he describes it—low, indistinct, terrible, ghostly. In fact, he thinks that he heard spirits. But, for my part, I dismiss that helmsman's testimony (if I may call it that) without a moment's hesitation. For I was there myself, saw ten times as much as he did, heard from Mr. Oxford's own lips what the helmsman never did; and I can swear that (save for Oxford's and my own) there were no voices—from the air or from lips, ghostly or otherwise.

That an intelligence, however, was actually borne to him, that there was nothing of delusion about it, I am convinced as fully as that I am this moment aboard the *Shadow*. For, brief though our acquaintance, nevertheless I know Mr. Oxford is too coolly scientific, too profoundly (terribly even) materialistic to permit superstition or fantasy to enter as a possible explanation of the matter.

No, the key to this mystery is *material!* But what is that key?

Now for the facts in the case.

IT WAS the first watch of the night—one of those still, starry nights that are so beautiful. There was a steady, gentle breeze from the direction of the land, some eighty miles distant now,

and we were going large. To be precise, the wind was from the east, our course was southwest by west.

Though unusually laconic of speech and subject to queer spells of abstraction and moody silence, yet, pleasantly to my surprize, I found Mr. Oxford a charming conversationist when once started—eloquent, truly poetical, if I may use that much-abused word, when deeply stirred by his subject.

In this instance, talk turned to the stars, and, though always profoundly moved to speculation by those mysterious lights set in the firmament, never had I heard, or imagined, till now the true poetry of the heavens.

I honestly believe that he knows the name of every lucid star in the sky. Also, as an instance of the man's wonderful memory, I learned that he has in his head the mantissa—to seven places!—of every single number from 1 to 10,000.

It was now that he drew my attention to a curious thing. Pointing out the stars Mu and Nu Andromedæ (the constellation was well up in the eastern heavens) he said that, if my look were fixed on either of those points, preferably Nn, I would see, a few degrees distant and a mere elusive patch of light, the glorious Andromeda Nebula.

"Then," said Mr. Oxford, "turn your look to the nebula itself—and see it vanish."

I fixed my eye on Nn, and there, sure enough, was that fairylike wisp of light—one of the most beautiful (as the telescope has shown), stupendous and mysterious objects in the whole expanse of the heavens.

Then, following his suggestion. I looked directly at the nebula itself, and lo, it had vanished!

I had never heard of this curious freak of optics, though I had long since noticed that the Pleiades (immersed in a nebulous mass) have a flocculent appearance if the eye is not turned directly upon the group.

As we stood there talking of these things, the moon rose, blotting out the smaller stars and hiding the great nebula with her yellow beams.

Not long after this, five bells struck, when suddenly Mr. Oxford lapsed into one of those fits of profound abstraction so common with him. And so I left him standing there, silent and with an air somehow curiously forlorn, by the weather mizzen-rigging.

As I have said, the wind, though blowing gently, was steady. At the time it had freshened somewhat, so that the maincourse had filled till the canvas had the semblance of a great concave mirror. I thought nothing of the matter at the time, and even now, when it comes to the explanation, I am as utterly as I am literally at sea. Why I so particularly mention the *Shadow's* mainsail will in a moment be sufficiently obvious.

For now I come to the mystery itself.

I WAS pacing back and forth and thinking; but of a sudden, as my eyes chanced to fall upon Mr. Oxford, I was fetched up short on the deck.

At the same instant, an exclamation of commingled awe and terror burst from the man at the helm.

"My God, sir!" he cried in a sort of whisper. "Did you hear *that?*"

I did not answer for a moment or two, for my look was fixed on Mr. Oxford, and it is no wonder that I was utterly mystified and not a little astonished at what I saw. In fact, it was as if something uncanny had crept aboard the *Shadow*.

As has been said, Mr. Oxford had fallen into profound abstraction, by the weather mizzen-shrouds: he was still there—but what an inexplicable, terrible change had suddenly come over the man!

Even from where I stood, the ghastliness of his face was startling—producing a sense of horror for which I am at a loss to find any adequate expression. The eyes, fixed (it seemed) on something in the air near the helmsman — whose own features showed pale in the rays of the binnacle lamp—were wide and staring, as if their owner had been caught in some petrifying spell. The attitude was that of one listening intently, fearful lest the slightest movement break or destroy some dreadful message.

"What is it?" I demanded of the man at the wheel.

A face upon which horror pitifully struggled was turned toward me.

"I don't know, sir!" he whispered. "So help me, God!—*voices! And in the air!*"

I cannot swear that I am myself entirely free from that cursed thing superstition, but thereupon I turned away from the man with an exclamation of disgust. I was just in time to see Mr. Oxford grasping one of the stays with his right hand, a curious quality of uncertainty in the movement; his face was covered with the left, and I thought that a groan was borne across the deck and away to leeward.

I lost no time in placing myself at his side.

"Mr. Oxford," I exclaimed, laying a hand on his arm, "what is it?"

He made as if to fling off my touch, then suddenly stood erect and very still.

"You caught it?" he queried.

"I heard nothing—saw nothing," I told him. " 'Tis all a mystery to me."

" 'Tis over now," he said, and his eyes became vacant—terrible.

"You speak in riddles, man! What has happened?"

"Murder!" said Mr. Oxford. "Foul murder!"

And then he covered his face with his hand again, muttering something, in which I caught only "Cupid's Tryst" and a woman's name—"Clara."

"Murder?" I exclaimed.

"Murder," said Mr. Oxford.

"Great Heaven, where?"

He uncovered his face and raised his eyes up to the big mainsail. Involuntarily mine followed. God knows I didn't expect to see anything, though, I fancy, I should not have been surprized or astonished if I had. However, nothing was visible there in the moonlight—save the vast spread of canvas itself.

The voice beside me brought my look back to the man's face. His gaze was still aloft, as if held there by some baleful charm.

"There has been no change there," said he, "and all is silent. It is all over now."

"All over?" I queried, scarcely knowing what to think or say. "What on earth, Mr. Oxford, do you mean?"

"That she is dead now."

A silence fell.

Suddenly he gripped my arm.

"Is it possible for me to return to land?"

I shook my head, wondering if, after all, the man had not completely lost his reason.

'Tis my conviction now, however, that no man ever was more sane than Mr. Oxford was at that moment.

"One of these boats—" he suggested.

"Why, 'tis eighty miles to land!"

"Though no sailor," he persisted, "yet I believe that I could make it."

"It is simply impossible!" I told him.

And there, rather to my surprize, Mr. Oxford permitted the matter to drop.

At the earliest opportunity, I questioned that helmsman closely, but all

I received was the absurd asseveration that there had been voices *in the air.*

That the man truly believes this, I do not question at all; neither do I hesitate for one moment to dismiss the statement as the sheerest of nonsense—utterly unworthy the consideration of any mind save one sunk in the deepest abyss of credulity and superstition.

Voices in the air! And the *Shadow* distant eighty miles from the land!

However—a face, drawn, ghastly in the moonlight, haunts my vision, and over and over again I ask myself: What did happen there on the *Shadow's* deck last night?

3. "Solved!"

CERTAIN matters necessitated a journey on the day following that night at the club, to the little town of Klepton, far up in the mountains. The road is, for the most part, an excellent one, and so I drove there in the auto. Arrived at Klepton—encircled by its jagged mountain ramparts—I found a further journey (on horseback) imperative. This was up to the Ruby mine, where I passed the night and the day and night following. News does not reach this place until "tomorrow," and so it chanced that I did not know that Guy Oxford had returned.

For the *Shadow* spoke a schooner—the *Sardis,* from Honolulu—and the result was that the bark hove to, a weather boat was lowered, and Guy Oxford was rowed over to the stranger. The schooner filled away, close-hauled (for the wind still held from the east) and the chief actor in that strange scene on the moonlit deck of the *Shadow* was on his way to the place of the tragedy.

It was about midafternoon when, tired and dusty, I drove into the city. Suddenly, through the rumble and clangor, came the shrill shout of a newsboy:

"Paypee here! Here Paypee! Great mystery solved!"

There in the big headlines was of all names—Oxford's!

Another moment, and the car was alongside the curb and I was reaching for a copy.

Oh, what was I to make of the story!

For, notwithstanding the allowance made for inevitable reportorial embellishment, what I read was so amazing as almost to challenge belief.

That morning, Guy Oxford, Sheriff Williamson, Deputy Sheriff Maxwell and Pierce, the well-known feature-writer of the *Daily Bulletin* (I wondered how Pierce had come to be one of that party) had gone out to Alta Vista, their car arriving there a few minutes past 10, just as Dirk was backing his own machine out of the garage.

There was a scowl as his eye fell upon Guy Oxford, but on the instant the man was dissembling.

"This is indeed a surprize, Mr. Oxford," was his somewhat sardonic exclamation. "I thought you were well out at sea."

"I was," returned Oxford, his black eyes fixed upon the other. "But fortunately, Mr. Dirk—in what manner fortunately you soon shall learn—I was only some eighty miles from land *on the night of Wednesday, the fifteenth.*"

"Only eighty miles," echoed Dirk, a little stiffly. "I'm afraid I don't understand you."

"You shall in good season," Oxford told him. "And ninety from Alta Vista. Fortunately, too, we met the *Sardis.* Fortunately, also, my position of third mate was merely nominal, for the *Shadow* is not allowed to carry passengers. So I changed ships, and here I am."

"I see," said Dirk.

"I'm afraid, Mr. Dirk, that you don't. But you shall, and soon at that."

"You speak in riddles," replied Dirk after a momentary panse.

He turned to the others.

"Will you come in, gentlemen?" he said.

The sheriff looked at the scientist.

"If you please, Mr. Dirk," said Oxford, "we shall, instead, visit Cupid's Tryst."

Dirk was silent for a moment, then:

"I don't know why you have come, gentlemen, for I have told all that I know. I can't see why you wish to drag me out to that cursed spot again, the very name of which is a horror now—"

"The first true words, those last, that you have uttered!" Guy Oxford told him.

"This is a most unnsual—this is a most unwarranted proceeding, it seems to me, gentlemen!" said Dirk, ignoring the dark import of Oxford's words. "But, of course, I shall go with you. If I can in any way help to solve this awful mystery, help to bring this dastardly brute to justice—"

He was silent for a space and was actually seen to shed tears, dabbling at his eyes with a handkerchief bordered with black.

Pierce has given us some remarkable work in the columns of the *Daily Bulletin*, but here, I believe, we have this brilliant journalist's *magnum opus*—his description of what followed there at Cupid's Tryst. His grasp of the psychology of the scene is well-nigh uncanny. Of Oxford's cruel, subtle vivisection (so to speak) of Dirk's guilty soul, Pierce remarks that it was as dramatic, as awful a thing as it is possible to conceive. His remark, however, is supererogatory: every one knows *that* as he reads.

Guy Oxford proceeded slowly—unrolling, as it were, the deed like a scroll before the eyes of the murderer and the astonished trio. He put Dirk's soul on the rack, watching his victim with the stony placidity of the Sphinx. He mentioned the very hour. He described certain details of the tragedy—never once, however, mentioning the murderer by name. He repeated words uttered that night—words that, it seemed, only Death (and the murderer himself) could have known. He was proceeding to the dénouement when a wild, inarticulate cry—a cry that was neither beast nor human—broke from Dirk. The next instant he was seen springing with the mad fury of a tiger at Oxford. But Williamson and Maxwell were watching; they seized the man and dragged him back.

Then Dirk broke down completely and confessed the deed.

"I don't know why I did it!" he wailed. "I was mad at that moment!"

"Over money!" said Guy Oxford. "It was for that you killed her. Your madness, I fancy, didn't blot that will from your brain."

"Will?" cried Dirk.

"Will," Oxford told him. "I suppose you deny knowledge of that?"

"No. But I didn't know to whom—"

"Tell that to the jury!" ejaculated Oxford with unutterable disgust and loathing.

"You fiend!" cried the murderer, "where were you?"

"On the *Shadow*."

"You, you," cried Dirk, "—are you human?"

4. The Maincourse.

"But," said I, "in the name of all that's inconceivable, how did you solve it?"

We were sitting in his den—that room which has seen so many problems solved.

Guy Oxford looked at me quizzically, his dark brows contracted.

"I never solved it," said he; "I knew it all the time."

"Never solved it!"

"Not at all, Hudson. There I was, some eighty miles out, ninety from Alta Vista, and I *knew*—so there was nothing to solve."

"Then there must have been something supernatural somewhere."

"Supernatural!" he ejaculated, giving a swift gesture of impatience. "Banish all that, Hudson. There are forces mysterious, elusive, some of them terrible—how terrible they may be man is just beginning to imagine—but there is no supernatural. No, banish that thought."

"Then," I persisted, "what the generality of mankind, in ignorance, would call supernatural."

"Not at all. No more supernatural than the senses of the blind man: on entering a strange room, the sound of his first footfall gives him the room's dimensions and even the character of its furniture."

"I didn't know that. However, I can see no connection between the acute senses of one deprived of sight and—the confession of Dirk."

"You could," said Oxford, "had you given to natural philosophy one tenth of the time that you have devoted to the mystic and occult. If one would know the wonders of this world, he should seek for them in the daylight, not go stumbling about in the dark."

"It is then," I reminded him, "that the stars are seen."

"The same old Hudson!" he smiled. "However, as I said, I didn't solve the mystery. It was owing to the sheerest chance, to a remarkable, to a most remarkable, fortuitous combination of circumstances that I knew.

"It is scarcely necessary to remind you, Hudson, that the laws of reflection and refraction are the same for sound as for light."

"I think I have heard or read that somewhere."

"As in the case of light," Guy Oxford continued, "the angle of incidence and that of reflection are coincident; the intensity of sound (as with gravitation also) varies inversely as the square of the distance; it can be concentrated by a lens, say a bag of India rubber or collodion distended by carbonic acid gas to the form of a double-convex lens or by a concave surface—"

"What on earth," I exclaimed, "has all this got to do with the explanation!"

He gazed at me for a moment in silence.

"To make a physicist out of you, Hudson, is, I perceive, impossible—utterly so. However, you will remember that acoustic phenomenon known as the *Ear of Dionysius.*"

I nodded.

"I do not understand the allusion, though. But go on."

"Also, you know the principle on which whispering-galleries are constructed—how a person standing at one of the focal points can carry on a conversation with a person in the other, though the words will be inaudible to a person at any point between."

"I know that. But—"

"Well, I knew that, too—that and other things. And that was why I knew that those voices which I heard there on the *Shadow* were real—that, incredible though it may seem, I actually heard Dirk's curses and Clara's cries of fear and mortal agony. That was the difference between myself and that embodiment of ignorance and superstition, the man at the wheel. He believed that the supernatural had come aboard the *Shadow.*"

"Still I can not conceive how—good Lord!" I burst out; "do you

really mean to tell me that the voices carried clear out there to the *Shadow?*"

He nodded.

"That you, ninety miles distant at sea, heard that struggle on the cliff?"

"Yes," said Guy Oxford.

For some seconds, I could only stare at him in speechless astonishment.

"How can such a thing be possible? I never dreamed that sounds like those could carry so far."

"Farther—much farther. But, of course, at that distance, such sounds *cannot be heard.*"

"And yet you heard them?"

"And yet I heard them," said Guy Oxford.

"Great Heaven! What next?"

"The proper reflector, however," he went on, "can concentrate the inaudible sound and render it audible."

"Render it audible?"

"Yes; just as the speculum of a reflecting-telescope concentrates the rays from an invisible star, brings them to a focus and thus makes it possible for the observer to see the invisible."

"But where was such a reflector there at sea?"

"The *Shadow's* big maincourse, or mainsail, filled to concavity by the breeze!"

I made an exclamation and for some moments sat there staring at him.

"There is one thing, though, that I don't understand."

"And what is that, Hudson?"

"The mate did not hear those voices from the cliff."

"He would have heard them had he been where I was, or beside the helmsman, at the proper moment. Remember, the big maincourse brought the sounds to a focus; it did not broadcast them."

"What a sensation," I cried, "there will be when this is made known! There never has been anything like this!"

"In that you are mistaken, Hudson," Guy Oxford told me. "As for the sensational part of it, science will not be astonished, though even she may be a little surprized. For there is that instance, well known to her physicists, of the sound of bells on land, at São Salvador, Brazil, being rendered audible one hundred miles out at sea by a ship's big mainsail—pressed by the breeze as the *Shadow's* was, into the form of a great concave reflector."

WHEN I looked about the inn, and light from the candles grew uncertain to my eyes, I knew I had had enough to drink. I reached to set my glass upon the table, misjudged the distance, and the clumsy thing sounded tonelessly as it struck the dirt floor. I looked again and there were no candles, only wavering splotches of light where candles should have been. Sour smell of vat-skimmings from the taproom in the rear began to sicken me. A lone rung in the back of my chair chafed my spine. I slid down in the chair to relieve the pressure, but realized that, slumped in that position, I should soon be dozing. The idea of sleeping through the night and being pitched into the gutter at dawn when the tavern closed dismayed me. The landlord had fishy eyes, a purple nose, and drooled on his shirt-front. It would be the landlord who would pitch me into the gutter. The mere fear of it disgusted me.

Gritting my teeth and gripping the edge of the table, I prepared to hoist myself to my feet when I caught sight of an empty wine-glass on the floor. My wine-glass! Horrible! A sailorman should never forget he is a gentleman—never leave empty wine-glasses on the floor.

As I reached to pick it up, on the floor near the wine-glass lay his shadow, Tortoni's shadow, a crooked thing like a black vulture against the sun. I kicked dirt over its outlines to blot them out. Inevitably my eyes traveled to where he sat. Before I glimpsed his face I knew he was leering at me. Through the haze his teeth, and moisture which trickled from the corner of his mouth, gleamed like phosphorescence.

I put a hand before my eyes to shut off the sight. With the perversity of a cripple, Tortoni misinterpreted my gesture for an invitation. His fingernails scraped the top of his table as he dragged himself to his feet. The hump on his back loomed impossibly large. He shuffled to my table.

Through the partly opened door, admitting a late visitor, came the sound of wind shrieking across the Bay of Genoa. The sea must be running white. My ship would be pitching like a tortured giant. There would be no sleep, no comfort aboard her. The inn was warm and soothing. At all events, my shore boat must already have shoved off on her last trip. In spite of Tortoni, I must stay.

He sat at my elbow, studying the label on my wine-bottle.

"Seignior drinks good wine, eh?" The tone was insinuating.

"Two bottles in my case in the taproom."

He shuffled away, returning with a bottle under each scrawny arm. He drained them in great sucking gulps. The last drop swallowed, he started sobbing.

"You're drunk, Tortoni. By the saints, get out of here!"

"No, no, Seignior!"

"Then quit your crying."

"Not drunk, Seignior. Sad, Seignior. Sad for the Donna Vanna."

"Donna Vanna? Is she good-looking?"

"The fairest in Italy."

"Where's she live? May look her up."

Tortoni wept more copiously, more noisily.

"Quit your bawling. Where's she live?"

"Ah, Seignior, the Donna Vanna—she is dead."

"That's why you're crying? When'd she die?"

"Ten months ago—"

"Too long. Too long to blubber about now. Quit bawling or get away. You'll start me."

"*Si*, Seignior. But you should hear her story. Ah, what a delicious sorrow it would bring you!"

"Delicious sorrows, nothing! My cargo's macaroni, and that's all I'm interested in."

"*Si*, Seignior, but the Count d'Almeda—"

He brought me up with a start. The lone rung jabbed my spine.

"Count d'Almeda? Young officer who slashed his throat at Place Cristoforo Colombo some years ago?"

"The same! Donna Vanna's lover!"

"Thought he killed himself because they'd hauled him up for treason."

Tortoni raised one hairless eyebrow.

"That is what the papers said, Seignior. But he died for love of the Donna Vanna!"

"An' she's dead, too? Both dead? Tough luck. She commit suicide, too?"

Tortoni discarded his drenched rag of a handkerchief, wiping eyes and nose on the cuff of his coat.

"That was the story, Seignior, I longed to tell you—full of sweet sorrows!"

"Well, start your story—but go light on the sweet sorrows! An' if the story's no good, I'll crack these four bottles on your empty head."

Tortoni tipped the bottles futilely one after another over his glass. I ordered two full ones for him. As I settled myself to avoid the lone rung, I heard a cork pop, then Tortoni's shrill, drooling voice.

2

THE Count d'Almeda! The handsomest officer in the King's Guard—and the bravest! I can see him now as he entered the ballroom, tall, vibrant like a tempered blade, a wordless man with a tongue set on rusty hinges. Like a prince returned from a land-where-all-is-known he stood in the archway, across his bosom a red ribbon like a smear of his own hot blood, his cape with its purple edging thrown over his shoulder. Immobile he stood, a tolerant smile playing across the darkened surface of the soul behind his eyes. His eyes! Like craters of lava. Eyes which might have made him a major over night—for they brought futile dreams of love to meaty dowagers, and meaty dowagers make our majors.

But d'Almeda was of another sort. Women to him were like bluebottle flies slapping against a window. When he noticed them at all, he was only impatient with their buzzing.

But the Donna Vanna—she, too, was of a different world, probably

d'Almeda's world—a world where all that is fleshy is forgotten.

I was there when they caught their first glimpse of each other, in the court ballroom, so wide that when Tony, our loudest drunkard, is in good voice he cannot be heard across its expanse.

D'Almeda paused in the archway. Their glances held. At that moment, her voice, speaking to her husband, caressed a word as it passed her lips. The complacent fingers of d'Almeda stroked the edge of the crimson ribbon across his breast. That was all.

(Tortoni chuckled moistly, gloating over the depravity of his tale. "That is very fine wine you are—" "Order two more and be damned." Tortoni's nails scratched distractingly as he tore the foil from the top of a fresh bottle.)

I could not guess whether the Seignior Vanna sensed the importance of that incident, but I should wager my chances for heaven that he did. As I think of it, I know he did. Jealous men, like all dogs, have an instinct for nosing out bloody fights. I would not have you believe that Vanna was altogether at fault. As time went on, d'Almeda and the Donna Vanna grew almost indiscreet in their passion. Indiscreet—yet only to the extent of a glance held a heart-beat too long, a shade too deep crimson at the cheeks, an instant's catching of the breath in speech.

They danced together, perhaps not too often, yet too—too completely, if your wine-deadened brain can comprehend.

(I determined to frown at Tortoni for his impertinence, then begrudged the effort, ignoring him like a gentleman.)

He held her ever so daintily, she poised her body ever so chastely. Yet they danced too completely. It was always as if they danced alone in a separate world where their spirits found release.

Meaty dowagers, of course, started the scandal. Just a breath—oh, the tiniest, most guileless of whispers!

"But it could never be," they said. "Really I could not believe it. Not d'Almeda and the Vanna, of all people!"

"Surely Seignior is not jealous of his wife and that fiery-eyed lieutenant. And they, so casual—so discreet!"

Corrosive poison for Vanna's jealousy!

THERE came the day of the King's Carnival, most brilliant of our fiestas. On the Avenida in the afternoon, Seignior and Donna Vanna drove in their brougham. Along the sidewalk, solemn, preoccupied, d'Almeda strode with the step of a king. As the carriage passed, instinctively he lifted his head, paused, then with most formal gesture saluted. It was all an accidental meeting, a half-smirk of the fates.

It marked the snapping point of Seignior Vanna's restraint. He and the donna were not present at the King's Carnival. Drolly, Seignior, she never again was seen in Genoa. Seignior Vanna, to my knowledge, returned but twice in eighteen years. Furtive, thieving swoops they were—flights of a half-crazed eagle from a moldering gray-walled castle in the mountains. Gossip said the donna was held there imprisoned. On the first swoop, he caught me. Tortoni, in his clawing fingers. On the second and last swoop—but let us talk first of the earlier visit.

Seignior Vanna revisited Genoa five years after he left it—on the day of the King's Carnival. Few knew that he had returned, for few could recognize in that grayish-white, wrinkled mummy the Vanna of other days. I caught sight of him as he approached me, and asked myself why madmen were permitted the run of Genoese streets. He hugged the

shadows of the buildings, crept among them like a graveyard wraith. I sought the curb and quickened my pace. He spoke to me and his voice cut through me like a Damascene blade slicing home.

"Tortoni," he whistled, "in five hours you leave Genoa for the hills."

And, Seignior, there was that in his voice which held me speechless. I mumbled that he had no hold on me, could not order me about, but my lips were dry and stiff.

"Your debt of ten thousand lire. It is due tomorrow. You will pay or go to jail, and in jail you will quickly be forgotten. Perhaps you do not remember Giuseppe!"

I recalled Giuseppe only too vividly —Giuseppe who had once displeased Vanna. For a time acquaintances asked where Giuseppe had gone. Friends replied, "To jail." Later they could only answer, "Perhaps to paradise." This Vanna was dangerously powerful.

"At the Roman Gate at 10—without fail."

The ghost that was Vanna melted into the afternoon shadows. I sucked in the fresh air as if I had quitted a graveyard tryst. People stared at me as I stumbled along wringing my hands, talking to myself like a fool. Safe in my rooms, I quieted my agitation over a bottle of Sauterne—no finer than this—

(His nails scraped the foil. A cork popped. Then, the sucking sound of liquid drunk from a bottle.)

—and I said to myself I would disregard his impertinent demand of the afternoon. I promised myself I should be in my bed by 9 and he would find but a dark hallway and a locked door at 10.

When 9 o'clock came, I could not lay off my clothes. I was not afraid —I only waited, waited, waited tensely in my chilly room. An hour later, I counted clock-strokes, eight, nine, ten. Still my light burned and I stared fascinated at my unbolted door.

I heard a step creak four flights below me, knew he was creeping up my stairway with the stealth of a python. I watched the knob on my door turn ever so slowly. Then a thin crack of darkness crept in, pierced by the gleam of his eyes. I lost control of myself. I opened my mouth to shriek, but so tight was my throat that only a whimper came forth. The door swung slowly open. He stood in the shadows.

"I match my courtesy with yours," he began evenly, bowing with the mock deference of a maniac. "I invite you to my castle. You flaunt my hospitality. Now I repay your boorishness by calling at your quarters. I bear an invitation written in the only letters you can read, gold and silver. What is your price?"

I should have twisted his chicken-neck till the words were drowned in his own blood. Yet I sat petrified, staring at his leering face like a ninny. You cannot understand my inner torments. The sinister soul of the man overwhelmed me.

He came to me, gripping my shoulder with his talons. I swear to you they struck a chill through my greatcoat and vest. He guided me to my feet, led me to my bag and without a word directed my packing. Trundling a portion of my baggage, he hurried me down the stairs and into his brougham at the curb.

WE ARRIVED at the castle at midnight. It towered harshly against flashes of lightning stabbing the western sky. For an hour we had driven through a country, bleak and tenantless, across which a rising wind whistled. The hoofbeats of our horses played a hollow accompaniment.

Our driver was unnaturally silent, as if his tongue had been torn from its roots. As I glanced at the fever-

ish face of Vanna, I could imagine him reveling in the tug of flesh and cords ripping from their base.

His eyes never traveled in my direction. He looked steadily before him, like a lover impatient for a tryst. He seemed inwardly elated.

Some phantom gatekeeper heard the clatter of our horses. A drawbridge settled rustily in its groove. Pine torches sent up greasy flares from sockets in the wall. As we rumbled across the bridge, I stole a glance from the window and saw the glint of inky water in the moat. Though I did not trust myself to look over my shoulder, I knew that the drawbridge had shut us in.

In the saffron glow of the porte-cochère, another silent servant met us. Vanna flung him my bags. Gripping my wrist with his icy fingers, he led me through clammy hallways to my room.

A smile crossed his face as he stood in my doorway. "Five weeks! Yes, five weeks should suffice! A rest of such duration should benefit you, especially since you will spend it quietly in this room!"

He chuckled. The door swung shut. I heard a lock slip into place, a key withdrawn from its slot, then Vanna's quick footsteps echoing down the hall.

I shuddered, seeking to pierce the shadows hovering in each corner. A hot hell, well lighted with brimstone, would have been paradise compared to this house of ghastly insinuations. But my debt of ten thousand lire—and my curiosity—must be satisfied. Ten thousand lire to live for five weeks in a musty vault! My debt of honor! It taught me, Seignior, the evils of gambling—

(Tortoni's voice trailed off into a whisper. I stared at him and finally made out that his head had slumped on his breast. He was snoring. "Too much wine—or too little," I mused. Tortoni drew open one bloodshot eye, muttering thickly, "Too little." "Order some more and finish your damned story." Popping of a Sauterne cork revitalized him. He strained across the table, stretched tense hands toward me, and continued, his jaws opening and shutting with a metallic click.)

IN FIVE weeks we returned to Genoa, Vanna and I. We drove all night, arriving in my rooms at noon of a Saturday—the day d'Almeda slashed his throat from ear to ear on the Place Cristoforo Colombo. D'Almeda had just left my rooms when he killed himself. I had invited him there at the direction of Vanna, who promised that this favor would finally cancel my debt to him.

"Tell him his beloved, the Donna Vanna, has sent him a keepsake. Ask him if he is brave enough to face her husband to receive it." Those were his directions.

I sought out d'Almeda, and found him sitting far back at a table in the Grand Café. The years had dug more deeply those austere lines about his mouth. Yet was he still unbeaten in spirit. The flash of his eyes was undimmed.

As I delivered my message, he glanced at me half-amused, as if he had been sitting at that place in the café during five years awaiting Vanna's return. He rose deliberately, flipped the waiter a coin, then strode out like a man hastening to a welcome duel. He walked so rapidly that I had difficulty in keeping pace with him. I could not join him in conversation.

As we entered my rooms, Vanna bowed low, flashing his evil smile. I thought of a wolf I had once seen, slather trickling about his mouth as he tore another of his pack into bits.

"We meet again," Vanna said slowly. "I regret that I cannot offer you the hospitality of my own home

—which I was forced to quit so uncceremoniously."

"Forced?" d'Almeda countered. "It is said in Genoa that Seignior Vanna has yet to see the time when he is forced to do what he does not like."

Vanna looked baffled. His sneering face sobered. He nibbled his mustache.

"It was my wife—my wife's health, that forced me to leave. We do anything for love, do we not, d'Almeda?"

But d'Almeda was not to be caught in the trap.

"One can scarcely pass judgment on what he has never experienced."

Vanna studied his rival. His expression changed to one of appreciation.

"They tell mo you fence well. They do you scant justice. For they suggest that your skill is confined to rapiers."

D'Almeda bowed as an actor might acknowledge applause from an unfriendly audience. Across Vanna's face there flashed a gleam of satisfaction. Its victim so spirited, his revonge could be only the sweeter.

"I come at your request," d'Almeda remarked abruptly.

"No canse for haste, for in all probability this will be our last meeting. But, doubtless you are impatient for word from the donna. I can understand—"

Impulsively d'Almeda's hand went to his belt. He quickly regained himself. Vanna continued.

"My wife sends her greetings. Since her health makes it impossible for her to be present—will you step beyond this portière? I think there the light is better."

I watched d'Almeda between the curtains. Saw a hot flush of anger overspread his face. Saw him blanch, then totter and fall, struck by the hideous cruelty of the thing.

I leapt toward him, yet Vanna had stepped over the body and dashed past me before I reached d'Almeda's side.

"My appointment at 3! I am now ten minutes overdue! I shall pass here shortly. Watch for me!"

My door trembled with the force of his exit. D'Almeda lay colorless at the foot of a portrait of the Donna Vanna. Across its corner hung a riding crop. It was the portrait I had painted of her in payment of my debt of honor to the Seignior. Yes, it was the Donna Vanna. But it was not the Vanna of her courtly days; the days when there was none so fair in all Italy. It was the Vanna of a death-gray castle on the hill; the Vanna who had felt the sting of coaching whip and the deeper cut of insult. The once shimmering hair hung in wisps; black shadows ringed eyes grown pale in vaultlike dimness; the lips looking as if they had never met caresses nor known a smile.

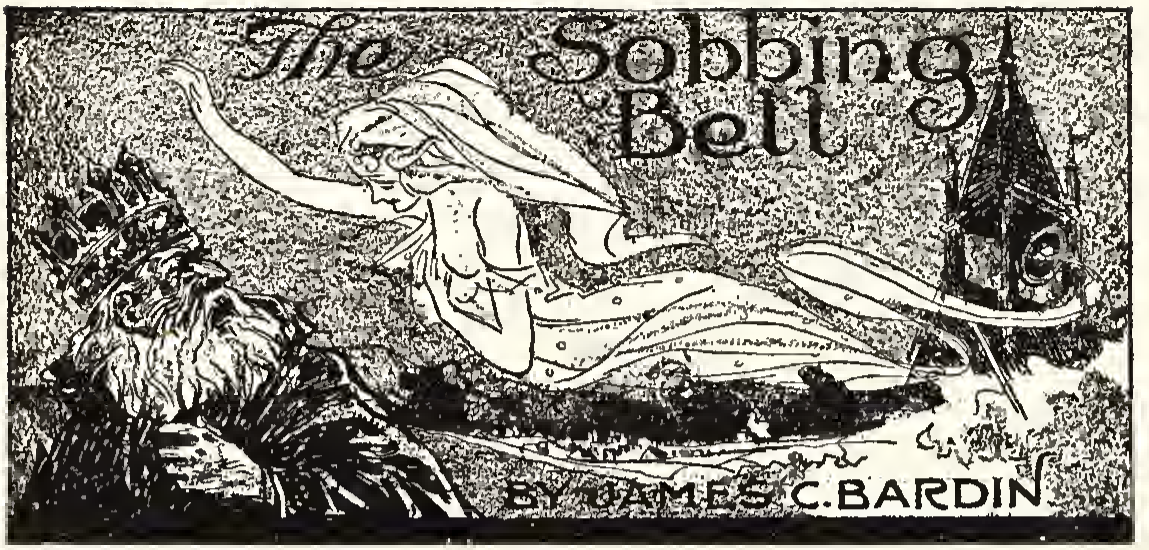
I dragged him to my bed, loosened his collar, and bathed his face. He came to consciousness just as the clatter of hoofs came up from the street below. He opened his eyes, stared about, then feebly, "Where is Vanna?"

His voice sounded as if he were sorry he had returned to life. I opened my mouth to answer. D'Almeda heard the hoofbeats on the street and sprang to the window. I hastened to his side. Passing my poor rooms, with noble pomp drove a funeral procession. D'Almeda stared mutely at it like a man beaten to dumbness.

He gasped. I saw his hand on the ledge tighten into bloodlessness. A frantic sob forced itself through his lips as his eye caught sight of Vanna smiling from the window of one of the leading carriages.

D'Almeda turned and sped from my room. Still staring dazedly from

(Continued on page 335)



Author of "Death"

I STOOD peering through the snow at the shadowy façade of the cathedral which soared upward into the dark. All day I had been tramping about this ancient German town, rummaging in musty towers and in the hollow courts of castles, long ago fallen into ruin. The cathedral I had not visited; I promised myself that pleasure for the next day; and now I stopped a moment to look at its vast bulk looming against the night.

Just across the street lay my inn, and from its windows came a glow of light that trickled over the snow in lines of faded orange. A merry group was within, and the laughter and loud talk were very inviting as I shivered in the freezing wind. A sound of tankards clinking together and the sight of a pretty girl with yellow braids, passing and repassing the windows, made me aware that thirst was consuming me. I glanced once more at the tall statue of the Virgin, and thanked her in my heart for her smile. Then I crossed the street and entered the inn.

"A seidel of beer, *Mein Herr,*" I requested when the landlord answered my summons. In a moment, the yellow-haired girl set a great, foaming tankard before me. A long draft of the rich brew set my spirits dancing, and I was amusing myself looking at the figures of a fat huntsman with fatter dogs pursuing a battered fox around the pewter stein. The company in the room beat upon the tables in time to a song that a tipsy student, ensconced on the mantel, was roaring. In the midst of the clatter, the door opened, and I looked up to see a withered little priest come into the room and peer around with rheumic eyes. He was spare and well weathered, with a great thatch of white hair around his tonsure, and a crooked back; but his eyes were intensely alive.

There was no unoccupied table in the room, and the priest, seeing me alone and distant from the revelers, came and asked if he might sit with me.

"The honor will be mine," I assured him, rising. "With those fellows roaring over there, a man of the church is indeed welcome."

The yellow-haired girl brought him a pat of cheese and a piece of black bread. He bowed his head, muttering, for a minute, and then looked up to smile at me.

"The cold makes one hungry, my

son," he began. "And the cathedral—"

He paused, and seemed to hold his breath. From across the street came a faint creaking, and a moment later, a great bell began to boom.

"The voice—" he whispered, and fell silent, cheese and bread suspended in mid-air and his body leaning forward as if to drink in every note.

Stroke after stroke, slow and ponderous, beat upon the night. The bell seemed to moan, as if its iron tongue spoke pain. Between the strokes there vibrated an undertone that was like the bitter sobbing of a woman. The noisy revelers stopped their singing and sat with bowed heads as the deep notes rang.

"A ghostly bell," muttered the priest, "a bell whose metal drank the blood of a maid, and whose tongue cries out with her agony after all these centuries."

"Ah!" I cried, with sudden recollection. "The sobbing bell of Marenburg!"

"So," said the priest. "You know it, then?"

"Only what I have read of it," I replied.

The bell boomed on, and for a long while after its last sonorous note had died, that sobbing undertone rang upon our ears. I moistened my lips with a long draft from the stein. The priest smiled at my agitation.

"The lamentations of Meister Kluken's daughter are not good to hear, my son," he said, with kindliness. "She mourns her virginity—as did Jephtha's daughter, perhaps . . ."

He paused, and bit into his black loaf.

"Meister Kluken's daughter?" I ventured to repeat, when he said no more.

"*Ach!* It is her soul that sobs in the bell. Or—so the legend has it."

"I have not heard the legend," I said.

The little priest brooded long in silence, idly fingering his rosary.

"THE tale is very old," he said, after a while. "Nearly as old as the church yonder. I heard it first some sixty years ago, when I was a choir boy. It was told me by an aged sacristan, and even today I remember the terror in his eyes as he told it. They were round, his eyes, like a pig's, and blue, like those of a doll from Gutenburg."

He laughed.

"Blue, like a doll's," he repeated. "The cathedral was built by a king who ruled, some six centuries ago, what was then a large principality. He was a cruel king, with a heart already black for hell and a soul heavy with crime. Conscience rode him like a hag, and his very being was steeped in fear—not of man, ah, no! But of God—sometimes, and more often of the devil. It was fear that built that church out there, and fear still lurks in the bell that sobs in the tower.

"When this king—Otho by name—had all but finished his church, after labor that lasted for nearly twenty years, he sent for a bell-caster, a Meister Kluken, who lived in a nearby city. This man had a wide reputation and a just one as a caster of bells, and he had cast chimes as far away as Toulon, which in those days was a great city. No man in all the world was more skilled than he in the use of metals.

"Moreover, God had blessed him with a daughter, slim as a poplar, graceful as a morning mist on a hilltop, and pure as the snow on the Matterhorn."

The priest stopped and scratched his chin reflectively.

"There are not many such left, sir, in this wicked world," he declared.

"This girl—Griselda she was called—was beautiful, as I have said," he resumed. "And her wonderful face

and her father's wealth had attracted the attention of many young men in lofty stations, and rumor had it that even King Otho himself had looked at her, and not without interest. So it may be that the ruler had other thoughts than those of bells when he sent for Meister Kluken. The king received the bell-caster with honor, and bade him sit at the council table.

"'You are Meister Kluken, a caster of bells, eh?' the king asked.

"'That is my trade, Your Majesty,' replied the *meister*.

"'I have heard some of your chimes. They are good,' growled Otho. 'I wish a bell for my church, and I wish you to make it.'

"Meister Kluken bowed.

"'It shall contain three metals—gold and silver and iron, to be a symbol of God's holy Trinity, whose voice it will echo, and a representative of the three graces that God gave to man,' the king went on. 'Gold will be for charity, silver for hope, and iron for steadfast faith.'"

The priest paused again and bit off another mouthful of cheese and black bread.

"Is it not strange, sir," he mused, "how ready the wicked are with the iron words of God? Well, Meister Kluken went away, and soon his furnaces were roaring, and his workmen sweated over the molds. After many days, the time came for the first casting, and Meister Kluken, his daughter, and many others went into the dark workshop to witness the operation. But sad was their disappointment. When the furnaces were opened and the liquid metals vomited into the molds, iron drew away from silver and silver from gold, and each cooled out in isolation. The *meister* himself went down to inspect the metals, but he could find nothing to account for their refusal to mingle. Thinking it was an accident, due to some fault in the preparations, he sent his guests away, and started his workmen upon another attempt. Two, four, a dozen times he made his furnaces howl with heat and caused them to spew out the molten metals. In vain—gold and silver and iron would not mingle.

"In despair, Meister Kluken went to the king and told him the bell could not be cast. The brow of Otho grew ominous.

"'Why can you not cast it?' he bellowed.

"'The metals will not mingle,' explained the *meister*.

"'They must mingle!' the king cried.

"'Your Majesty, it is easier to mix oil and water and keep them mixed than it is to cause these metals to mingle,' declared the *meister*. 'Gold and iron—'

"'Cast me that bell of gold and silver and iron,' Otho interrupted, pounding his fist on the council table, 'or your head shall roll in the dust ere the passage of a moon!'

"Meister Kluken looked for a moment at the enraged king.

"'I shall obey Your Majesty's commands,' he murmured.

"SADLY he returned to his labor at the furnaces. Again and again he tried to force the metals to blend—now cajoling them, as petulant women are cajoled, now bullying them, now begging them. But without avail.

"It was then—at the beginning of the third week of the moon's journey—that he thought of a certain astrologer who lived high up on a cliff above the Rhine. The *meister* paid him a visit, taking a golden goblet as a gift. The astrologer was a man skilled in all the arts of alchemy and dexterous in both white and black magic, and he had no fear of anything on earth, not even of King Otho, for his magic protected him. When Meister Kluken told his story, the astrologer swore a great oath against the king, because, he told the

meister, the bell would bring evil to those who first heard it ring.

"'It shall be cast,' the magician assured him, 'and there will be those to die for it. The lowly and the great must perish, and there will be black grief. Then—when this generation is swept away, it shall speak for God, but I know that men will never love it. It will—somehow—make them afraid. Ah, Meister Kluken, know that it must suffer its birth pangs in the blood of a virgin, and it must cry aloud through after ages in a voice of grief, not of majesty!'

"And he explained to the horrified bell-caster that until the flesh and bone and blood of a virgin were mingled with the molten metals, the bell could not be cast.

"The *meister,* in desperation, returned to his house and mourned in silence; for, of course, he believed that, with such a condition to be fulfilled, the bell could not be cast; he was an honest man, and had a horror of all death, and he dreaded the day when the moon should pass out of the sky, for he believed that then his life would end. In such matters, Otho was a man of his word, as kings usually are when it is a question of killing.

"Now it chanced that on the very day that the *meister* returned from his visit to the astrologer, his workmen had completed another flux of metals, and were ready to cast. The *meister* called his daughter and they went to the shop together. Like all the others, the casting failed. The good *meister's* face blanched. 'Fortune does not aid me,' he cried. And then, to his workmen, 'Let the furnaces cool; there is no more need for them.'

"He heard a harsh laugh behind him, and turned to see King Otho glowering at him through the gloom of the shop. With the king was a youth, a knight, whose face was as beautiful as Parsifal's.

"'So,' Otho sneered, 'you have given up?'

"Meister Kluken bowed his head.

"The king turned an evil glance upon Griselda. Then, with a smile, he took from his neck a golden chain and flung it around the throat of the maid. Without a word, he turned on his heel and strode out. Griselda stood motionless and horrified. The young knight, who had not moved to follow the king, strode forward in his clanking mail and took the chain from Griselda's bosom.

"'This is not for such as you,' he said, 'but for painted women. This would soon be a collar of slavery.'

"Griselda drew back, a little frightened and a little ashamed, as girls will be. The young knight took from his own neck a chain like that of the king's, link for link, save that the medallion was different. He placed the chain around the girl's throat.

"'Mine, at least, is pure,' he declared, and kissed Griselda's fingers. And when he had gone, Griselda kissed the medallion that hung on the chain. Then she turned to look at her father.

"'*Meister!*' she cried. 'Why hast thou turned so pale?'

"The old man took her arm, and as they walked homeward, he told her of the king's threat—how he should die if the bell were not cast within the month. And all the while, he could not keep his eyes away from the chain about her throat.

"'Is there not some way to make the metals mingle?' she sobbed.

"'None,' the old man replied. He bowed his head and prayed God to forgive him the lie; and he prayed, too, in the name of the young knight whose face was like Parsifal's.

"When they reached their house, the maid sought her chamber and brooded long, holding in her hands

the chain of gold. On her lips played the smile of a maiden hearing for the first time the rustle of love's wings; but in her eyes were the tears of one who looks upon death. And it chanced that she, too, thought of the astrologer who lived on the cliff.

"'He can give me help,' she dreamed, 'to bring my knight to my heart, and to help my father cast his bell.'

"That same night she secretly made her way up to the astrologer's den, taking with her the nurse who had tended her all her life. She remained a long time closeted with the magician, and when she came out terror was in her eyes and the broken chain hung about the fingers of her slender hands.

"'The flesh and blood of a virgin!' she whispered over and over again.

"THE next morning she went early to church, and was confessed. Then she sought her father.

"'Father,' she said, 'have the workmen prepare the furnaces for another casting, and tell them to be speedy, so that all may be ready ere night. Thou must go to the court and summon King Otho and his suite to the workshop. Today the bell will be cast.'

"'Why art thou so confident, child?' he asked. 'Thy father, a caster of bells for fifty or sixty years, has failed.'

"'I know, father, that it will be cast,' she declared. 'I have found a charm in an old alchemy book that tells how to fuse gold and silver and iron. If it be worked by a maid, it cannot fail. Go thou to the king and bid him come.'

"She embraced her father, and he kissed her on the brow.

"'May God forgive me!' she sobbed as she ran out of the room to hide her tears.

"The *meister* did as she bade him, and that afternoon when the sun was dropping behind the hills, a great company assembled in the shop of the bell-caster. Near the furnaces sat the king, and near him stood the young knight, with a dream in his eyes. All about was grouped the court. In the black furnaces the flames roared and boomed as they raced up the chimneys; red reflections danced fantastically upon the shining bare flesh of the workmen busy at their tasks, and upon the dull, empty faces of the king's women. Meister Kluken stood near the king, thinking of the beauty of the young knight's face.

"'So it is your daughter who is to save your neck, eh?' growled Otho.

"'It is she,' the *meister* replied.

When the king spoke, the young knight had gripped the handle of his sword.

"Passion distorted the face of the king. 'Well, should she fail,' he said, scowling fiercely upon the *meister*, 'I can solace myself for your death. . . perhaps. . .'

"The sword all but leapt from the scabbard when the young knight heard the words. He strode a little nearer the edge of the molding pit. A great shouting began at the furnaces, the workmen ran about, and a moment later the doors opened and a blinding flood of metal gushed forth and plashed into the molds.

"At the instant the shouting began, a door in the far end of the shop opened, and Meister Kluken's daughter entered, followed by her nurse. She was robed all in white, and about her throat was a twisted, broken chain whose links were tied together with ribbon. Swiftly she advanced to the edgo of the pit and stood beside the young knight. A stir of wonderment passed over the assemblage, and King Otho leaned forward in his chair.

"'That chain . . .' he muttered; but he said no more, because as he whispered, the maid turned. She pointed her finger at him and cried out, "'So dearly will you pay for

your bell, King Otho, that it will haunt you even in hell!'

"And so saying, she took the chain from her neck and kneeling suddenly, placed it in the young knight's hands and touched his fingers with her lips.

" 'Thy chain . . .' she half sobbed. And then, rising and turning again to the king, she laid her hand on the knight's sword hilt and said, 'If so pure a knight will soil his steel in such blood as yours, let him guard this chain with his life.'

"King Otho sprang from his chair. But before he was well on his feet, Meister Kluken's daughter leapt into the molten metal in the pit. There was a whirling splash, a hissing recoil, and then quiet. The maid was one with the metals.

"Slowly, and stricken with awe, the king and his court drew out of the workshop, afraid to turn their backs upon that fatal pit. Meister Kluken they left raving in the arms of his workmen. And at the edge of the pit stood the young knight, turning a broken chain about in his fingers."

THE priest fell silent, and outside the wind howled, I thought, as the flames howl in a furnace, while tiny ice flakes pelted the windows.

"The metals cooled out into a perfect bell," he went on, "and after a few months it was hung in the cathedral. Because Meister Kluken had lain near death after his daughter's sacrifice, and because Otho had slain the young knight with the thrust of a dagger from behind, the superstitious workmen had not put the clapper in place, and the bell had never been sounded.

"On the day that the bell was hung, the king and his court assembled to hear it ring for the first time. It was a brilliant company, and none seemed gayer than the king, who made merry so that his conscience might not devour him. Soon there came a ponderous creaking as men tugged at the ropes, and in a moment the bell boomed forth its first note. Then, while the clapper was swinging back, there came a low sobbing, just as *Mein Herr* heard it tonight. At the same moment, men say, the king's dagger leapt of itself from its scabbard. Otho's face blanched and all the court crowded together. Again and again boomed the bell, and again and again that bitter sobbing moaned through the air. Otho sat bolt upright on his horse, with his face bloodless and his teeth grinding together, and he was ashake with fear; each time that the bell boomed, terror caught him and he sweated like a man with ague. All at once, unable to bear it longer, he sprang from his horse, and running, clutching, stumbling forward, cried out to the ringers.

" 'Stop! In God's name, stop that bell. Stop it! Stop it! God's curse on that bell. . . . !'

"He fell to the ground, and the bell ceased. They carried him back to his palace, and in two weeks he was dead. The physicians said that fear had broken the fibers of his heart."

The little priest sat back in his chair and smiled a little.

"Men think little of such tales, sir," he said, apologetically. "Yet—but listen. . ."

Just then the great bell boomed again, and the lamentations of Meister Kluken's daughter beat upon my ears.

"Truly," the priest said, rising and gathering his robe about him, "such tales are for the innocent. Yet one can see the dagger with which Otho killed the knight—the same dagger that leapt of itself from the scabbard. And one can see also the chain that was around the neck of Griselda. They are both in the museum. And what better proof would you ask to add to the sob in the bell's notes?"

He raised his eyebrows enigmatically, laughed a dry little laugh, and went out.

The Brand of Cain

By G. W. J. BLUME

"An orphan's curse would drag to hell
A spirit from on high,
But oh! more horrible than that
Is the curse in a dead man's eye."
—*Coleridge.*

ONLY one other had possessed my secret, and now he lay, white and still, while a crimson thread slowly trickled down his distorted face from a wound in the temple, writhing and coiling like a fiery serpent among the deep furrows of his face.

He had looked at me with eyes wide frozen with terror as he realized my purpose and now, although the eyes were set in a cold, vacant stare, still they followed me. They fascinated me, so that I was unable to gaze away and was as powerless as a charmed bird before a serpent. An irresistible force seemed drawing me toward him. I tried to break away, but every movement served but to bring me nearer to that ghastly face. I threw myself to the gronnd, but still the glassy gaze of those dreadful eyes froze me as would the glance of a Gorgon, and I gradually glided closer and closer to the face of the dead man. My nerves gave way. Shaking as with the ague, I shrieked and cursed in my terror—but still I was unable to break the charm of those horrible eyes!

My last paroxysm of anguish brought me directly over the body of the murdered man. My face leaned toward his. My eyes were almost torn from their sockets by the uncanny power of that awful gaze, and I laughed a horrible laugh as I thought of the kiss of the dead man when my face should meet his! And then I fainted beside the body

The daylight was slowly fading as I roused from my stupor. Averting my gaze, I crept into the woods to find some place in which to conceal the corpse.

The bushes whipped my face as I passed and clutched my hair with lingering, weird clasps. The tall tree trunks loomed out, black and foreboding, and the early twilight cast dreary shadows in the thick recesses of the wood. Long, snaky roots reached out and tripped me as I passed, and my clothing and hands were torn by the briers.

I soon came to the brink of a small cliff, lapped at its base by a restless little stream. Climbing down the slope I fought my way through the tangle of undergrowth. Feverishly I threw myself down to drink at the edge of a deep pool. With terrible plainness the water reflected my drawn and ghastly face, which bore on its forehead the brand of Cain! Frantically dashing water to my head I scanned my features in a pocket mirror. The stains were still there, glowing as if branded deep with a hot iron. I rubbed sand into the skin until it chafed off, but still the marks burned deeper and deeper—into my very brain, nntil the whole universe seemed dyed in crimson streaks of blood.

Shrieking, I arose and staggered away through the brush and rocks. At last I stumbled upon a cavity in the cliff, which would serve my purpose. Hastily retracing the tortuous way, I reached the body. Lifting the stiffening corpse to my shoulder I struggled down the steep incline until I reached the fissure, in which I deposited the body. As I threw down the dead man the cold fingers of one of the hands

raked my throat, sending thrills of nervous terror down my spine. I started at every sound, and every shadow caused my heart to pound like a trip-hammer; such was the spell of the horror engulfing me like a soft, suffocating garment.

Instinctively I sensed that the horror had assumed bodily form. I felt it creeping up to throttle and hurl me into the cleft whose yawning jaws seemed to crave another victim ere they would be satisfied. I dug at the rocky soil with bleeding fingers, striving to cover the body, but living flesh and blood could not endure the torture of that noiseless, relentless advance, fearful in its uncertainty. My quivering fingers refused their task, and I leapt from the shelf and dashed madly away in search of safety.

I could feel the closely pursuing presence as I fled. I feared the baleful, paralyzing glare of its eyes should I dare turn around. I knew how it would look—all pale and ghastly, with eyes that glowed like red fire-coals and long, snaky hair that stood on end and greedy claws that were even now reaching for my throat!

My breath came in great sobs as I stumbled on, and rattled in my throat like the death rattle of my victim. The stars came out, but every star was a fiery eye gazing into mine. The fireflies twinkled, but every flash stabbed crimson through my bloodshot eyes. And yet, no horror could equal that of being constantly, relentlessly followed.

SOMETHING brushed my throat—a bnsh. I struggled on and still on. Another time, my hand in trying to tear the clutch from my throat encountered only a low-hanging branch, but my breath came in gasps. My throat contracted and I knew—yes, the phantom had overtaken me! Every nerve was a screaming wire and every hair stood on end as I shrieked out prayers and curses, but still the clutch tightened. Coming to a high embankment I hurled myself over, wishing only for death. Something soft held me—the top of a fir tree, I think—and I rolled down the bluff into a crevice, inside of which was something cold and soft. Every sinew froze as I encountered the touch of the dead. Frantically I threw myself down the declivity and plunged into the thicket, but still I felt that awful, haunting presence and the clasp of those cold fingers. Thrice that night I fled from the terrible spot and thrice my circlings in the dark brought me again into the presence of death.

At last I knew as I crawled away that I must turn aud face my pursuer. Powerless to resist, I turned, and my eyes met eyes of greenish red coals that pierced my brain like throbs of forked lightning. The bristling hair gleamed with a dull phosphorescent glow and across the cruel features, sickly yellow, grinned gleaming teeth through blood-stained lips. The long, snaky fingers tightened their clasp and I fell at its feet as if dead.

How long I lay there I do not know. It may have been hours, or days. I do not know how I got out of the forest, nor how I got here. . .

Why am I in this padded cell? Why do my fingers ache to clasp your throat through these bars and to strangle you while I hold yon powerless with my eyes? Why will not the keeper let me wash from my forehead these awful spots that are setting my brain on fire? Can't you see them? But what—stranger, don't leave—don't leave me—O God! my throat, the clutch—and those eyes—those eyes!

IMPRISONED FOR THIRTY CENTURIES

BY ROMEO POOLE

Author of "A Hand From the Deep"

ALONE in his darkened bedroom, clad in his sleeping garments, Walter Frey turned the blackish flake of stratified rock back and forth, gazing with the fascination of a crystal gazer at the ghostly rays of light that emanated from it.

"Stones of all kinds there are," he solemnly pronounced to the solitude, "precious stones and cornerstones and Blarney stones, bnt here's a stone I wouldn't trade for ten times its weight in diamonds—I wouldn't exchange it for the cornerstone of the Woolworth Building and the rest of the building thrown in."

Lest he lose some small portion of the effect, he arose and drew the last shade down to exclude the only crack of light that entered from the outside. Now he could see the mysterious phenomenon with perfect clearness. The stone was a flake chipped off a large rock. It was as large as the palm of a man's hand, hardly thicker than paper, almost as evenly curved as a manufactured lens, and smooth on both sides where the succeeding layers had been split off. Seen in daylight, it might have been taken for a huge moonstone of very dark color and poor luminosity; but when accident caused the student of geology to look on it in a darkened room—there was a discovery that made all the findings of the last hundred years seem as petty as the invention of the clothespin.

Frey had set the stone up in his window during the day, and on coming to his room to retire he had taken it down to put it in a safe place, for he nearly worshiped his geological specimens. After he had turned ont his light for the night, however, he chanced to glance toward the table whereon lay the mysterious flake of stone—then he shook himself very thoroughly to make sure that he was neither dreaming nor insane.

A picture emanated from the surface of the stone, in such a manner that he seemed to see directly through the stone and beyond it for many yards. It was the view of the street in front of his window. A pedestrian, caught with one foot in the air and his body leaning forward in an impossible posture, stood on the sidewalk across the strect, apparently frozen into inactivity. An automobile that had just run over a protruding cobblestone in thc ancient paving and bounced two wheels off the ground hnng thus suspended, without visible means of support. All shone with

crystal clearness, sharp and unmistakable, and all was motionless so far as the eye could detect.

Only a scientist, versed in the ways of light, could understand how this mysterious vision came to exist: and it was long, long minutes before Walter Frey arrived at the one unquestionable solution. The stone retarded light rays, and let them through with extreme slowness!

We see an object because rays of light reflected from that object enter our eyes and set up a picture on the retinas. We look through a window glass at a passing automobile, and of course we see it at the exact time it passes, for light travels at the rate of thousands of miles per second.

Here, however, was a "glass" that stopped the headlong flight of those speeding rays and held them down to a snail's pace. The consequence was that, hours after a car had passed in front of the stone, the light rays reflected from that car were slowly escaping from the reverse side of the stone, and the image of the car was thus communicated to the human eye, the car appearing to be just as far through and beyond the stone as the real car had been hours earlier.

The light rays came out so slowly that the image was too faint to see in daylight, but in the darkened room it was clearly visible.

Whereas it had first appeared to be a motionless image, however, the student was now able to check up movements of different objects, as one might notice the changed position of the clock hands although he cannot see them move. The pedestrian ultimately stood on the other foot, the car-wheels finally came back to earth, all in sequence, like a ridiculously slow moving picture, as the imprisoned light rays came through.

NEEDLESS to say, there was no sleepy feeling in Walter Frey's eyes or brain now. He fumbled about in the darkness, turning the stone this way and that, placing its back against different objects, all in constant fear of making a misstep and breaking it. Turn it as he would, however, the vision seemed to suffer no change until he set it on a small shelf fastened to the wall near the head of his bed. As he stepped backward he stumbled, and involuntarily his hand seized on the shelf for support, bending it down out of line.

A lightninglike change took place in the ghostly scene coming from the stone. From movements of imperceptible slowness the entire scene snapped into life, and in fact far faster than real life, whizzed through its day's maneuvers in a series of flashes; and then, before Frey could begin to comprehend the cause, all disappeared and the room was in blackness!

Apparently there was nothing to lose now, so Walter turned on the light to ascertain, if possible, what had caused this sudden and erratic change in the mysterious light rays. But what was his surprize to find nothing that could account for it. There were no chemicals in the room. He did not keep electrical equipment of any kind. There was not so much as a current of hot or cold air to account for the erratic speeding up of those light rays. He pushed the shelf about and finally tore it loose from its brackets, but discovered only the bare wall behind.

"Yet there was a cause," he finally decided. "There was an effect, so there must have been a cause. The fairies didn't do it. But why," wailed the unhappy student to himself. "why couldn't this have happened before I parted from Isabel today? Why couldn't I have had the opportunity to show her that I can work wonders as well as Henry Kopp? Thank God, she isn't married to him yet, though!"

Walter Frey's mind was going back over the events of the day when he had practically stepped off an inbound liner and into Mrs. Rissing's reception and there, by further accident, stumbled upon Isabel Ryan. He had been a little nonplussed by the fact that Isabel did not begin to chide him for letting his passion for exploring rock formations and studying deprive him of more substantial rewards; for instead, Isabel had seemed to look at him with somewhat of regretful pity.

"Oh, don't try to hide your left hand, Isabel," Walter had said, as he and the girl slid behind a big potted palm and sat at the coziest table in the room; "I've already spied that stone. I couldn't overlook any kind of a stone. They're my hobby, you know. Only"—and here he turned his eyes directly on hers—"who's the lucky man?"

"Is that necessary, Walter?" questioned Isabel, almost in tears at seeing the young man's mournful expression, which, no matter how he tried to conceal it, still showed in his eyes; great, honest, faithful, open, brown eyes they were, but a little too frank and trusting, a shade too dreamy, to be those of a man making a commercial success in a world of keen competition.

"Well, no, on second thought," and Walter smiled a little more successfully this time. "I suppose there's only one possible answer—Henry Kopp."

Isabel nodded.

"Kopped the prize while I was knocking around Egypt and the Sahara with my little geologist's hammer. And I wish you joy. That diamond is immensely becoming to you—just suits yonr hand. Only thing wrong is the man that put it there. I spent a lot of years hoping I might have that honor."

"Yet, after all, Walter, I guess you understand it simply couldn't be, don't you? You were like so many others that made a brilliant record in college and then couldn't apply what you'd learned. You've been out of college eight years, and I suppose you know all the rocks in the world by name. But the stones won't be much good when you want bread, not to mention porterhouse and mushrooms, and seal coats. And Henry—"

"Yes, I know all about Henry. Quit school when he was fourteen, aud now at thirty he's a financial wonder. He has application, all right. I suppose he was showing the dawn of that faculty when you and I nsed to make mud pies together in that little Connecticut creek and Henry used to drive the hogs in and chase us out."

The girl laughed lightly. "Yes, you had the right-of-way over Henry those days, in spite of the pigs. But it isn't memory that makes the mare go. And then, you'd be surprized," she said, brightening a little, "to know how well Henry applies himself to his courtship."

Walter surveyed her blond loveliness and wondered how Henry could help it. "Henry's a fine one-purpose man," he commented. Looking backward into his own recollection he had to admit, however, that he had been too devoted to his science to look out for the material things of life, and that he owned less now than when he left college.

"'One-pnrpose man' is what Dad calls Henry," affirmed Isabel. "I don't mind it, so long as I'm the purpose."

It was a compliment to the inborn fineness of Walter Frey that Isabel stopped praising Henry for the short time that remained to her and Walter.

"I don't allow Henry to rush me with his eternal aggressiveness," she added. "He was going to limit our engagement to three months, and he set about to 'put it through' as he puts through his business proposi-

tions. But I declined to be pnt. I'm going to Europe or somewhere with Aunt Ella, and not see Henry for six months if I can help it. I suppose he'll pester us to death, dropping in ont of an airplane or jumping up from a submarine whenever we stop for a day. And if I remonstrate with him hc'll say it's only incidental to his business."

"What is his business, that takes him so far and wide?"

And Isabel told him briefly, and Walter forgot briefly. He only remcmbered that Henry Kopp drew a salary of twenty thousand dollars a year, which enabled him to aspire to Isabel's hand.

"We're getting off some time tomorrow," finishcd Isabel. "We're fully supplied with everything from tickcts to seasick medicine, and it's about all over but the shouting—across the gang-plank."

IT WAS not the mere discovery of a slice of stone that kept half a day's news in cold storage that so excited Walter Frey. It was the staggering possibility of the remainder of that same rock. The fragment he had brought with him, a little thicker than a sheet of paper, perhaps a hundredth of an inch thick, would have held back the rays of light that entered it for days, perhaps a month, had the disturbance not occurred that ended the scene. The huge rock from which he had chipped it was as big as the house he lived in, thirty or forty feet through, and only its one side had been exposed to the light. Now he multiplied.

A month for light to make a hundredth of an inch, eight and a third years to an inch, a hundred years to a foot; thirty feet, three thousand years!

Not that these figures were accurate, bnt they showed the possibilities. Clear images of things that happened before the birth of Christ were now seeping slowly through that gigantic rock, ready to be witnessed by anyone who would clear away the earth and build a dark room around its concealed side; and no one in the wide world knew its secret or its location except himself!

Walter had not planned to hunt np Isabel again before her departure; for, having no appetite for sharing the farewell with the aggressive Henry Kopp, he had not learned what vessel she was sailing on, nor anything else about her trip. Now he would have given his eye-teeth to find some way to communicate with her. He had been abroad for two years and Isabel's family had changed their address.

Taking the telephone directory at as early an hour in the morning as he decently could, Walter discovered thirty-seven W. B. Ryans in that interesting volume, seven of which deigned to answer him. None of them was the desired Ryan.

To make a long story short, it was 12:30 when he reached the dock from which Isabel's liner was sailing, and ten minutes more before he discovered her. And the vessel was sailing at 1 o'clock.

To pry Henry Kopp away from Isabel was of course impossible under the circumstances, and Walter was compelled to tell them both together. So much as we already know he told her in the first five minutes.

"Now," he concluded, "I'm headed back that way, as soon as I can get started, with the last of my inheritance—sixteen thousand dollars (which was thirty when I left school). I'm going to invest ten thonsand of it in lawyers to deal with the French government, and the rest in making a mnseum out of the Rock of Ages. The admissions are going to be few but high priced, and for once I'll be mercenary enough to let people pay to see my find."

Isabel was almost as much shocked at the last remark as at the dizzying possibilities of Walter's discovery. But Henry Kopp took his habitual "show-me" attitude.

"What's the certainty that anything ever happened in front of this rock of yours, Walter?"

"It faces a natural roadway through a mountain pass," explained Walter. "It's at the highest point of the pass—the top of a ridge of low mountains between two fertile valleys, and if I'm any judge of history there has been a road there ever since the human race started walking on its hind legs. Every hold-up and robbery, every battle for possession of the pass, every effort to close up the road, every reconnaissance to see what went on in the other party's valley in the last twenty or thirty centuries, must have taken place right in front of that rock. And the whole record is right in the rock today, coming through a little at a time. And if I ever learn what speeded up the process in that little flake I brought home—"

It was too much for words.

"All ashore that's going ashore!" came the voice of fate, putting an end to the conversation. And amid a shower of farewells Walter made his own way ashore, bringing with him Isabel's addresses for a couple of months, which she had smuggled to him right under the nose of her powerful fiancé, hugely enjoying the joke.

THROUGHOUT the million hardships and hazards of the next month Walter Frey's mind kept continually working on the one problem of his mysterious rock which he had never been able to solve—what it was that threw the light rays into action and projected the picture so brilliantly in his room that night.

Going through the pages of a two-months-old English magazine one night, however, he skimmed through a story of a man who had been killed by driving a nail through the wall into an electric light wire concealed inside. The story was of course wildly improbable, for such wires are enclosed in iron pipe; but Walter suddenly remembered that there had been trouble with the doorbells in the house after his first night's experience with the rock, and the thought now struck him that the nails holding the little shelf to the wall might have come in contact with the battery circuit that ran the doorbells, as the wires could be run up the walls with nothing on them but cloth insulation, and probably had been.

If that were true, it only required the application of a sufficient electric current to galvanize those age-old scenes into life—to make them flare forth not in the dim and apparently motionless images he had at first figured on, but with the full glare reflected from the blazing African sun, vivid and clear—moving as rapidly as they had moved originally—a literal reproduction of life centuries ago!

IT WAS at Naples that Isabel received a cablegram from Walter as follows:

WHEN CAN YOU MEET ME AT TRIPOLI FOR AIRPLANE TRIP TO MY MUSEUM REPLY IMMEDIATELY SOME PREPARATION NECESSARY

Some hours later, when she had gathered the necessary information from the railroad and steamship agents, she replied:

MEET YOU TRIPOLI
WEEK ENDING THIR-
TIETH ISABEL

Although less than five hundred miles as the crow flies, the trip as human beings must make it is a long and tiresome journey, and before it was finished Isabel had begun to feel almost lonesome for the strenuous and omnipresent personality of Henry Kopp, of whom she had seen nothing since leaving New York. It was with a curious reaction, however, that upon landing at the city of Tripoli the first familiar face that showed in the multi-colored throng at the docks was not Walter Frey's but Henry's ruddy and beaming physiognomy.

Henry was more than usually pleased with himself at having found her, and explained his presence there with great gusto.

"Got in communication with your aunt by wireless," he cheerfully announced, "and planned things just exactly right to be here a day or two ahead of you. Got a place for you to stay at an Englishman's home, which was no easy job, and an Italian army plane to take you down to the mountains."

"Well, Henry, it's awfully good of you to fix things up for me this way, but don't you suppose Walter made provisions for about everything? It's too bad to disappoint him, after all his months of work down in that awful desert."

"Well, I like that!" Henry's voice began to take on the proprietary air that had always irked Isabel more or less. "A wildcat explorer makes a date with my fiancée to go down in the middle of the Sahara desert with him, and if I take it on myself to provide some of the comforts of life, he might be disappointed!"

Whatever turn the discussion might have taken was prevented at this moment by the arrival of Walter Frey; aud through the sweating, crowding, chanting throng of mixed black and brown people the three made their way together.

Of the two nights and a day spent in that black man's town making ready for the trip to the interior, the less said the better. Henry had, as he said, engaged an Italian airplane with which to make the trip to the valley of the wonderful rock, piloting the machine himself and intending, of course, that Isabel should accompany him. But when the three arrived at the sun-baked landing field, one look at the two specimens of aircraft was sufficient. The Caproni triplane Henry had hired would have drawn attention almost anywhere because of its size, but when compared to Walter's huge English machine it looked like a toy. Accustomed to frequent flights in the desert, Walter had further equipped the plane with innumerable safety devices and small conveniences, so that travel by that means was not only quite safe but more like a trip in a Pullman car than a fighting machine.

Henry was game enough to see the light and to abide by it. Certainly, he wanted Isabel to travel in the greatest possible comfort. But, just the same, having engaged the Caproni, he was coming along to have a look at that rock.

ON A semi-desert plateau a few square miles in extent, down in the French Sudan, Walter turned his airplane for a landing, and Henry in his machine followed suit, both making the stop without mishap. It was late afternoon and, coming down from the comparative coolness of the upper air to the choking heat of Mother Earth, Henry and Isabel began to realize for the first time something of the terrors of work for a white man in such a country.

Walter led the way along the plateau and down a rocky trail into

the pass where the rock was located. A draft of air up the hill made breathing a little easier as the trio descended into the pass, and in a surprizingly short time they had arrived at a long, odd-looking structure built of concrete, hardwood and sundry other materials, which lay alongside a huge, grayish-black rock. Of the size of the building they could not get any clear idea until they entered.

"Welcome to our castle," announced Walter, as the door was opened by a tame enough yellow negro. "Museum, laboratory and living quarters all in one, and the coolest place in Africa north of the equator."

Tiny electric lights, well placed, lighted the structure at will, and fans which brought the air supply through underground passages made the place quite comfortable.

They dined in the largest room, one side of which was formed by the surface of the rock, a common-looking formation to the casual glance.

By the time the meal was finished the brief African twilight was gone and the outer world was in blackness. Walter arose from the table and went back to the outer wall, where a number of switches controlled the electric current from his power plant.

"And now if you folks will excuse the lights," he said, "we'll have a look at the light of another century—nobody knows just which one."

The room was left in total blackness for a time, but as the eyes became accustomed to this, a curious sight began to dawn where the gray rock had been. Straight through the rock the little audience began to see—across the little pass, up the other side, even to a distant patch of sky visible above the profile of the hill at one place. This scene differed from that outside at the moment in only one particular, that many of the rocks were higher and sharper in the magical view, showing what centuries of wind and sand had done toward wearing them down. It was all very faint, and could be made out with difficulty.

Then, at the click of another switch, the scene grew clearer and as bright as day. The rock did not exist—they saw through it as through a piece of lens glass. A vagrant wind stirred a cloud of dust and sand to action.

"A dull day in the pass," commented Walter, "but it wasn't always that way. I'm going to speed it up until we strike something."

The scene whirled on, varying from dazzling light to blackness, representing days and nights, in periods of a minute or two, until Walter's quick eye caught a flash of red. Instantly he snapped off the switch and turned the current back to show the movement at its natural speed. A blazing camp-fire illuminated the rocks, and about it were gathered many strange, dark figures; hairy, heavy-jowled creatures that jostled one another roughly and showed grimaces of laughter when one of their number stumbled barefooted upon a red ember.

But why describe it further here? Why go into details regarding scenes that have been reproduced by camera and newspaper in every country on the globe?

Walter Frey was too intent on his experiment to note the effect of this phenomenon on his visitors until, after half an hour spent in drawing out the marvelous picture from the rock, he stopped the electric current and lighted up the cavernlike interior again. Then, after feasting his eyes on Isabel's glorified countenance, he turned to observe Henry Kopp's reactions.

His first impression was that Henry was suffering from a complex of some kind—probably an inferiority complex. He had slumped down in his chair somewhat, and his face had lost its aggressive, cocksure expression for the moment. Henry's eyes were still riveted on the dead-looking

gray rock as if he were afraid something of that wonderful discovery might escape him. Silence reigned in the room.

Henry finally arose to his feet, his every look and gesture indicating that he was about to make some climactic exclamation, hut his utterance at last seemed a very trivial thing for a man under such stress of emotion.

"Walter, I want to talk business with you in the morning."

"All right, Henry; this is a business proposition."

Still wearing an expression somewhat like that of a hunted animal, Henry went out into the cool night, seeking to be alone, and leaving Walter and Isabel with only the African servants.

"Walter, it's just wonderful—too marvelous for words—to see you do this magnificent thing!"

Isabel's enthnsiasm was unquestionably real.

"Not half so wonderful, Bella, as if I'd managed to do it a little sooner —say a year or so."

"That would have been fine—" begau the girl, absently, and then she suddenly snapped herself up. What was she saying? Or thinking? Abruptly she changed the subject. "Henry thinks he can make something of this, too; I hope he can." And Isabel looked out through tho window toward where Henry had disappeared.

Walter, not knowing what Henry made of anything, nor caring, only sat silently gazing at Isabel and musing over what she had almost said—that she had given him up with some regrets, and only because he seemed unable to make his way in the world. Although the soul of fairness himself, Walter almost wished that Henry might meet with painless and sudden death in order that the eternal triangle might be broken up. The black servants prepared the guest rooms, and when Henry returned, all three retired, in an atmosphere of rather high tension.

THE next morning Walter was np early, according to his custom, having no wish to be ronsed by that copper-colored sun; and he was a little surprized to find Henry already up, his eyes indicating a somewhat sleepless night.

"Doesn't the tropical night agree with you?" iuquired the host. "I've always found the nights cool enough, here on the plateau."

"I guess it was cool," admitted Henry, absently. "I was too busy thinking to take much notice of the thermometer. Bnt, see here, Walter, there's no use of my beating around the bnsh any longer. I want to buy some rights in here for my company, and I've got authority to bid for them."

"For yonr company?" Walter was now mildly interested.

"Yes. You know what I deal in, don't you?"

"Why, I don't know that I remember exactly, Henry. What is it?"

"Movies. And you've got something in there that's worth more money to the films than all the stars in Hollywood. I can film that stuff as easy as falling in a coal-hole, and I want to come to contract terms, and come soon."

"I hadn't ever thought of that angle, Henry. I figured on people coming to look at it, scientific expeditions and such things. But—why the great hurry about contracting for the films?"

"Walter, I'm going to put my cards ou the table and then you'll know. You aren't the kind to strike a man when he's down. The movie game the world over is about the same. They pay you fifty thousand dollars one week and the next week they kick you into the alley without even an apology. It's a little differ-

ent with the actors—the public has a hold on them—but in the managing end it's touch and go, and no matter how good a man is he never knows a week ahead whether or not his job is solid. Now, I made quite a hit with Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tales. 'The Snow Queen' and 'The Goloshes of Fortune' went over like a rocket, and made about five times as much for the house as they expected. Naturally, I couldn't do a thing like that every day, and the features I've put out since then have looked pretty tame by contrast. Now I'm on the verge of a movie man's typical finish. I've been fighting for months to get them to look into this proposition of yours, just from what you told us on the boat that day, and they laughed at it for a crazy student's dream. At last they did consent to send me over here, and I'm practically at the end of my string unless we can do some business. There are mighty few days left—I don't care to say just how few—but so long as this written authority holds good I can make offers that the house is obliged to back up. Now as to actual figures—"

And Henry was off into a maze of figures involving cash advances and royalties that left Walter's brain in a whirl with the sheer magnitude of the amounts mentioned—so immensely more than he had ever hoped to make.

Walter was on the verge of taking up Henry's first proposition just to relieve his evident distress—and then he turned a little hard. Let Henry sweat a few minutes! He would have a lifetime of Isabel's companionship and an ocean of wealth as compensation, while for himself there would be nothing but barren gain and bitter loss. So he hesitated, remaining silent.

Henry raised his offer fifty per cent, hanging breathless on Walter's every expression. Yet Walter said nothing decisive. Having many times made the mistake of letting other people rush him, he was now resolved to take his own time. The most striking aspect of the question was his own position in being able utterly to break Henry and thus compel him to give up Isabel—a possibility that he thought was also in Henry's mind—although of course he had no slightest intention of doing anything so contemptibly unfair. And, even barring that thonght, what would Isabel think of a man who would do such a thing!

Henry rose to his feet and leaned across the teakwood table on which he had been writing, haggard lines drawing his face into that of a total stranger.

"I've got one more chip left, Walter, and here it goes on the table. I've got Isabel—you want her. I'll give her up—stay away from her—never see her—as part of the contract."

"Oh, stop!" Walter's mask at last came to life. "I may live in Africa, but I'm not buying slaves, either white or black! I don't want to think of Isabel in connection with this mess. I—"

"Forget it, Walter. Don't be a fool. With a quarter of the royalties I'm offering you, you can keep Isabel in luxury—as well as she ever has lived. It's true that she cares something for me. She didn't agree to marry me just for my money—"

"No, although she did have to pass me up because of my poverty."

"Exactly. Now, I want her. So do you. But I can't stand it to be busted—ruined—at my age, with probably never another chance at the big money—not even for Isabel. You're inconsolable without her"—Walter nodded as Henry paused for breath—"and I'm not!"

"YOU'RE lucky in that!"

Both men whirled at the sound of the third voice at their backs. Isabel stood in the door!

In their excitement both had failed to note that their voices had risen to a pitch clearly audible through the thin hardwood doors.

If they expected hysteria or dramatic exclamations from Isabel, however, they were both to be disappointed. Slowly, studiously, she crossed the big room and paused standing by the table. Henry, with his fountain pen in one hand and the unsigned contract in the other, avoided her eyes and looked down at her hands, his face ashen with excitement. Walter, whose analytic brain had not had time to comprehend this new development, gazed with earnest, wide-open eyes at first one and then the other. It was Isabel who again broke the silence.

"Don't take it so seriously, boys; I'm not going to hurt either of you."

Henry shifted in his seat and glanced a little nearer her eyes.

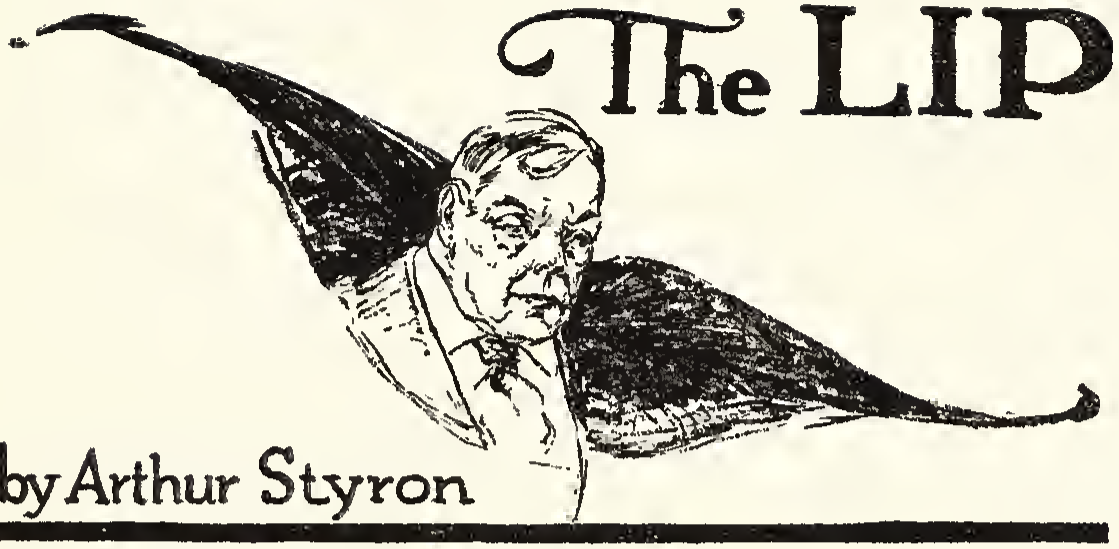
"I've heard people speak of you more than once as a one-purpose man, one with a single-track mind. Now I know what they meant. And I know I'm no longer your purpose. I'm very glad I'm not to be married to such a man."

"Then we—I played square, didn't I?" Henry struggled to justify himself in his own eyes—Isabel's—Walter's—anybody's. "It's all over. We'll sign up this contract, and then there's nothing more to be said, is there?"

"Oh, yes, a great deal more," replied Isabel, with an odd smile, the color spreading in her cheeks, "when Walter gets ready to say it."

"Where's that dotted line, Henry?" inquired Walter.

The LIP



by Arthur Styron

YOU wish me to tell you the story of the Lip? You have heard it before, perhaps? You fonnd it amusing—a huge joke? No? You will not say? You will not commit vourself? Perhaps it is just as well you did not; for I believe if you did but mock me, in spite of tbese iron bars between us I would slay you where you stand—would strangle you with these two bare bands, you with that ingratiating smile on your lips and that contemptuously pitying light in yonr eyes!

But I will tell you the story of the Lip, merely because I like to talk. Perhaps yon will be more enlightened, if not more sympathetic. No; you will not be more sympathetic. And I am glad of that, for may I not construe your lack of understanding as evidence of my own originality? Yet, admitting my superiority, I recognize the fact that it is well everyone is not so. Rare logic, eh? Well, take tbe occurrence of which I am speaking: Did everyone think as I do, humanity would soon be lipless, would it not? Ha, ha!

But you think me light, frivolous? Ah, no. Though I take due pride in my originality, it pains me ofttimes to think on the difference between other folk and me—pains me for their sake. Ha, ha! Perhaps you think me mad? Some folks do. But I am not. Observe, sir: here I sit, natural, gay, unrepressed as a child, while there you stand, austere, artificial, afraid to be natural. Since insanity is a breaking down of repression, are you not, being more repressed, the madder? Therefore, is not what men call the maddest person tbe sanest—and wbat tbey call the most normal person the maddest? . . . No matter; you do not understand. Anybow, you can understand why, if I have not the comfort of your sympathy, I can take a sort of bland satisfaction in your adverse views. What makes me think your views are adverse? Perhaps it is the way you look at me—I feel your mental attitude is hostile. Most people bave this mental attitude toward me. Tbey despise intellect and artistic imagination because it makes them seem, by comparison, cheap and vulgar. They like flattery; and to be around a superior person is far from flattering them. So they bave recourse to persecntion. Ab, yes. I have been persecuted, bitterly, ceaselessly. Tbere is scarcely a moment in my life when I have not felt the penalty of my rare mind. Perhaps I should bave been happier had I not nnderstood so well, for as you have

doubtless observed, I am exceedingly analytical. I can usually analyze any person, his motives and characteristics, merely by looking at him. So unfailing is this instinct, and so well do people know it, that I have frightened them merely by gazing at them intently. . . . What do you say? Oh, the Lip. Yes, I shall tell you about the Lip.

ALL would have gone well had I been wealthy. For then, you see, I conld have employed myself as I would, and my delicate nerves, untouched by strain, would not have failed me; and I should never have seen the Lip. For, as you have doubtless already noticed, I am very nervous—so nervous that I cannot tell you how nervous. Perhaps you can comprehend. Do you know what it is to be so nervous that yon would allow yourself to become nnconscious rather than longer bear the consciousness of the anger and exhaustion produced by suppressing your temper and self-will? Epilepsy, they call it; but we whose nerves are so delicately wrought, whose temperamental intolerance for things monotonous is so intensified, know that it is a voluntary, self-induced unconsciousness. This ability to induce unconsciousness I acquired after I had been driven from home by an irate father, who songht to suppress my highly colored imagination to a prosaic and commonplace purpose. What a blessed relief it was! It was like being soothed to rest by my sweet mother, whom I have never ceased missing!

But I dissertate, and I promised to tell you something about—What? Oh, the Lip. But first I wished yon to jndge for yourself as to my sanity; though no donbt you have already discovered that I possess a clarity of mind, a singleness of thought, a choice discrimination of events, and an impartiality of view, that could in no way be associated with abnormality. Indeed, what I cite is ample proof that I cannot be insane, as they claim. For one thing, I never *feared* that I should become insane. And I am always natural and loquacions except when they give me hot baths. Hot baths seem to make me slow and stnpid—more like other folks—more like the attendants (are you an attendant?) with their thick iutelligence and gross imaginations. My difference is psychological, not pathological, and my admission proves—!

O yes; I remember. You wished to know about the Lip. Very well, I shall tell you. You must overlook these temporary digressions. I have an unusually analytical mind, and once let loose upon its mission it takes much restraint (of which I am quite capable should I desire to exercise it) to curb excesses. Most people's minds run in small circles. Mine is a series of tangents. Perhaps I do not interest people with my cleverness—perhaps! Ha, ha! Listen: no greater outcast from society is there, no more bitterly persecuted criminal, than the imaginative or artistic man, nnless he is clever enough to hide his superiority. Ha, ha! Now the Lip—

That reminds me. I promised to tell you about the Lip. Ah, what a relief to have it out of my heart and mind! If it had not been for that cursed Lip I should not have grown as sick as I did. But it produced such fever in my soul that I could not but do as I did. Now they will not understand and free me. Do they think me malicious, cruel? I would not harm a kitten. All my earnings have I given to charity; my religion is an ecstasy. I have always gone to chnrch with regularity—sometimes six or eight times on a Sunday. I have no greater passion than that my soul may magnify my God, and my works reflect His greatness. But I *had* to do as I did. The same motive inspired me that forces one to jump from a height. Now they will cage me, will

punish me for it! Bnt thank God, they cannot take away my peace of mind! I am at rest now. Strange, once I did not dare to imagine the Lip, although I did not dare to forget it. Now, I not only think of it freely, but discuss it coldly and unemotionally. It has become a danger overwhelmed, conquered, and therefore not to be feared.

You wish to hear more of my life? With pleasure, sir; for I find you are an agreeable listener. There is always the hint of a pleasant smile on your lips, as if you wished to placate me, as if yon partly feared me. I enjoy that. Yes, you shall hear all.

Even in childhood I possessed an imaginative and excitable temperament, an unusual degree of intellect, and an inordinate temper. Full of inchoate talent I was; shunning and shunned; proud, vengeful, misunderstood, yet thoroughly comprehending. Yes; even in childhood I thoroughly understood those about me—and distrusted them, for I was deeply religious and loved truth and beauty.

With such brilliance and spirit, naturally I was sensitive and unhappy, feeling keenly the hatred of people and hating them in return. On account of my sudden and passionate outbreaks of temper, everyone persecnted me, but feared me. My playmates, and even my parents, regarded me with awe, helplessness and even with terror, and made haste to do my slightest bidding. Do you wonder I grew up wilful, triumphant over all and everything save my own ungovernable passions?

The two great emotions of my childhood—ay, of my life—were my love for my mother and my hatred of my father. But I was always afraid that my mother would die if she discovered my hatred for my father, so I carefully repressed the feeling, and no one ever knew.

Why did I hate my father? Was it not he who forced me to go into a degraded life of toil which resulted in my illness? And did this not lead me finally into meeting the Lip—which broke down the barriers of my composure? I hated him—hate him—shall always hate him—shall forever curse his memory for forcing upou me the horror of hating him whom I should have loved—the agony of disobeying a universal law!

But that was not my sole reason for hating him. I think the real reason was that he was a type I have always abnorred—that smug, prosaic, self-reliant type that affects anger at abnormality. For my father was always commonplace and uninteresting, and uudertook to reason with a minimum of imagiuation. He was a sort of lesion npon my soul—an indescribable mental irritant. He continually mocked and ridicnled my natural inclination—the artistic. Then, my anger aroused, he would become the object of my sarcasm and wit, which was so biting and clever he could not return. So he would resort to abuse; and flying to my mother for protection, I would find that she feared him. Thus my hatred increased, and I would plot revenge—revenge for both of us, my mother and me.

At times I was indifferent to his stupidity, then amused, then annoyed, then angered. At times I feared him—but always on account of my mother. I remember I used to find him gazing at me in a puzzled, embarrassed sort of way. Ha, ha! Children who embarrass their parents hardly fit in, do they? Sometimes, evidently moved by a spirit of fairness or kindliness, he would try to treat me as he did my other brothers—in a casual, gruff manner. Consequently, to me he was crude, stupid. The greater attempt he made to appear paternal, the greater grew my contempt and irritation. Hence re-

sulted the habit of doing everything I conld to disturb him, particularly when he was hearty.

As I was saying, this might have gone on indefinitely, and I might have been spared all my snbsequent suffering, had my father not been so intent upon my going to work. I was still a youth when his nagging became determination. He was a poor man. All of my brothers—one of them younger—were working; therefore, I should work also. I undertook to be gentle with my father, and to enlighten his ignorance as to why I should not go to work. I pointed to my rapid and brilliant progress in literature, in art, in music. I explained that it would be my privilege to wander in the Garden of the Muses whilst he and my brothers dealt in drab commercialism. Hc was little impressed by my artistic yearnings.

"Yon fool," he would shout, resorting to abuse as was his wont when worsted: "you fool! How do you think you can live on yonr silly twaddle? Nowadays people get paid for headwork, not twaddle."

Always ready with a pun, I would invariably reply:

"What do you call headwork, father—barber or milliner?"

Whereupon he would become more violently angry, and would reproach me with my worthlessness, my nerves, my queerness, until, goaded beyond endurance, I would reply stingingly.

It was after such a scene as this (I remember it with characteristic clearness as if it were yesterday!) that hc ordered me to find work immediately or leave home. The stupidity, the pathos of it! How my pride was stnng at the idea of going forth to mere barter and exchange—to sell my energy and initiative—divine passion—for hire! To be torn from my books, my art, my music, my dreams, and become a degraded slave! I, who could interpret the motives of the masters, 'leaping over the bridge of personality and making common cause with their feelings,' to sell my ability! Dear God, I could not do it! Death was preferable to this degradation. So, despite the tears and pleadings of my mother, I left home—first throwing a plate at my father (it unfortuuately missed him). and taking my departure airily and hopefully.

I planned to spend my time in the woods in introspection, composiug and sketching, besides communing with those spirits which my dream-mind, thus isolated, would learn to recognize. The first few days—I do not know how many—were happy. I built an altar and had daily worship of God through nature. I planned numerous compositions, and wrought many motives for my future artistic creations. For drink I had the clear, cold water of the woods; for food, the delicate flower petals or grass-blades. I laughed to myself to think of my father's chagrin when he should find out how happy I was!

But soon there began to creep over me a restlessness for which I could not account. Likewise, I began to feel the pangs of hunger, and was forced to steal food from the neighboring farms. I grew irritable. The nights became depressing. I could not sleep. At times, a lond ringing madc itself heard in my ears. I seemed to hear small voices whispering—always whispering.

Then I turned to my religion for comfort. It likewise availed me naught. Why should I bc denied that boon? Was my faith unfounded? Impossible! Those in the outside world had greatest faith who believed in the supernatural. Why, then, was not my faith perfect, since I not only believed in the supernatural but *had dealings* with it?

I could not rest; I was never quiet. I was constantly engaged in one task or another—and the necessity for such tasks seemed to increase day by

day, until I soon found that I had not enongh time to finish them. Sometimes, working madly on one thing, I would suddenly remember another task. So I would rush to do the latter, forgetting myself in the intensity of my energy. Yet each day I desired to do a little more—a little more; and I became almost crazed with despair.

Another thing that enhanced my excitement was the knowledge that my father had not ceased his persecution. I found that I was being sought! Everywhere I went I saw men shadowing me. The nnmber increased day by day, until it seemed there must be hundreds of them. This I could not bear, so I fled to a neighboring city and hid myself in the throngs. I walked the streets until I became famished and weary. My talents left me as hot tears of outraged pride, as bitter curses from an anguished soul, for I realized that now I must work or starve. With that realization came a bitterness of spirit that I cannot define, so far did it exceed anything previously felt. At last my father had triumphed! I was forced to lead a life of mental slavery, except for which my nervous system would not have been warped even for a time, and I should never have seen the Lip.

Oh—the Lip! Curse the Lip! Why were such things made for the undoing of mortals? Where is the God that dares justify an accursed way to perform His wonders? No, I shall not be quiet! Damn everybody—except my mother. About that time she died. No one told me, but I knew it. I saw her weeping, and I knew she was going away. I seem to see her yet: her straggling gray hair parted smoothly over her wrinkled brow; her dear, dim eyes shining with love and pity; her old hands, rough and coarse from work, plucking distractedly at her dingy black skirt! Thinking of her thns, I learned to give way to that blessed, self-induced unconsciousness, that restful bliss of oblivion, which fools call epilepsy, but which I discovered in after years, when I had lost the power to induce it, was a soul-opiate—the only balm save death!

With the knowledge of my mother's death came one idea: to avenge her and myself. But how? I must be clever; I must be exceedingly wary. More than once I had detected some poor fool looking at me queerly. I must play subtly against their suspicions. I must not resort to violence. I must be very cunning—very crafty!

Then in a flash (I have always been susceptible to inspiration) I had it. I recalled my father's oft repeated phrase about "headwork," and my witty reply as to whether he meant barber or milliner. How I laughed over the idea—and how I gloated at the prospect of punishing him so cleverly! I would repay him for every word of scorn, for every reproach as to my queerness. For though intensely poor, he had a family pride in proportion to his sternness and severity, and I knew he would be stung to the quick by my course. Do you know what I decided to do? Ha, ha! I decided to become a barber!

ONCE the decision was made, I went about it quietly and scientifically. First, I procured a place as bootblack in a barber shop. A bootblack—I! Is it not laughable? Ha, ha! I, the companion of Virgil and Milton, the disciple of all that is cultured and sublime, blacking boots! In the secrecy of my room how I laughed at my image in the mirror—I actually enjoyed the ridiculous position I was in—the incongruity of the thing.

And so, in time I became a barber. How my father must have suffered from the knowledge! How the knowledge of his suffering soothed my hatred-swelled soul! This knowledge made life bearable—this, together with the self-induced oblivion of which I spoke formerly, in which I

began to indulge more and more freely. I found—

What do you say, sir? Oh—the Lip. You wish to hear something of the Lip? Well, in goodness' name am I not telling you the story? You are impatient, sir. We should change places. All these things led up to my finding the Lip, and have due bearing upon the Lip's effect on me, so they must be told you. Moreover, to understand fully my impulse for doing what I did, you must first know something of my temperament, which was so vitally affected by my life and profession. Temperament, you know, is not a constant gift. It is stretched here and there, distorted or straightened, abused or refined, by environment and circumstances— Ah, yes, I shall proceed.

As time went on I began to grow ill. My artistic temperament began to suffer a reaction under the excessive aggravation produced by my terrible vocation. You do not know what it is to cut hair and shave faces all day, the while slowly dying of humiliation and despair, with hundreds of mirrors making horrible mockery of your suffering? Pray God you may never know! Do you know what it means to ache and tremble with the craving to cut, and cut deep, yet realize you must be so careful that not one feature may be disarranged? I loathed the work, the customers, my associates; I despised the tawdry den with its mocking mirrors, its soapy scent, its cheap vulgarity; I abhorred the filthy instruments which I was obliged to sharpen and sharpen in order to purge nature.

In the evenings, when, exhausted and enervated, I stumbled on my way to my small, dingy room, small voices began to grumble in my ears; fantastic and undefined figures sauntered sneeringly before me, stepping backward, so that I could not turn and flee. Each day I found with increasing terror that the voices became more distinct and irritating, the figures bolder. I was consumed with the dread that they might be real, and my imagination not permitting me to prove them otherwise, I suffered accordingly.

On such occasions as these, when I could not longer bear the fatigue and strain, I would long for my mother—for oblivion. Then it was that I would fain close my eyes and expel my strength, falling upon the street—unconscious! But alas! Even that boon was to be denied me. More and more rarely did I find the ability so to rest, and finally I lost the power altogether. . . . Epilepsy? Bah! Does one lose the power to afflict oneself with disease? Nonsense!

Added to my cup of bitterness was my father's death, which occurred just at this time when my health was beginning to fail. I had gone into this disagreeable work in order to exasperate him, and had done so; but now that he was dead my incentive was gone, and I could no longer find a particle of joy in my dreary vocation. Yet it was my life: I could not escape from it. I knew how to do nothing else for my livelihood; so I must go on clipping, singeing, massaging, shaving, with my health ruined and without the incentive of my father's wrath and broken pride. I felt that I must escape, yet I knew not how. I became angry; I despaired. Emotion would sweep over me like the surging of a thick fluid. My vision would become red; at times I would be incapable of speech, devoid of reason. Then my emotion, ebbing, would leave me languid with reaction, and everything would become drab and listless. What formerly had been intense discomfort was converted into bitter unhappiness by that monotonous work, those glaring lights and mirrors, those terrible noises; my initiative into inertia. When I at-

tempted to think upon the situation, a sense of suffocation, so overpowering and deadly, would come upon me that I needs must rush into the street—anywhere, anywhere, away from those suggestive surroundings, that scene of my torture!

Why did I not seek diversion, you ask? Satisfaction of my artistic instincts brought only depression. Amusement? What sort of amusement is provided for a creature like me? Thoughts of a hereafter might have diverted me, but I could not think them. So I found diversion in examining my face in a mirror, in counting the pores of my skin, in forming enemies, and analyzing loneliness in the madding crowd. Ah, sir, do you know what it is—the loneliness of the singular? To hear no word of human sympathy and understanding? To yearn for sympathy, and, through fear, forced to hide the craving in repression? To long for death, yet fear dying? To suffer in understanding but in silence—always in silence—since the plea for surcease would appear to be a monster of disgrace? When you pray, sir (if you do) do not pray for the dead and dying, the innocent and oppressed. Let your prayers (yours will be the only ones) ascend for those whose souls are wrong; for those who fit into no known plan, divine or human; who dare not ask for a justice the understanding of which would disgrace the universe; who must suffer mutely—ever mutely—! I am nervous, sir. I ask you to overlook a digression.

WHAT was the nature of my illness? I do not believe it was anything organic, yet I was exceedingly nervous. Perhaps my imagination, developed to a point ordinary people cannot comprehend, was perverted, suppressed too much, by a wretched environment, and cursed by a lack of sympathy which I, being forced to exist in the world, needed from the world. Perhaps I was born devoid of pure idealism; sensitive to morbid pleasure and pain—an imagination overbalancing intellect.

Daily I became more nervous. My sleep grew more and more disturbed, until finally I scarcely knew the blessing of rest. Ofttimes from my stupor of exhaustion I would be awakened, shaking and terrorized by loud, nerve-racking cries, only to find that they were the suppressed, silent groans issuing from my own agonized soul. I grew sick with agony. My head ached incessantly and miserably. I always feared the nnexpected; and with this fear I became apprehensive, and then I feared that my apprehension was being detected. For hours every night I would examine my face in the mirror for some telltale signs of my agony. But no; save for a slight twitching of my left eyebrow and the corner of my mouth, and perhaps a glassier expression in my eyes, I was gratified to find no trace of my mental and physical suffering. I was sure no one suspected, and I seemed to babble contentedly to my reflection, though I do not remember now what I said.

Thus I would have gone on indefinitely—a little sick, as I said; resentful of my wrongs and persecution, and perhaps a trifle eccentric as are all geniuses—but I would have gone on, enduring my agony with perfect self-control and stolidity, had it not been for the cursed Lip. Indeed, so well did I conceal my feelings that I was a favorite barber (hateful term!) with my many customers.

The Lip was among my customers. Just why he first became attracted to me I cannot say; it was the fascination that makes a man rush headlong to his fate. Certain it is that the first time I set eyes on him he irritated me in an indescribable way. I pondered the matter deeply and considered it from every angle in my en-

deavor to ascertain the cause of my resentment. He was short, fat, and had a high, thin voice and an inoffensive manner. His eye was mild; he was timid and retiring. Why did he excite me so? I questioned my looking glass at night; I drew caricatures of him and studied them. I did everything in my power to solve the mystery, but in vain. It was not a mental hostility, for I felt sure he had no mentality. He could not be an agent seeking to confine me, for my father was dead and no one else hated me enough to take that interest in me.

But one night in my sleep the spirits must have told me, for the next day when he stretched himself in my chair for a shave, I discovered, without any mental effort, that it was his lip—a long, pendulous organ, shaped like the peel of a quarter of an orange, flapping over his big, yellow fangs! Truly a disgusting object, a hideous spectacle! As I shaved it, in my heat-oppressed brain it seemed to grow until a wave of hopelessness and despair swept over me at ever being able to finish so great an area. Then when I had finished it, it seemed to wave almost imperceptibly—to taunt me! This faint quivering lashed my nerves uncontrollably. Goaded to fury, almost to madness, I could scarcely refrain from slashing the cursed object!

As I have intimated, the advent of the Lip led to the climax of my illness. As time went on, he came with unfailing regularity to be shaved by me. More and more did that hideous monstrosity pluck away the remnants of my self control, until I felt I could not stand it much longer. I became sick unto death. The days were years of pain. My suffering became so intense that I had great difficulty in keeping from gibbering; more than once I noticed people turning to look at me on the street, and even the barbers began to act queerly. I was certain that unless I could get away from the Lip I should be unable to retain my self-control much longer.

I struggled—oh, so hard!—to get away from that part of myself that was so cowed by this damnable object. I even contemplated suicide (do you think suicide would be normal for me?) but refrained because I knew people would say I was crazy. And I was afraid of dying, too, though I had no morbid fear of death itself. Your desire to live, sir, is organic. My desire to live—the desire of a sufferer—was, then, sublime. I chose to live and suffer. I am, then, a saint. For who, after all, can gainsay the privilego of dying? I had it at my command to satisfy the most imaginative longing for quest; to find surcease of sorrow, my mother, and the reward of my soul's development through suffering. Yet I resisted the temptation because, as I have already said, I am naturally religious and introspective.

Why did I not go away? I thought of it, but I had nowhere to go, no way to live. I knew not where to obtain work, and I was afraid. Besides, even had I gone away I should sooner or later have returned, like a murderer to the scene of his crime, to gaze upon that fearful Lip. But surely no murderer was ever so tortured as I. At night the hard wall padded with leering faces composed mostly of lips, seemed to *give to my touch* when I fearfully reached forth to feel it. Mark well, the wall seemed to give to my touch. My hearing, sharpened to sounds that you do not hear, ached from constant straining to catch the weird music and faint, awful cries issuing from the other world. And when the first dawn looked over the east, I would arise, weakened, groaning, and almost blind from pain and unrest, with spots dancing before my vision, cold sweat dampening my form, and penetrating noises echoing through my head, and walk about the

house, the street—anywhere. Once in my agitation I forgot to dress, and the servant girl, coming upon me in the lower hall, cried out in fear. I remember thinking it might be well to kill her then before she should have a chance to tell anyone about my illness, but I was too weak and nervous.

Bnt though present fears are horrible, they are less than horrible imaginings; and as time went on, the fear that my illness might be discovered grew less as my suffering increased. Indeed, for some reason I began to take a sort of fiendish satisfaction in the knowledge that they must suspect. Yet when I recollected that it was because of the Lip that I had grown so ill as to excite their suspicions, I was filled with such an increased loathing and hatred for that hideous, flapping deformity, that I determined it should no longer make a hell out of my existence. With this resolution came the kuowledge that I must play warily against their suspicions. I must be calm, though my whole soul shrieked with dread and my heart beat to suffocation, for only thus could I determine the manner of my emancipation.

It was on a morning after a night of terror such as I have just described, that there came the brilliant thought, the illuminating idea, that was to change my whole existence, you might say; at least to lift me from the depths of despair and suffering to the height of couteutment.

It came as do all my ideas, not as the result of concentration and effort (which but drive me to fury), but in the calm of my despair, when one thinks so nnemotionally, so clearly. I was shaving the Lip, gazing at it iutently and shuddcringly, and fearing it with a sort of fondness and fascination such as one has for a crawling, writhing reptile. In the same quiet way that had eome the knowledge, a long time ago, that it was the Lip that irritated me, came the knowledge as to how I must dispose of it. No effort being required to conceive the idea, there was no corresponding excitement. I calmly finished shaving him, politely wished him good morning, and retired behind my paper to gloat.

Ah, how I chuckled and gloated! Would you believe it, sir?—from that moment I seemed to grow better. My headaches abated; my mind grew clearer; and my sleep, except for terrible dreams instead of real presences, improved perceptibly. It was almost too good to be true. From the chaos of my despair had been born a world of hope. Why did I not accomplish my object then and there? Ah, no; that were premature. I wished for a period in which to perfect my plans, and to enjoy the bliss of anticipation. I tried to keep my ecstatic joy from shining from my countenance. I constantly struggled to repress my gayety. But sometimes I would catch myself smiling, or laughing, or emitting faint purrings like a cat, which I would hastily check. I did not want anyonc to suspect my purpose. Ah, no; I was too crafty, too cunning, for that! Once or twice I thought I detected the barbers glancing at mo cnriously. Perhaps I did talk in tones too high, and perhaps I chatted too fluently; so I redoubled my vigilance in watching myself. But their curiosity was not suspicion, I saw; so, sccure in my composure, I made my plans, and decided upon a certain date for their execution. Then I waited.

The time passed all too rapidly—time full of pleasurable anticipation and high hopes. I arose early and breakfasted heartily—though you, of course, do not know that. I remember drinking eight or ten cups of strong coffee, after which I proceeded to the barber shop in high spirits, to sharpen my instruments and—wait!

I was early, and the first to reach the shop. Silently I went abont my preparations. As I sharpened my instruments and tried to think of my happiness just in sight, a strange change took place in my feelings. All my cheerfulness seemed to depart, leaving me sick with my former lassitude and despair. I was filled with forebodings; the ghastly mirrors on the walls mocked my misery. My head hegan to ache with its old-time persistency, and a painful throb made itself felt at the back of my neck. I began to wish the deed over; to think of flight. Still, I remained.

I became more and more depressed. It seemed my nerves would snap. Where was the elation I had looked forward to? Was I losing the courage to emancipate my soul? Blankly I admitted to myself it was so. Then, I understood my depression. Whereas I had heen gay and happy in the certainty I would he free, on the day set for the deed I was afraid to accomplish my purpose, and was, therefore, miserable and unhappy because I was uncertain of my freedom. In some way there had seeped into my imagination the fancy that if I perpetrated this deed it would mean the end of everything for me; and this fear had sapped at my courage and endangered my resolution. I understood vaguely that if I did not accomplish my purpose this day, I should never accomplish it. Could I endure going on, in torture and suffering? Oh, God, never!

Customers arrived. The shop became alive with the senseless jargon that befits such a place.

Then came he of the Lip. Have I described it to you? Oh well; it does not matter. His iron-gray hair, hristling in a thousand cow-licks, smote me like a club. His beetling red face, encased in large eye-glasses, made my rancor surge. I did not understand why any human being could be so; but since he was, it would have displaced all my faculties in accepting him thus. How could I be indifferent to that pendulous lip—that awful, quarter-mooned labial? To me it symbolized the swelling terrors of the night when I shrieked aloud within my soul, and the dreadful stillness drove me from my bed into the deserted streets—anywhere away from myself. Whenever I gazed upon that seething, undulating lip, I lived anew the concentrated horrors of the night! My agony was intensified a thousandfold!

This morning as I shaved him hastily and nervously, cold sweat gathered on my hrow and nose and dripped into the lather; the tremor of my loins made itself felt even to the top of my head, until I feared it shook the entire room.

Half of his face was shaved. I must decide quickly! My nerves became perfectly lax. I felt I could not do this thing—I, who had never spilt human blood. . . . Then a miracle happened. Just when I had decided I could not accomplish my designs, something seemed to tell me that my purpose would be accomplished without any effort on my part—that a higher force, firm and steady, would act for me.

With the knowledge, then, that the deed would be accomplished, I again grew elated, exultant. I spoke of trifles with infinite wit. Thought was become a pain, so I must exclude it by talk and laughter. . . . Gradually everything hesides myself grew quiet—oppressively quiet. The voice of the Lip became faint, then hard, then penetrating. His voice waved as did his Lip. It was absurd. I giggled and sighed, and delayed the shaving. I was playing with my victim. Once I thought I detected a look of terror in his eyes. This filled me with ecstasy. I gazed upon the Lip hungrily, gloatingly. I fingered it softly, while hell flamed into being in my

heart. It lay there—the Lip—faintly quivering, distinct, blue, hellish! . . . Slowly a hazy mist obscured the room—obscnred everything save the Lip, which lay before me sharply defined and seemingly glowing, though completely covered with lather.

This, I knew, was the consummation of my entire life—my art, my religion, my suffering. Soon, I should find peace. Time would be no more; space would be only infinite!

Something seemed to snap within my brain. A clear voice bade me consummate my plans. Sensations swam, then departed, leaving me numb. The face before me looked like clay; the eyes were watery and, methought, pleading.

Immediately I acted—not potentially, but automatically, as if I were the calm and yielding agent of some unseen force. My left arm passed swiftly across his neck, and with that hand I grasped the chair. He could not move. He was choked beyond ntterance. The whole thing took scarcely a moment. No one had time to observe, much less interfere. One shriek I gave—a loud shriek of triumph. Then my strong right hand, grasping the glittering razor, descended with terrifying swiftness, and that curse of hell was severed forever from the face that suffered it! Ha, ha!

I shall never forget that moment—never! Though they take my freedom—ay, my life!—they cannot take that one moment of ecstasy from me, nor the subsequent peace! Even now I recall the frightful shudder that passed throngh him, while I shrieked with laughter. The startled cries of the barbers, who stood staring with horror, came to me dully, inconsequentially, monotonously, in a jumbled, mnffled sound. One thing more I remember after his agonized shudder: the shining, yellow teeth, now entirely exposed, glittering with blood through the assembled forms of demons and devils who came, with a sudden swirl and ear-splitting clamor, to applaud my deed. Time seemed to stand still. The grinning devils flitted about noisily and rapidly. Their cries became louder and louder until I could stand it no longer. I could not see. I had laughed so much it had become a pain. Nothing seemed worth while any longer. . . . Then . . . I regained my longed-for power to induce self-unconsciousness.

WHEN I recovered, I was here. Someone had been giving me a hot bath, and I felt enervated. I consider warm baths injurious to one's health, don't you? I find they always leave me dull and fatigued. Although ordinarily a good talker, after taking a hot bath my conversation never seems to flow fluently; I do not seem to be as analytical, and I miss much of the detail that I am nsually so quick to perceive. Sometimes they are soothing. They make me think of my mother . . . and then I long to die. So I shall ask them not to give me any more hot—

About the Lip? Ah, yes. I am glad it is over. I now have a peace of mind I did not think I should ever possess. Surely the law will punish me, but I always did have a contempt for the law—haven't you?

That makes me think. Why do you suppose the Lip is not grateful to me? Before I carved him he was deformed, nnnatural. Now he has nothing worse than an exaggerated harelip. I presume, however, that the discomfort he suffered has robbed him of a sense of gratitude. Ha, ha! The situation has its degree of humor, has it not?

I shall go to sleep now. I am a little tired. Strange—is it not?—that such a brief recital as this should make me sleepy—me, who have been accustomed to talking all my life, even when no one is around! Perhaps I am not so nervous.

When the Stone Turned Red Then Ill-Fate Befell Its Owner

THE ORANGE OPAL

By H. THOMPSON RICH

Author of "Little Island" and "The Crimson Crucifix"

IT WAS set in a ring of plain gold—a magnificent stone of at least five carats—and Wesslyn had worn it on his little finger for many years.

There was a curious legend about it, handed down through generations in the family of the Hindoo prince from whom he had won it at cards one night in Calcutta—a legend to the effect that the stone would turn red as a ruby were ill-fate likely to befall its owner, thus warning him, that he might take steps to protect himself and modify his destiny.

The time had been when Wesslyn and I were friends. That was in the East Indian campaign, and after, when he was a young captain of her Majesty the Queen, and I a lieutenant-colonel.

But with the passage of years the love of a girl had come between us, and I was now his bitterest enemy, though I still professed friendship.

I shall call the girl Cynthia. She was the daughter of one of the officers at the American embassy in London, and our military standing brought us in touch with her socially. She was charming and gracious, and we both fell in love with her. But Wesslyn, being younger, won her—and he placed on her finger, as a sign of troth, the orange opal. They were to be married in the fall. That was in 1914.

Then came the war, and Wesslyn was commissioned a colonel for service.

I, too, was summoned, but being older, and a trifle out of shape, was shelved.

Oh, but I fumed! To no avail, however. They were doubly strict. Kitchener had come to the front, and he was all for fitness. So I stayed behind, and Wesslyn went.

Before going he came to Cynthia and asked her for the ring. It would be well to have it with him, he said, to ward off danger in the trenches. He would give her another, instead.

But she was haughty and proud. She laughed. She asked him if he believed the silly legend connected with it. He had given it to her, she argued, and now she was going to keep it. If he insisted upon having it back, however, he could have her promise, too.

So he said no more and went without it, and she continued to wear on her engagement finger that glittering orange stone.

When I heard he had yielded to her whim, I gloated. Knowing the ways of the Hindoo even better than he, and the curious trait their legends have of coming true, I was filled with satisfaction. Not only should I be even with him for his high-handed and insolent courtship of Cynthia, but I should have her as well—for now he would be without the means

of warning, were danger imminent; and moreover, with him out of the way I knew I could win his fiancée, for she had confessed to liking me less only than him. Truly, I had nothing to be despondent about.

So, as the months passed, I managed to see a great deal of her. Under the guise of proxy, always professing to maintain my old regard for Wesslyn, I saw to it that she did not think overmuch of him.

AT FIRST I did no more than visit her at her home, but gradually I prevailed upon her to let me take her out—and we went together the rounds of the rather limited social life in London that winter.

That set people talking, and somehow the rumor must have reached Wesslyn in muddy Flanders, for he wrote her sharply on the subject. Indignantly, she showed me the letter. Then she took off the opal ring and would have laid it aside—when I asked her if I might wear it.

"For," I explained, "though he has offended you, my friendship for Wesslyn causes me to fear continually for his safety. Were I to have the ring always by me, I should then be able to watch it, and warn him if it should turn at any time to red."

"So you believe in the silly legend too?"

For a moment disdain showed in her face. Then her eyes softened.

"Very well," she laughed. "Take it."

So I slipped it on my finger, Wesslyn's opal which he had given her in token of engagement. I truly think that had she realized its full significance, had she believed there was anything in the legend, she would never have parted with the ring. He had indeed offended her, but even so, it was no more than a momentary fit of anger. In her own heart she still loved Wesslyn.

"Yet it is none of my concern," I argued. "I love her madly, and all is fair in love, at least."

So I stilled my conscience and smothered my shame at using my former friend so badly. And had I thought she would have accepted me, then I would have proposed to her on the spot; but I knew that Wesslyn still came first with her, and that what she felt was nothing but a temporary annoyance, and would soon pass.

So, though I hated to think of it thus, I knew that my only hope of winning her lay in Wesslyn's death; and knowing this, I made of the ring an unholy, murderous shrine, watching it, forever watching it, praying that its clear orange hue would in some strange way deepen to red.

And then—would I warn him? Ha, ha! I would remain silent, and let him die. Then I would go to Cynthia and ask her for her hand.

So, through the weeks that followed, I watched and waited, until, chancing to look at the ring one morning as I awoke, I beheld with shameful satisfaction that it had indeed changed its color during the night, for (so help me heaven!) it was now flame-red.

HOW I ever kept the secret to myself during the days that then ensued, I do not know. Of course, I could not wear the ring. That was out of the question, for its orange opal now burned like a ruby. So I put it carefully away, in a bureau drawer, and to Cynthia I made the excuse that I had discovered its setting was insecure and I was having it fixed. No one else, of course, knew enough about it to notice.

Breathlessly I awaited news from Wesslyn. Each day I scanned the latest casualty reports for word of his death—as an officer having free access to all data of the Information

Bureau. But the days passed, and no news came. In fact, one morning Cynthia showed me a letter she had just received from him. He was well and apparently on the most intimate terms with her again.

Then, when I would have cursed the ring as worthless—that night, suddenly, three zeppelins slid out of the sky and raided London.

In the midst of the commotion the telephone in my quarters rang.

Wonderingly I picked up the receiver. Who could wish to talk with me at a time like this?

It was from Cynthia's father. Their home had been struck by a bomb. Cynthia had been killed!

With a cry I dropped the receiver and went to the bureau drawer in which I had laid the ring.

Tremblingly I took it out and held it up. As I feared, the red tint had gone. It was orange again!

Then, standing there, I understood. Wesslyn, in pledging his troth, had *given* the ring to her. It was his no longer, but *hers*. Its red had been a warning to *her*, not to him.

With a shudder I put the ring back and slowly closed the drawer.

Had I known—had I only known!

THE SUICIDE'S AWAKENING

By GERTRUDE WRIGHT

Spirits of fire, who dwell in the deep,
Why do ye torture me out of my sleep?

Angels of darkness who float in the flame,
Why are ye moaning and calling my name?

Ghosts of the unredeemed, fallen from grace,
Why do your crimson wings flap in my face?

Demons that circle under the wave,
Why are ye howling over my grave?

Back, ye fiends, back again, to the unknown;
I am a dead thing: leave me alone.

Cold are my limbs and departed my breath;
I am not living, but this is not death.

A SERIAL NOVEL

INVADERS FROM THE DARK

by Greye La Spina

Author of "The Tortoise-Shell Cat," "The Remorse of Professor Panebianco," etc.

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters

Sophie Delorme, coming to live with her niece, the young widow Portia Differdale, finds her engaged in carrying on her deceased husband's warfare against the unseen powers of evil.

The Russian Princess Irma Andreyevna Tchernova comes to live in the old Burnham mansion, accompanied by five pet wolves, which she keeps in a wolf-den in the Burnham grounds. She proceeds to flirt with Owen Edwardes, with whom Portia Differdale is in love.

Princess Tchernova excites the comment of the tradespeople by ordering great quantities of red meat, ostensibly for her wolves. She spreads the rumor abroad that Portia's two magnificent wolfhounds are running wild at night. A few nights after this, Policeman O'Brien is attacked by a white animal, presumably a large dog, and severely bitten. The animal is put to rout by Portia's two wolfhounds, Boris and Andrei. Portia's mother-in-law and sister-in-law, as well as the princess, spread the rumor that Officer O'Brien was attacked by one of Portia's wolfhounds.

PART 7

THERE was no way to evade the proffered invitation. Owen and I walked behind the trailing-robed, sinnous, triumphant princess, and her savage-eyed chauffeur helped each in turn into her limousine. It made me think of ancient conquerors and their captives of war.

I was thankful that the cut-glass vase did not hold marigolds, the odor of which I detest; it was full on this occasion of lilies-of-the-valley, which had filled the car with an almost cloying sweetness of perfnme.

As we rolled down Elm Street toward the boulevard, I leaned forward to examine more closely a central flower in the white-and-green of the valley lilies, a flower that to me was a hideous travesty npon the beauty of nature's garden products. It was of a deep bnrnt-orange color, with irregular, swollen black hlotches, and the petals were not delicately translucent as orchids I have seen mostly were, hut of a thick fleshiness that was somehow unpleasantly suggestive of—of life!—not the innocent life of a fiower, but life that reeked of something inherently, powerfully evil and malevolent.

"You admire my heautiful Balkan orchid, yes, Annt Sophie?" asked the princess, her delicate brows raised slightly as if shc herself were not qnite sure of the purpose of my extreme interest in the strange-appearing flower.

"I presumed it was an orchid, princess, but I cannot agree with you that it is beautiful. Isn't it responsible for the rather acrid, pungent odor that is mingled with the perfume of the lilies-of-the-valley?" I countered.

The Russian withdrew her eyes, the crimson lips all at once tightening.

"Ah, then you do not like my orchid? So many," caressingly, "do not like it at first and then—afterward—they grow to love it."

I sensed something intangible but none the less sinister in her words.

"Ow-een, you shall show to Aunt Sophie that some of my friends do value my so-wonderful orchid."

She leaned forward, drew out the strange, fleshy-petaled thing, its thick stem oozing a sticky sap, and put it in Owen's buttonhole with a proprietary air. The sickly, faintish odor pervaded the limousine.

Owen laughed, but I fancied that his laugh was not a happy one. He glanced at me in a half troubled fashion, and I smiled back broadly to express my confidence in him. After all, poor fellow, it wasn't his fault if a lovely woman chose to distinguish him before the aunt of the girl he loved. Then I saw his eyes drop and his brow gather as he regarded the blossom—no, I can't call it that, and I didn't then, even in my own mind—the—*thing*—in his buttonhole.

"Thank you for the flower, princess. I must confess that I agree with Miss Delorme," formally, "that its odor is far from agreeable. I presume you're accustomed to it, aren't you? Perhaps for some sentimental reason?"

"It may be an acquired taste, like olives," I put in.

"My father was very fond of such orchids, Ow-een. He had many house of glass on his estate, full of these—experiment." The princess spoke a bit carefully, her narrowed eyes shifting from Owen's face to mine. "I have but few, yet more wonderful than this one. I have the great blood-red orchid that seem so solid, so yielding, at once—like the pulsing flesh of a child's heart."

I couldn't restrain an exclamation of disgust and horror at the simile, and the princess straightened her slim form suddenly and changed her tone, with a gracious smile.

"And the thick white flower as of new-fallen snow," she purred, "is one of the most lovely. But I see the *chère tante* is not interest' in Irma Tchernova's poor flowers," plaintively. "Ah, perhaps, some day you will come, then, to see my jewels? You are a woman and must be interest' in the jewels? I have many that are most fine, of the diamond, the ruby, the sapphire, the emerald," she ended, leaning toward me engagingly with what I am sure she intended for a friendly smile.

Such was my interior impression of her exactly opposite feeling toward me that I withdrew almost involuntarily from her advances and she observed this with a slight twitch of her crimson lips. The situation might have become further strained, had we not stopped at that moment before the great wall about the Differdale house.

OWEN sprang out to ring the bell, and waited with me beside the door, hoping—I felt so, at least—that Portia might appear when the gate swung open, instead of Fu Sing. Sure enough, she did, and put out her hand to him prettily, to thank him for having brought me home.

"Don't thank me," he said, motioning to the limousine drawn close to the curb. "The Princess Tchernova—oh, you two have already met, haven't you?"

"Why, yes, I think we have met," Portia drawled, her clear eyes upon the glowing garnet eyes of the Russian, who leaned back in the car almost as if she desired to escape notice.

Tben her tone changed from indifference to a tense alarm that startled me so much that I leaned back against the open gate, panting at the suddenness of her attack.

"Who gave you this—this *thing?*" demanded my niece sharply, and plucked at Owen's buttonhole as if she were conquering an innate reluctance to touch something horribly loathsome. "Oh, it is not necessary to answer. I know!"

With a quick, nervous jerk she pulled the strange and monstrous bloom from Owen's buttonhole and let it fall upon the ground. Then she put out one foot and crushed it into a pulpy, nasty mass that sent its sharp, acrid, disagreeable odor puffing up into the air about us. At once she seemed to recover herself.

"That—flower—princess, is dangerous. I wonder if you know *how* dangerous?"

Rapierlike glances shot between the two women. "Owen, I didn't mean to startle you," Portia continued, "bnt that—flower—is a very poisonous—orchid. I'm sure the princess wasn't aware of its bad qualities," and another sharp interchange of glances took place. "I'm sorry, princess, if I spoiled a favorite—flower—of yours. I presume it came from your hothouses?" She directed her remarks to the silent occupant of tbe limousine. "Of course, you bave—others?"

I felt, as I had been feeling when Portia made certain remarks, insignificant in themselves, that they had a deep inner meaning running through and under tbem. I was convinced that, whatever it was that my niece meant to convey, the Princess Tchernova caught her idea clearly. There was a moment's silence, tben the Russian leaned toward the open door of the limousine and spoke slowly, each word dropping like venomous slobbering driblets from a mad beast's jaws, so concentrated was the bad feeling that I knew lay behind each syllable.

"*Ma chère* Mrs. Differdale, I have many—others. Do not fear that I resent or misunderstand your—your uncalculated action. You shall see some day—the many—others." She turned to Owen. "Poisonous? Tchah!" contemptuously.

Then she smiled, such a smile aa chilled my very heart, there was such tense purpose in her tight-locked teeth, ber narrowed green eyes, as she fixed her gaze upon Portia.

"Are you going on, Owen? Or will you stop in for a moment?"

I was astounded at Portia's invitation, after all onr hashing and rehashing of the delicate situation, but laid it to her ill-concealed jealousy of tbe otber woman, who continued to smile without speaking. I could see that Owen wanted to come in, but felt Portia's invitation a trifle tactless under the circumstances.

"Any other time," he began hastily, when he was interrupted by the princess, whose evil smile had never once left her red lips.

"Any otber time, *chère* Mrs. Differdale. But Ow-een is promis' to me for now. Are you not, my Ow-een?"

Her assumption of proprietorship was certainly enough to have made any woman furious. Portia whitened and winced.

"Some other time, tben, Mr. Edwardes," said she, pointedly, and withdrew inside tbe bronze doors, motioning me to follow so that she could close them.

Owen was dreadfully disturbed, it was plain to see, but there was nothing for it but for him to bid us good evening and withdraw. Before she closed the door, I caught the glances that were once more exchanged between Portia and the serenely triumphant princess. I could see that Portia was maintaining her poise, meeting the beryl-green eyes of the Russian with an unyielding steadiness of

gaze that disconcerted the princess, who after a moment withdrew her own angrily flashing orbs with sullen reluctance, the loser in that final duel between them.

As the limousine rolled away, Portia swung the bar that closed the gate, turned to me and clutched with one groping hand as if to keep herself from falling.

"It is the confirmation of my horrible suspicions," she said in a soft, broken voice. "Oh, Auntie, I am sick with the nausea that overwhelms me at this near approach of inconceivable evil!"

I put my arms about her comfortingly until she had regained her poise.

"Oh, poor Owen! Poor Owen!" she suddenly exclaimed in a voice betraying such keen anguish that I pushed her from me and held her at arm's length the better to see her face.

She met my eyes steadily with a confession of her love plain to see.

"Why 'poor Owen'?" I demanded.

"If I could only make you understand," she said, a desperate expression crossing her tortured face. "If I could only tell you all that I surmised, inferred, and must now accept against my own will," she ended, pitifully.

"Portia Delorme, the very best thing you can do now is to come into the house and eat your dinner. And after dinner you are going to try to tell me what you think I shall be able to understand, about this very mysterious situation. I'm referring," I said rather tartly, "to your strange and inexplicable and horribly rude behavior to that perfectly inoffensive woman. She must be gathering very pleasant conclusions about the good breeding of our American women," I finished sarcastically.

Portia bestowed a half-pitying, half-apologetic look upon me as she withdrew herself from my impatient grasp and preceded me into the dining room. It exasperated me, that look; it reminded me too strongly of the gaze with which a parent regards a child too young to grasp what the adult mind comprehends easily.

Portia's excitement did not keep her from eating a very good dinner, particularly as I represented to her that if she didn't eat she wouldn't have spunk enough to compete with her Russian rival. After dinner Fu served coffee in the library on a tabouret between Portia and myself, as we sat on piles of luxurious cushions.

My niece was deeply troubled at the incident of the flower, but whether it was for having permitted her temper to run away with her, or for having seen that signal sign of the princess' favor on her own cavalier, I wasn't sure. At last she put down her drained cup and leaned back among the pillows with a relaxed air. I waited, impatient for some explanation of her incomprehensible and—to me—ill-bred conduct.

"I suppose you think me a vulgarly jealous woman, Aunt Sophie. If you do, you do me an injustice. I admit that I was dizzy with nausea at the thought of that—that vile *thing*—in Owen's buttonhole, and especially at the bare idea that it had been placed there with intent by a—by the Princess Tchernova. Of course, you are mentally telling yourself that it could have been nothing but sheer jealousy on my part.

"Aunt Sophie, if you saw a loathsome and venomous insect upon my shoulder, wouldn't you strike at it, destroy it, without considering how your momentary blow would appear to onlookers? And if you knew that one of the onlookers had dropped the thing upon me for her—his—own wicked designs, would you hesitate because she—he—was watching?"

"My dear Portia, I'll admit that that—er—orchid, was about as un-

pleasant a bloom as I've ever seen, and had a most nngodly odor," I added viciously, "hut you can't persuade me that it was a venomous thing designed by the princess to injure Owen. Why, any fool can see that she's deeply interested in . . ."

Portia interrupted impatiently. "That's just the point. She *is* interested. That's why I'm troubled. It isn't his body, it's his soul that I'm concerned ahout."

"But if she's interested, why should she wish to hnrt him? Oh, Portia, don't you see how unjust your jealous suspicions are making you?"

I was heated. I conldn't help it. I didn't like the princess, bnt neither did I like my uiece's incivility, if I may call it that, to a person who had done nothing to merit such pointed hostility, unless the flirtation with Owen might he called into evidence.

Portia shook hoth hands violently in front of her, with a gesture of hopelessness. Then she hnried her face in both palms and I could see her shoulders shake gently. Portia was crying.

"My dear!" I was repentant for my harshness.

She lifted her face, all tear-stained, and regarded me with a kind of despair.

"That's just it, Aunt Sophie. I can't make you understand. It seems a paradox to you, doesn't it, when I say that the more Irma Tchernova cares for Owen, the greater is his danger? Oh, not from her love! Not from her love! But from what she may hring upon him, if he unhappily falls under her influence, as he is in a fair way of doing if she is unchecked in her designs."

"I'm afraid you will have to go a little further into detail, Portia," I managed to get ont, wondering if her love and jealousy had unsettled her usually clear, uuprejudiced judgment.

"Would you consider me mad, Aunt Portia, if I told you that the strange growth that creature put in poor Owen's buttonhole is capahle of bringing down upon his head such terrible consequences that the mind cau hardly conceive them?"

I TRIED to he judicial. If my niece's mind had become unbalanced, I must keep my own poise.

"I can helieve that *you* believe, my dear, but I must confess that it seems impossible that there could be any sound basis for yonr helief."

"Other people besides me have uot only helieved such things, bnt have writteu them in some of these ancient —and modern—hooks." She waved her hand inclusively about the library walls, lined with volnmes small and large, new, and mnstily old. "Suppose I read selections from some of those books and try—try, Aunt Sophie!—to make things fairly clear to you. At least, from my own standpoint."

This sounded logical and eminently sensible. I told Portia so. She seemed relieved at my fair-mindedness, and my readiness to listen, at least. And so began one of the strangest, most brain-bewildering nights that I ever spent. All that uight, until dawn broke, Portia read to me, talked to me, argued with me, explained to me, until—until I actually begau to feel the faint glimmerings of probability in the mad and seemingly improhable propositions that she laid before me.

That such frightful monstrosities should exist seemed almost incredihle, until Portia told me hluntly that I was like the old country man who, when confrouted hy a giraffe, stared incredulously, exclaiming "bnt they ain't no such animal!" My own personal ignorance of the existence of the strange anomaly called a *loup-garou* or werewolf was no proof that this traditional monster did not live. I was obliged to admit this, much to

my own distaste. It is always hard to admit one's ignorance on any subject, especially to a younger person, someone of a newer generation.

That Portia had studied the subject under Mr. Differdale, I was prepared to admit; that he believed in lycanthropy, I could not deny; that he was a little bit "off", I assured myself secretly. Portia, however, kept dinning fact after fact at me, until I began to say, "seeing is believing", to which she replied with a rather pitying look, that she wouldn't wish upon her bitterest enemy an encounter with a werewolf, its brute-propensities intensified by the human intelligence that directed its actions.

The things upon which she based her suspicions were several. There was the coincidence of Sergei, the princess' chauffeur, having called his mistress *"volkodlak"* in his jealous passion, in my hearing. Portia read to me certain characteristics of the fabled werewolves, and pointed out their similarity to certain of the princess' striking and individual peculiarities. "The werewolf," ran one account, "cannot eat sugar, but turns from it with loathing. Nor can it drink any sweet cordials. Raw flesh in any form is its principal food, and a fresh kill is the favorite meat meal." There were here the coincidences of the princess' refusing sugar and sweets at the Differdale-Arnold home the afternoon that I had tea with them, and the plentiful supply of raw meat Gus Stieger had been ordered to send daily to the princess' residence—for her wolves!

As for more intimate personal characteristics, there were the beryl-green eyes that in dusk gleamed like garnets; the sharp white teeth; the small, low-set ears, pointed above (I had seen one escaping from the closely bound hair when the princess removed her ermine cap); the over-red lips; the narrowed lids under eyebrows that curved down to meet at the foot of the nose. There were the oval, tinted, highly-polished nails on the slender fingers, with the third finger so abnormally long. Even the princess' slinking, sinuous walk, Portia pointed out, by its resemblance to the tireless gait of a wolf, would have betrayed her real personality to an expert. But I suppose I'm getting too far ahead. I must set down here, for the benefit of those who are not familiar with the subject, what Portia's conclusions were in regard to that evil personality.

PART 8

From what Portia said, it appears that from time immemorial there have been people whose faith in the Evil One or his angels has been so complete that it has enabled them to work miracles of evil, just as faith in good enables others to work miracles of good. It is the faith that does the work, just as the same electricity can light our houses or kill us, according to how it is handled and directed.

These infatuated people who believe in the Evil One are actually metamorphosed—either at their own desire for some personal reason, or by someone evilly disposed toward them—into the form of a wolf, so that at night time they are impelled to go about mauling, killing and eating small animals, such as rabbits or sheep, until they come to the point where they prey upon human beings.

At just this point, I can divide my readers into two distinct factions. There are those who are saying: "Oh, this *is* a wild tale! But then, it makes fair reading to pass an idle hour." There are those others who are devouring my every word with tight lips and fixed eyes; *those others who know.*

For the benefit of my two classes of readers I shall say that I do not intend to attempt the proof of my sanity or the disproof of my credulity;

I leave that momentous judgment to them. For the personal opinion of the class that believes all this a fanciful tale, I don't care; I am writing, from now on, for those few who know that I am penning a tragic and incredible truth. Bnt I shall sketch a few logical points that may help my incredulons first class readers to understand the story; at least they shall not complain that I am asking them to swallow the impossible, without an apparently sonnd fictional basis upon which to build.

That there are entities good and evil existing in the ether "in which we live, and move, and have our being," is today indisputable; only a very ignorant person dares now deny the existence of what he has not happened to realize in his own limited personal experience. These entities may even be drawn into material form; solid, living, breathing flesh, to all appearance. I need go into no details; one way of doing this is through the services of a good medium, and the other by ancient spells, known to the initiated. Certain of these entities are men and women who have "died" and left their bodies of flesh on this earth-plane; others are entities which have never been housed in flesh and blood but have always existed on the astral plane of life.

Some of these latter entities possess the power of granting requests made by those who call npon them, provided always that the suppliant worshiper has sufficient faith in that power. It may not please religious bigots to have me point out that in the Bible the great Teacher stated definitely that His followers would in time be able to do greater works than He, provided that they would follow certain procedures, which He explained to them exhaustively. He cursed the fig-tree to show His disciples that the Universal Power could be as easily drawn upon for unjust, as for good, purposes. He even drew their attention to the blighted tree with a careful warning to be very particular about forgiving their enemies before attempting to use this Universal Power, as a precaution against their misuse, in anger, of an impersonal power that is at the initiate's disposal for evil as well as for good.

There are certain of these evil entities which can confer upon a believer the privilege of metamorphosing—or appearing to do so, which seems to me to be about the same—into the shape of a savage wild beast, usually a wolf. This tradition exists in every European country, even in Asia, in one form or another. Germany, France, Russia, all the Balkan countries, abound with tales of werewolves. Irish legends tell how St. Patrick turned Vereticus, King of Wales, into a wolf; of how St. Natalis cursed an illustrious Irish family so effectually that each member of it was doomed to be a wolf for seven years. In Iceland the *berserkir* averred their ability to metamorphose into bears and wolves, and they dressed themselves in skins of these animals in support of their pretensions. In England, as late as these modern days, a young woman artist, returning from a painting expedition through a wild and lonely countryside, had a most alarming and unpleasant experience with what can only be called the fantasm of a werewolf. The incident—and there are others, also—is sufficiently well authenticated to go on record as a fact. Let me remind the too-cynical reader that today no one can deny the existence of what were once generally called scoffingly "ghosts", and a thing can hardly have a ghost without once having existed in the flesh.

Scientists have proved that everything in the universe is composed of infinitesimal intelligences which I believe they call electrons. These tiny entities have what certain religious

denominations term "free will"; they are able to repel or attract other electrons as they choose. It is conceivable that if each electron has intelligence and will of its own, it can, to a certain extent, select its companionship, shape its environment. When electrons are grouped together in a certain manner, such as in a human body, there is always a central, or group will, that governs them in certain functions for the benefit of the group. The group will, for example, commands all voluntary movements consciously and can learn by practise how to command the so-called involuntary functions of the body-group; this has been proved by scientific experiment.

The thing that starts the group will to functioning is an abstract thing; a thought; an idea. A thought held in a man's mind or imagination can make him ill. Conversely, it can make him well if he is sick. It is strange that humanity prefers to accept but half of this proposition. Mankind readily believes that unhappy thoughts will depress it, but mankind has not yet learned to think, consciously, the happy thonghts that will uplift it. The electrons of the body-group are just as ready and willing to accept, and act npon, agreeable thoughts as upon disagreeable thoughts.

THE Bible, as a book of practical science, leaves nothing more to be asked for. It puts natural science so plainly before the eyes of the reader that he usually considers it too easy, hence too good to believe, so he tells himself that the promises weren't meant to function in modern days, only in ancient times! Yet we are told over and over in the Bible that the individual will at the head of each body-group, the will that we call our Ego, can do anything it pleases; no limits are imposed, *provided only that it will follow the natural laws for producing certain results.* The great Teacher expounded the Law in Faith: "Whosoever does not doubt in his heart, but believeth that what he saith shall come to pass, he shall have whatsoever he saith." These words in themselves are sufficient for a practical, working philosophy of life. Moreover, in performing his so-called miracles, he told sick people: "According to *your* faith be it unto you." The Bible tells us that in his home town, where he was well known, Jesns was *unable* to perform "miracles." Why? Because the people there couldn't raise themselves to any very high state of faith in the carpenter's son whom they had known as a boy.

I am not trying to instruct anybody in religious faith, but trying to show that the Bible teaches that nothing is impossible of performance that is asked in absolute faith. If, instead of a firm and steadfast faith in God's power to do all things, we substitute as firm a faith in an evil entity's ability to work unlimited evil, are we not turning Universal Power into materialization through the same channel of faith, merely altering conditions of transmission? In other words, when God-power flows throngh the medium of man's imagination, it must by its own law perform what it is called upon to do through unwavering faith, whether that deed be intended by the group will of that man's body as good or evil. Electricity is differentiated in power and results by man's intervention; God-power is subject to natural laws just as is electricity.

The carpenter's son proved his mission by his works. When He, therefore, tells me that I can have anything, or do anything, provided only that I *believe without doubting* that such things can be had or done, where is the inspired idiot who will dare rise up to tell me that God has limitations, "especially in modern times", and not hide a shamed head for his own

inconsistency in professing belief in promises that he declares aren't workable . . . "except spiritually," this last being a sop to his own incredulity. The god is clay who cannot make good his promises, and the God I worship isn't made of clay. His promises hold good today just as they held good thousands of years ago, because they are based on natural law.

I see no more reason, then, to discredit the statements of some individuals that by exercising their faith in certain directions they can metamorphose into wolf-form, than I see reason to discredit the statements scattered all through the Bible which make complete faith the only desideratum to obtaining all things. Aren't good and evil opposite poles of the same magnet?

All this, and more, my niece Portia pointed out to me in our all-night session. I may frankly admit that although I was a skeptic before we began that memorable conversation, I emerged from it with a new and astonishing viewpoint on the phenomena of life.

PART 9

MY NIECE kept on talking and arguing until daylight surprized us at our gruesome subject, and until she was assured that she had at least brought me to that open frame of mind when all I wanted was proof, more proof, of what to her was as clear as the daylight filtering through the silken curtains.

"But if the Princess Tchernova is a werewolf," I said, distastefully, the new word with its bizarre conception coming reluctantly from my tongue, which hated to voice so seemingly absurd a thing, "what do you intend to do about it?"

"With your assistance, Aunt Sophie, I intend to save Owen from her wicked designs. I—I will go to any length, to prevent her making him what I believe her to be already. I would even attempt a projection of my astral body—and that is a dangerous, a very dangerous thing."

I was inexpressibly shocked and alarmed. It is one thing to become such a monstrosity voluntarily: quite another to have the metamorphosis forced upon one. Portia replied to my horrified look with a stern expression.

"Perhaps you begin to understand now that I was not experiencing vulgar jealousy when I stripped that loathsome lycanthropic bit of rank growth from Owen's lapel?"

"Do you mean, Portia Delorme, that the Princess Tchernova is trying to make a werewolf out of Owen Edwardes?"

"That is exactly what I mean, Aunt Sophie. My action in destroying it was prompted by the love of one soul for the salvation of another soul," she said, slowly and thoughtfully. "But—he is safe only for the moment. Didn't she say that she had 'many others'? Oh, I read her meaning, just as she meant I should! She did not refer to that horrid growth alone, but to other—other means of accomplishing her fell purpose."

"Then she doesn't really want to make a meal out of Owen?" I ventured, uncomfortably aware that I was tacitly accepting my niece's amazing conclusions.

"No!" passionately. "It would be better, far better, if it were only this ordinary danger to which he is exposed. What threatens Owen is a far more subtle, far more terrible thing. Irma Tchernova intends, because of her infatuation for him, to transform him by her arts, her knowledge of the means to do so, into a companion werewolf for herself. It is not his body that is so much in danger; it is his soul that stands in such deadly peril that the very thought of it sickens me."

"Why don't you warn him?"

"About how much would he listen to, without thinking that I had taken leave of my senses?" demanded my niece, helplessly. "No, I cannot tell him anything. I can only try to attach him to me so deeply that he will avoid that creature's propinquity."

She colored.

"If I were you, Portia Delorme, and I believed the man I loved was in such deadly peril, I'd go to see him the very first thing tomorrow—that is, this morning—and let him know that I accepted his attentions definitely. After that, he won't feel like letting another woman stick flowers in his coat lapel. That is, if you'll see to it that your flowers go there first."

"I believe you're right, Aunt Sophie." Portia sprang up from her cushions with surprizing spirit, when you consider that we'd been talking all night. "I'm going to get dressed this minute—"

"Do have breakfast first," I urged, somewhat alarmed at my niece's abrupt decision. (I myself like to turn a thing over in my mind carefully before acting.)

Portia laughed and ran out of the room. She came back in an astonishingly short time, attired for the street. Her face shone with the happiness of hope; her eyes sparkled vividly. She hesitated a moment beside me (by this time I was having breakfast, preparatory to taking a good long nap to make up for my wakeful night), suddenly bent, and kissed me warmly.

IT DID not seem fifteen minutes before she returned, wearing an entirely different air. Her face was grim; her lips met in a tight line of determination. Her eyes glowed darkly. She dropped into a chair opposite me (I had not yet finished my cup of Fu Sing's excellent coffee) and stared unseeingly across the room as if in a trance.

"Portia! Did you see him?"

I was as excited as a girl over her first sweetheart.

"Yes, Aunt Sophie. I saw him—and—her."

"What? At this early hour—?"

"Do the powers of evil limit themselves to the hours of darkness?" she parried, looking up and meeting my eyes with that same look of stern determination on her face that I had noticed when she entered the room. "She was there on some excuse about the papers for the transfer of the Burnham house. I—I had to wait in the outer office, while she"—with bitter accent—"wound him more hopelessly within her toils. I presume you'd like to know what I overheard? I assure you that I personally have no scruples at listening to anything and everything that the Princess Tchernova may say."

"Is it possible that the odor of the marigold is disagreeable to your nostrils?" the princess was questioning Owen, as if in wonder, as Portia came into the outer office. "But there—how stupid of me! I remember that when I was a little, little girl, I rather disliked it myself. I remember, yes, my Ow-een, that I did not care for the perfume of the marigold. Until—well, I grew to love it, for it was a flower very dear to my father, who grew many marigold flowers on his estate. Now you can understand, of course, that Irma loves the marigold because it reminds her of the happy days she will never know again."

She sighed softly.

Owen must have reproached himself inwardly for his lack of tact, for through the glass partition Portia saw him put out his hand impulsively to take the yellow flower from the slender hand of the Russian. He put it into his lapel himself. Irma smiled at him with a pretty gratefulness. Although she must have seen Portia approach and enter the office, she feigned to know nothing of her rival's nearness.

"Some day yon shall see my so-wonderful orchids," exclaimed she, as if this were an afterthought. "You will be interested in my orchids; they are so weird, so bizarre—"

"I'm afraid I don't deserve your kindness, princess. I'm rather a matter-of-fact chap, you see, and a simple field flower means more to me than these freaks yon mention. However," hastily, "I'll come, of course, to see your orchids if you wish me to do so."

"They have been bronght from all over the world, Ow-een. Some from Germany, some from France, some from India, and oh, the wonderful orchids from my Russia! They are well worth coming to see, my Ow-een. And—soon you will love them as Irma loves them—wear them always as Irma wears them. Ah, I know, my Ow-een; they are irresistible."

She pronounced her English with a delicate precision that sounded charmingly on unprejudiced ears. She knew very well the powerful charm of a language spoken with a slight accent and funny little irregularities; it makes a man feel that the pretty speaker is an ingenuous infant, not a grown woman capable of using every feminine weapon with deadly intent and purpose. Portia could not stand the strain any longer, and the knowledge that the other woman knew beyond doubt that she was waiting without was too much for her already strained nerves. She stepped to the inner office door and spoke to Owen in a casually friendly manner, inviting him to have dinner with us that same evening.

"So sorry, Portia," Owen said, going toward her disturbedly; "bnt I've just promised the princess to spend the evening with her. There are so many things abont the Burnham honse that need attention," he hastened to explain, at the look that must have come into Portia's eyes.

"Again, have I made the intrusion?" cried the princess vivaciously, her tongue caressing har red lips rapidly as if tasting something particularly palatable.

Portia, who surmised that it was her own possible discomfiture that so pleased the other woman, hastened to reply indifferently that Mr. Edwardes might care to drop in some evening in the near future, when he didn't happen to be engaged. She managed to make the invitation so casual that the Russian, she said afterward to me, actually looked disappointed.

"Then Owen's going to dine with that creature tonight?"

"Yes, Auntie," she admitted, her brow drawn thoughtfully.

"What—what are we going to do to save Owen?"

At the tremor that I could not keep out of my voice, my niece suddenly gave me a searching look, leaned her head on her hands on the table, and burst into wrenching sobs, greatly to my alarm and mystification.

"Don't mind. I'll be all right in another few minntes," she managed to tell me between sobs. "I'm crying, dear, because I think you're beginning to see the terrible gravity of the situation; becanse I think yon're beginning to realize that Hamlet's words to Horatio were only too true."

She dried her eyes at length, and regained her self-control.

"Owen will be there in that woman's house tonight, Annt Sophie, subject to Heaven only knows what devilish machinations on her part. About Sergei, her chauffeur, I am not yet quite certain; I have never seen him near by when he was not muffled in furs, and—oh, his very fondness for those enveloping furs may point to his—. Yon see, Aunt Sophie, how bewildered the brain becomes that attempts to cope with this terrible subject?"

"Is there anything we can do to prevent her harming Owen?" I demanded nervously. I was in the strange mental condition when I believed and disbelieved at the same time, see-sawing back and forth as Portia talked and I reflected.

"No. Yes!" cried my niece. "We can watch and see what she does. Perhaps in this way I may learn something, or prevent something. Forewarned is forearmed, Aunt Sophie, and all's fair in love and war," she finished enigmatically. "Would you go with me again, on such questionable business as this of peering into other people's windows?"

"Portia Delorme, if you intend to stick your head into the lion's mouth —I mean, the wolf's mouth—do you think I'm going to desert you? And didn't I go poking into her window with you once before?"

I was indignant at her questioning me. She jumped up then and went to the door, turning before she went down the hall.

"I'm going into the library, to read up some more on lycanthropy. And then I'll probably be busy in my laboratory for quite some time. Don't expect to see me until dinner-time. If you'll manage to be ready by then, we can be out of the house as soon as it's dark."

I tried to curb my excitement, but found this a difficult matter. After dark we two women were going out to spy upon the Princess Tchernova. And we were justifying our action by telling ourselves that this lovely Russian woman was a fiend in human form, a demon from whose wicked schemes Owen Edwardes had much to fear! Why, the thing was so bizarre that it made me laugh aloud with incredulity one minute, and stop my own laughter with horrified shrinking and backward glances the next.

How I got through that day, I don't know. The approaching excitement buoyed me up, of course, but I remember that I entirely lost my appetite for lunch, and could hardly taste the delicious dinner that Fu had prepared with his usual painstaking care. I put on the same clothes I had worn on the night when Portia and I had first looked into the princess' windows, in order to be as inconspicuous as possible. At dinner I noted that Portia was wearing breeches and a heavy dark coat short enough not to impede walking—or running.

While Portia ate her dinner in silence, with only a casual nod across the table to me, I thought over the preposterous things she had read and told me the night before, and recalled the marvelous powers she had claimed for Mr. Differdale, powers which I secretly began to hope my niece shared, considering the errand we were contemplating.

PART 10

WE WENT out of the house before dusk and made a considerable detour by dark, to avoid observation or comment by people of the neighborhood. We had left the dogs at home. Portia did not even mention taking them, although they followed us wistfully to the gate, and whined plaintively when it closed after us. I presume she did not wish to risk alarming the inmates of the Burnham house.

We entered the grounds from the farther side, opposite Queens Boulevard, and crept silently toward the house, guided by lights that flashed from the tall windows of the lower floor. We had but a momentary glimpse into the dining hall; just as we came within good seeing distance, Sergei appeared at the window and pulled together the long dark draperies of heavy brocaded silk.

I was so disappointed that I let out an exclamation which chagrined me terribly for fear Portia had overheard my indiscretion, but she appeared not to have heard me, so preoccupied was she with the problem before us. I have always envied men for their freedom of expression: the relief they seem to find in a curse-word always appears enormous. It is indicative of the high tension under which I labored, that when Sergei pulled the curtains together, robbing Portia and me of what we had come especially to see, I emitted a single short and savage word. I said, with fervor: "Damn!" I cannot really be sorry, even today, that I said it; I felt afterward—apart from my fear that Portia had overheard it—as if that expletive had been a safety-valve to my feelings.

While I stewed over the possibility of Portia's having heard me disgrace myself, my niece was busily engaged in peeping and peering from the ground to see if there were not some tiny openings in the hangings, and apparently she did find one, for she remained with her face glued to the cold pane. When I saw this, I went at once to the window nearest her and found that I was as fortunate as she, for the heavy curtains had been dragged against high-piled rugs, resulting in V-shaped openings at the bottom, just where our eyes came as we stood outside on the terrace that ran about the house. What we saw was innocent enough, so much so that I began to blame Portia in my mind for having brought me on a most undignified wild-goose chase.

The whole room was magnificent to the extreme, but it was of that type of splendor that reeks of barbarism with its display of vivid colors, flashing semi-precious stones, gorgeous draperies and pictured hangings and embroideries. It was not at all the kind of room you would have expected from the exterior of the old Burnham house with its very dignified architecture and generally sober aspect. My eyes ached after a minute's trying to distinguish objects through that small opening, particularly as the room was illuminated by several dozen candles, the light of which was broken up into hundreds of dancing, blinding facets of dazzling brilliance by the dangling cut-glass ornaments that festooned each candlestick.

A table occupied the center of the room, a table that stood about a foot higher than the rich velvet rugs covering the floor. What seemed a richly embroidered, lace-encrusted white linen cover was spread upon it, and silver, glass and china glittered and sparkled and gleamed above it. Around the table great masses of richly colored cushions were piled. Reclining among them, her back to the window, was the Princess Tchernova. She was wearing a daring costume, cut down to her waist-line in back, and nothing but straps of diamonds held it at the shoulders. Her arms sparkled with many-colored gems.

Owen Edwardes occupied a pile of cushions opposite his hostess, but unless I am a mighty poor judge of human nature he was extremely ill at ease. He leaned among the pillows as if he did not enjoy them very much, and evidently found it awkward to eat in that half-reclining position.

The room was full of great vases overflowing with yellow marigold blooms. Where the princess could have procured them at that time of the year I don't know, unless she had standing orders for her favorite flowers with florists in a position to supply her. The stench of those unsavory-smelling blooms must have permeated every crack and crevice of the room; I actually imagined that I smelled it from where I stood outside the closed window, so many of those glowing flowers

were there. The princess wore a huge corsage bouquet of marigolds and I noticed a yellow dot of color resting on the lapel of Owen's unpretentious business suit.

Sergei was serving his mistress and her guest, entering from the swinging door that led to the butler's pantry whenever the princess clapped her hands, Oriental fashion. As I stared, my head on one side so that both eyes could look through the opening simultaneously, Irma clapped both palms, leaning across to her companion and smiling as she chatted vivaciously. Sergei brought in a crystal tray and set it down upon the table before his mistress. On it stood a tall, curiously cut decanter of some clear liquor that sparkled as if with an inner life of its own. Two slender goblets of gold stood beside the decanter.

IRMA waved the retainer from the room. Still talking to Owen, her narrow eyes regarding him provocatively from under lowered lids, she leaned forward and began pouring that bubbling, springing, living liquid into one of the golden goblets. As she poured, I was unutterably startled to hear a gasp come out of the darkness near me, from where my niece Portia stood staring through the adjoining window.

"Not that, dear God! Not *that!*" she half groaned, half prayed. And then all at once I felt my hand grasped and a strong tug drew me away from the house and in the direction of the boulevard.

I screamed. I couldn't have helped it to save my life. For the moment I was so taken by surprize that I was unnerved completely. All the horrible things that had been recounted to me during the vigil of the preceding night seemed to have come crashing about me.

"Scream!" That was Portia's injunction, as she ran beside me and pulled me along with her in the direction of the lighted stores that line the opposite side of the boulevard. "Scream! Keep it up! Your scream is much shriller than mine, Aunt Sophie."

She was aiming, I soon saw, at reaching the protection of the lighted street and the police-signal shelter, but all at once she stopped short and drew me down behind the sheltering concealment of a winter shrub. The pounding feet of running men came down the walk toward us, and as they whirled by in the darkness I thought I recognized the heavy body of Sergei and in front of him the athletic form of Owen.

The curtains on this, the other side of the house, were now being drawn apart, and before one window, her lithe form outlined darkly against the brilliant lights within, stood the princess, staring out into the garden. Although common sense told me that she could not have seen our crouching figures against that fir-tree, my heart began to beat quickly with sick apprehension. Still Portia held me down firmly, until the sound of a police-whistle shrilled to our ears across the dark grounds, and the voices of men calling excitedly rose from the boulevard. We could see dark figures emerging from lighted stores. Then Portia pulled at my hand and whispered guardedly:

"Don't expose yourself, Aunt Sophie, any more than you can help. But we can't go out by the boulevard now, with the police on the lookout, and we've got to risk crossing the grounds again to the other side, and going down the Burnham Road to the subway station. We'll be safer inside the station than out here in the open. I wish I'd brought Andrei and Boris," she finished regretfully.

THE excitement on the boulevard continued to grow, but was apparently centered about the police shelter. Portia and I crept warily

from behind our shelter, like two criminals. I noticed that she had taken off her coat and was running in flannel shirt and knickers, and it crossed my mind that she had done it on purpose, for in the uncertain light she would readily have passed as a man. We heard no pursuing footsteps, but as we gained the other side of the house grounds, I could hear the snarling of the wolves in their den at the foot of the garden; disturbed, probably, by the unusual sounds. I certainly hoped the cement and steel cage would prove as strong as it had looked when Owen showed it to me.

By the time we had gotten a couple of blocks away and could see our goal looming darkly ahead of us across the fields on the other side of the subway line, we had regained our confidence, if not our breath. I observed to Portia then, that I never had thought that I could run as I had that night.

"You ran like an old dear, if not a young deer," she punned mischievously. "Oh, Aunt Sophie, I would never have forgiven myself if they'd caught you peering into the princess' windows."

I couldn't help laughing. "How about you, my dear?"

"It wouldn't have mattered abont me," she said quickly. "I can take care of myself. I'm prepared for all emergencies. But you—your faith, dear Auntie, is the blind faith that isn't very reliable because it isn't founded on knowledge of irrefutable logical truths. Mine—mine is the cultivated faith that believes because it knows—because it has demonstrated those truths."

"Then you're not talking about Owen, and the storekeepers, my dear?" I said, rather puzzled.

"Oh, no! It was—wolves—I was tronbled about. If I'd given you a sprig of this ash and told you the formula to repeat in case of an attack by a werewolf, do you suppose you would have had the faith to believe that it wasn't all mummery?"

I couldn't reply, so I remained silent.

"You see?" sadly.

I most certainly wouldn't have expected to rout a ravenous supernatural beast with a sprig of an ash tree and an abracadabra exorcism. Portia was quite right. If she knew, or believed that she knew, that the ash-sprig would be efficacious under such circumstances, then she was protected; if not by the ash, by her belief in it.

We walked briskly along, stopping occasionally while Portia listened. The excitement about the boulevard and the Burnham place had died down, but it seemed to me that I could hear the pattering feet of something behind us, something like a big dog. I communicated my alarm to my niece by grasping at her hand and pointing wordlessly in the direction of the sound. She turned her head and appeared to be trying to pierce the darkness. Then she pushed upon me a rough sprig of something that she broke from a spray which I now noticed she was wearing at her girdle.

"Take this, and if you can possibly believe in it, believe! Pray, Aunt Portia, pray!" she whispered tensely. "Something *is* following us. I don't know if it is some big dog, or if the princess has let out one of her pets—or if she herself . . ." and then her surmises died away into silence as she took my hand in hers and urged me into a run again.

By this time we had come to the corner of Burnham Road and Gilman Street. As we reached that corner, Portia jerked me around it and pulled me into the comparative shelter of the overhanging wall. She pressed the button, at the same time applying her key to the lock, without waiting for Fu to open the door from within. She pushed the bronze door

open and pushed me into the aperture, backing in after me.

Just as we shrank into that niche in the wall, there came the sonnd of something scratching on the pavement at the corner, and then a dark, heavy body hurtled through the air and past the opening with a savage snarl that sent my blood cold. Hardly had Portia closed the door (it closed with a spring lock), than the heavy thudding feet of that unknown beast that had dogged our footsteps came scratching against the metal.

Boris and Andrei had been let out into the enclosure by Fu, and came springing and bonnding to us, only to stop as if petrified at the sound of that scratching. Portia stood between them motionless, absolutely silent, her attitude that of the ntmost concentration, her head thrown prondly up as if in secret defiance of that which was withont. After a long minnte, there came an ngly, qnavering howl that made me clutch at her in apprehension.

"Portia! It can't get in, can it?" I whispered tensely.

She shook an impatient head and returned to her concentration. The sound of those padding feet went softly from the doorway and melted into the quiet of the spring night.

Now that the danger was past, I permitted myself the luxury of nerves.

"Why didn't it attack ns while we were walking across the fields?" I inquired, almost hysterically, checking a tendency to laugh and cry at once.

"I think she was afraid," said Portia.

"Oh, my dear, yon don't mean that you think it was . . . *she?*"

"What do you suppose it was? It was she herself, or it was one of her wolves."

"Is there anything we can do now —I mean, abont Owen?"

"No, Auntie. Owen won't go back tonight, to drink that—that poison with her. He will be told that she is indisposed; that the excitement has been too much for her. No, he will not find—her. Now do try to get a few winks of sleep, Auntie; I feel the need of rest myself."

We went quietly into the house. Boris stuck to me, for which I felt very thankful; I disliked the idea of going to bed in a room that would have seemed peopled with phantom beasts that leered upon me with beryl-green eyes, and Boris meant company.

As Portia was about to leave me in the corridor, I asked her something that had ronsed my curiosity.

"What was it that the princess was pouring out for Owen into those golden goblets, Portia? You called it poison just now, and I wonder . . ."

"Poison? Well, so it is. Didn't you notice how alive that clear liquid seemed, with its bubble and sparkle and constant motion, even when the bottle still stood on the tray? That water has nndoubtedly been bronght by the Princess Tchernova from Rnssia, from some lycanthropous stream."

"Then . . ?"

"It impregnates the person who drinks it with the curse of lycanthropy."

I was sick with horror. I leaned back against the door-frame and stared at Portia.

"Do you suppose we were in time?"

"If yon hadn't screamed when I touched you, I was going to scream myself. Your shriek was timed as if you had rehearsed it beforehand. It served my purpose. Owen heard it, and must have sprung away from the table before that evil beverage had moistened his lips. It was only a moment before he was out in the grounds, hunting for the woman who had screamed out of the night." She

laughed, but without real mirth. "If you hadn't precipitated matters by your scream, I would either have screamed, or have taken the risk of breaking in upon them and begging Owen not to drink, for my sake, no matter what he thought of me."

"I'm afraid I shall be nervous tonight, Portia," I told her, rather quaveringly. "Do you suppose it—she—could get into this house?"

"This house is safe from such invasions, for the present, dear. You can sleep soundly. But if you are wakeful tonight, call me. I shall hear you, even if you whisper, for my whole being is on the watch."

She kissed me, and I went into my own room. I must admit that I did not get into a sound sleep before morning, for I was haunted by memories of those padding footsteps that had come up behind us in the dark. I began to understand what it meant to feel real fear, and told myself that I would not venture out after dark either with or without Boris.

PART 11

When I went down to the stores the next morning, it was to find everybody in a great state of excitement. Gus Stieger, weighing the steak I had ordered, told me about it with gusto.

It appears that about dark a woman had been heard screaming "Help! Help!" from the grounds of the Burnham house, and that Owen Edwardes, who had been dining with the Princess Tchernova, rushed out with the chauffeur and searched everywhere but without result. Then the two men rushed down to the police station, and the officer sounded his whistle for other assistance, and disappeared into the darkness to search the grounds himself. Those of the storekeepers who were keeping open a bit later, among them Gus, saw O'Brien's flashlight occasionally as he went here and there on the grounds. They waited for him to come back until nearly midnight, then closed up their stores.

"And believe me, Miss Delorme, he ain't showed up yet!"

My heart nearly skipped a beat. Had the genial O'Brien fallen a victim to it—to her? I felt as if I could not wait to get back to Portia with this terrible and unexpected news, although what she could do I didn't know.

"They've got a new man at the station," chimed in the voice of a woman, and I turned to meet the eyes of Mrs. Differdale, wearing a new boudoir cap of pink satin and white lace, in which she felt quite coquettish and dressed up. "A new man named Murphy. You see, Miss Delorme, they've found poor O'Brien's electric torch lying just outside the wolf-den, and they're thinking one of the wolves ate him or something. They say there's one brute missing."

"That's rather silly," I murmured, trying to gather my scattered wits. In another moment, thought I, she'd be blaming Boris or Andrei, and I must be ready for her.

"Were Portia's wolfhounds out last night?" bluntly inquired she.

I realized that she had only been waiting to ask me that question.

"Why?" I queried innocently.

Her eyes avoided mine self-consciously.

"Oh, I don't know," she said vaguely.

But she did know, and she knew that I knew, that she was trying her best to accuse those noble dogs of killing and then devouring O'Brien.

I couldn't help smiling ironically as I remarked that both dogs had been in my room with me all that evening. She wasn't half pleased with my assurance, I could see, but couldn't very well continue with her half-veiled insinuations, after my direct statement.

On the way home I ran into Owen Edwardes, coming out of the hardware store.

"I'll drive you home, Aunt Sophie," he commanded, rather than asked.

I surmised that he wanted to say something about the previous night, and I was not wrong.

"It's an odd thing, Aunt Sophie, that I felt Portia so vividly in my mind last night that I could have sworn she was within a few feet of me." (I concealed an ill-timed smile). "When that woman screamed, I had the terrible premonition that it was Portia who was in deadly peril. Of course, common sense told me that she was home shut safely behind the Differdale walls," dryly.

"Well?" I encouraged.

"There wasn't a sign of anything anywhere, although the Princess Tchernova's man hunted with me over every inch of the grounds, and as soon as O'Brien joined us we had his electric torch. By the way, it is a very strange thing that O'Brien should have disappeared off the face of the earth. What do you suppose could have become of him?"

What did I suppose! I felt my brain whirling with sick surmises: a faint feeling seized upon me, but I tried to reply as collectedly as possible.

"He'll probably turn up some time today," I ventured.

"I have a feeling that he won't," Owen said in stubborn contradiction. "Just why I should feel so positive I don't know, but I do. Funny, isn't it? No, I don't think any of us will see O'Brien again. I'm afraid something has happened to him. What, I can't guess—but something."

I could not speak, then; Owen's words were too close to what I suspected, what I dreaded, from Portia's disclosures to me. I could not meet Owen's frank, inquiring eyes.

"I wish you'd tell Portia," he went on after a moment's pause, "that the princess is considering altering various things about the Burnham house and insists upon asking my opinion on every change. I suppose that when they are finished, I won't be making so many visits, Aunt Sophie. Just now," he finished, rather vaguely, "I really — well — you understand — I can't exactly—help myself."

I understood far better than he thought I did. I began to think I knew why he couldn't—exactly—help himself, poor Owen! What he wanted was reassurance from me as to Portia's complete understanding of the situation. How little he realized that my niece knew more than he could possibly have suspected!

"I'm sure Portia understands," I managed to tell him. "If she doesn't, I do, Owen."

At that use of his first name, he turned and looked me full in the eyes with such a grateful smile that it warmed my heart.

"That sounds good to me, Aunt Sophie," he said softly, with a bit of emphasis upon my name, in turn.

We drew up before the Differdale gateway.

"I don't suppose Portia cares to go to the theater with me some evening next week?" he ventured wistfully. "It's time—don't you think?—that she began to go out a little, for her own sake."

I may have been unwise, but I couldn't help speaking a bit sharply. "It's high time, Owen, that she began to cultivate the acquaintance of people of her own age," I snapped.

"It's too bad she doesn't seem to care for the princess, isn't it? The princess seems to have taken a strong liking to her, and often wonders why Portia hasn't called on her. Really, my fair client isn't so dreadful, when one gets to know her. She always treats me royally; insists upon making me eat and drink all kinds of na-

tive Russian dishes every time I go to her house. And you ought to see her orchids! They are certainly gorgeous plants, although I must admit I don't care a whole lot for them myself. They have such a sickly, faintish odor, all of them, in spite of their vivid, fascinating colors. And I never did care for flowers with thick fleshy petals and sticky soap oozing out of their stems; I prefer the honest field flowers, or perhaps a more ethereal type of orchid. After all, it's just a matter of taste, I presume."

I rang the bell and Owen drove away after he had watched me enter the gateway. I think he would have liked to pursue further the question of Portia's attending the theater with him, but didn't exactly dare say much more than he had already said.

PORTIA was breakfasting when I went into the dining room to look for her, after finding she was not in her own room. She put down her coffee cup and lifted her eyes intently to my face, studying it.

"What has happened now?"

"O'Brien has been missing since last night. The only trace they've found of the man is his electric torch near the wolf-den of the old Burnham house. And they say that one of the wolves is missing; that it must have gotten out and made away with O'Brien."

My niece drew a long breath, her eyes deeply troubled.

"I'm sorry. I'm very sorry. But I'm helpless to avert these—disappearances. I can do nothing until it is too late. That is the awful thing about it. If the princess should take a fancy to some child in the neighborhood, and I were to warn its mother, do you think my words would be taken seriously? The mother would believe me insane, of course. That's why I can't help things."

Her words touched a faint memory. It stirred formlessly as I listened to her lamentation, then suddenly took shape.

"Portia! Minna Arnold!"

My tones must have been horror-stricken as I sank into a chair opposite my niece, for her face was a shade paler as she leaned across the table toward me.

"What about Minna?" Her tone was sharp and her expression much disturbed; her clear eyes were wide as she watched me.

"Portia, I can't seem to collect my thoughts properly. It's too frightful to suspect any human being of such—such calculation, such wicked scheming." I gulped.

"Try to calm yourself, Auntie, for heaven's sake! There's too much at stake. I grant the child isn't very appealing, but if danger threatens Mr. Differdale's little niece, I must run the risk of being considered insane, and warn Aurora Arnold."

"You know I went to your sister-in-law's the other day for a cup of tea, Portia? The princess was there. She made a good deal of Minna. I can remember distinctly that she was disturbed because Alice was so thin, and it turned out that she had been giving Minna large boxes of expensive chocolates. Minna has been going to her house to get them, two or three times a week. Mrs. Arnold said that the child had been eating too many sweets, and the princess declared that the next box should be for Alice, so that she would grow plump like her sister."

Portia laid her napkin on the table and got slowly to her feet. She did not look very happy over the prospect of what she probably felt it her duty to do.

"I'll have to go over at once, Auntie. Alice is in deadly danger. Minna, too; perhaps more than Alice."

"But what will you tell Mrs. Arnold, Portia?"

My niece looked past me with eyes that seemed to see beyond the open doorway. She sighed deeply.

"Auntie, I don't know. I'll have to trust to the Powers of Light"—she often referred to what she called "beneficent entities" as "Powers of Light"—"to put the right words into my mouth when I am there. I'd better go and dress now. I'll take the dogs. The poor beasts haven't been outside for twenty-four hours; a long run will do them good."

As PORTIA told me afterward, she found Aurora Arnold at home, but the older woman had not returned from her marketing—or gossiping. Aurora pretended to be afraid of Andrei and Boris.

"I wish you wouldn't bring them here, Portia," she said, snappily. "They're ugly, vicious brutes, and I don't care to have my two girls exposed to the danger of being bitten."

"I understand that Minna is going alone to the Princess Tchernova's," Portia said, directly, scorning preambles. "I just want to warn you against letting her go there alone, especially at night."

"I'm ashamed of you, Portia Differdale," rebuked her sister-in-law, with her irritating assumption of superiority. "You're just jealous of the princess and the preference she's shown for mother and me and the girls. The very idea of keeping Minna and Alice away from a charming woman like the princess, who's been so sweet and generous to them! I'm astonished at your petty attitude."

Portia must have groaned within herself at the woman's obtuseness, the inability to recognize a friendly motive on her part.

"I'm sorry that I cannot refute your charge with certain knowledge that I possess, Aurora," she replied coldly. "But the truth is so strange that you would be unlikely to accept it as such, so that I find myself unable to do more than beg you, since you will not listen to my advice, *beg* you not to let the girls go to the Burnham house alone, especially at night. A policeman disappeared there last evening, Aurora. I tell you, that Russian is a subtle and dangerous woman."

"I don't intend to discuss the matter at all, Portia. You're just plain envious not to be invited to the princess' home as an intimate friend," cried Mrs. Arnold. (I could just imagine her tossing her head, with that air of supercilious triumph.) "I'll thank you, moreover, not to meddle in my affairs any farther. I rather imagine their father and I are able to take care of them perfectly well, without suggestions from you. What do *you* know about a mother's duties and responsibilities, and the necessity of having your children meet the right kind of people socially?"

Well, of course, Portia said no more. She simply took the dogs out, and walked on up the street to give them their much-needed airing. When she came back, it was by way of Queens Boulevard. She noticed the new policeman staring hard at the dogs, and told me that her blood did boil for a moment when she saw the man touch, inadvertently, the pistol at his belt; she couldn't help wondering if perhaps he'd not been given orders to shoot to kill, in case her dogs were found at large without her.

Then she acted on an impulse. She went across to the police signal station, Boris and Andrei walking sedately along on either side of her on their leashes, like the gentlemen they were.

"I just thought I'd make you acquainted with my splendid dogs," she said cheerily. "Boris, shake hands with the officer. Andrei, your paw too, good dog."

"As sure as my name is Murphy, your dogs are real gentlemen,"

gasped the man amazedly, as the two fine beasts complied with their mistress' order. "Tell me, now, Mrs. Differdale, do you ever let them run out alone at night, about here?"

Portia sensed the inference. That he had called her by name showed that he had been told that it was she who owned the two huge Russian wolfhounds that would permit no one else to approach them unless she were near and gave the command.

"If they are out at night, I am always within call. They are really never out of my sight, even then. And they haven't been running at night for some time," she finished, pointedly, her eyes straight upon his.

"I'll take your word for it, ma'am. Bedad, they're noble animals," he admired. "It's no harm *they'd* be doing, I'll swear."

Portia was pleased.

"The man knew enough to recognize the truth, in spite of the gossip that had evidently been poured into his ears," she told me afterward. "Boris and Andrei impressed him as gentlemen, which they are," proudly.

When she left Murphy, it was with the most friendly protestations on his part. Of course, this only made us feel worse later on, when—but again, I'm getting ahead of my story, chronologically.

OWEN plucked up sufficient courage that afternoon to telephone Portia, inviting her to take in some play or other in New York, the following week. She accepted. She did more; she invited Owen to drop in for tea the following afternoon, and when he came, she had marguerites on the tea-table and she put a spray of them into his buttonhole and playfully made him promise not to put any other flower there except the ones she gave him. Owen was so overcome at her friendliness that his hand trembled and he nearly dropped the tea-cup I was passing him.

I could see that he was tremendously excited over the great courtyard (it was his first visit) and the remains of chalked circles and cabalistic signs on the pavement, but he did not mention his interest or curiosity to Portia, although his eyes did seek her face more than once in a puzzled manner. We had a delightful afternoon, and much amusement over Owen's absurd attempts to sit cross-legged like a Turk on a pile of cushions. Portia, of course, had learned to sink gracefully down, and I had practised in private with sufficiently good results to imitate her movements without making too frightful an exhibition of myself.

I was much relieved to see Owen leaving us with Portia's innocent and homely little-sister-to-the-daisy in his buttonhole. But when Owen left the house, the pleasant afternoon we had spent together, the three of us, quite unprepared me for Portia's outburst. She listened until the heavy gate clanged upon his exit, then hid her face in the pile of cushions and broke into such a wild storm of sobs that I was quite terrified at the shock of the contrast between those paroxysms and her customary cool composure.

"Just let me cry, Auntie," she managed to tell me, when I tried to quiet her. "The storm was due to break, you see, and I can't help thinking how much danger threatens Owen, and how little I can do to shield him. If only I could tell him the truth! But he would be like all the rest. He would think me out of my mind. I wonder that you haven't thought so too, Auntie."

"I don't, my dear, because if your brain isn't all right, mine isn't, either," I admitted. "I've heard and seen so many unsettling things these last days that the more I think on the subject, the more facts seem to pile up and point out one conclusion. Our grocer told me this morning that when the princess told him to make up a

list of staples he had included a bag of salt and she had it crossed off, with the observation that she never used salt. Didn't you tell me . . ?"

Portia took herself in hand strongly and sat up, wiping her eyes listlessly.

"She won't touch salt, of course, if she's what I suspect. Neither will she eat sweets nor drink cordials of any kind. And she will use quantities of raw meat, unless"—she shuddered—"unless she has found a victim recently. We'll have to find out just what her orders are during the next few days."

I shuddered at that, myself. I couldn't help wondering if the princess had canceled her standing order for raw meat for the time being, or if the same quantity were being delivered. The next time I went downtown, I inquired, and found that *the quantity had been cut down for two days.* It made me sick to think of it. .

PART 12

NOTHING of any importance happened for the next ten days. Owen became a constant visitor at the house, however. Portia kept a standing order at her florist's for marguerites, and Owen wore one constantly in his buttonhole. (I surmised that there might be an occult significance to the marguerite, but it just happened that I never asked Portia about it.)

On the evening that my niece went with Owen to the theater another item was added to the dark list against the Princess Tchernova.

Officer Murphy disappeared from his post some time during the night, exactly as had his predecessor. But he left no trace behind him; he had apparently vanished into thin air. No one had seen him go. No one knew when he had gone. The fact remained that in the morning the signal station door was open, as if he had only stepped across the road, in sight of the building, but the officer himself was nowhere to be found.

Naturally, there was another furor. I learned the facts when I went down in the morning to do my shopping. When I ordered the chops for dinner, I forced myself to ask, although sick premonition nearly overwhelmed me, if the princess were still ordering such large quantities of meat. Gus remarked that she had telephoned in that morning that she would need *only half the usual quantity* for a couple of days. . . . Nausea almost drove me out of the shop.

I learned something more than the authorities were to know, for when I passed the foot of Elm Street, Mrs. Differdale—who was sweeping the sidewalk before her house and evidently watching the boulevard—called to me and beckoned imperatively. I was forced, much against my will, to turn up the street to see what she wanted.

"Come into the house, please, dear Miss Delorme," she murmured with agitation, when I had reached her side. "I've got something to ask you, but I don't want anybody else to hear."

I followed her into the house, feeling that somehow she had stumbled across some fact related to the disappearance of the second policeman.

"I heard somebody say that the new policeman is missing this morning?" she half asserted, half asked. "I'm afraid to tell the authorities what happened last night. Minna said she'd met the princess on the boulevard, and the princess wanted to buy the child some chocolates but had forgotten her purse, so she said she'd send Agathya to buy them that afternoon, and Minna was to go over for them at night."

"Where is Minna?" I almost screamed at Mrs. Differdale. It startled her so that she almost fell back-

ward on the stairway. Her new boudoir cap slipped awry but she did not notice it. A horrible fear was assailing me.

"She's all right. Why, what's the matter?" breathlessly.

"Nothing. Nothing." I could willingly have sunk upon the stairs myself, so great was the reaction at her reply.

"Well," she continued, mysteriously, "when Officer Murphy saw Minna going into the princess' grounds, he called to say that he'd go with her, because it was growing dark. He walked up to the door with her. Minna said the princess seemed awfully put out about something when the child told her how kind the policeman had been. Then all at once she said she'd forgotten the candy, and that Minna must come for it some other time, and that Minna must run right home. She went out to the door with Minna and said something in a low tone to the policeman, who nodded. Then. . ."

"But you are sure that Minna is safe? Where is she now? In school?"

"Why, of course. Where should she be?" wonderingly. "The odd thing is that Minna was the last person to see Murphy alive last night, and I'm afraid to tell the authorities, for fear we'll all be drawn into some court procedure and perhaps the poor child half frightened to death by legal inquiry into the disappearance."

I saw the drift of her conversation. Mrs. Differdale wanted me to tell her to remain quiet on the subject. I thought concentratedly for a minute. Then I advised her to keep the matter to herself, but to forbid Minna's entering the princess' grounds again after dark, at any rate. Of course, I couldn't give any other reason than the fact that two police officers had disappeared in the vicinity in the course of a couple of weeks, and that it was as well to safeguard the child, even at the cost of losing a box of chocolates, or of offending the Princess Tchernova. I think Mrs. Differdale was really very glad to have me give her this advice; it must have confirmed her own secret feelings.

I REPORTED the conversation to Portia, who telephoned Owen. She asked him if he had seen the princess that morning. Owen said that she had stopped at his office on her way into town, and had mentioned that she was going to tell the authorities that she had been the last person to see him alive; that he had accompanied Minna Arnold to her door for a box of candy she had promised the child, but which she had forgotten; that she had gone to the door with the child and thanked the officer for looking after the little girl, and had seen the two walk down the path toward the boulevard.

It sounded very frank and straightforward on the princess' part. Still I could see that Portia was thoughtful about it when she related it to me afterward.

"They're putting two officers out here," she told me. "They have orders not to get out of each other's sight. That may help some," significantly.

It was that same morning that Andrei began to show signs of illness. Poor dog! It did not occur to me that the trouble was anything worse than an attack of indigestion or something of that kind, so Fu did not call Portia's attention to the animal until it was too late. The Chinaman found the remains of a large piece of raw meat lying inside the enclosure as if it had been tossed over the wall. When Portia examined it, she turned her face to me, grim and determined.

"Aunt Sophie, somebody has tried to kill my noble dogs. Poor Andrei has been eating poisoned meat. There is only one person interested in eliminating my wolfhounds from the present delicate situation, and you know

who that person is. After today, we must keep the dogs inside the house, and watch the enclosure carefully."

The decision to keep the dogs in the house came too late to save Andrei. The poor beast did not suffer long. From the time Fu first observed his drooping behavior until he dropped his white muzzle weakly against Portia's tender hand and drew his last breath, only a couple of hours passed.

Portia was positive that the princess was planning something, and had tried to rid herself of the dogs with some special purpose in view. This made her more than ever careful about Boris, whom we kept with us in the house from then on, or on the leash when we walked outside.

I told Portia that I intended to ask Gus Stieger about how much meat the princess had been buying during those last days. She had, like me, a horrible suspicion, and felt that we must confirm it, although it meant sick disgust and horror to entertain it. When I compared notes with my niece a few days afterward, we found that it was true that for two days after the disappearance of O'Brien and two days after the disappearance of Murphy, the Princess Tchernova had cut down one-half on her usual meat order. It was horrible—horrible!

THE two officers who were now quartered in the signal station were named Willard and O'Toole. O'Toole was the same man who had come to the house not long before, to make inquiries about the dogs. Portia told me the names of the two new men when she returned after going there to complain of her dog's having been poisoned. O'Toole was much exercised at the thought that anybody could want to kill such splendid animals. He remarked that the previous night he had seen a big black dog racing along with a white one, by the hedge of the Burnham place, and Willard wanted to follow them up a bit, but he had objected.

The two policemen hadn't been three nights in their new station before something happened. Willard was severely torn by a "stray dog"; bitten on his shoulder and arm, after having been knocked down by the animal, which he averred was enormous. O'Toole declared he had seen it also, and that he had come up just in time to save his brother officer from severe maceration by the beast's sharp teeth.

"There were two of them, ma'am," he told me. (I made haste to inquire about Willard as soon as I heard the news from Mike Amadio the next morning.) "Sure, if this was Ireland, I'd be tempted to believe that what I saw weren't dogs, but wolves—and wolves of no pleasant kind," he ended, significantly.

The Irish people have their own peculiar superstitions, thought I to myself, as I carried my telltale face away from O'Toole's sharp eyes. I felt that he knew too much, or suspected too much, of the possibilities in the case, being undoubtedly familiar with Irish traditions and folk-lore.

Mike Amadio asked me pointblank if Boris had been loose that night. He had seen the big white dog, it appeared. Portia would have felt disturbed at this, but Mike's personal interest in a very good customer was sufficient to persuade him that what he had seen couldn't have been Mrs. Differdale's wolfhound.

Meantime Owen had been rather avoiding the Differdale house, it seemed to me. Mrs. Arnold told me with a sour smile, when I met her one afternoon on the boulevard, that the princess had a fine beau in Owen Edwardes, who was all the time courting her, up at her house when she wasn't down in his office. It made me feel dreadful to tell this to Portia, but of course it had to be done.

Portia looked at me, silent suffering in her clouded gaze.

"I can't do anything now, Auntie," she said to me; and I knew that it was taking all her self-control not to let herself go in hysterical tears. "There's nothing to be done now, but await developments."

IT MUST have been three weeks after Willard's injury—it had not been sufficient for him to be taken off the beat, and after his wonnd had been dressed he was back again with O'Toole—when the next act in that tragedy of evil took place. Portia and I had been studying together from certain books—Portia looking up things and reading them to me, and I taking down notes at her dictation—when the telephone rang insistently, and a minute later Fu Sing appeared at the door of the library in an agitation that contrasted ominously with his usual Oriental impassivity.

"Missee, lillee gal go away! No come back!"

Portia sprang up, the books on her lap tumbling to the floor unheeded.

"Little girl? What little girl, Fu?"

"Lillee gal Missee Ah-nol."

"Mrs. Arnold's little girl, Portia," I gasped. "Minna!"

My niece and I stared at each other, aghast. Then Portia dashed out of the library and into the hall where the telephone was, and I heard her voice, very clear, very much under control, as she talked to somebody over the wire.

(I ought to state here, that after that day when Portia broke down and cried under the sense of her impotence to aid Owen, she did not again betray such womanly weakness as is shown by tears. I do not remember her crying; she went dry-eyed, tight-lipped, self-controlled, through the terrible things that came to pass before we finally won out of the mists of evil that the dark powers wove about us.)

"Officer O'Toole?" she was saying.

I listened, tiptoeing to the door the better to hear every word.

"Yes, this is Mrs. Differdale. Missing? Minna Arnold? Since when? Since half-past 8 this evening? Why, it's nearly midnight now! Good God, man, why didn't you call me up before now? What? You didn't think—? You say that Willard saw the child walking up the roadway to the princess' house? And she did not return? This was at 8 o'clock? And then yon heard her scream? Talk—talk—I'll listen!"

For several minutes my niece held the receiver to her ear, without speaking. Then she said very sharply and decidedly: "Listen, Officer O'Toole. My dog Boris has been lying across my feet all the evening and hasn't been out of sight of Miss Delorme or myself all day, so what you insinuate is utterly impossible. It wasn't Boris you saw. Put that absolntely out of your mind. I shall go over to see Mrs. Arnold right away, and may drop in on my return to see the Princess Tchernova, if you will do me the kindness to accompany me, both of yon, to her house."

Her tones indicated deep but controlled feeling, and I could see her lips tighten as she hung up the receiver. She turned to me impulsively.

"Minna went to see the princess at about 8 o'clock, Auntie, to get a box of chocolates. At half past 8 Willard heard a child's scream from the princess' grounds, and without waiting for O'Toole to accompany him, he rushed over. In the middle of the boulevard, where it runs past the princess' house, he found a broken box of expensive chocolates spilled all over the street. Nothing more. By this time O'Toole had joined him. He told O'Toole that he had seen a white wolfhound dashing away through the

princess' grounds. They went up to the house together, and were told that the princess had retired for the night with a severe headache. Sergei opened the door to them. He said the child had called for the candy, which he had given her at the princess' orders. He knew nothing more about the matter, but said he thought he had heard someone scream, out on the boulevard."

Portia's eyes sought mine, full of a terrible significance.

"You really believe, then," I stammered, "that she—?"

"I believe, Aunt Sophie, that the princess couldn't appear because she was unable to show herself in her metamorphosed form," she replied grimly.

"What are you going to do, my dear?"

"I must go to see poor Aurora first. Then I must also call at the house of the Princess Tchernova," decidedly.

"Portia! Take care, my dear girl!"

I was terrified, as I might well be. To walk into that den of devils, where she could only expect the worst at their hands. . . .

"I shall take Boris on the leash," she went on calmly. "Don't be afraid that anything will happen to me, Auntie dear. Nothing could possibly happen tonight, because of what has just happened to Minna. The most savage wild beast will not attack when it has eaten its fill."

She shuddered, and for a moment covered her eyes with one hand.

"I'm hoping that I may be in time—to save that poor little creature—but I'm afraid it will be too late."

I wanted to go with her, but she refused decidedly to let me venture out. She declared so positively that she would be safe that I was obliged to take her word for it.

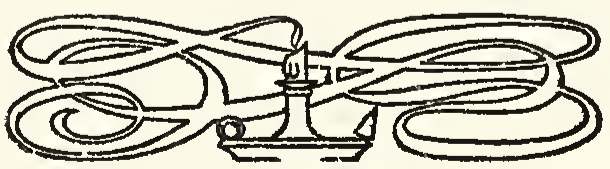
"Don't you see, Auntie, that she wouldn't dare do more tonight, without throwing suspicion upon herself? As it is, they've tried to make it appear that Minna was abducted on her way home. Automobiles are passing every minute on the boulevard. And the broken box of chocolates in the middle of the road! O'Toole thought at once of an abduction."

Portia was ready for the street in a very short time. I called up Owen in the meantime, and he was waiting outside in his car by the time she was ready. She had changed her mind about taking Boris; she did not need the dog if she had Owen with her, she said. She left the house about midnight. It was half past 1 when she returned.

I was waiting for her in the library, devouring page after page from the strange books she had taken out for me to study.

Owen would not come in, because it was so late.

[TO BE CONCLUDED]



MEN WHO WALK UPON THE AIR

by Frank Belknap Long Jr.

Author of "Death-Waters," "The Ocean Leech," etc.

YELLOW water filled the ditches by the roadside. Yellow clouds drifted lazily through tranquil webs of darkness and obscured far, glimmering stars. Horror and misery stared out of sodden eyes, and the night was filled with voices. Men with packs made vivid, grotesque gestures against the yellow sky and swore in their beards. Men ambled over stony paths and climbed hills and passed with disgust through shadowy orchards and gray, deserted vineyards.

François Villon fingered his stained cowl and sighed. The thing above his head moaned and gibbered in the wind and occasionally the chains upon its poor, maimed wrists and ankles clinked like jolly glasses raised to toast a well-fed abbot or a stout, beneficent knight. The night wind whistled through its flaffing garments as it swung pathetically to and fro, and Villon pitied it.

Villon pitied all outcast, shameful things. Ho had wasted his lean years in an orgy of pity and exaltation and song. Unfortunately he had lost his teeth and he had no hair to warm his chastened head; but still he pitied. Through the vineyards of Picardy he strolled in his splendid misery and shame, and he stopped and wept when he met men who could no longer exchange happy memories, or slap unresisting backs or laugh over deliciously calculated jests. High up in the cool, damp air they swung—and no one ever spoke to them.

Villon wiped the corners of his shapeless, dissipated mouth and stared indignantly at the yellow sky. The feet of the thing on the gibbet swept rapidly across his world of clouds and owls and trees and made no sound under the stars. Then the chains clinked out a curt command and the gibbet held itself erect and replied with a barbaric rattle. Villon knew that on still, cold nights gibbets become restless and chafe under their heavy burdens and move about, seeking warmth and companionship. They have been known to stroll at midnight through lonely vineyards; and legends of walking gibbets were rife in Picardy. Villon coughed and shivered, and suddenly he thought: "It is very cold, and that poor man has no covering for his feet!"

Something fumbled nervously with the edge of his ragged cowl. He turned and stared into inconceivable blue eyes wide with horror. The eyes

were mild and soft, and tears had gathered in the corners of them.

"A wonderful profile," thought Villon. "Beautifully proportioned, too. And hair like fields of waving summer corn, and Flora or Archipiade or Heloisa did not possess such eyes!"

While he reflected thus she took him by the hand and dragged him ruthlessly across the road. "I have a favor of great magnitude to beg of you," she said.

Villon scowled, but he was secretly elated, and he observed how gracefully the small yellow curls clung to the nape of her neck and how buoyantly she held herself as she walked over the hard, frozen ground. He followed her indoors, and watched her spread a table and make a fire. Then she turned to him. Pity and misery and terror looked together at him out of her vividly unconventional eyes.

"He is my husband, and there is no one else to whom I can appeal. Of course you will get him down. I ask only that. I want you to climb up and cut him down. It will be difficult, of course, with the wind whistling about your ears, and the horrible birds—" she blushed and dropped her eyes.

Villon nodded. "I understand," he said. "And as you suggest, it will be exceedingly disagreeable. But when I think of his poor, frozen feet I am prepared to sacrifice both my comfort and peace of mind!"

"And I shall give you a good dinner," she added shyly, feeling perhaps that she owed him some inducement.

"Very well," said Villon, "I shall do it!" It had not occurred to Villon that she might invite him to dinner. Now that he thought of it, he was atrociously hungry. For three days he had tramped through the vineyards, scribbling ballads to Guenevere the mythical and Guillemette the upholstress and Jenny the hatter, and to his cronies Master Jehan Cornu and the Seigneur de Grigny, to notaries and abbesses and to Merlin, but nought to whet his appetite had he derived therefrom, and he had munched disconsolately at insufficient cheese and tasted of immature wine, and once he had crawled on his hands and knees to a pool by the roadside to cool his thirst with water that stank. It would be good to sit at a merry provincial board, and with such a companion the time would pass right jollily.

"Sit by the fire," she commanded, "while I cook the meat. Do you like rice and sugar? And would you care for some champagne of the vintage of 1216?"

"I am not at all difficult to please," said Villon, as he slid into a chair and removed his boots.

THE fire was warm and luxurious. Villon spread out his feet and warmed his great, cumbersome toes by shoving them into the glowing coals and withdrawing them before the heat could painfully or seriously blister them. Then he stretched his fingers above the coals and whistled a Parisian tune.

The wife of the man on the gibbet unwrapped a dozen white loaves, and heated some broth in a brouze kettle and rolled several small casks of wine into the center of the room. The table was spread with embroidered yellow linen, filigreed on the edges with designs of falcons and hydra-headed dogs wrought in gold and silver wire. Upon the gorgeous cloth she laid large wooden spoons, copper cups and knives and tiny containers replete with various seasoning: vermilion pepper, spice, oil of cloves, nutmeg.

The dinner heralded itself by enticing and glorious odors. Villon sat up, and drew into his nostrils the rich variegated smells of roast geese, fried snails, and scrambled ostrich eggs. Villon displayed upon the whole

an admirable restraint. Only once did he lose countenance. A loud hissing sound arose from behind his chair, and Villon shook like an aspen-leaf in an October gale. "What is that?" he demanded, considerably put out.

"Only mussels from Marseilles. I am putting them into hot water. Don't you like them?"

Villon sighed and relaxed. The fire became less hot, and he permitted his toes the luxury of a longer interval of repose between the blinking coals.

He was fairly famished, and when she invited him to the board he fell to with relish. He ate furiously, immoderately, and with passion. He swallowed, stuffed and crammed. He discarded spoons and knives, and took between his soiled fingers great chunks of firm, white meat. His manners were deplorable, but his enthusiasm deserved commendation.

"Now," she said, when he had finished, "you must go out and cut him down. I ask only that. It is so cold that his feet will freeze!"

But Villon had forgotten the man upon the gibbet. His hostess was charming. Theoretically, he had noticed it before, but he suddenly discovered that she was made of flesh and blood. And the champagne had unfortunately gone to his head.

"Perhaps you do not know that I am a poet," said Villon, holding on to his chair for support.

"I should never have guessed it!"

"But I am, really. And in Paris I am famous, in spite of—er—an unfortunate accident."

"An accident?"

"I killed a booby. But it doesn't really matter. And I'm a master of arts at the University of Paris, and I belong by birth to an exceedingly aristocratic family."

"But that has nothing to do with my husband, whose feet will surely freeze if you do not go out and cut him down."

"Naturally. But it is not pleasant to go out in the cold, with the wind whistling about your ears, and the birds—"

"What more do you wish?"

"Well, you might spare me one little kiss. No one would ever know. Your husband is scarcely in a position to care, and a kiss is never taken seriously outside of Paris."

Villon's hostess seemed a little angry, and her eyes narrowed dangerously. Villon preferred this, since he disliked both high-pitched and docile women. The quiet, angry variety pleased him.

He knew that his proposal was odious to her, but he reflected that a hopeless desire frankly expressed was better than innumerable beatings about the bush. She might refuse his request, but he would not have failed through a cowardly reticence. The thought of his courage nerved him, and he released his hold upon the chair. Then he discovered that he was hopelessly drunk. He seemed so pitiful as he swung back and forth above the table, with his crimson cowl rent in twain and covered with stains, that his considerate and adorable hostess could not contemplate him with anger.

"If I kiss you just once," she asked, "will you go out and cut him down?"

Villon nodded dejectedly, and confessed that he would do anything within reason to please her.

"Very well," she said, "you may kiss me."

Villon wondered if perchance he had fallen asleep, and he tweaked his nose to assure himself that he did not dream. He had scarcely expected a victory so complete. It seemed unreasonable. Nevertheless, he prepared to take advantage of the opportunity offered him. He smoothed his mustache, and endeavored to cover up the rents in his cowl. "So rapid a con-

quest is really very flattering," he reflected.

She stood in the center of the room, and she did not move away when he came up to her and took her into his arms. "Remember," she said, "you are only to kiss mo once!"

Villon nodded, and sighed. "That is a misfortune!" he said, and kissed her with delectable impudence. She made no attempt to push him away, and he kissed her eyes, and her hair. Then he quailed and released her. Something horrible had taken place in the soul of the woman before him. The skin on her face had gone suddenly bloodless, and her eyes did not blink at him, but simply stared. Her mouth hung agape, and her shoulders rose up until her head seemed lost between them. She threw out her arms, as if warding off some unthinkable *spiritual* presence, and retreated toward the corner of the room.

VILLON stepped forward, and then, all at once, a sense of profound physical fatigue overwhelmed him. He stood horribly still in the center of the room, and gazed at his hostess reproachfully as shriek after shriek came from between her colorless lips.

"He's at the window!" she screamed. "Don't you see him? And he's holding up his poor frozen hands, and little streams of blood are running out of his eyes down his frozen cheeks! He saw you kiss me, and now he's come—he's come!"

Villon turned slowly and gazed stupidly at the window. It was a small, diamond-paned window set high up in the wall, and Villon saw nothing but darkness, and vague, disturbing shadows that occasionally passed to and fro in back of the shimmering blue glass. "You are very idiotic," said Villon, "to disturb yourself over shadows!"

He knew that women often behaved unaccountably, but he could not explain the change in the woman in the corner. A moment before she had been in his arms, and had not objected to his innumerable caresses; but now she lay huddled in the corner, shivering and wailing, which put quite a different complexion upon the affair. "One never knows," thought Villou, "what they will take it into their heads to think or do!"

Villon wished that he had not accepted the invitation of his erratic hostess, and he cast anxious glances toward the door. The words that came from between her lips did not carry moral conviction, and Villon preferred not to test her allegations in the light of reason. He preferred to ignore them, which was wise.

But he was really quakiug from toe to chin, and when he heard a voice without calling him loudly and urgently by name he sought to establish friendly relations with the woman in the corner. She might, conceivably, be able to intercede for him. "You know that my intentions were honorable," he said, and this might have led to further talk and discussion, but someone pounded heavily upou the door.

"Don't let him in!" shricked the woman in the corner, and tears ran down her sallow face, and her wide, unblinking blue eyes glittered with unspeakable terror. Villon's actions failed to reassure her, and when she had exhausted a repertoire of conventional emotions she collapsed in a heap upon the floor.

Villon devoted his entire attention to the door. It was an enormous door, fashioned of stout oak, and it was heavily studded with great bronze nails, and it might have resisted Satan; but Villon felt that the bolt was feeble, and the suspense was killing him. The door bulged inward and shook visihly, and Villon resolved to seize the occasion by its tail. He stepped quickly to the door and unbolted it. A gust of wind swept

into the room and whistled up the chimney.

And there in the doorway stood what Villon had feared. It had come down from the gibbet and it stood trembling with wrath, and waving its blood-clotted, skeleton arms against a glimmering square of yellow sky.

For a moment it wavered uncertainly in the doorway, and then it raised its right foot, and stepped over the sill and into the room. The chains on its wrists and ankles clanked as it advanced leeringly over the smooth floor. Its hollow eyes glittered, and phosphorescently illumed a face that was eaten away at the corners. Its mouth gaped, and a portion of the lower jaw had fallen away, and its teeth projected through a surface layer of mottled and striated and nauseously flabby skin. Villon screamed when he saw its flaring eyes, and the tiny rivulets of blood that oozed from beneath its lids and ran out of the corners of its poor mouth. He covered his eyes with his bands, and endeavored to shut out the noisome sight; but the thing from the gibbet was a screeching reality, and Villon was so intent upon trying to turn it into the stuff of dreams that he aided his imagination to his own hurt. He saw it imaginatively, which was imprudent. He was probably unable to seize npon any straw that might have saved him, and he got to explaining the situation in a manner that was ridiculously trite. It was the champagne, he told himself, and he assured himself that the best thing he could do would be to ignore the thing that had come down from the gibbet.

Perhaps that is the reason why he stood still and did nothing when the thing came up to him and breathed heavily into his pinched, frightened face. But the thing was qnite blind, in spite of its coruscating eyes, and it somehow failed to get wind of Villon, and it stood shivering and moaning and showing all of its yellow teeth, and Villon was conspicuously upset.

Villon stared frowningly for a moment, and thonght how much the thing reminded him of the woman in the corner. Married women, thought Villon, noticeably resemble their husbands. For himself he began to wonder why he had ever desired to kiss her. He had, for no definite reason, impaired his dignity. He was so deeply moved when he thonght of his humiliation that he entirely forgot the insane, hybrid creature that had stumbled into the room. He could not help feeling that the cards were against him. His several fates had played him a scurvy trick, had rubbed it in disconcertingly thick. With something like a grimace he sat down upon the floor.

The thing went tearing past him and collided against the opposite wall. It collapsed with a terrific rattle, and lay still for a few seconds, breathing heavily. Then it got awkwardly to its feet, and prepared to search the room. It made a disastrous circuit of the walls, groping blindly. It could not speak, but it hissed and whistled, and Villon was sorry, for in spite of his affected indifference he strenuously objected to half-articulate vituperation. The thing was facetiously cursing him and Villon's spleen rose eloquently. He got to his feet, and stepped forward, and affirmed to the creature's face that while he conceded its hallucinatory nature he was ill-prepared to overlook even imaginary insults. But the thing continued to search the room, and finally it stumbled upon the woman in the corner.

It bent, evidently in a state of profound agitation, and its thin, bony fingers fastened upon the woman's left wrist. Then it drew itself erect, and started across the floor, dragging the woman brutally with it. Villon's drunken and speculative anger was

succeeded by white-hot terror. But he valiantly endeavored to intercept the thing he could not subdue.

Unfortunately the initiative displayed by Villon proved curiously worthless. When he stood in the creature's path and endeavored to wave it back it simply spat at him, and then it extended a long, bony arm and struck him across the face with the flat of its hand. Villon reeled back, and the knowledge that he had deserved the blow sobered him. He made no further attempt to retard the creature's progress, and he did not even object when the thing from the gibbet pummeled the woman from the corner until she awoke and screamed—and screamed He did nothing when the loathsome thing released its grip upon the woman's arm and seized upon her long, yellow hair. And when it dragged her out through the door into a night of clouds and owls and trees, Villon simply stared and groaned and fell back against the wall.

Later on he found his way out into the cool night, and discovered to his delight that every little wind awoke and sang. Owls were hooting on the twisted, cankerous arms of hopelessly distorted trees and the boles of the great oaks resembled men walking. The night was filled with futile whispering, and men swore roundly, and ambled through gray orchards and lonely vineyards.

VILLON fingered his stained cowl and sighed. Above his head two gray, amorphous forms swung merrily in the night wind. The wind tore through their flaffing garments, and they made no sound under the stars. Only the chains clanked on their poor, maimed wrists and ankles, and Villon noticed that one figure held the other closely.

He turned on his heels and walked in the opposite direction. "The pity of it!" he murmured. "Oh, the pity of it!"

THE GHOST FARM

By SUSAN ANDREWS RICE

WHEN Steven was killed we did not know it until nearly thirty days afterward. He went overseas in April, and it was the last of June before we knew he went out with a party of engineers to repair the railroad track, and was blown to pieces by a German shell.

We could not tell Maidie the truth. She knew he was dead, but concerning the manner of his going she was ignorant. They were engaged. Her love for him amounted to adoration. She was an intense, emotional girl, bound to be unhappy because of her sensitive nature and strong feelings.

She was under my professional care for several weeks the latter part of the summer, suffering from a broken ankle.

"It is the silence, the awful blank wall between Steven and me, that drives me frantic," she burst out one day, when I was making her a visit. She had been reading a letter from Steven, and it lay in her lap. She had a little package of his letters always near her.

"I know," I returned, with a sigh. I, too, had lost my nearest and dearest.

"I wish I could consult a medium," she said, lowering her voice. "How wonderful it would be to receive a message from him! I could hardly bear it, I'm afraid."

"Don't do it, Maidie," I said. "Better leave such people alone."

"The ouija board, then? It seems rather like a silly game, but—"

I shook my head.

"'That way madness lies'," I quoted. "I wouldn't, Maidie. Steven lives in your heart, in your memories of him."

She smiled that pathetic little smile she had worn when she wished to appear cheerful.

"You are right," she answered, and changed the subject.

In spite of what she had said I discovered she was reading everything she could find about spirit communication, although I never heard of her making any attempt to reach Steven in that way.

I was very busy that fall with influenza cases, and Maidie went into Red Cross work, and when the epidemic was over I heard she had gone to California. She returned early the following summer looking haggard and ill. I prescribed for her, but could find nothing really wrong with her. She took long walks, and, her mother told me, she always went alone and resented any offer of companionship. She thought it queer, and said she feared Maidie was drifting into melancholia.

MAIDIE came into my office one afternoon, and I was struck with the change in her expression: she looked happy and young; the strained misery had vanished from her face. I was puzzled. Could she have fallen in love? I ran over in my mind a list of her young men acquaintances, but none of them could I see as Maidie's lover.

Her mother had informed me her walks were always in one direction. Thinking of that, I asked, "Why do you always walk along the river road, Maidie?"

She turned a vivid pink.

"You won't understand, I know, bnt I'm going to tell you," she replied, twisting her gloves in her hands. "In tbe first place, you must know Steven and I nsed to plan that when we were married we would own a little farm. Just a little summer placc, you know. He used to say every man wanted to have a farm. Doctor, when I go np the river road, just past the school bouse, on the bank, wbere the road turns into the woods, I see a little farm. Tbe fields are neat and cultivated. The house is painted white with green blinds and the door is open into the hall, as if people lived there. Hollybocks are growing around the kitchen door. On a table milk-pans are turned up to dry in the sun. There arc some dish-towels drying on a linc. And at any moment I expect to see Steven come around the corner of the house. I feel he is there, out of my sight. I wait, and listen. He hasu't come yet, but he will, some day, and when he comes, I shall go with bim."

Her faee was luminous with joy. Wbat could I say? What ought I to say?

"Do you think I could see the farm if I were with you?" I asked, speaking slowly.

"I'm afraid you couldn't," she replied. "No one knows it is there but Steven and me."

"Then, my dear Maidie, it exists only in your imagination," I told her, gently.

She smiled, as one smiles at a child who donbts one's word, and she went away.

I studied her case earefully. A good psychanalyst might have helped her. but I was not skilful in that method of treatmeut. I see now that we did wrong in circumventing her. In accordance with my advice her friends attempted to divert her attention from her daily walk. She was taken on automobile excnrsions; visitors came at that hour of the day; she was invited to go to moving pictnres; dnties were crowded upon her, in the hope of altering the fixed idea in ber mind of Steven's waiting at the ghost farm. She was very sweet about aeceding to the demands and requests, tbough sometimes she would obstinately refuse to listen to them.

AUGUST brought hot weather. The extreme heat wore upon our nerves; everybody relaxed. Released from vigilant watchfulness, Maidie left the house, nnnoticed.

A terrific thunder storm came up, and Maidie's mother was beside herself. She had been lying down taking a nap wben Maidie slipped away. She telephoned to me when the shower was over, as Maidie was not missed until then.

I got out of my car and started up the river road, a sense of foreboding in the back of my mind. I had not proceeded far when a tire blew out. Impatiently I left the machine and hurried on foot past the weather-beaten old schoolhouse a short distanee. Snddenly I stopped in my tracks. The sun had eome out, and I saw tbe ghost farm. It was exactly as Maidie had described it: a stretch of green fields; a small white honse with green blinds; hollyhocks growing by the kitchen door; milk-pans glistening in the sun, drying on a table; towels fluttering on a line. I was struck dumb, and stood motionless, hardly able to draw my breath at the strangeness of the scene.

In a few minutes the vision, or mirage, vanished. Then I perceived a tall oak tree split in half by a bolt of lightning. At the foot of the treo lay Maidie, on the wet gronnd, a smile of raptnre on her upturned faco.

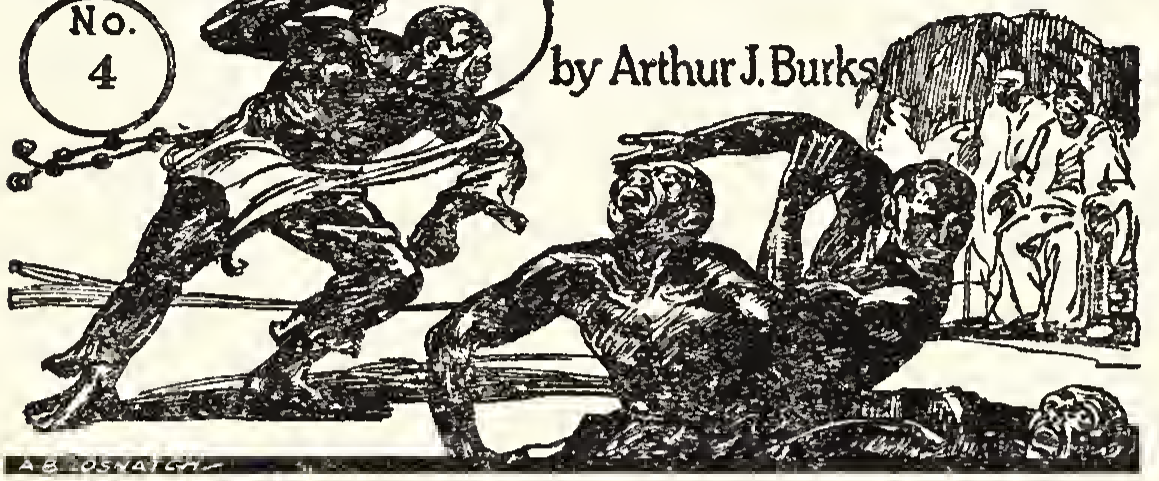
I knelt beside her and examined heart and pulse. Nothing could be done, her spirit had left its earthly body. She had gone to be with Steven.

STRANGE TALES FROM SANTO DOMINGO

No. 4

The Sorrowful Sisterhood

by Arthur J. Burks



Author of "Luisma's Return," "Thus Spake the Prophetess," etc.

I HAD often heard of the sorrowful sisterhood which had its abode among the rabbit warrens and runways westward of *Bombilla Roja,* in Santo Domingo's capital city. The heart of the section, the center of the spider's web if you will, was a small block of evil-appearing houses known as *Las Anacaguitas.* The evil genius of the place was a one-armed man known as "El Mocho", who, with the aid of *El Tigre Sucio* (the dirty tiger) kept a semblance of order among his slaves. But, so far in my career as head of the Dominican secret service, I had not been called upon to enter this abode of evil.

Then José Espinosa, the murderer, had escaped from Nigua Prison, after adding the murder of a night watchman to his list of crimes and, a week later, killed one of my secret agents in cold blood. Rumor had it that the murderer, who was feared wherever his name was known, came nightly to *Las Anacaguitas* to feed like a vulture upon the flesh of El Mocho's slaves. I knew this to be true enough, but knew that it were useless to attempt to find any one whom El Mocho wished to keep hidden from sight.

Then, for some evil reason, El Mocho turned against the murderer, and wished to see him taken back to justice. He came in person to interview me at my office.

He was waiting for me one morning when I arrived. I took one look at the man and, cripple as he was, if he had offered me his hand I swear I would have felled him to the ground. He was forty, or thereabouts, had perhaps himself forgotten when he had taken his last bath, never shaved, clothes held together with bits of string in lieu of buttons, and was as bald as an egg. He was as stringy as a bean-pole, and there was an evil cast in one of his eyes, which, when he looked at one, gave him the appearance of leering very unpleasantly. His right arm was gone at the elbow, and the empty sleeve flapped about as he walked, making him look like a scarecrow. He was a Dominican, but, to win a wager, one could not have named his true color of skin. His left arm terminated in a filthy hand that was always curved like an evil claw. He wore an aged black felt hat with half the brim gone and a generous hole in the crown.

He arose as I came in and gave me what he intended for an engaging

smile. His teeth, through lack of care since his ill-fated birth, had fallen into frightful decay, and what was left of them were but yellow snags in the black maw of a beast. I shuddered as he smiled at me. He saw the shudder—he had eyes for everything—and smiled anew. A leering caricature of a human being.

"WHAT do you want of me, El Mocho?" I demanded sharply. "Tell me your business quickly; and be sure that it interests me, for I have little patience with such as you!"

"But for once the *señor* will be patient," replied El Mocho, and he spoke excellent Castilian Spanish. "I have news for you concerning José Espinosa, in whose welfare, I have been informed, you are deeply interested."

"Say on," I replied shortly.

But he knew that I was all ears.

"I suppose that you know José comes nightly to *Las Anacaguitas?*" El Mocho leered at me. "He loves a *muchacha* there; and he comes often to visit her. He comes at midnight tonight, and I am in position to help you make arrangements to receive him."

"I don't trust you, El Mocho," I replied, "and it is certainly strange that you have not seen fit to report this matter before!"

"José's money has all been expended," replied the monster with terrible frankness, "and he sees fit to threaten me because he is no longer welcome. So I wish him out of the way!"

"But if he had money?"

El Mocho gave an eloquent shrug of his lean shoulders.

His position was impregnable and he knew it. Once upon a time the *Jefe de Policia* (chief of police) had accepted a bribe from El Mocho, and the latter had been the *Jefe's* master since that time. He was undisputed king of his realm, and none knew it better than did El Mocho himself. His devilish self-confidence affected me as if a horde of vicious ants were running up and down my spine.

"Your proposition?" I demanded.

"Come to *Anacaguitas* at 11:30 tonight, in plain clothes, and the Dirty Tiger will admit you to my own room. Come armed if you wish, and keep your pistol on me while you are there if you do not trust me. My room adjoins that of Juanacita, José's light of love. We can wait until José is in that room, then all you need do is draw a chair against the adjoining wall, step upon it and fire at him over the partition!"

Justice for José, certainly! For his life was forfeit many times over: but El Mocho was not playing Judas because José was a murderer, but because he no longer had money with which to pay for the fruits of his evil desires! Choosing between José and El Mocho, I would have preferred José, the murderer, many times over. Yet the law could not touch this loathsome spider, and the people still had faith in their chief of police!

"I shall come, El Mocho," I replied.

"And alone, *señor*, for more than one stranger would attract attention, and José would take alarm."

"Alone if you wish," I agreed, even as I questioned the wisdom of this walking, like a helpless fly, into the slimy web.

THAT night at 11:30 I walked slowly along the tree-shadowed road which joins San Carlos to Villa Francesca, my automatic gripped in my hand inside the belt of my trousers. I called myself a fool. But I went just the same.

I glided slowly along toward *Las Anacaguitas*, outlined against the side of a low hill at the edge of Villa

Francesca by the dull glow of three or four red lights at the several corners of the block of houses. The largest light, I had been told, marked the house in which El Mocho and his henchman, *El Tigre Sucio*, exercised dominion. The henchman was as much the slave as those sorrowful sisters whose bodies fed the greasy purse of El Mocho. He was the doorman and all-around factotum—the vicious man of all work, who enjoyed his unhallowed labor.

I climbed a rickety fence in rear of the main building, any noise I may have made being lost in the sounds of raucous laughter that came gratingly through the doors and windows of the houses of sin. *Las Anacaguitas* bloomed like a toadstool in a dank sewer. I crept up in rear of the houses and listened. Through the half opened doors of several of the tiny rooms, I could see the slightly clothed bodies of sorrowful sisters who strove to appear happy in their ghastly occupation of pandering to the beasts in the breasts of men who came up to them from the waterfront after nightfall. Once more I felt that army of vicious ants, as it frolicked in battalions up and down my spine.

"The *señor* wishes a *muchacha*, perhaps?"

I started violently, for I had heard no one approach. The fellow could have killed me there without warning of his intention. I turned about with my flashlight full upon the face of the Dirty Tiger! He was a handsome chap, with the physical beauty of the brute, and his smile was a winning one. He could have been no older than twenty-eight or thirty; yet I knew that he was even more evil, if that were possible, than his terrible master. He possessed the strength of two men, according to report.

"Turn off that light, you fool!" he whispered fiercely.

I did his bidding.

"I am looking for El Mocho," I said.

He beckoned me to follow, and stepped at once inside a door near by. I found myself in a black hallway, narrow, and foul with the odor of unwashed bodies. Odd gleams of light glittered above the partitions, which reached to just below the ceiling of the house. El Mocho had low partitions in his house for a certain purpose—he wished to hear every word that was spoken in those adjoining rooms. Knowledge among his women that he knew everything acted as a deterrent to those who would have cheated him of his share of the spoils garnered by the slaves. And the words of the men, few of whom ever noticed the low partitions, were sometimes valuable to El Mocho in many ways. His evil trades were not confined entirely to traffic in human flesh!

THE Dirty Tiger led me into the evil presence of his master, and vanished like a restless ghost. El Mocho's room was dark, but I fancied I could see his filthy snags of teeth as he smiled at me through the gloom.

"The *señor* can show his light for a moment or two, to look about him, whispered the spider, "if he thinks that El Mocho is leading him into a trap."

I flashed the light hurriedly about the dirty little room. El Mocho sat hunched up in a corner. There was a chair in another corner for me—and a table in the center of the room. On the table I saw an article that made me shudder anew. It was a long black whip, fashioned of three pieces of insulated copper wire, twisted into one piece, with several inches of the copper showing at one end of the weapon—a thing more deadly than the cat-o'-nine-tails! This instrument, I had gleaned from whispers I had heard in the capital city, was used by El Mocho to exact

obedience from his slaves. I had seen some of these slaves just now—hollow-eyed, hopeless, beautiful, sorrowful creatures—and knew that El Mocho never struck them where the marks would show. God! What a monster to live in the twentieth century!

I forgot these musings after a bit, though; for I was remembering a little incident which had occurred just before I had entered this spider's web with the Dirty Tiger. I had been looking into one of those rooms, and right into the eyes of a beautiful girl who could not have been over fifteen years of age. I was sure that she could not see me; for she stood in a lighted room and I stood in darkness. But she had stared right into my eyes, and had made an imperative motion with her hands that said as plainly as if she had spoken the words:

"Go back, *señor!* Go back!"

Had she known of my mission, or was my imagination playing pranks on my reason? Had the Dirty Tiger seen that motion? If he had seen, what action would he take?

There was a low knock at the door. I looked at my watch and it lacked fifteen minutes of midnight, so it could not yet be time for the arrival of José Espinosa—he was more likely to be an hour late than fifteen minutes early. El Mocho glided to the door and I heard him speak the name of the Dirty Tiger. I heard that creature's low whisper in answer. Straining my ears I caught a word or two—"Juanacita", "*espion*", and "*traidora*". I wracked my brain in an attempt to give these words a logical explanation and could not. "Spy!" "Traitress!" What did it all mean?

El Mocho snarled viciously a wordless snarl that once more started the battalion of ants to moving. Then, without a word to me, he stepped outside, slammed the door—and I could hear his footfalls outside, moving down the hallway. I sat alone there in the darkness, wondering what was to happen next. Was this indeed a spider's web into which I had blundered, intent upon playing the rôle of the luckless fly? I pressed my lips stubbornly together and stuck to my post.

THE door began to open softly. I should not have noticed, had I not turned, upon the departure of El Mocho and his henchman, so that I faced the door. Slowly, an inch at a time, the door swung open. I gripped my automatic and waited with bated breath. Whose face would appear at the opening—that of El Mocho? The Dirty Tiger? Or the pock-marked face of José Espinosa, come to gloat over the fly in the web? It would be just like José to come in upon me like that, meeting my automatic from the front. Whatever he may have been or done, he feared not God, man, or the devil—and I gave him credit for his courage. Even with the advantage which I now had I knew, should José's face appear, that it would be a battle to the death, with a good chance of my playing the corpse lead. A man who can keep the entire power of the constituted authorities on the jump is a man to be reckoned with.

But the face that finally appeared, frail and fragile in the faint light that came down from above the partition, was not the face of a man. It was the wan face of the girl who had beckoned to me before I had entered the house of El Mocho! She placed her fingers to her lips as she softly closed the door behind her. She moved her head this way and that as if, like an owl, she could see in the dark. Perhaps, being a creature of the dark, she *could* see.

She glided across to me and placed a hand upon my shoulder. She was trembling like a leaf.

"Go, *señor*, for love of the *Virgen de Altagracia!* It is a trap! El Mocho meant to play fair, and I was in the plot to help you take José Espinosa—whom I hate with every inch of me! But, when El Mocho came to you to make the plans, he expected to be treated as an equal. You showed your disgust too plainly, and he plans to turn you over to the mercy of José, out of revenge! Go, for God's sake! I am Juanacita!"

I listened in astonishment, unable for the moment to fear for my own safety. This girl was begging in the name of the Immaculate Virgin! She spoke the name as if it were often on her lips. The incongruity of it! I was later to learn that El Mocho's slaves prayed nightly for the redemption of their sins—and that there were more tiny, golden images of Christ Crucified in the house of El Mocho than there were in any church in Santo Domingo City. But now I could only marvel. Poor, frail, lovely little woman! Whatever her body may have been, she had a heart of gold.

"Ah, I thought so!"

El Mocho, with the Dirty Tiger grinning over his shoulder from behind, stood inside the door. They had entered so softly that neither of us had heard. The girl cried out in mortal terror and flung herself upon my breast, clinging to me as if she were a child that feared the dark.

With one stride El Mocho reached the table in the center of the room, touched a match to the wick of a dirty lamp, filling the evil room with a yellow glow. He raised that terrible wire whip in his talonlike hand. The Dirty Tiger, after locking the door, leapt upon the girl and tore her away from me, dropping her to the floor with a single blow of his open palm. El Mocho stood over her and raised the whip. I threw down on him with my automatic; but before I could pull trigger the Dirty Tiger had seized both my hands at the wrists, holding me with one hand as easily as if I had been a babe in arms instead of a grown man. He did not even look at me again, but grinned at El Mocho, licking his lips in joyful anticipation of what was to come.

One downsweeping blow across the back of the unfortunate girl, and her fragile, tawdry dress was cut through to the bronze skin beneath. A livid wale appeared instantly, dyeing the cloth of her dress with crimson. El Mocho showed his snags in a grin of pure pleasure. No sound came from the tight-locked lips of Juanacita. I later learned that if a slave receiving punishment should cry out, she would receive double punishment.

I writhed in the grip of the Dirty Tiger, and he seemed not to notice my struggle. I cursed him, and he slapped me across the face with his open palm, dazing me and bringing the red blood to my crushed lips.

The whip rose and fell rhythmically. The girl's clothes were almost torn from her body. Her back was crisscrossed with those livid wales in countless numbers. The frenzied El Mocho paused a moment to tear the rest of her clothing from her body. He beat her until she stretched out on the floor—unconscious or pretending to be. It was a terrible sight. I resolved that, given the opportunity, I would kill El Mocho with my bare hands for this ghastly thing. That pitiful, blood-stained body on the floor was the half-formed body of a mere child!

EL MOCHO drew back at last, wiping the froth from his lips with his empty sleeve. He looked at me and there was a yellowish gleam in his eyes. His fangs were all at once the fangs of a hungry wolf. The Dirty Tiger knocked my automatic to the floor and released me, stepping aside as he did so, and looking up at the partition which separated this room

from that of Juanacita. I looked up there, too, and saw José Espinosa leaning over the top of the wall, with an automatic trained directly upon me.

"I enjoyed the entertainment immensely," he said mockingly, "and ask your leave to do my share!"

I saw his hand tighten on the butt of the pistol.

Just before the flash came that was to mean the end for me, that nude little figure on the floor came miraculously to life. Juanacita was on her feet like a cat, and her body was between mine and the menacing pistol in the wink of an eyelash. The pistol exploded before I could hurl her aside. She sank to the floor with a low moan.

It was a dramatic moment. The actors stood mute, stunned, looking at one another in bewilderment. José dropped from sight on the other side of the partition. Hardly knowing that I did so, I drew a police whistle from my pocket and blew it with all the strength of my lungs. There was a scurrying as of many rats from all parts of this evil building. Cries of fear, masculine and feminine. Oaths and prayers. El Mocho and his henchman fled, untouched by the bullets which I sent after them through the door.

I hurried to the outside door and flung it open as I heard the Dominican police battering away at it with the butts of their pistols. They went through that building like a cyclone, and many a sorrowful sister spent that night in the Tower of Homage. Fortunately they were headed by a lieutenant who knew nothing of the hold that El Mocho had over his chief. The two evil birds of prey were not captured. I suppose that El Mocho made a visit to the *Jefe* next morning. Nor was José Espinosa taken—then.

I WENT back to the room where I had left Juanacita. The door was locked on the inside. I could hear the roar and crackle of flames; could feel the bite of acrid smoke in my nostrils. The girl I had thought dead from a bullet in the chest had fired *Las Anacaguitas!*

I smashed in the door with my shoulder; fell back before the terrific heat that leapt hungrily out at me; caught a glimpse of Juanacita herself, through a rift in the flames. She was moving slowly, on leaden limbs, along the opposite side of the room, splashing that flimsy partition with oil from the dirty lamp. She turned and saw me. She leapt through the flames and pushed me from the room, slamming the door in my face. I pressed against it, calling her name. It would not give, and I knew she had placed a chair against it so that its back was under the knob, holding the door to its fastenings.

Juanacita had the courage of her convictions. Never again would she grovel beneath the wire whip of El Mocho.

Heat forced us all outside the building. We stood and watched until *Las Anacaguitas* was naught but a smoldering pile of blackened timbers, and the red sun was creeping up over the eastern horizon. Then we walked slowly away.

NOTE: The fifth of this series of "Strange Tales From Santo Domingo" will narrate a weird adventure of José Espinosa, the same bandit who made so much trouble in this month's story. It is called "The Phantom Chibo," and will appear in WEIRD TALES next month.

Out of the Mists of the Past Came
This Beautiful Spanish Girl

The CRIMSON ROSARY

By WRIGHT FIELD

SOMETHING happened to some of us, there in the trenches of war-torn France—a quickening of perception toward the unknown, a keening of the spiritnal sensibilities, a thinning of the wall of flesh that ordinarily shuts us out from communication with the mystic forces of the invisible world that surrounds us. After a time, once we are back in contact with a matter-of-fact, prosaic, practical world, this apparent sixth sense seems to die of inanition, bnt at first. . . . I can perhaps better elncidate my meaning by a tale that I shall unfold.

I had been bnt three months away from the trenches when it happened. I was making a motor-trip through Southern California at the time, and had come upon a deserted village, a village hoary with age, its hnmble adobe houses buried in creepers that apparently bad not been molested by the hand of man for more than a generation. I was making my way alone, in a small car, and as evening was falling and I knew not how far it was to human habitation, I decided to spend at least the night there. One factor in my decision was my love for the ancient and the mysterious, wherever I met with it.

Scarcely any sign of the former inhabitants remained, and the place made me shudder, with its similarity to a deserted and forgotteu graveyard. It gave me the creeps just to walk about these streets of the dead, even with the hot California sun shining down upon the place. Back of the mission was a little cemetery, marked by stone crosses that had long ago tottered from their bases, and wooden ones that had rotted into the mold.

One house alone aroused in me a more than passing interest and faint repulsion. Within this remained a huge wooden bed, stripped of furnishings, some other heavy furniture, and a picture or two. One of these was an oil painting of the Madonna, still bright, though it received the direct rays of the sun all morning, with a little altar beneath it. There were iron candlesticks of ancient pattern thereon, and under the pieture was nailed a wooden cross of crude design.

There were some musty garments in an old chest, a woman's finery, and some coarse bits of crockery in a rude cupboard. The whole place bore the aspect of having been used at some time in the past, when the old village was inhabited.

A piece of tapestry, which to my unpractised eye seemed to have been of some value, still hung, rotting and ragged, before a door leading to an upper story. I tried the heavy wooden door, but it would not give, being fast locked with a contrivance too modern to have been part of the original ruin.

I CHOSE this house for my temporary dwelling, feeling some slight sense of human companionship therein. I made a lazy vow, as I stretched myself, after a supper of sorts, on the huge bed, with such bedding as I had provided, that I would break down the door and explore the house before going on my way on the morrow.

I was awakened that night, perhaps near midnight, by the most alarming play of lightning it has been my ill fortune to witness—and this in Southern California, where thunderstorms are rare. Hardened as I had become to all phases of life, I quivered beneath the bedding, as it smote the old walls with searing tongues of light.

Finally, after a roll of thunder that seemed like the very voice of hell crying out to an implacable heaven, the whole room seemed filled with lambent flame—a flame which revealed to me a most astonishing thing. . . . I was not alone in the old village!

Beneath the altar of the Madonna knelt a woman. Hair of midnight blackness was wound high on her head, and from it gleamed an ancient Spanish comb, from whose jewels the lightning flashed in tints of sapphire and rose. Her lace mantilla had fallen about her shoulders, which gleamed like ivory through its black meshes. Her perfectly rounded arms were lifted in white supplication to the pictured face, which I could have sworn had taken on a look of living pity. The very eyes, so calm and moveless, seemed now to be turned upon the kneeling supplicant, while the painted lips moved in some accent of comfort.

The unknown woman wore a short full-skirted garment of black and scarlet, and a gay, fringed, silken Spanish shawl fell about her feet, that were clad in tiny scarlet dancing slippers.

I had time to think what an outlandish costume it was for the time and place, before it occurred to me to slip into my clothes and offer what aid and comfort I could. I knew not whither she had come, but it was evident that she had sought this place to worship, frightened by the storm, which was enough to make a stout heart quail, let alone that of a frail young woman.

I sat very still for a time, not wishing to disturb her at her devotions, or speak unless she showed some sign of panic. Finally she rose, slowly, slipping her mantilla over her head, and drawing the shawl about her slender, graceful form. Then she turned toward me, the still flashing rays of light showing me a face of transcendent loveliness, and eyes of dark fire. She seemed to be perfectly aware of my presence, and stepped lightly toward me. I motioned her to come and sit beside me on the bench I had chosen in a sheltered corner. As she approached, I was aware of a faint, intangible, curious odor, reminiscent of some time or place that I could not determine. She glided toward me, and sank upon the seat. In five minutes, my arms were about her.

I cannot give you any coherent account of the nights that followed. . . . I cannot quote a word of the endless conversations we had together. . . . I cannot remember the feeling of her smooth flesh, the touch of her lips on mine, the sensations that pervaded me. I recall only the facts themselves. . . . Something I had wanted all my life was given to me during those three nights, when time was not, and life stood still, as at some crossroads—some quality of heart, brain, or spirit that no woman before —or since—has ever been able to give me. She, too, seemed to find in me some quality to which it seemed her other lovers had been strangers. Although I could not quote a word

she said—and still more strangely, I cannot now recall a single accent of her voice, as if I had never heard it at all, but merely sensed her thoughts in some occult manner—I know that she conveyed to me a sad story of having been in the control of a man whom she had at first loved, then learned to fear and hate, and who had often threatened her life. Over and over I pleaded with her to come away with me . . . always the one answer met me . . . she could not! Although her whole soul cried out to leave this place of horrors and sorrow, she was bound fast here, by what tie I could not tell—perhaps fears of the consequences, should she leave this Pedro Gonzales, who loved her with the fierce love that seeks to hurt, to imprison, to destroy, but knows not tenderness and pity.

My love for her was all reverence, tenderness and pity. Her love for me was a spiritual thing, like the love of an angel. I would not have hurt or harmed her for a million worlds. . . . Hours, we sat in each other's arms, while outside the storm raged, the rain falling in torrential streams day and night. She always sat until I had fallen asleep from sheer weariness, and then glided away. Days I sought the village over frantically, hoping to meet her oppressor face to face . . . but found nothing, not even a footprint, which anyway the fierce rain would have eradicated. It was all I could do to stagger against it from house to house.

Each night, when I had turned my head away from the entrance, or was looking out of a window, she would suddenly appear, I knew not from where, or lay a soft arm around my neck, a touch met by every bounding pulse in my body. She kept faithfully the secret of her hiding place. So I came to believe it might be off in the dense forest somewhere, and only awaited the abating of the storm to search until I could find and carry her away. . . .

When she was gone, I indulged in hours of fruitless, smoldering hatred for this Pedro Gonzales; when she was in my arms, I only loved her. . . . There has never been another love like it; combined of the earthly charms of a woman and the mystic charms of a saint, she appealed to the best side of my earthly nature and my spiritual—a dual lure that sometimes seemed to call the very soul out of my own body, to mingle and merge with hers! It was at times, as if our souls stood naked together, and our bodies did not exist . . . I thought the storm seemed to have something to do with my feelings; for a storm always seems to me a supernatural manifestation, and it plays upon my nerves many strange tricks. But she did not seem frightened when she was in my arms, or when I but held her hand. And so the nights went by.

IT WAS near the end of the third night, during a sudden wild quickening of the pulse of the storm, which had somewhat abated for two or three hours, that she whirled without warning from my side, and into a wild dance of such abandonment that I could only marvel. She seemed not something human, but a winged spirit of black and scarlet, a writhing, tortured, twisted flame, at times on her knees pleading with something inexorable and implacable, again dashing to her scarlet toe-tips and flinging out defiant hands, as if challenging this imperious fate to do its worst—a sound flung out from her white throat that was neither a laugh nor a wail, but something between the two, a derisive, hysterical, mocking, shrilling sound that made my blood run cold.

All at once, our lovely intimacy, our dreamy romance, seemed at an end. She was no longer anything to me but a disembodied spirit of defiance, of sardonic wo, of unearthly,

mocking mirth! I sat stunned, again surprized by that strange, tantalizing odor, so reminiscent of something I could not place . . . some past experience. . .

Suddenly, in her tortured writhing, her shawl was flung aside, and her bodice half torn from her white bosom . . . I canght a glimpse of a red, bloody scar . . . and saw also, for the first time, that she wore about her neck a common wooden rosary—of a deep red color, with a carved ivory cross hanging pendent on it.

Suddenly, in a wild gyration, the cross was jerked from the rosary, and fell at my feet. I stooped to pick it up . . . when I looked again, she was standing in the doorway that led to the upper regions, pushing back the rotted fall of tapestry with one slim white hand. I darted toward her, to touch her once—just once.

She waved me back, imperiously. I halted, as if held in my tracks by a mysterious power superior to my own. . . Her lips moved. . . I caught a word . . . *"Mañana!"* (tomorrow).

And she was gone. The door had opened at her touch. I made no effort to follow. I mnst have swooned where I stood, for when I came to myself, in the light of a dazzling, calm new day, I was lying, cold and stiff, on the hard stone floor. In my hand was still grasped a little carved ivory cross, whereon writhed a tiny, tortured Christ, so lifelike that I shuddered.

I examined the door. The lock was rusted shut! I broke it down with my ax. . . Upstairs was a jnmble of moldering finery, flung from chests and boxes. An antique jewel-case lay open, empty and broken on the floor. A woman's slipper and a painted fan, dim with age and dust, lay in one corner. There was no sound nor sign of life.

I think I was not quite sane. I called to her. I beat and pounded upon the walls. There might be a secret door to some other apartment. At last I was rewarded by a hollow ring.

Again I beat with superhuman strength upon the adobe wall. Bits of clay fell at my feet. . . Again . . . more of the wall gave . . . a wooden door came into view. I jerked it open . . . again that strange odor, reminiscent of I knew not what. . .

God! . . . even now . . . if I could forget! . . . but I can't.

Behind that door, hermetically sealed for how many years I shall never know, crouched a girl in dancing costume . . . the sun reflected from her high Spanish comb in flashes of sapphire and rose . . . it showed the skin stretched like drying parchment over features still beautiful and still recognizable . . . it glittered back at me from the scarlet satin of her little slippers . . . it shone upon the hilt of a dagger stuck into the white bosom . . . and upon a wooden rosary, crimsoned still by the blood that had long ago dripped down upon it from the breast of a dying girl!

But the cross had gone from the crimson rosary! And all at once I knew . . . I recognized . . . that strange, tantalizing odor; a war-ravaged field in France . . . men lying long unburied . . . flesh drying on human bones. . .

I DO not know how I got away. I stumbled, I fell down those time-corroded stairs. Somehow, I must have found the car, and driven with the fury of a man with seven devils at his heels . . . I came to myself weeks later, in a hospital in a town I shall not name. I never found, nor indeed sought, the path to that deserted village again. I made no effort to prove to my friends the story I told. And I flung into the sea, as a thing accurst, the carved ivory cross that I found in my pocket when I came back to life and reason.

No. 3

SERVANTS OF SATAN

by Seabury Quinn

Rebecca Nurse, Saint of Salem

Author of "The Phantom Farmhouse," "Out of the Long Ago," etc.

"THE frown of God" lay black upon the Province of Massachusetts in the spring of 1692. Harvests of the previous summer had been less bountiful than those of other years, much livestock had died during the severe New England winter, and an expedition against the French in Canada had ended disastrously for the colonists. All these calamities, or any one of them, would have been enough to justify a day of solemn fasting and prayer for divine forgiveness; but terrible as the material misfortunes of the people were, they were as nothing compared to their spiritual torment. When crops failed and cattle died, it was understood as a sign of heavenly displeasure, and when the Frenchmen and their red-skinned allies withstood the trained bands of the New Englanders, the God of battles seemed to have withdrawn his favor. And when witchcraft, wild and rampant, spread like a plague throughout old Salem and its environs, the clergymen and elders of the church felt assured they were entirely forsaken by heaven. The Lord had turned His face from His people, and Satan, who laid cunning traps for the souls of the unwary, was working for the colonists' spiritual destruction even as the French and Indians sought the destruction of their bodies.

No man dared look his neighbor in the face for fear of seeing there the mark of Satan. Salem and Ipswich jails were full to bulging with confessed or suspected witches, and the group of young girls and women who seemed particularly susceptible to malign influences was constantly augmented by new recruits—children and girls who fell into fits, cried aloud in terror at invisible phantoms which mocked them from the air, or fell writhing to the floor, tortured by invisible fingers which pinched them black and blue or thrust pins and needles into their tender flesh till the red blood spurted from their wounds, staining their clothing and terrifying the beholders.

The devil was loose. Everywhere he added to the number of his servants; soon the entire settlement would lie beneath his dreadful domination.

Sarah Good and Sarah Osburn, poor and friendless old women of Salem Village, had been denounced as witches and thrown into jail. Tituba, the half-breed slave of the Reverend Samuel Parris, pastor of Salem Village Church, had confessed herself

a witch and been sent to Boston to be sold to another master; Giles and Martha Corey, substantial farmer folk dwelling in Salem Farms (where the town of North Peabody now stands) had been "cried out against" by the afflicted children and lay in jail awaiting execution. Still the tide of deviltry ran higher and higher, the children continued to denounce first one, then another of the neighbors as witches; for, it seemed, no sooner was one witch apprehended and lodged in prison than a dozen more arose to plague the people with the magic powers derived from Satan in return for their souls.

Cotton Mather, doctor of divinity and eminent Boston preacher, had come to Salem to reinforce the Reverend Mr. Parris in his combat with the Evil One, and the force of his sermons stirred the terrorized people to a fever pitch. Not one servant of Satan, not one brand out of hell's fire was to be allowed to remain in the midst of the congregation of the righteous. "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live," commanded Holy Scripture. Witches and wizards, be they poor, friendless old women, prosperous farmers or substantial citizens of Salem itself, must be gathered into the meshes of the law's net and dealt with according to the dictates of Scripture.

And now a shiver of surprize and incredulity ran through the dwellers of Salem Village. Rebecca Nurse, widely known and universally loved wife of Francis Nurse, of Salem, had been denounced as a witch by the "afflicted children."

The farmstead on which the Nurses dwelt had been divided into parcels, Francis and Rebecca Nurse retaining the original home, while such of their eight children as had married occupied smaller plots adjacent. The family, while not the richest in Salem, was one of the most highly respected and most contented in the neighborhood. Mrs. Nurse, herself, was a veritable "mother in Israel." Nearly every person in Salem was beholden to her in some manner, for she had watched beside their beds of birth and death, nursed them in sickness and comforted them in sorrow. No one had ever applied to her in vain for aid, no beggar had ever been turned hungry from her door. Her seventy-one years of life represented seventy-one years of blamelessness.

March 23, 1692, a warrant for her arrest was given George Herrick, marshal of Essex county, and she was brought before the magistrates to answer a charge of working "certain detestable acts called witchcrafts" upon Ann Putnam, Mary Walcott, Elizabeth Hubbard and Abigail Williams.

Ann Putnam, a child of twelve years, was one of the "afflicted children" who had accused Sarah Good and Sarah Osburn of witchcraft. She was also the original accuser of Martha and Giles Corey, of Salem Farms. Abigail Williams was a niece of the Reverend Mr. Parris, and a member of his household. Together with the Putnam child, she had been a prosecuting witness in every trial for witchcraft in Salem Village.

WHEN Rebecca Nurse stood before Magistrate Hathorn to answer the charges brought against her by the children, there were many in the courtroom who felt a grievous error had been made. That saintly old Goodwife Nurse should be suspected of witchcraft, of trafficking with Satan, was as unthinkable, almost, as a similar charge against Mr. Parris or even the learned Dr. Mather would have been.

Yet Magistrate Hathorn proceeded in the same hectoring manner he had used toward all suspects in witchcraft cases, asking the prisoner repeatedly not whether, but *why*, she had injured the prosecuting children.

At last, desperate, the old lady ex-

tended her hands toward heaven, exclaiming, "I have none to appeal to but God!" At this all the "afflicted" showed every evidence of undergoing violent pains, their screams and howls drowning out the words of the accused.

Hathorn determined to remand the prisoner to jail. and the old lady bowed her white head in meek resignation. Immediately the "afflicted children" were forced to bend their heads forward, nor could they raise them till, at Abigail Williams' entreaty, the marshal roughly forced Mrs. Nurse's head up, "whereupon" (according to a note made by Mr. Parris) "it was observed that Betty Hubbard her head was immediately righted."

June 2, 1692, Rebecca Nurse's trial for "certain detestable acts called witchcrafts" commenced. The Reverend Samuel Parris, pastor of Salem Village Church, acted as assistant prosecuting attorney, clerk of court and general factotum.

The first witness examined by Mr. Parris was the child, Ann Putnam, who swore:

"I was grievously tortured by her during her examination [before Magistrate Hathorn, in March], and also during the time of her examination I saw the apparition [*i. e.*, a supernatural specter or demon duplicate of the accused which emanated from or returned to her body at will] of Rebecca Nurse go and hurt the bodies of Mercy Lewis, Mary Walcott, Elizabeth Hubbard and Abigail Williams." This deposition we have in the handwriting of Mr. Parris, but whether he wrote it after Ann's testimony, or jotted it down as she delivered her evidence, there is no way of telling. At any rate, we find another note, also in the handwriting of the reverend prosecutor, which states, "To the same effect were the statements of Mary Walcott, Elizabeth Hubbard and Abigail Williams."

One of the beliefs of the time was that Satan set his seal upon all his servants—that witches and wizards were all branded with the devil's mark. For this reason it was customary for the court to appoint a jury of the same sex as the accused to make a minute physical examination and report any unusual warts, moles or growths found upon his or her body. It was thought that the Evil One assigned one of his imps to the special service of each of his human servants, the imp assuming the shape of a black cat, an owl, a rat or some other uncanny-looking creature, and performing such supernatural errands as the witch chose to order. For nourishment the imp, or "familiar", as it was termed, sucked the witch's blood, and the spot from which the blood was drawn became insensible to pain. This spot was popularly known as a witch test.

Now, it often happens that old persons grow certain excrescences of the flesh not found upon the bodies of younger people, yet these are perfectly explainable by natural causes. Such a growth was found upon the body of Rebecca Nurse by the jury of women appointed to inspect her person, and though two of the jurywomen reported it to be of natural origin, the verdict of the committee as a whole was that the prisoner had been marked by Satan.

JUNE 28 the jury returned a verdict of not guilty. "Thereupon," Mr. Parris records in his notes, "there was much anguish among the afflicted." The girls, whose testimony, under the skilful questions of the Reverend Samuel Parris, had charged Rebecca Nurse with being in league with the devil, rolled upon the floor, shricking and crying, frothing at the mouth and otherwise giving evidence of unsupportable suffering.

Then came the crowning infamy of this infamous proceeding. The judges

refused to entertain a verdict favorable to the prisoner. Solemnly they rose and directed the jury to retire and reconsider their verdict. The jurymen filed from the courtroom, debated some time, and returned to state they could not arrive at a verdict other than that already given. The court thereupon *ordered them to bring in a verdict of guilty as charged* against the accused, which monstrous order was complied with by the overawed jurymen.

It must be remembered that persons accused of felony were not allowed the services of attorneys for their defense under the English law of those days; but to compensate for this handicap, the judges were supposed to conserve the prisoners' legal rights in every way. This was their sworn duty, and, according to law and to the judges' oath, every reasonable doubt was bound to be resolved in the prisoners' favor. By their action in the case of Rebecca Nurse, then, her judges violated their duty and their sacred oatbs as judicial officers, staining their hands with innocent blood and their reputations with infamy for all time. Such a villainous perversion of justice was never before or since committed in an English-speaking court on the North American continent.

Sentence of death by hanging was passed npon Rebecca Nurse, but thirty-nine of the most prominent and respected persons in the community signed a statement declaring "... we never had any cause or grounds to suspect her of such thing as she is now accused of," and Sir William Phipps, royal governor of Massachusetts, granted her a reprieve.

HERETOFORE, all power to do harm had automatically departed from witches and wizards, once they were safely under lock and key; but Rebecca Nurse appears to have been an exceptionally powerful evildoer, for no sooner had the governor's reprieve been served on the Salem authorities than the children whose testimony had sworn her life away became "afflicted" as never before. Abigail Williams, the Reverend Mr. Parris' niece, was especially marked by her sufferings, and had her seizures in the most public places. The sight of her torments was too much for the neighbors. Representations were made to the governor by certain gentlemen of Salem and the reprieve was withdrawn. Rebecca Nurse was hanged on Gallows Hill July 19, 1692.

In the dead of night her family crept stealthily to the unmarked grave into which her body had been tumbled by the hangman, exhumed her remains and buried them in the family graveyard. No clergyman was present to read his office over her, for she had been excommunicated by the Reverend Mr. Parris; but her aged and sorrowing husband read from the Scripture such passages of love and forgiveness as seldom are heard from ordained clergymen of the fundamentalist school, and tears of grief watered the grave where the faithful wife and mother was laid beside her dear ones gone before.

If meekness and forgiveness of those who despitefully entreat one accused falsely, and resignation to an unjnst and undeserved fate constitute the essentials of a saint's character, then Salem, Massachusetts, is as surely entitled to claim golden-hearted Rebecca Nurse as its patron saint as any cathedral town of France or Flanders may claim patronage from some martyr who tasted death for the faith that was in him.

NOTE: No. 4 of this series will treat of the persecution, trial and execution of the Reverend George Burroughs, one-time pastor of Salem Village Church.

The Story of an Evil Mistake

Damned

By CHARLES HILAN CRAIG

IVAN walked slowly along the narrow, tortuous road that wound through the sparse woods. The sun that shone down through the limbs of the trees was strong and hot, but the blood of Ivan was cold, and he shivered a little as he walked along.

He was dressed in loose and comfortable clothes, gaudy-colored, though poor in quality. He was going to the village to buy food and to get trinkets for his daughter, who had not been very well. To most peasants, daughters were worth little more than their other animals, but Ivan truly loved his daughter—perhaps because she was so different from the others, little and fair and beautiful. Her eyes were the bluest blue, her skin was like cream, her nose was straight, her brow fair.

Ivan thonght of many things as he walked west along the road. He had been told many times that farther west there was a beautiful sea, wide and very fair, and that still farther there was a broad and majestic ocean, and that beyond the ocean lay a country called America where people were all equal; where each one had a voice in making the laws; where there was no war; where a man's property was safe from the soldiers. Ivan knew that there were things called ships, which traveled back and forth across the vast expanses of water. He knew that these ships carried people over and back and that for many *levas* he could get them to carry him over, together with his wife and daughter. In America he need not work so hard, and his daughter could marry a man of high estate. Such was only fitting.

But Ivan was a poor man. He knew that if he worked his whole lifetime he could not get enough *levas* for transportation to America. And he was too canny to sign his name—Ivan could sign his name by a laborious effort—to the list which a man in the village circulated every once in a while. He knew that the men who signed this paper—with a mark usually—were made to work their lives away after they reached the new country. Ivan had worked all his life. He did not want to work away any more of it than was absolutely necessary.

But it would be nice to go to America. . .

And as Ivan thought these things he came farther along the road till he reached the edge of the forest and stood on the outskirts of the village. He passed numerous vile hovels and huts and a few good cottages, and finally he came to the market place.

The sun was shining down fiercely now, but Ivan and the other peasants did not mind that very much. Ivan watched with sinister eyes the men who were trading. Many times during the year he came to the village to watch the trading, and many times through his craft he carried away money to buy food and trinkets.

He became particularly interested when he saw a well-dressed peasant lead five calves into the market. The peasant was accompanied by a girl

just budding into womanhood—a beautiful little lady who in many ways resembled Ivan's own daughter.

Ivan watched as the peasant with the calves went about the business of selling them. The crafty, sinister eyes of the man lit up when he saw the sale made and the money—a great bag of it—turned over to the peasant.

Ivan watched them covertly during the time they remained in the village. After a while he saw them start off down the road. Elation soared up within him. They were taking the road that ran east—the road along which he had traveled that very morning. Chiefly was he elated because he knew that there was no branch in the road for a long distance. He could make no mistake. Ivan followed the father and daughter at a respectable distance for a few minutes and then he edged over to the side of the road and slipped out of sight into the woods. By this time the long shadows were creeping through the forest, for the sun had fallen deep in the western heavens.

IVAN made a wide detour from the road, running swiftly when he got far enough away to be out of hearing. His heart was pumping fast, and its beating sounded to him like a trip-hammer. All the time he ran he was thinking of that bag which the man carried, the bag which would have been placed ere now under the thick shirt so as to be out of sight.

Some time later Ivan emerged from the thicket a goodly distance ahead of his intended victims. He was very tired, for his journey had been a rapid one, so he sat down by the side of the road to rest for a few minutes. Then he looked about till he found a big club which was very hard and very strong. He tested it out by striking it fiercely on the ground several times. After he had done this he stepped over behind a rather large tree and waited.

The darkness was quite thick now. Stars were beginning to peep out in the heavens above, but their light scarcely pierced through the leaves of the trees. Looking up, one could see that they were there; that was all.

Ivan did not have to wait long. He heard them coming; intuition told him it was the victims. They were talking and laughing to keep up their courage as they traversed the blackness of the woods. They came along the road rapidly, their feet pattering. When they were twenty feet away Ivan could make out their outlines. They came nearer—passed him.

Silently, swiftly he stepped into the road behind them. The great black club swung back, forward, down. The peasant had been laughing a moment before, but the laugh changed in his throat to a terrible gasping groan. The girl screamed once and leapt away as Ivan swung his club in her direction. Seeing that he could not hope to use it again, the murderer dropped it and leapt toward her. His clutching, outstretched fingers closed on cloth, clinched, but the girl screamed again and with a mad strength tore away and plunged into the darkness of the forest.

Ivan did not follow her. She did not know him and besides, he did not want to kill her. She was much like his daughter. . .

He went back to the man he had killed with the club and knelt beside him. His hands felt over the body. It was cold. Ivan shivered again. He had been shivering all day. It was as if there was in his blood a terrible premonition of disaster to come. Ivan did not recognize it as a premonition: he only knew it was a discomfort—and he hated discomfort. It did not hurt his conscience to kill a man; it wasn't that. But nothing. . .

Strange how quick a dead man grows cold! . . .

Ivan reached his hand under the shirt of the man on the ground. A queer little sensation began to play in his breast when his hand encountered no bag of money. Hnrriedly, and with fear in his heart and soul, he felt over the body. Inch by inch he covered that man's body. Then he stripped off the clothes and went through them carefully. With a low growl in his throat he paused to consider. Gradually the truth camc home to him. They had feared robbers; the man would naturally be the one attacked; the girl had the money. And she was gone.

Ivan rose to his fcet in wrath. Hc started away, but he stumbled over the club he had nsed to kill a man with. With a savage cry he picked it up. Again and again he whirled it about his head and brought it down with sickening impact upon the body of the victim. Again—and yet again! Then he turned and walked rapidly away through the woods toward his cottage.

THOUGH he knew the woods hereabouts as well as he knew the interior of his own house he lost his way. Perhaps it was his wrath at being frustrated, or again it might have been that thought of impending disaster. . .

It was nearly three hours later that he reached his cottage. There was a light. His wife was waiting.

In a few terse sentences he told her of how he had killed a man uselessly as the daughter of the fellow had escaped with the bag of money.

The woman gazed at him in astonishment After a while she said, "A girl came here tonight. Fear and blood were on her face. Her clothes had been torn from her. She said that a band of robbers had set upon herself and her father, and her father had been killed. For a long time she had been running wildly through the woods until at last she saw our light. We comforted her—your daughter and I—and gave her to eat. She probably has the bag of money with her. She was afraid about something."

"It must have been a lot of money," said Ivan.

"I wish that we were rich," said the woman.

Ivan considered for a time, and then he said, "I will kill her tonight. I will kill her and get the money. Then we will go to America."

Silently his wife went and brought the long, heavy knife.

"You will use this?" she asked.

"No," said Ivan, "I do not like blood. With my bare hands I will kill her and get the money. Then we will go to America."

"She is upstairs," said the woman. "She and our daughter are asleep. Perhaps it will be best to wait a little while."

So for nearly an hour they sat there looking out into the blackness of the night. Ivan began to get nervous. The strange sensation in his blood was getting worse. He shivered. He was cold. His hands were icy.

"I am a coward," he said to himself. "I fear the inevitable."

He sat still for a little while. Then he rose to his feet and walked around the room. He looked once at his powerful hauds. Then he took off his shoes and began to climb the ladder to the loft. His wife sat very quietly.

Ivan cautiously opened the door to the loft. Quickly he pulled his great bulk through. He listened. He could hear the quiet, regular breathing from the wooden cot near him. It would be here the visitor would sleep. His danghter would occnpy her own bed across the room. He crept up to the nearest bed and looked down npon the sleeping girl.

A moonbeam had found its way through a rent in the ceiling. It fell upon the naked breast of the girl. Her breast was white and fair. Almost as white and fair, thought Ivan, as that of his own daughter. The moonlight glowed on something. Ivan touched it—and then he knew that it was a tiny crucifix. He shivered violently, but at the same moment he decided that on the morrow he would give the crucifix to his daughter. He reached across the girl and felt a bag near her head. He chuckled softly. It was just then that she must have wakened, for she started up with a soft little cry.

Ivan said nothing. He did not want to wake his daughter. His great left hand covered the girl's face. His great right hand clutched her naked throat; the dirty, powerful fingers dug deep; the delicate throat walls succumbed. And then she was dead. Death comes quickly to the fair, and Ivan's hands were strong.

Ivan took the pouch and started to go down. It was lighter than he had thought it would be. He rapped his fingers against it. There was no clink of metal. Then he thought he heard a sound from his daughter's bed and crossed the room quickly. He looked very closely at the bed. She must have spoken in her sleep. There was no sound. He listened for her beloved breathing. All he could hear was the beating of his own heart. There was no other sound.

He reached down. He could not feel her. His hands groped over the bed coverings. There was no one in that bed.

Ivan's heart must have stopped beating for a second, for the silence was as the silence of death—yes, it was the silence of death. Death . . .

The pouch that was too light. . . . Dawning!

A little agonized cry burst from the man's lips and he called to his wife, "Bring the light!"

She brought the light.

Then Ivan looked down upon the dead girl.

A LITTLE over an hour had passed by when the daughter of the man Ivan had murdered led the soldiers to Ivan's house. She had overheard the peasant and his wife talking and had made her escape. Now she was back with the soldiers. They gave no signal. At the girl's direction they broke down the door and entered. The wife was sitting there, crooning softly to herself. Ivan was not in sight.

They paused a little, uncertainly, looking around. They wondered where Ivan was.

Then there came the sound of a man laughing. It was Ivan who was laughing. He was laughing as he came down out of the loft carrying his daughter. He did not see the girl or the soldiers. He sat down on the floor and placed the head of the dead girl between his knees. He was laughing about that crucifix which was attached to a chain and hung about her neck. He wondered who had given it to his daughter. He was laughing—a weird, wild, horrible sort of laugh. It chilled the hearts of the soldiers, for it was the laugh of a maniac.

THE EYRIE

SO LONG as the human race lasts, the old legends of witches and vampires and the evil eye will grip the imagination. Is there, among the readers of WEIRD TALES, anyone who actually *believes* in witches and demons and werewolves? Probably not; yet when one of these old legends is tied up with the facts of modern life, as in Seabury Quinn's *The Phantom Farmhouse* and *Out of the Long Ago,* it has a pull like a Fordson tractor. These two stories were tales of werewolves, based on rank superstition; yet they created a flood of requests for more like them.

When mankind ceases to thrill to tales of magic and djinns and the ceaseless warfare between occult forces of good and evil, when the *Arabian Nights* lose their charm and Sheherazade is forgotten—then the freshness will have gone from life and mankind will have passed from the enchanted realm of the imagination into a somber world of sober logic—a drab, uncomfortable mental world in which the childhood pleasures of fancy are forgot. Men will be no longer human beings; they will have become a race of flesh-and-blood machines.

But in the meantime, WEIRD TALES exists for those who want to escape for a time from the drab commonplaceness of everyday life; and in the pages of this unique magazine the werewolf is brought to grief (as in Greye La Spina's *Invaders From the Dark*); the malignant vampire is foiled, his head cut off, and a stake driven through his heart (as in Victor Rowan's *Four Wooden Stakes*); the "afflicted children" are pinched by witches, and swear away the lives of innocent old women (in Seabury Quinn's true tales of Salem witchcraft: *Servants of Satan*); and the enlightened modern psychic destroys the monstrous familiar created in the caves of Verdun by medieval devil-worshipers (in Stephen Bagby's *Whispering Tunnels*).

On such legends WEIRD TALES has built its popularity, adding to this type of stories tales of the marvelous science of the future, wars of the worlds, voyages through space, great inventions foreseen by the prophetic eyes of imaginative authors.

A type of story that seems more and more to find favor with you, the readers, is the tale that introduces you to local legends in various little-known parts of the world. Chinese occultism lives again in the exquisite tale told you in last month's issue by Soong Kwoen-ling and James W. Bennett; Lieutenant Burks recreates a Dominican legend in his *Desert of the Dead;* Lieutenant William J. Stamper, whose keen eyes and ears missed none of the local color and superstitious customs of Haiti during the occupation of the Black Republic by the American marines, has recreated for you

some of the most vivid bits of Haitian legend in a remarkable series of short stories beginning in next month's issue. Voodoo is the basis of West Indian belief; and we sincerely hope that the Virgin Islands, our country's outpost in the West Indies, will shortly yield some of their wild beliefs to the scholarly pen of the Reverend Henry S. Whitehead, who has just returned from there. In the West Indies magic is the one touchstone to the character of the people. The obeah doctor still flourishes; the jumbie roams the canefields at night on the watch for unwary negroes; and two of Mr. Whitehead's personal friends are popularly believed to be werewolves!

"I wish I could get a story of the Virgin Islands published in the local dialect, in which I can preach," writes Mr. Whitehead, "but it would be virtually unintelligible to the reading public:

"'Mon, yo' lated!'

"'A-wee ca' cuke tell a-wee ca' done yett, mon!'

"I don't suppose there's anything quite like it on top of the earth."

The votes of the readers for favorite story in the March issue were more evenly distributed than in any previous poll. The favorites seem to be *Radio V-Rays*, by Jan Dirk; *The Flaming Eyes*, by Fletcher R. Milton; and *The Death Bottle*, by Volney G. Mathison. What is YOUR favorite story in the present issue? We want to know what stories you like best, so that we may give you more of the same type. Tell us which story you prefer in this issue; and if there is any story that displeases you, tell us about that, too. This is your magazine, and it is you who determine the type of stories in it. Address your letter to The Eyrie, WEIRD TALES, 317 Baldwin Building, Indianapolis, Indiana.

Paul Shaffer, of Windber, Pennsylvania, sends in to The Eyrie a crossword puzzle, writing: "It is not my purpose to make a crossword puzzle of WEIRD TALES, but I am in this way expressing my favorite magazine, also the two best authors in this issue: March, 1925. 1 Vert. and 8 Vert. are first and second choice respectively, while 1 Hor., 5 Hor., 20 Vert. and 22 Hor. express the way I feel toward the magazine itself."

The crosswordings mentioned read: "WEIRD TALES IS GREAT" and the puzzle-constructor's two favorite authors in the March issue are WHITEHEAD (author of *The Thin Match*) and STRATTON (author of *A Pair of Mummies*). Such words as "weird", "eery" and "eyrie" are used in the construction of this ingenious expression of approval.

Dawn Good, of Los Angeles, writes: "There is no other magazine in the world that comes through with such good all-around satisfaction as yours. There is one fault I have to find, however, and that is that you publish only once a month. Can't you publish WEIRD TALES at least twice a month?"

P. M. De Leon, of Chicago, specially praises "the unusual stories created by Arthur Thatcher: *The Valley of Teeheemen* and *The Last of the Teeheemen;*" and B. Travis, of Portland, Oregon, expresses the wish that Leo A. Borah would write some more stories like *The House of Dust*.

Warren A. Gregory, of Lynn, Massachusetts, writes: "I have just read *Radio V-Rays* and do absolutely pronounce it to be one peach of a story. But what is the best story in the issue it is hardly possible for anyone to tell—the yarns are all so good."

J. Wasso, Jr., writes from Pen Argyl, Pennsylvania: "I like to have my 'weird tales' in your magazine strong in both horror and terror, without being repulsive and disgusting. Good stories give the readers thrills, without being nauseating. My real favorites, however, are neither horror nor terror

stories, but such pseudo-scientific stories of the planets as *Invaders From Outside* and *Draconda.*"

This is a small part of the letters received. There are a few letters—a very few—that are not so high in their praise: letters that point out what (in the opinion of the letter-writers) are faults; and these letters receive the most careful attention; for is not this magazine yours? You are the readers; it is you who have made the success of WEIRD TALES possible; it is you, therefore, who should determine what stories we print. If anything displeases you in WEIRD TALES, write the editor about it, and your criticism will be very carefully studied.

One letter from Moscow, Idaho (the writer asks that his name be withheld), criticizes what he terms "impossibilities": "Just one instance: *Teoquitla the Golden* was very clever and entertaining, but the permutation of sex described is a biological impossibility. Let me qualify that. Sex has apparently been changed experimentally in certain lower animals; varying degrees of change from female to male are known to take place in cattle (the freemartin phenomenon), and possibly may also occur in other mammals. But the important point is this: such changes can only take place during the embryonic stage of development. After that, they are impossible. Any biologist will tell you that. Of course, fiction of the weird sort is not intended to stick to scientific facts, although realism in any story will be enhanced if the scientific basis is properly regarded. Still, *Teoquitla the Golden* was clever.

"Your authors ought to familiarize themselves very carefully with the environment in which they place their stories, in order to emphasize the realism. Some minor point might spoil the story for the readers. An instance comes to mind: in *Whispering Tunnels,* reference is made to a telegram, on *yellow* paper. But in France telegrams are blue—the so-called *petits bleus.* A criticism of microscopic importance, you will say, and I admit it; still, that one point shattered all the realism for me and just spoiled the rest of the story.

"WEIRD TALES has given me many a pleasant hour."

Another reader points out an inaccuracy in *The House of Dust,* where one of the characters says: "The Senecas hev took to the warpath and skelped the whole winter colony out to the lake." But the Senecas (the reader points out) were never within hundreds of miles of Louisiana, where the scene of the story is laid. Now if the author had said Choctaws, instead of Senecas, the story would have gained in realism for one reader, at least.

Dennis G. Cooper, of Detroit, writes: "I must congratulate you on your selection of stories used in WEIRD TALES. Everyone with a leaning toward this fascinating kind of fiction can surely find what he likes in the magazine. There is food for all tastes."

"Keep the shivery tales going, say I," writes Eli Colter, of Portland, Oregon. "Poe has plenty of disciples, and Will Shakespeare knew a thing or two. Let me say thank the gods for a magazine that steers clear of sex rot and its ramifications, yet produces stories that hold the reader seeking thrills. More power to you!"

H. E. Fuller, of Loxley, Alabama, in voting for *A Gaddaan Alaad,* by George Ballard Bowers, as the best story in the March issue, writes: "Mr. Bowers has been eminently successful in catching the elusive superstitious atmosphere of aboriginal Luzon, and his is a sweet sad story of the triumph of father-love over the sodden instincts of a primitive race."

Under the N-Ray

(Continued from page 218)

Crude weapons he carried—a short javelin in the right hand and a long bow and quiver of arrows swinging from the shoulder. His features suggested rude material from which might be chiseled the well-shaped lineaments of Jack Hodge.

I was hard put to it to place the period of time represented in this picture. Something told me the era was not many centuries advanced from the Stone Age. Prehistoric I at once classified it. What caused this conviction I cannot say, unless it was that the whole atmosphere of the picture seemed newer and the sunshine brighter, cleaner, than any I have ever seen. Surely this was a younger sun than ours.

The hunter came to a stand at the head of a steep declivity. Some hundreds of feet below lay a little green valley, through which wound the silver thread of a river. Nearer at hand I could glimpse through the tops of giant conifers the deep blue of a mountain lake. Toward this the huntsman for a moment directed his gaze. Having apparently located something on the lake shore too far distant for me to recognize, he uttered a grunt of satisfaction and turned away.

Unslinging his quiver, he selected an immense, red-tipped arrow. This he bore to the base of a pine tree, where he plunged it repeatedly into a great lump of oozing pitch. After smearing the end well with the sticky substance he brought the shaft to the edge of the cliff and laid it down. Next he busied himself at rubbing two splinters together until they had produced a smoking spark and, with many great distendings of rough cheeks, blowing the spark into a tiny flame. With this he ignited the pitch-smeared end of the arrow. Fitting the arrow to the rawhide string, he drew it back—back until it seemed the mighty bow must break. Now he looked once more at the spot on the lake shore, raised the bow a little and released the fiery shaft.

Up and up it sped, leaving as a wake an immense arc of brown smoke. Up, and still higher, until reaching its limit it began to drop. It fell slowly at first; but by the time it had dipped from view behind the farthest treetop its speed was that of a meteor. One moment the youth stood with folded arms, watching the course of the flight. Then, apparently satisfied that the arrow would hit its mark, he suddenly wheeled and darted into the forest.

THERE came a view of a group of rude, thatched huts on a beach by a lake. On the right side of the screen was a sharp upslope surmounted by a little bluff easily recognizable as that from which the hunter had loosed his quarrel. Swarms of rough warriors could be seen toiling up the slope, while in the village nothing was left but a few women who stood with shaded eyes watching the progress of their protectors. An arrow stood still burning and untouched where it had plunged into the ground at the center of the compound.

To the screen sprang a closeup of a hut I had seen standing a little apart from the rest. In the doorway stood a broad woman holding a wooden platter in her hand. On her face was an expression of helpless fright. Following her line of vision to a near-by thicket, I beheld our archer of the cliff. Apparently realizing he had been seen, the youth now

bounded from cover and pursued the woman into the hut. He made short work of binding her wrists and ankles with thongs of hide, and then turned to the slight figure of a girl cringing in a dark corner. With one motion he spun her about and tossed her roughly on to his shonlder. Now he ran from the hut and headed for the beach, where was drawn np a little dugout. Ungently placing the girl on a seat, the fellow pushed off, sprang in, grasped the lone paddle, and with great thrusts began rapidly to put distance between him and the cabin.

I studied the not unbeantiful face of the captive, and in spite of myself was amnsed at her expression. Where were the loathing glances one might expect? There were none; the girl showed rather a shy admiration for her captor. His bronzed face bore little expression at all, nnless perhaps a trace of triumph.

And who could blame him? To start the village men off on a wild goose chase as he had done and carry off doubtless the prize specimen of their women! I glanced np at the hillside. So bold a plan deserved to succeed.

Bnt it could not. Already the men had realized they had been fooled. Brandishing their weapons and uttering perfectly visible yells of rage, the whole party was swarming down toward the lake. Already they were within fair bowshot of the canoe, and one after another dropped to the knee to release a winged missile. In all too short a space they were at the shore. Some few hastily launched canoes, but the greater nnmber set off on foot around the shore to head the elopers off.

The young man in the boat plied the paddle with renewed vigor. The girl sat quietly in the bottom of the dugout now, and kept her eyes glued upon the shore they had left. As she watched every movement of the pur-

suing party, the first glint of anger came to her eyes.

Far ahead where the lake dwindled to form the source of a mountain stream I saw a single dwelling. The straining youth fixed his eyes on this and redoubled his efforts. But all was useless now; the flight had been discovered. The hutch was too flimsy to withstand any half-determined siege. And furthermore—the running men had reached it first. Now they had set fire to it. The last vestige of hope left the youth's face. With a look of grim determination he ceased paddling and faced the girl.

Her face went white, but she answered the question in his eyes with a nod. The man resumed his paddling, but now his eyes were fixed on the stream banks. He sent the dugout straight on beyond the burning hut.

Those on shore seemed now to divine his purpose. Gesticulating wildly, they ran to the stream. The girl in the dugout raised her chin defiantly and pointed straight ahead. A huge fellow drew back a bowstring, but instantly the girl threw herself into her companion's arms. Torn between two fears, another man, whom I judged to be the girl's father, restrained the archer, then covered his eyes with a hairy paw.

The dugout went on with an ever increasing current. The banks of the rivulet drew nearer together and rose towering over the little craft. Faster and faster it flew, while the young warrior tightened his grip on the girl who had elected to die with him rather than leave him to his fate at the hands of her people. The stream became a mill race—the little boat was as a javelin cast by some battling merman—or had the rock walls on either side so rank with slime and ooze taken on a backward movement of their own?—faster—a million disordered shapes leered from out the swirling mist clouds—the maiden hid her face in the youth's tunic—the

dugout dipped, righted, swung completely around. Now the craft hung suspended in space—a swift vision of a long slant of green water—jagged snags—the bottom had dropped out of the universe—down—. . . .

From the mesmerized form of Jack Hodge came a choking whimper; the tortured body fell writhing to the floor.

8

I SHALL never forget the terrible countenance that met my gaze when I bent over the supine figure of the reporter. The eyes were open and staring glassily. The lips were drawn back so tightly they had cracked open and were bleeding. The teeth and gums were exposed in a manner horrible. . . . That protruding tongue! . . . I drew back. Bestial! I dared not touch the man.

I watched the hands which before had been so white and nerveless. They were slowly turning a deep red, as if the man were being filled with a new, bursting life. The backs flattened and broadened; the fingers lengthened before my eyes, curved upward from the backs and downward to form ugly claws. Any moment, I expected the fellow to spring to his feet and run amuck. For I knew as well as Losieva what had happened.

She had lost control of her subject! At the end of the seventh cycle—that of the prehistoric lovers—the mind had failed to assume the usual state of coma. Instead, and contrary to the suggestions of the psychic, the ego had leapt backward another cycle. And judging from the distance separating the other cycles from each other, this one must be back before the time of man!

I whirled to confront Losieva. Just what idea I had in mind I cannot remember. I was beside myself. I remember only one transcending thought—to break up this wicked

séance! Madly I rushed at the woman. . . .

I seem to remember hearing the softly modulated voice of the psychic addressing me; of a strange something enveloping me, a twilight—no, not twilight; that thrice-damned N-ray! Now I began to fight, but it was too late. My muscles refused to respond to the urgings of my brain. I remember particularly that I wanted to strangle that fiendish professor and smash his miscreated machines. No use; I could do nothing except at the mystic's command. The ghastly light had me nearly blinded, and within a few seconds I was suffering inexpressible torture. When the pain in my eye-sockets reached an intensity unbearable I must have passed out entirely. I have a confused sensation of falling—falling—recurring flashes of dazzling light—a monstrous whirling vortex into which I was being drawn —one pitying thought for Jack Hodge —oblivion. . . .

THE rest of the story I pieced out next day with the help of Roger Norton and the heavily scare-headed *Clarion*.

Roger tells me that my subjugation had taken but a moment—that it was over before anyone in the audience had decided on definite action. It had consisted only of a few purring phrases from Losieva and a momentary stab of the N-ray in my direction. Next the mystic was making slow passes over me which had—heaven be praised!—sent me into a normal, exhausted slumber. The ray had again lighted on the head of the creature on the platform; and after that things had happened too fast to permit any thought of me.

What had been Hodge had arisen heavily from the floor, to stand glaring at the audience and weaving slowly from side to side. Norton swore the thing's chest had swelled to enormous proportions and that as it stood half

bent forward the hands hung on a level with the knees. While the crowd cowered in horror, the being stood gibbering and grimacing for a moment and suddenly plunged down among them.

There had been pandemonium, during which had been made frantic efforts to locate Losieva and Ember. But these two had deserted, leaving their victim despoiled of humanity. Worse still, the professor had left his rays going full blast and casting pictures unspeakable to the screen. Roger learned that at the moment the monster set upon his daughter the screen was lurid with a picture of a hulking, manlike brute overtaking and subduing a big she-ape. Of course he never saw the picture—mercifully no doubt—as he and four or five other men had their hands full with the ogre and Emily. It seems they tore the screeching girl away and got the beast pinioned to the floor finally, but only after the girl had sustained ugly tooth-marks on her throat.

Just then, as if to make a fitting climax, the place had caught fire. Norton thinks some of Ember's contraptions got overturned and caused the blaze. At any rate the whole room had become a roaring furnace in a twinkling—I remembered those flimsy cloth draperies—and the crowd had barely time to get outside. Good old Roger passed lightly by any mention of who rescued me, but I can easily guess why it was that at the moment I was seized and rushed out, the Frankenstein made its escape.

I agreed with Norton in the belief that the creature had perished in the flames, until in the afternoon I read the *Clarion*. That sheet held a hectic account of the séance, called upon all the powers of heaven and earth to search out and punish "those black mountebanks", contained a glowing eulogy of "our beloved asso-

ciate," and went on to recount his death:

The man who was supposed to have been burned to death was seen this morning by a party of school children. They described him as a monkey dressed in men's clothes but without shoes. He was first sighted when he darted out of the shrubbery on the Hallet estate near the East Fairbrook bridge. The children declare the animal 'swarmed' over the wall (Mr. Hallet's wall is 15 feet high at this point) and made for the bridge.

Here, instead of crossing as a man would do, he swung himself under the planking and, monkeylike, attempted to cross on the iron string pieces. Half-way across, where the current is swiftest, he somehow lost his foot-grip and fell fifty feet to the water. The body was recovered this noon at Douglass Mills.

I READ the piece over again from end to end. Norton and the others had missed it, but could it be that the newspaper was blind, too? Yes; evidently it was I alone who had noted the most salient fact of the whole affair.

In all phases of his ego, Jack Hodge had met death through water!

Seignior Vanna's Jest

(Continued from page 240)

my window, I saw him round the corner and walk swiftly toward the Place Cristoforo Colombo.

3

TORTONI paused as if his story were ended. I bestirred myself.

"Actually went dippy at the sight of the Donna Vanna's funeral?"

Tortoni leered.

"Ha, it was only the Seignior Vanna's quaint jest. He smiled from the carriage window to convince d'Almeda it was the donna's funeral. Drolly, Seignior, they were burying the hostler who sold Seignior Vanna a whip he used to good purpose at the castle. Vanna rode in the first carriage only that he might carry out his lovely joke on d'Almeda."

A desire to throttle this misshapen Tortoni seized me. I flung myself to my feet, but the landlord anticipated me, dragging Tortoni away by the scruff of his neck.

A moment later, the landlord returned, bowing ingratiatingly, as well he might over such a bill for wine.

"Tell me," I asked, "who is this fellow Tortoni who sat by my side and told me his depraved story?"

The landlord shrugged and spread his hands.

"Just a mad painter, Seignior, who once made portraits of beautiful women."

"What did you do with him just now?"

"Pitched him into the gutter."

"And was the gutter filled with filth?"

"Worse than usual, Seignior."

"That delights me, landlord. You and I owed Tortoni a strange debt of honor; and you—you have canceled it nobly."